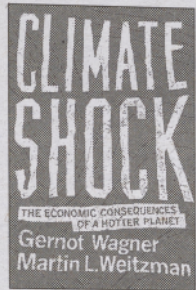


# A unique problem in need of a unique solution



**“Climate Shock: The Economic Consequences of a Hotter Planet”** by Gernot Wagner and Martin L. Weitzman

*Capitalism may hold the answer to climate change, authors say, but we all can do our part to help*

**BY TOM WATSON**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**T**he rich will adapt. The poor will suffer.”

That’s where we’re headed with global warming, according to “Climate Shock,” a welcome new addition to the growing library of depressing but important books about climate change.

Although that quote may seem too glib, it’s probably right on, and I appreciated such a blunt reality check in a book by two economists, Gernot Wagner from the Environmental Defense Fund and Marty Weitzman from Harvard University.

If you’re interested in learning more about climate change and the options for dealing with it, “Climate Shock” isn’t a bad place to start. Naomi Klein’s “This Changes Everything” is still the gold standard, but “Climate Shock” is easier to read and much shorter, only 155 pages of text. It also makes new and useful points.

Many of us do want to know how we — the whole world — can respond to climate change so that poor people suffer less. Klein emphasized that angle in her book (her subtitle is “Capitalism vs. the Climate”), and this new book doesn’t dwell on economic inequality nearly as much. But a reader can still use Wagner and Weitzman’s observations to help determine the best ways to take action, individually and collectively.

First, the authors lay out the situation, listing four factors that make climate change the most difficult environmental and public policy problem the planet has ever faced. “It’s almost uniquely global, uniquely long-term, uniquely irreversible, and uniquely uncertain — certainly unique in the combination of all four.” That sentence may have a few too many uniques, but this still helps explain why we’ve been so unsuccessful addressing climate change so

far and why the odds are so long for beating it.

Wagner and Weitzman then focus at length on “geoengineering.” Proponents of this concept claim that humans can prevent the worst effects of climate change with a technological fix.

The book’s main example of how geoengineering might work, the natural eruption of the Mount Pinatubo volcano in the Philippines in 1991 pumped about 20 million tons of sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere, resulting in a temporary decrease of global temperatures by about 0.9 degree Fahrenheit. If something like this could be done on purpose, at a relatively low cost (globally speaking, and compared with the costs of increased climate change) of under \$10 billion a year, why not try it?

Like most environmentally minded scientists, economists included, Wagner and Weitzman point out that geoengineering should only be researched or attempted extremely carefully because of all the uncertainties and potential negative effects. But we all certainly need to become knowledgeable about it, because eventually the big-money corporations will push hard for various geoengineering solutions. The unintended impacts of geoengineering would surely hit hardest those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder, just like climate change itself.

“Climate Shock” wraps up, as does nearly every book about climate change, with a chapter about “what you can do.” This one works better than most. The authors start by saying we need to “Vote... Vote well... Vote for those who seek to look out for society at large,” not to further an agenda. Simple, but they nailed it. That’s exactly what it will take, on a grand scale, for our society to make a stand against climate change.

We also need to do much more, of course, and they describe that with flair, as well:

“Scream, protest, debate, negotiate, cajole, tweet, use all the means at your disposal to call for the scale of policy change needed to match the magnitude of the climate challenge. To use the economists’ logic of comparative advantage, do what you do best: Teachers, teach; students, study; community leaders, lead.”

They end the book by concluding, “It’s capitalism with all its innovative and entrepreneurial powers that is our only hope of steering clear of the looming climate shock.” They lose me a little bit there, but I guess economists need to believe that. If capitalism can be used as a positive tool while we scream, negotiate, cajole, etc., to stop climate change, then let’s do it.

We may not have a choice. Having just celebrated the 45th Earth Day last month, there’s really no better time to think about our climate future.

ILLUSTRATION BY  
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## DEEPER WATERS, from page 5

environment for mentoring, learning and becoming a steward for environmental protection, says Brown.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has become one of Soul River Inc.’s, biggest supporters, choosing it for a five-year cooperative agreement in which it funds and helps plan fishing trips and events.

This year most of those funds are going toward the trip to Alaska, but Brown is scrambling to find new donors and adjust the budget to cover all expenses for the trip.

Brian Lawler, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife representative working with Brown, says that with 80 percent of Americans living in urban areas, programs like Brown’s are helping to connect many people to nature who otherwise wouldn’t have access. That’s “planting a seed,” he says, that could grow them into future environmental stewards and conservationists. “Maybe they won’t grow up to be a biologist, but maybe they’ll grow up and love to fish,” he says, and that

will help them understand that nature is something we need to protect.

In addition to learning how to fish, tie flies, read the water and study the science of nature, Brown says he’s providing a space for people to learn leadership skills and most importantly, to heal.

Mark Roberts met Brown at a fly-fishing Meetup group Brown initiated four years ago to bring local fishing enthusiasts together. Now Roberts, a Vietnam War veteran, actively volunteers with Soul River Inc. He says youth and veterans come back from Soul River fishing trips “changed and energized.”

He remembers a four-day rafting trip he took with Brown and several other professional guides on the Deschutes River. Every one of the youth who went along had been involved in gangs, he says. “They were all in challenging life situations, and I would say the first half day on that trip, a lot of them were pretty much like turtles, with their heads pulled in,” he says. “But by

halfway through the first day, they were very involved, they were very enthusiastic.”

He says it’s incredible to watch kids who had very limited or no outdoor experience before signing up for Soul River’s free fishing trips, grow quickly into environmental stewards. “They’re all becoming mentors, and they’re all becoming very educated and very skilled, not only with fly fishing but with understanding the entire environmental aspect of understanding what’s around them, above the water, under the water, and they’re changing their lives.”

In April, Brown stood before a group of 500 fly-fishing industry leaders giving him a standing ovation at a conference in Missoula, Mont. He had just accepted a 2015 Breaking Barriers Award from Orvis, an international fly fishing retailer. Senior manager of Orvis Adventures, Simon Perkins, said the company had received numerous nominations for Brown. After reading from so many people how Brown was changing lives through fly fishing,

Perkins says it was easy to see that “Chad’s story was truly exceptional.”

Since the summer of 2013, Brown has taken groups of youth and veterans on fishing trips along the Deschutes River and up to the Olympic Peninsula. He’s also conducted fly fishing workshops and executed the first annual Celebration of Wild Steelhead. The free reggae concert and fly-fishing event attracted thousands of people to North Portland’s Peninsula Park in 2014. Brown hopes this year’s celebration on Sept. 13 will do the same. He plans to give away fly-fishing kits to 200 children in attendance.

“Whatever we are going through in life, whatever our challenges, whatever our dark places are,” Brown explains, “it runs deep within all of us. And the river has a way of connecting us and helping us get through that process, and getting us the answers that we’re looking for.”

To learn more about Soul River Inc., and its 2015 events, visit [soulriverinc.org](http://soulriverinc.org).