



Working for the climate is a way to work for peace

by Kathy Conway and Alan Journet, March 23rd 2020

Climate change has a powerful impact on interactions among humans. As temperatures increase and climate chaos ensues, tensions and conflicts rise.

There exist persuasive arguments suggesting the revolution known as the Arab Spring was driven to some extent by climate chaos compromising wheat production and bread supplies. Tensions created by these shortages and rising prices led to substantial conflict.

Meanwhile, rising sea levels rendering agriculture impossible in coastal zones of many Asian nations are generating massive numbers of climate refugees relocating within those nations or seeking escape to neighboring countries. Again, conflicts arise. Absent substantial collective effort to limit global warming and minimize trends such as these, human conflicts will become more frequent and severe. As the risk of military conflict rises, peace is the victim.

Given the potential for international conflict, it's small wonder that U.S. military and defense agencies have frequently cited climate change as a top national security risk and have urged that political leaders address the problem.

On a regional level, climate activists have consistently argued that social and environmental justice should be incorporated into any proposals developed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions statewide. We must acknowledge that some segments of our society have historically suffered more from climate change than others and some will suffer more from transitions in our energy economy from fossil fuels to renewable sources.

For these reasons impacted communities have been designated in legislative proposals to receive a substantial proportion of the investments of funds raised from the auction of pollution allowances. Unfortunately, the failure of legislation to pass during the 2020 Oregon legislative session forced the governor to take action that her executive authority permitted. Regrettably, her authority does not include establishing an auction, and thus precludes the generation of funds that can be invested in addressing social justice issues. SOCAN continues to work to ensure that emerging climate proposals address social justice issues.

Here at home, through its Government Group, SOCAN is collaborating statewide in the campaign to reduce Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions while ensuring that social and environmental justice issues are addressed in any proposed solutions. In addition, SOCAN volunteers are assisting city staff in promoting development and realization of climate plans in the region.

Recognition of the potential for stress induced by the consequences of climate chaos is integral to programs and projects pursued by SOCAN. Examples include:

- The Climate in the Classroom project promotes teaching about climate science in our schools, and thus develops among students a greater understanding of the issue along with potential individual and collective solutions in which they can engage.
- The Natural Resources group engages with agencies and other regional organizations to minimize the threat posed to our natural resources (notably our forests and waters) from global warming and the climate change consequences. As we know, considerable tension is generated as our natural resources are compromised by climate-influenced events such as wildfire.
- Voices of the Valley provides an avenue for regional residents impacted by climate change in their work or daily lives an opportunity to express their concerns and share their actions. By sharing the concerns of individuals from whom we rarely hear, our hope is to reduce the stress they feel.
- SOCAN at Mountain Meadows and Coastal SOCAN provide vehicles through which individuals engage in efforts to stimulate regional awareness and action and thus reduce local conflict.
- Through our presentations we offer programs to the community that provide area residents with information on the science of global warming, its climate consequences and what they can do to address it. Our hope is that this reduces tensions and conflict.
- The Sustaining Climate Activists activity offers support to those engaged in the activist community who themselves suffer stress as a result of their work. The goal of this project is to reduce stress and promote the inner peace of troubled activists.

While the connection between climate action and a culture of peace may not be obvious, in our view a prerequisite to a peaceful world is sustainable management of our collective resources. Solving the climate crisis is essential to achieving this sustainable future. While addressing the underlying cause of climate change, we simultaneously insist on promoting social justice.

Kathy Conway and Alan Journet, co-founders and co-facilitators of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN), are retired professors from Southeast Missouri State University. For information, see <https://socan.eco/>.