

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

The new normal

BY CHRIS BRATT

Evidently the sky is not falling like Chicken Little once thought. But it does look like our world really is warming from greenhouse gasses that humans spew into the sky. Despite congressional skepticism and naysaying about global warming, I got the word in mid October that Medford (including Applegate) is soon going to be the new Redding, California, temperature wise. I don't know about you, but starting last summer I thought we were already living in Redding. Our family and neighbors sweated through about three months of extremely hot weather (many days over 100 degrees F), unrelenting drought, and degraded air quality while we watched wildfires raging north and south. Is this the new normal for our area?

To find out, I attended a Rogue Basin Conference on "Our Critical Climate," sponsored by Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN) on October 13 and 14 at the Inn at the Commons in Medford. What I and about 175 other participants heard at this two-day exploration of climate change trends, impacts, and solutions was that this warming trend is expected to continue throughout the Rogue Basin. Some climate models now forecast worldwide temperature increases of as

much as five and nine degrees F by the year 2100. Keynote speaker Dr. Phil Mote, director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute and science professor at Oregon State University, said that "very low snowpack, big wildfires, [and] problems with irrigation water supply" will become more normal for the Northwest. Dr. Mote also said that science tells us that coastal impacts such as erosion and rising sea levels and forest mortality from drought, forest fires, and insect attacks "will become increasingly a problem." He stated further that these are "things that we've already observed."

These scientific forecasts of projected climate changes are unsettling for most of us, especially if you experienced last summer's record warm temperatures or other extreme weather patterns and changes. But this conference was not devoted to raising fears about climate change or beating up climate change deniers. Rather, it was more about developing adaptation strategies, actions, and collaborations to protect people and natural resources from the harmful impacts of a warming climate. Presentations focused on building alliances between individuals, government agencies, private businesses, schools, hospitals,

planners, transportation designers, and the community at large. All the speakers were certain that climate change is occurring and reported on how their agency or job is adapting to these changing conditions. Many spoke about what actions they were taking to reduce our regional contributions to the more damaging global problems.

A good example of this coordination and cooperation between our state and local government is already happening in Jackson County. As part of a two-year collaboration, Jackson County and the Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division developed a climate change adaptation plan to protect the health of our community. A five-step program was implemented to provide an overview of local climate change and health projections. This Climate and Health Action Plan considers risks of injury and death, water and vector-borne diseases, respiratory diseases, malnutrition and food security, and mental health. This was just one of the many projects outlined in the conference. Very good and important work, I'd say.

The conference also stressed the need to continue reducing our CO₂ emissions in Oregon, America, and the

world. It is not enough to just try to anticipate the risks of a changing climate and prepare to adapt to the consequences. We must accept the fact that human activities worldwide are increasingly warming the earth. We must do everything we can to reduce our fossil-fuel emissions and sequester carbon here in the United States. We are making some progress: US CO₂ levels have been reduced by about 12 percent since 2007, and Oregon is down about 16 percent during the same period.

But this is not the time to dillydally. Devastating consequences are on the horizon if we can't reach reduction agreements with the rest of the nations in the world (especially China and India). The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is preparing to meet in Paris this December to negotiate the reduction of carbon emissions. Hopefully, our country can convince the other nations that we have a common stake in finding and using new energy sources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

I think I'd like to be part of the old normal. What about you? Let me know.

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Our Critical Climate: A Rogue Basin Summit

BY ALAN JOURNET

A seventeenth-century philosopher-mathematician, Blaise Pascal, is the source of the argument known as Pascal's Wager. Basically, Pascal argued that if one doubts God's existence, the possibility of eternal damnation should be enough to persuade one into believing.

Much like our modern-day Precautionary Principle, which argues we should always err on the side of caution when making difficult decisions, Pascal's Wager can be applied to many difficult choices. For example, when diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, we have to decide whether we should accept the diagnosis or not. Pascal's Wager encourages us to incorporate into our thinking the potential costs of accepting versus denying the medical advice.

Pascal's Wager can also be applied

when evaluating the evidence on regional climate trends and impacts presented at Our Critical Climate: Trends, Impacts and Solutions—A Rogue Basin Summit. During the Southern Oregon Climate Action Now-sponsored event, attendees learned much about the grave threats we face as a result of regional climate trends and their impacts.

Although some local residents might ignore the array of climate trends currently affecting the Rogue Basin, conference presentations made it clear that our basin is currently in the grip of several trends likely to compromise both the beauty of our region and the very way of life we cherish. Prudence and Pascal's Wager suggest we address the problem.

Attendees gained clear glimpses of

the critical and threatening trends and projections: increasing temperature with an increasing number of really hot days, reduced snow pack, serious drought, increased fire risk, steady rainfall annual averages but with dryer summers and moister winters. Only by focusing on just one of these trends and ignoring the rest is it possible to argue that we have experienced these conditions before. Only if we look at all the trees, can we see the forest. Only if we see all the dots, can we connect them.

Attendees learned how these trends are compromising:

- our domestic and agricultural water supplies particularly for our small farmers, orchardists, and wine growers
- our aquatic and terrestrial natural resources including our forests
- our tourism and recreation
- our health
- the lives of Native Americans

We also learned that these problems are basin-wide, extending through Josephine and Curry counties.

The second day of the conference began with comments from Oregon Senators Merkley and Wyden offering glimpses into what is happening (or more correctly, *not* happening) in Congress. Attendees learned about some of the many efforts already under way in the

region that are helping communities respond to the climate threats. These included discussions of many great projects, including what Eugene is doing and what is happening locally in terms of domestic and agricultural water management, recreation, renewable energy and construction, and transportation. State Representative Peter Buckley and State Senator Alan Bates also offered thoughts on what is happening at the state level and what might be expected in the forthcoming legislative session.

During the Wednesday afternoon breakout sessions, many further ideas were initiated in the areas of forest health and fire, human health, recreation and tourism, agriculture, transportation, water, and individual and collective action. SOCAN will be supporting members of these breakout sessions as they further develop the ideas.

Area residents interested in joining any of these discussions are encouraged to contact SOCAN at socan.info@gmail.com. Conference information, presentations, and details regarding the breakout session projects can be found at <http://socanclimatesummit.info>.

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