

CLIMATE TALK

We Can Change Climate Change

Bill Bailey

Bayfield

“I think the world is going to be saved by millions of small things.” - Pete Seeger



Climate change is a complex problem. Scientists analyze CO₂ levels that trap heat in our atmosphere, predict trends in weather patterns, keep track of ice at the poles, monitor the sea level and CO₂ concentrations and temperatures at various ocean depths, and if that isn't complicated enough, there's more; the human side of the equation. We already have Climate Change. What we need is Human Change. Too often humans are short sighted, focused on quarterly profits, taking the easy way out, “taking” in general and not giving anything in return. This leads to an extraction mentality, extracting oil, coal, iron and other metals, sacrificing the environment in the process for short term profits. It also leads to pollution, because it is easier to dump than to deal with the problem.

What can you do about this complex global problem? Urging your members of Congress to address climate change by enacting a revenue-neutral carbon tax—the goal of Citizens' Climate Lobby—is one important approach, but in my view, it's not enough. We should also look for local solutions and start by thinking about the way we live, the way we eat, the way we farm and garden, the way we heat our homes, the cars we drive, the list goes on and on. Everything we do directly or indirectly affects the planet and its climate. It becomes an attitude; is the planet ours for the taking or do we have something to offer the intricate web of life?

Some of my favorite local solutions to this complex problem are the local food movement, planting native species in our gardens, and locally produced energy. Take the local food movement as an example. Did you know that we can produce spinach and other cold hardy greens in Northern Wisconsin all winter long with no supplemental heat? Want to learn how? Take the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute's (SOEI) field tour on May 9th to Bailey's Greenhouse and we will show you how. There is no need to ship spinach from California anytime of the year, burning no fossil fuels- a local solution. Reduced shipping means fewer emissions, but local food also means local jobs, money that stays in the local economy, plus healthier and fresher food. A strong local economy increases community resources leading to more options and control.

What do native plant species have to do with climate change? Inefficient gasoline lawn mowers produce as much pollution in one hour as driving 450 miles. If we converted our 40 million acres of lawn to native plants including trees, we could capture more carbon, produce more oxygen, and create much needed food and habitat for wildlife. Native

plants and native insects co-evolved. Just as a monarch butterfly caterpillar can only eat milkweed plants, native plants are used by native insects. The National Audubon Society report called “Common Birds in Decline” highlights the widespread problem of declining bird populations because of loss of habitat. “We’re losing the battle acre by acre” says Ken Rosenberg of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. We’re not just changing the climate; we are changing the entire ecosystem. We need to reverse this trend one yard at a time.

And then there’s solar energy. The sun blankets our planet with all the energy we need. It’s free, it’s clean, and it’s inexhaustible. We have learned to use it to heat our water, heat our homes and businesses, and to make electricity to power our lives. The cost of producing electricity from solar photovoltaic (PV) has dramatically dropped in the last few years, creating an opportunity for sound business investment, job creation, and economic development. Producing electricity from the sun has become a global phenomenon. From 2001 to 2010 the world installed 40 Gigawatts (GW) of solar capacity. By comparison in 2013 an additional 40 GW’s were installed in that year alone. Asia is leading the solar PV revolution with China, Japan and India being the major players.

In 2014 the United States’ solar PV industry also climbed to new heights, with 6.2 GW of solar PV capacity installed, up 30% over 2013. Of the new generating capacity in the U.S., solar accounted for 32%, second only to natural gas. MidAmerican Solar for example, a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway, owns the largest solar PV installations in the country. Two such projects in California, the Solar Star Project and the Topaz Solar Farm are 579MW and 550 MW respectively and cover about 5 square miles each. There is money to be made by going solar, ask Warren Buffet!

Closer to home, Minnesota passed a nationally watched 2013 Energy Omnibus Bill that set the stage for that state’s solar industry to blossom. Hear more this coming Tuesday, April 28th, 7:00 pm at the SOEI when Tyler Huebner of RENEW Wisconsin talks about “Solar Power in Northern Wisconsin”. In January 2015, Xcel energy filed an Upper Midwest Resource Plan outlining proposed new generating capacity including 1700 MW of new utility scale solar PV by 2030. They have 14 MWs of solar PV capacity on their system now. From 14MWs to 1700MWs in 15 years, that’s a big increase. Also, close to home, the Bayfield Electric Cooperative (BEC) is planning a Community Solar Farm, which is when a BEC member buys a solar panel(s), the Co-op installs it at their facility and the member gets credit on their electric bill for the energy that panel produces. Find out more at the SOEI’s Field Tour on May 9th, or at the BEC’s annual meeting in June.

Climate Change is a big deal, but northern Wisconsin is responding to the challenge. Our community can create Human Change with a million small things. What are you willing to do to save our planet and all the interconnected species that live here? You can do a lot!

