

Southern Oregon Climate Action Now

**SOCAN**

Confronting Climate Change

<https://socan.eco>

Alan Journet Ph.D.  
Co-founder & Co-facilitator  
Southern Oregon Climate Action Now  
7113 Griffin Lane  
Jacksonville OR 97530-9342  
541-500-2331 (VOIP)  
541-301-4107 (Cell)  
[alan@socan.eco](mailto:alan@socan.eco)  
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[MayorCouncil@grantspassoregon.gov](mailto:MayorCouncil@grantspassoregon.gov)

Reference: GRANTS PASS SUSTAINABILITY AND ENERGY ACTION PLAN

Mayor Bristol and members of the Grants Pass City Council:

I write as cofacilitator of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now, a ten-year old organization of over 2,000 Southern Oregonians who are concerned about the climate crisis and seek collective action to address. While the majority of these live elsewhere, a substantial number live in Grants Pass. SOCAN's mission is to promote awareness and understanding of the science of global warming and its climate change consequences and stimulate individual and collective action to address it. We attempt to do this within the framework of promoting social justice. As Grants Pass residents know, rural Oregonians live on the frontlines of the warming, heat waves, reducing snowpack, drought, increased wildfire risk, extreme weather events, and flooding that the climate trends are promoting. For these reasons, SOCAN encourages regional communities to take whatever steps they can to address the climate crisis either through promoting adaptation to the trends or mitigating them.

Wherever we seek a definition of 'sustainability, we find it incorporates a set of ideas that include a desire for humanity to be able to coexist and thrive on Earth for a long time, essentially indefinitely. The pillars of a sustainable lifestyle are economic viability, environmental protection, and social justice. Essentially, sustainability demands that we manage our natural resources in such a way that we can enjoy life and thrive while we do not compromise the ability of future generations to do likewise. Anyone owning a farm or forest who wishes to pass that on to their children and grandchildren understands the need to adopt sustainable management principles. In our advancing industrial and technological world, a critical element in living sustainably relates to our energy usage. We are wise if we not only consider the availability of energy resources, but also the impact of energy use on our environment. As the report states (p.32): "Sustainable development is living on nature's income rather than its capital."

Given the argument above, we offer kudos to the Grants Pass Council for establishing the Sustainability and Energy Action Plan Taskforce. Additionally, in recognition of the concern, even resistance, that some city residents might have to a plan that involved their changing behavior to achieve a sustainable future for Grants Pass, the Task Force is to be applauded for developing a proposal that focuses on city administrative actions. If the city can undertake actions that effectively render its operations more sustainable and, as a bonus, less expensive, residents of the city might see potential benefits for them in adopting a more sustainable lifestyle.

In reviewing the plan, I was particularly struck by the emphasis on accessing federal funds rather than local taxpayer funds to achieve sustainability objectives. Also notable is that the Taskforce demonstrated a consistent concern for saving local taxpayers' money in the proposals they developed.

These dual emphases are reflected in the statement on p.9:

“Due to its rurality and designation as an area of economic hardship, Grants Pass is also currently more eligible for funding opportunities than other municipalities. These funding resources' availability, coupled with energy savings projections, are key to project feasibility and impact. Right now, the savings in energy usage due to plan projects using the most modest scenario is estimated to be at least \$900,000 annually by 2045, and incorporating some more intensive projects is estimated to produce annual savings reaching up to \$1,904,582.”

#### **Focus Areas:**

The four focus areas of the plan listed on p 17 are commendable in that they reflect well what we learn from studies of statewide greenhouse gas emissions. For example, DEQ (2022) shows our total statewide contribution to climate pollution in 2021 was 61 million metric tons (MMT) of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions with the transportation sector responsible for some 22 MMT and the residential commercial sector responsible for about 21 MMT. Each of these sectors thus contributed over a third statewide. There is no reason for thinking Grants Pass is substantially different. Meanwhile, Oregon Department of Forestry assessment of carbon flux in Oregon forests (Christensen *et al.* 2019) reveals that they are responsible for some 31.6 MMT of CO<sub>2</sub>e sequestration from the atmosphere. Unfortunately, countering this benefit, Law *et al.* (2018), assessed carbon flux from forestry management. They reported that annually: “In 2011–2015, net wood product emissions were 34.45 million tCO<sub>2</sub>e ...” This suggests that (a) forests could contribute substantially to addressing the climate crisis if sustainably managed while (b) logging activities have historically been sufficient to negate this benefit.

Finally, though a decade old, a study (Good 2011) of greenhouse gas emissions in the Rogue Valley (specifically Jackson and Josephine Counties) suggested that fully 44% of the climate pollution for which we are responsible stems from our consumption of materials. This comprises the emissions that result from the manufacture and shipment of items made elsewhere to us.

This evidence indicates how appropriate are the focus areas chosen by the Taskforce: Buildings and Energy, Transportation, Consumptions and Materials, and Natural Systems.

It is valuable to note that among the hazards confronting Grants Pass, over half (Extreme Heat, Wildfires, Winter storms, and Windstorms) are projected to increase in frequency and or severity in the coming years. While the report itself does not stress the cause for these projections, it is worth noting that the primary cause for the trends is ongoing climate change. At Southern Oregon Climate Action Now, we are therefore, encouraged to see that the focus on sustainability in the plan is entirely consistent with the efforts that would be developed to help the city adapt to and mitigate its contribution to the ongoing warming of the planet, an effort that, if emulated across the state, nation, and planet would contribute to reducing the intensity of these hazards over time. While efforts undertaken by Grants Pass will not be sufficient to divert the projected trajectories in these hazards, the city can contribute its share to

addressing the cause. We therefore applaud the efforts proposed in this plan. As the plan states (p.21) "...there are actions the city can take to minimize these hazards." Likewise, we applaud the statement (p.29) that: "Grants Pass' climate vision for 2045 is one of resilient City operations that best serve the people through cost-efficient achievement of net zero emissions."

We recognize that not everyone is as concerned about and committed to addressing climate crisis as we are in Southern Oregon Climate Action Now. It is thus entirely reasonable that the Taskforce has developed a plan (p. 33) that, in addition to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, offers the following immediate and additional direct benefits:

- better allocation of limited City funds.
- Ongoing energy availability in the event of a grid failure or catastrophic natural disaster.
- Urges a central role for sustainability thinking in all City decision-making and project considerations.

Given the extensive effort undertaken by the Taskforce in developing this plan, we urge the council also to look favorably upon the proposal to establish a standing Sustainability and Energy Advisory Committee to monitor progress, advise on new technologies, and engage in citizen outreach. This would (a) allow the city to take advantage of the expertise that Taskforce members have developed in producing this plan, and (b) relieve city staff and council members of the burden of the monitoring, advising, and education that ongoing success of the plan demands.

One of the problems that communities have when developing plans such as this is a lack of ongoing capacity and commitment. Another benefit to establishing an ongoing committee is that the energy and enthusiasm of city residents for such a venture can be tapped and utilized for the benefit of the city and all its residents. Even among those residents who doubt the value of adopting a sustainability plan, few will probably sneer at efforts that will likely have the profound economic benefit of between \$912,575 and \$1,972,272.

Consistent with the last point, it is worth noting that the Taskforce assessment of the plan was based on the principle (p. 97) that "All projects in this plan were chosen for their affordability/cost-effectiveness. The vast majority of these projects would not only balance out in the City's favor as a quality investment with or without funding assistance but are even smarter financial choices because they qualify for an abundance of currently available, limited time funding options."

After considerable and effective hard work, the Taskforce seems to have produced an exemplary document. We applaud the Taskforce and encourage the council to look favorably upon its recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Journet". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alan Journet Ph.D.

## Sources

Christensen G, Gray A, Kuegler O, Yost A. 2019 Oregon Forest Ecosystem Carbon Inventory: 2001-2016. Oregon Department of Forestry.

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