

THE RATIONALE FOR EXTINCTION

What does McPherson base his NTHE predictions on? In his lectures and on his blog *Nature Bats Last* (see guymcpherson.com), he says, “I’ve been accused of having no hope, and that’s true.” Environmental scientists tend to specialize, and McPherson has collected their published research from around the world. He cites and documents “irreversible, self-reinforcing feedback loops” from hundreds of scientific studies.

He admits to “cherry picking” his data, but “no matter how dire the situation becomes, it only gets worse when I check the latest reports.” He was so convinced by the evidence that he left his academic career behind and became a certified grief counselor to help people through their final days.

Even the relatively staid IPCC has warned of such a scenario: “The possibility of abrupt climate change and/or abrupt changes in the earth system triggered by climate change, with potentially catastrophic consequences, cannot be ruled out. Positive feedback from warming may cause the release of carbon or methane from the terrestrial biosphere and oceans.”



PHOTO BY PAULINE PANAGIOTOU-SCHNEIDER

Here are a few of McPherson’s conclusions. If this is all too depressing, skip to the “What We Can Do About It?” sidebar.

- The **Arctic ice cap** is breaking up for the first time in recorded history. “An ice-free Arctic could be this year, in September,” McPherson says, “and this could lead to a burst of methane at any time” from the shallow Arctic seabed. An ice-free Arctic could also lead to large-scale drilling for oil and gas, which would exacerbate our overdependence on fossil fuels.

- **Methane**, a greenhouse gas, is also trapped in permafrost and peat bogs in boreal forests. Warming would release vast volumes of methane into the atmosphere. Giant “methane blowholes” are appearing in Siberia. Thawed peat can also catch fire and smolder for years, releasing carbon and covering ice fields with soot. The “dark ice” in turn absorbs sunlight and hastens melting.

- **Earth’s soils** contain countless trillions of microorganisms that hold about half the sequestered carbon on the planet. Soil warming will release carbon dioxide.

- Rising atmospheric **carbon dioxide** gets a lot of attention (think Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*), but it’s only one factor in rising temperatures. Ozone doesn’t get as much attention, but atmospheric ozone is blamed for forest dieback, which in turn reduces carbon sequestration.

- **Heat** by itself will not kill humanity, he says, but hot summers will lead to crop failures and mass migration. “We are clever but we cannot live without habitat, at least not for long.” Countries closer to the poles, he says, don’t have fertile soils and can’t grow nearly enough food to feed billions of people.

‘We’re under some gross misconception that we’re a good species, going somewhere important, and at the last minute we’ll correct our errors and God will smile on us. It’s a delusion.’

— AUTHOR AND ENVIRONMENTALIST FARLEY MOWAT

- **Lack of fresh water** is already a huge problem worldwide, and it will get much, much worse. Water shortages will stifle agriculture (think dust bowls and desertification) and seriously hamper business, industry and drinking water supplies. Desalination is expensive and energy-intensive with our current technology.

- The world’s 443 **nuclear power plants** could melt down due to lack of cooling water, blanketing the planet with toxic radiation. It takes decades and many millions of dollars to decontaminate and decommission a single nuclear plant, and more than 60 new nuclear reactors are being built today.

- **Rising sea levels** will inundate cities and lowlands, displacing more than one billion people and flooding low-elevation farmland with saltwater. Coastal erosion will also destroy plant habitat and release carbon dioxide. A global hike in temperatures of just 1-2 degrees Celsius could raise sea levels by 20 feet, according to a study of the geologic record just released last week by OSU scholars Anders Carlson and Peter Clark.

- **Our oceans** and their prevailing currents are in flux for a variety of reasons, and jellyfish could take over, destroying the food chain for the rest of sea life. Billions of people rely on seafood and seaweed as diet staples.

- **El Niño**, a natural cycle of ocean warming, can exacerbate both flooding and drought, along with storm intensity, wildfires and other factors in the “vicious cycle” of climate change.

- **Water vapor** in the troposphere increases with warming and in turn “absorbs more heat and further raises the Earth’s temperature,” McPherson reports.

- **Our planet** in relationship to the sun is already at the “inner edge of the habitable zone, and lies within 1 percent of uninhabitability,” McPherson says. “A minor change in Earth’s atmosphere removes human habitat.” None of our neighboring planets can support human life on any significant scale.

CONTRARY PERSPECTIVES

Noted Australian science writer Geoffrey Chia, M.D.,

writes in *The Canadian Daily* online, “I have learned a great deal from the writings and presentations of Dr. Guy McPherson; however, I do not agree with all of his conclusions or views.”

“Everyone gets things wrong,” Chia says. “It is impossible to conceive of any credible scenario in which the mass die-off of billions of people will not occur in the century. Mass culling is guaranteed ... Is it, however, possible that a small number of humans may be able to survive the next couple of thousand years, given adequate preparations in certain geographical pockets, until the overall global climate becomes more conducive to humans?”

Chia figures planetary temperatures will “eventually cool in the long term in the absence of large numbers of humans,” and biosequestration of carbon will resume.

Hydrologist and science writer Scott K. Johnson is more skeptical and writes on his Fractal Planet blog: “It takes careful examination of McPherson’s references, and a familiarity with the present state of climate science, to uncover that his claims aren’t scientific at all.”

Johnson says McPherson “just latches onto anything that sounds scary,” he is “especially fast and loose with timeframes,” and “his argument fundamentally reduces to ‘positive feedbacks exist, ergo extinction.’”

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON EXTINCTION

“After his talk I went home and read his book — whole — gobbled it up nearly,” says Jungian psychoanalyst Jennifer Gordon of 350 Eugene. “I wanted to ask him to say more about ‘It depends on the political will of the people,’ the only hopeful thing I heard him say.”

Delaney Pearson of 350 Eugene says, “To McPherson I would also argue that we (the privileged first world) have debts to pay, and it’s not good enough to just give up and ‘face the truth’ while billions of people continue to experience the worst effects of climate change. This is about justice — on all levels. The animals and trees, rivers, oceans and skies, children and new babies everywhere need and deserve our attention.” ■

What Can We Do About It?

Guy McPherson quotes Edward Abbey, saying, “Action is the antidote to despair,” and encourages activists to go down fighting. Giving up and being depressed accomplishes nothing and is no way to die, or live for that matter. He advocates for “the simple life,” echoing the idea that we should “live simply so that others may simply live.”

“Do what you love to do and live life by striving for excellence every day,” he says. “Treat people with dignity and compassion, and think about how you are going to live and not about how you are going to die.”

He says to “not worry about the jerks in your life, the guy in the Hummer who just cut you off. He will die, too.”

Knowing we are all going to die soon can also be liberating, McPherson says. No more worries about that retirement plan, that bucket list, how to pay for the grandkids’ education, etc. Money, in fact, will be worthless when the world economy collapses. Even gold and silver will lose their value when they can no longer buy food, water and shelter. Worried about your personal legacy? It takes about 10 million years to recover from mass extinction. The next evolution of *Homo sapiens* will have no knowledge of you, Beethoven, Donald Trump or Kim Kardashian’s butt.

Groups of people who have accepted abrupt climate change (ABC, another new acronym) are forming, and a website is up at onlyloveremains.org. The website offers low-cost workshops and reads, “You’ve come to grips with near-term human extinction. It’s a lonely conclusion, one that interferes with many relationships. You want somebody with whom to discuss the most important topic in the history of our species. It seems most of your friends and family are in denial. Now what?”

Locally, climate activists continue to meet, discuss and bring speakers to town. Next will be associate professor Kari Norgaard of the University of Oregon speaking on her book *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions and Everyday Life* at 4 pm Sunday, July 26, at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 13th and Chambers in Eugene. Free. Eugene 350’s Summer Meetup will be from 7 to 8:30 pm Thursday, July 16, at First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive Street.