

Montana Climate Change Advisory Committee Recommends Action

This briefing paper is adapted with content provided by the Montana Environmental Information Center - <http://www.meic.org>.

In late 2005, recognizing the serious consequences global warming has on our environment, public health and on the economy, Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer unveiled an initiative that directed the Department of Environmental Quality (MT DEQ) to establish a Climate Change Advisory Committee (CCAC). The goal of the committee would be to develop a state climate action plan by July 2007.

Under MT DEQ's direction, the initiative examined state level greenhouse gas reduction (GHG) opportunities in all sectors in Montana, and considered a myriad of opportunities to "save money, conserve energy, and bolster the Montana economy." Eighteen Montana citizens representing a variety of interests and backgrounds, including industry, were appointed to the committee in April 2006 by MT DEQ Director Richard Opper. In June, Opper announced seven additional individuals to serve on a Science Advisory Panel.

The Center for Climate Strategies (CCS), a non-profit organization that has played a leading role in virtually every state and regional climate policy process since 2000, worked in partnership with MT DEQ to provide facilitation and technical support for the CCAC, in pursuit of the following objectives:

1. Development of a comprehensive GHG emissions inventory and forecast for the state for the years 1990 to 2020;
2. Development of a comprehensive

set of individual policy recommendations for reducing GHG emissions in Montana.

The CCAC met six times from July 2006 through July 2007 to evaluate the recommendations from internal technical working groups (TWGs) representing the following sectors of Montana's economy:

1. Energy Supply (ES)
2. Residential, Commercial, Institutional and Industrial (RCII)
3. Transportation and Land Use (TLU)
4. Agricultural, Forestry, and Waste Management (AFW)

A fifth TWG, Cross-Cutting Issues (CC), developed strategies that cut across the various sectors of Montana's economy and evaluated the issues of inventorying, forecasting, reporting and registering Montana's GHG emissions.

The process formally concluded with the release of the CCAC's final report - the "Montana Climate Change Action Plan" (and appendices) - in November 2007.

The panel found that between 1990 and 2005 Montana has experienced a 14% increase in greenhouse gas emissions, shifting Montana from a net carbon sink to a net carbon emitter. The state now averages net emissions of approximately 12 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year, with a per capita rate that is nearly double the national average.

The CCAC discovered that reasons for this high level include the state's large fossil fuel production industry, substantial agricultural industry, significant distances for transportation, and relatively harsh climate.

Resources

On the Web

Montana Climate Change Action Plan:
<http://www.mtclimatechange.us/CCAC.cfm>

Center for Climate Strategies
<http://www.climatestrategies.us/>

Western Climate Initiative
<http://www.westernclimateinitiative.org/>

Government

Montana Climate Change website
<http://www.MontanaClimateChange.mt.gov>

EQC Climate Change Survey Results
http://leg.mt.gov/css/lepo/2007_2008/environmental_quality_council/climatesurvey/climatesurvey.asp

Montana Conservation Groups

Montana Environmental Information Center,
<http://www.meic.org/>

National Center for Appropriate Technology,
<http://www.montanaclimatechange.com>
<http://www.montanagreenpower.com/>

Alternative Energy Resources Organization
"Repowering Montana - A Blueprint for Homegrown Energy Self-Reliance,"
<http://www.aeromt.org/blueprint.php>

The Climate Change Action Plan included a goal of returning Montana’s GHG emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2020, and a package of 54 specific recommendations to meet that goal. All but one of the recommendations were approved by unanimous consent. It is important to note that while the recommendations contemplate different means of action (i.e. administrative rulemaking, legislative, etc.), all 54 must be implemented in order to meet the 2020 goal.

Collectively, these 54 actions would keep 63.4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere over the next 12 years (see Figure 1 below). The overall economic impact of the plan is a net savings to Montanans of \$65.8 million (just over \$1 per ton of carbon dioxide not emitted).

At a press conference announcing the release of the report, Gov. Brian Schweitzer also unveiled two conservation initiatives for the State. The first was an ambitious goal of reducing the energy consumption of State agencies by 20% by 2010, and the second was a separate goal of having state-owned vehicles attain a fleet average fuel economy of 30 miles per gallon. These measures would save taxpayers millions of dollars annually in avoided energy costs.

In addition, Schweitzer announced that Montana would join the Western Climate Initiative (WCI), a collaborative effort by seven western states and three Canadian provinces to develop a multi-sector cap-and-trade program for reducing the region’s GHG emissions. Joining WCI was one of the report’s 54 recommendations.

Enacting other action plan recommendations through the legislative process will prove a considerable challenge. Resistance to the plan has been expressed by a number of Republicans serving on the state’s Environmental Quality Council (EQC) – a 17-member bi-partisan committee charged with reviewing and appraising state programs and activities related to the environment to ensure compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act. In February 2008, the EQC crafted an unscientific opinion survey to gather public input and to assign a level of importance (on a

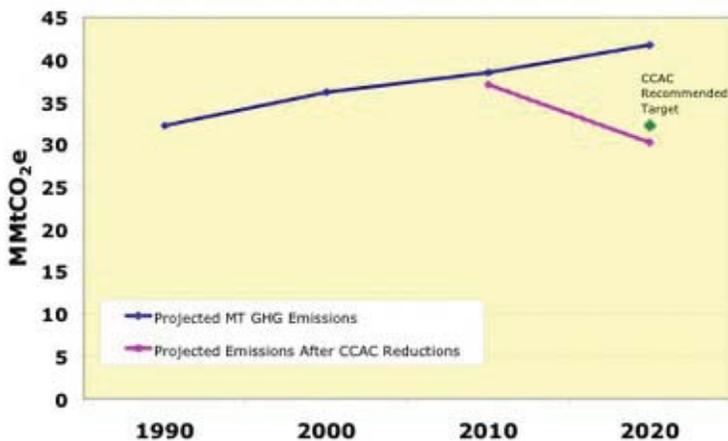


Figure 1: Montana consumption-based gross GHG emissions.

scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “do not support” and 5 being “fully support.”) to each of the 54 recommendations.

Prior to the release of the survey, a presentation by DEQ Director Richard Opper to the Environmental Quality Council in January culminated in some harsh rhetoric by several state lawmakers serving on the Council.

According to news accounts, Rep. Craig Witte (R-Kalispell) stated: “I don’t think the state of Montana is the cutting edge that is going to fix this global warming crisis, if one exists.” Witte also called the report “junk science.” (It should be noted that the deliberations of the 18-member committee were informed by input from a six-member Scientific Advisory Panel. The panel included Dr. Steven Running, who recently shared in the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his work on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.)

Sen. Robert Story (R-Park City) argued that Montana’s emissions are insignificant from a global perspective, while Sen. Dan McGee (R-Laurel) asked how much of the blame goes to human respiration.

When the EQC survey closed on Feb. 29, a total of 1,986 surveys had been submitted online. Of those surveys, 962 people volunteered to leave their name and/or affiliation. Public participants gave the strongest support (58% or greater) to these 10 recommendations:

- AFW-12 Enhanced Solid Waste Recovery and Recycling 63%
- RCII-2 Market Transformation and Technology Development Programs 61%
- TLU-10 Transportation System Management 61%
- TLU-9 Procurement of Efficient Fleet Vehicles 60%
- AFW-8 Afforestation/Reforestation Programs – Restocking 59%
- AFW-11 Programs to Promote Local Food and Fiber 59%
- RCII-6 Consumer Education Programs 58%
- RCII-8 Support for Renewable Energy Applications 58%
- RCII-11 Low Income and Rental Housing Energy Efficiency Programs 58%
- ES-2 Renewable Energy Incentives (Biomass, Wind, Solar, Geothermal) 58%

According to recent public opinion polling, a majority of Montana voters are also ready to meet the challenges posed by global warming. A Dec. 2007 Lee Newspapers poll showed that 63% of voters were personally willing to make major sacrifices to potentially slow global warming.

It is also highly encouraging that Montana has joined a growing number of states that have developed (or are in the process of crafting) roadmaps for responding to climate change, and seizing the related opportunities for economic development, clean energy, and a safer environment.