

Climate change demands collective action

This past week, the Oregon Global Warming Commission adopted a draft report that shows how climate change is already drastically transforming Oregon's ecosystems and weather patterns. From ocean acidification and smoke-choked cities to drought-inundated farmlands and dwindling snowpack across the Cascade Mountains' peaks, climate change is already costing Oregon's industries millions of dollars, threatening wildlife species and proving to be a public health hazard.

EDITORIAL

This report comes mere days after a warning from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that climate catastrophe, if greenhouse gas emissions continue to pour into the atmosphere, will occur within the lifetime of most people who are alive today.

Meanwhile, Oregonians are driving gas guzzlers, increasing their consumption of carbon-emitting products and dining on foods that carry significant climate consequences – it's as if the planet wasn't on the verge of collapse at all.

As the commission's report also shows, these behaviors have caused Oregon's consumption-based carbon footprint to go up a few shoe sizes. While consumption-based emissions have been increasing since 1990, they've accelerated in growth starting in 2010.

Ultimately, policy changes, regulations and a global network of action are needed to effectively curb the climate crisis, but everyday choices Oregonians make as they decide how to travel to work and what products to buy are, collectively, stalling progress toward meeting statewide carbon reduction goals.

Part of the increase is due to population growth – there are 43 percent more people in Oregon now than there were in 1990. And as Oregon recovered from the Great Recession, consumers had more disposable income.

And we can't say Oregon hasn't made strides: Greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector and industry are down, and the greenhouse gas emissions expended per capita have declined 23 percent since 1990.

But while lowering emissions per capita is no small feat, Oregon Global Warming Commission's chair, Angus Duncan, said it best as he addressed members of his commission at their most recent meeting.

"At the end of the day, the atmosphere doesn't really give a fig whether we're doing better per capita or doing better per dollar of GDP," he said. "It only cares about the parts per million."

Scientists have long agreed: 350 parts per million is the limit for a safe level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. As of last month, we were at 405 parts per million.

Bend resident Maxwell Roe, a business development director at Clean USA Power, traveled to Portland to make one of several impassioned public comments as the commission prepared to adopt its report.

He said what the IPCC has suggested but

many in Oregon have failed to address.

"There is a portion of this conversation that needs to be redirected toward the constituent population and the behavioral component to climate change and what actually needs to happen at a consumer level," he told the commission from his seat in the back of the room. "In order to remedy this untenable situation, we're going to have to sacrifice collectively."

We agree: This global crisis demands uncomfortable and at times inconvenient collective action.

While lawmakers in Salem consider carbon-capping legislation and Portland's City Council doubles down on banning new fossil fuel infrastructure, we must remember, that's only part of the solution. We can't wait for politicians to solve this crisis.

Collectively, our consumer decisions are adding up, and only we can change that.

Oregonians are responsible for millions of metric tons of carbon dioxide billowing into the atmosphere from developing nations that have far less restrictive environmental laws than the United States – even as the Trump administration seeks to erode them. While the problem may seem too big to tackle, we must try. Our not-so-distant future depends on it.

We can start by looking at ourselves. Do you take public transportation or bike when you can? Do you know how far that product you're purchasing had to travel to get to you? Do you know under what environmental regulations it was made?

For the greatest impact, stop eating beef, ditch the car, properly dispose of your old air conditioner and refrigerator – and most importantly, join efforts to help low-income Oregonians do the same.

Eat locally-grown foods and buy locally-made products. And better yet – don't buy things you don't need. Support leaders who are passionate about addressing global warming.

Vote yes on Portland Ballot Measure 26-201, which would place a tax on large businesses to fund projects that would make the homes of low-income Portlanders more energy efficient, as well as create green jobs for those with low-incomes and communities of color – the very people climate change will impact the most. Join one of the many local organizations working for a cooler planet, such as 350PDX, or get involved in forest management with groups such as Oregon Wild and Bark. Oregon is blessed with some of the greatest carbon sequestering potential on the planet and could be instrumental in drawing carbon out of the atmosphere

And pay attention to Oregon's next legislative session. Lawmakers will be considering bills for a carbon cap and invest system.

Whatever you do, don't give up. We must all take responsibility for the roles we play, no matter how seemingly insignificant. It's only together that we can change the path our legacy has taken from one of indifference to one of triumph.

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