

Southern Oregon Climate Action Now

SOCAN

Confronting Climate Change

<https://socan.eco>

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Joint Legislative Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St., NE
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Senators and Representatives:

Southern Oregon Climate Action Now is an organization of over 1500 rural Oregonians living near the California border who are acutely aware of how the climate change consequences of global warming are affecting our region and our lives. I write, on behalf of these Oregonians, to you as a member of the Joint Ways and Means Committee since, in that capacity you represent the chamber, and thus our representatives, and us. We are aware that some rural Oregonians have been persuaded by the opponents of climate action that proposals to reduce emissions are an effort by urban Oregonians to undermine their lives and livelihood. Some rural Oregonians choose to overlook what they can actually see happening and, instead, seem to accept the lies and disinformation promoted by the opponents of climate action who sometimes claim to accept the science, but actually behave as though they deny it. This is a constant source of amazement to those of us who have eyes and minds open to the evidence. Furthermore, contrary to the misinformation campaigns of opponents, states in the U.S. that have imposed a mechanism for reducing greenhouse gas emissions have out-performed their neighbors economically, and have not suffered rate hikes for electricity and gasoline attributable to these climate programs.

As residents of rural Oregon, we know that the temperature trend in our area is one of substantial increase over the last century. We know that snowpack is declining and that precipitation is falling at lower elevations as rain rather than higher elevations as snow. We further know that these trends will likely continue absent efforts to reduce emissions globally as winter rainfall increases, summer rainfall declines and Spring and Fall trends hold steady. Living in rural Southern Oregon, we are well aware that we occupy a Mediterranean winter wet / summer dry climate. This climate induces substantial annual drying of soils and vegetation during late summer inevitably generating fire risk. Furthermore, we understand that the handful of locations around the globe where such a climate exists consequently support vegetation that is fire prone, fire adapted and fire dependent. As a result, we have to accept

that fire is an inevitable component of our natural systems, and thus, our lives. Unfortunately, the natural phenomenon of summer/fall fire has been exacerbated by a combination of factors over which humans have great control. The first problem is fire suppression that has allowed our dry forests to become invaded by an historically atypical density of smaller trees leading to a high fuel load in the forests. The second problem is global warming and the consequent climate change it is inducing. This has resulted in even drier summer conditions enhancing the fire risk already with us. The pattern of increasing megafire risk is most likely a result of this combination of human factors. If we wish to protect our forests, whether to serve the timber industry or simply to preserve the biodiversity and beauty of our region, we need to address both problems. While we certainly need to learn to live with fire, we also can reduce the risk by undertaking steps to make our forests more resilient to changing climatic conditions. But that will never be quite enough. We also must address the global warming problem bringing us ever greater destruction and we absolutely must be part of the global solution by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Those who argue against climate action in Oregon are arguing for continued and ever more severe wildfires threatening our way of life and very existence in rural Oregon. If we are to keep global warming down to a manageable level, such that our forests might survive, it is imperative that we reduce our emissions and urge other states and nations to do likewise.

It is for these reasons that we in rural Southern Oregon urge that the state legislature establishes a strong greenhouse gas reduction program. We have been urging the state legislature to establish such a program since SOCAN was inaugurated in 2013. As our legislators probably know, efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon were initiated in 2007 when HB3543 was passed and signed into law by then Governor Kulongoski. The program established by that bill identified a greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal of 75% below 1990 levels by 2050. This was an ambitious but appropriate goal at the time. Unfortunately, the program established to achieve this goal relied on purely voluntary contributions from all sectors of the economy. Maybe unsurprisingly, the state never achieved a reduction trajectory sufficient to achieve that goal, and is now - contrary to the claims of those who argue Oregon has reduced its emissions substantially - far away from that trajectory. It is evident that voluntary goals are inadequate. If Oregon is to join other states and nations in the international effort to protect the livability of our planet for future generations, we need a program that contains scientifically acceptable goals and reasonable enforcement and penalty components. While SB1530 strengthens the 2050 goal to 80% below 1990 level by 2050, it still falls short of what the science tells us we need. The required goal is net zero emissions by 2050. While this would not guarantee a livable planet, it would offer a reasonable probability of our achieving that condition. What the evidence tells us, however, is that we must initiate a steep reductions trajectory now if we are to have any hope of preventing future global catastrophe. What ethics tell us is that Oregonians must do our part to contribute to the global solution. We cannot afford to rest on non-existent laurels if we are to urge other states and nations to do their part to protect themselves and us; we must join the international effort.

While we have several serious reservations about components of this proposal, our understanding of the urgent need for all jurisdictions to establish steep greenhouse gas emissions reduction trajectories leads us to support SB1530. We recognize, however, that there will be a need to return in the near future to re-examine how effective the program is at reducing emissions, and evaluate its goals in terms of the best available science of the day. Fortunately, the Oregon Greenhouse Gas Initiative proposed here incorporates mechanisms that will allow such assessments and re-evaluations

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan R.P. Journet". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "A".

Alan R.P. Journet Ph.D.