

CLIMATE TALK

Drawdown: Sorting Through the Tools We'll Need to Reverse Global Warming

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Global warming is a big, hard problem for our species. But what do we do when faced with a tough problem? When we are at our most effective (which isn't everyday) we break it down into some smaller questions: what is going on? how did we get here? what will it mean if we do nothing? what are useful actions?

The “what is going on” has been studied for nearly 200 years and we now understand it quite well. The remaining scientific questions are about when and where the damage wrought by a warming climate will strike. What places will suffer dangerous heat waves? Where will agriculture be increasingly threatened by drought? Where and how fast will sea level rise force coastal cities to undertake costly rebuilding? What of nature will be lost when?

The “how we got here” is pretty easy to envision: the incredible benefits of fossil fuels led to unimaginable gains in health, welfare, and the opportunities for the pursuit of happiness. Some of the downsides of our dependence on coal and oil have been visible for as long as we have exploited them, but we accepted them as a tradeoff for the benefits. But now we understand a potentially catastrophic cost and wonder if we are irretrievably addicted.

“What will it mean if we do nothing?” is among the possibilities that climate scientists are still studying. The details cannot be known for sure, but there is high likelihood that it is a world we would not want for our great-great-grandchildren (and may prove all but uninhabitable for theirs).

That leaves “what are useful actions?” Ideas abound, each with a cost to our way of life and uncertain impacts on the core problem. A recent effort to critically evaluate 100 promising possibilities is “Project Drawdown.” The title refers to the goal of adopting practices that will begin to reverse centuries of increased greenhouse gas in the atmosphere — beginning the necessary drawdown. Hundreds of experts from far-flung fields studied useful actions and reported their findings at the website “drawdown.org” (and as a book, “Drawdown - The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming”). The 100 span an incredible range of possibilities — from improving educational opportunities for girls in poor countries to new formulations of concrete. The potential solutions are grouped into what the project calls sectors: Materials, Electricity Generation, Food, Land Use, Women and Girls, Transport, and Buildings and Cities. Solutions from five of these sectors appear in the top ten solutions — visit the website to learn what they are.

Would you like to dig more deeply into this smorgasbord of possibilities? The Chequamegon chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby (citizensclimatelobby.org) is sponsoring four discussions during the month of March to explore the Drawdown findings. Meetings are every Monday in March, 4:30, at the Washburn Library. At each meeting we will look into 4 or 5 of the most intriguing solutions within a sector. You will be able to read up the solutions on the website (or in the book). A group leader will select the solutions and say a few words to get the discussion rolling.

We are still finalizing leaders, sectors, and solutions. As we complete our plans we will post them on the “Events” section of the Chequamegon Bay Renewables website (cheqbayrenewables.org) and on our Facebook page (search “Chequamegon Citizens Climate Lobby” and click on the Facebook link). You can also email us at cheqccl@gmail.com and ask to be kept updated. But for now reserve every Monday in March, 4:30-5:30 to explore the “what are useful actions” part of effective problem solving.

Bill Bland is a retired soil scientist, enjoying his second Bayfield winter. He is delighted with the great people, big water, boats, and real winters in the area.