

THURSDAY MORNING: BURNING BRIGHT

*Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

*In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?*

– excerpt, The Tyger by William Blake

Props to Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada, for evacuating a city under immediate threat of fire without any casualties directly attributable to the blaze. There was one death reported due to a vehicle accident, but it's not clear the accident was caused by the fire or the evacuation process. I don't know that an American city could have responded as quickly with the same results, but then Fort McMurray's folks remember the Slave Lake wildfire five years ago in May 2011. Slave Lake, located roughly 250 miles southwest of Fort McMurray, was similarly forced to evacuate its 7,000 residents after 60 mph winds fanned a forest fire out of control and into the town.

In addition to expanded evacuation south of Fort McMurray, another wildfire in northern Alberta approximately 500 miles northwest of Fort McMurray forced evacuation of the town of High Level last evening. Fortunately, cooler weather will help battling this and Fort McMurray's blaze; temperatures are expected to be 20 degrees cooler than the 88F degree high reached yesterday in Fort McMurray. There's no rain in the forecast for nearly a week, though.

If you look at a satellite map of Alberta, you'll note the areas surrounding these two municipalities actually had quite a bit of

forest near them to their west (Fort McMurray is south of the Athabasca tar sands production site by a 30-minute drive). I'd like to know how much of this is boreal forest, which was once aggressively protected by Canada – before Alberta's Stephen Harper became PM, that is. Despite the efforts of NGOs, expansion of the tar sands escalated dramatically from 2006 on. Now that oil prices have plummeted, production at Athabasca may drop, but too late to prevent damage to a wide swath of forest, not to mention the clearing done to support oil and gas development in northwestern Alberta. With the likelihood of wildfires throughout the rest of the summer running high, let's hope the current Trudeau administration invests heavily in forest restoration efforts to replace growth lost to both fossil fuel production and to fire.

Reforestation is only a start, thought; additional protections going forward are needed as boreal forest is the largest carbon sink on earth, bigger than rain forests. We Americans don't pay as much attention to Canadian deforestation because the country's population is much smaller than Brazil. But Canada's forests are critically important to reducing CO2, locking it up in trees and preserving it in bogs. We're Canada's largest trading partner and its largest consumer of wood products. We should be more aware and more responsible for our role in protecting Canada's boreal forest.

Bits and pieces

- Ford sinks cash into software company Pivotal (Detroit Free Press) – One of the many recent investment/partnerships with technology firms to augment vehicles' features. Ford said it would have difficulty doing what Pivotal does. Let's hope

Pivotal is more conscious of cybersecurity than its automotive partners.

- Former Apple employees to release new AI bot, VIV next week (Apple Insider) – Description sounds like Siri let out of the iPhone, or Amazon's Alexa on Echo bot. Whatever it is, stay away from me with this stuff.
- Nearly 300 million email account credentials floated in criminal underground (Reuters) – A massive collection including tens of millions of accounts on Yahoo, Microsoft, and Gmail email services was offered up in exchange for favorable comments in hacker forums. Something about this scenario sounds fishy, especially since the hacker first asked for 50 rubles (about one dollar) in exchange for all the compromised email accounts' credentials. Some of the accounts belonged to banking, manufacturing, and retail personnel.
- Has the revolution begun? Shareholders protest Reckitt Benckiser's CEO compensation (Bloomberg) – Is this the beginning of a trend?

Your assignment today: check your area for wildfire or bushfire risk, and develop a personal evacuation strategy. Fortunately in my area we have standing water after nearly 24 hours of rain. Out of here, gang.

UPDATE – 2:00 P.M. EDT –

Fire's still spreading across portions of Fort McMurray. Reporter Vince McDermott believes he just lost his home this morning while he was at work. Must be just awful to cover a story affecting your community so dramatically and find yourself experiencing loss, too.