

Time to Act

Industry opinion on climate change

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AT ITS HEART, fly fishing is about connections. When we wade into a handsome trout stream or stalk across a vast bonefish flat, we hope to touch something elemental, something that resonates deep inside. Rather than sitting in front of our TV sets or viewing nature through a window, we immerse ourselves in the world around us. The sunshine, the currents, the breeze, and the intricate dance of life itself becomes more obvious, more personal, more real. And when we're graced with a trout, tarpon, or a steelhead on the end of our line, we can't help but give thanks for such an incredible gift.

Sadly, our friends and neighbors don't always share our passion for the outdoors. Nor, we're afraid, do they always understand the importance of healthy landscapes. We live, as the great conservationist Aldo Leopold once pointed out, in a world of wounds, and because anglers tend to see things more clearly—because we choose to wade deep rather than sitting on the bank—those wounds are obvious. The garbage lying next to the river trail, the sheen of oil glinting in the sunlight, the clearcut weeping topsoil into the natal salmon stream . . . all these affronts,

and a thousand others, cut deep and leave emotional scars. It's the rare fly fisher who doesn't feel the bad as well as the good.

This is why we work so hard to protect our fisheries. Whether it's planting bankside willows or standing up against the Pebble Mine, we do what we can for our landscapes and our waterways.

We don't win every fight, in fact, it sometimes seems like we lose far more than we should, but there's simply too much at stake to sit quietly on the sidelines. Especially when it comes to the single threat that will impact every single angler: Climate change.

People inject more than 30 billion tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year. All that carbon dioxide changes the chemistry of our atmosphere and warms our planet. That's not conjecture, that's scientific fact. An overwhelming majority (97%) of climate scientists agree with the world's most prestigious scientific organization, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences: "Climate change is occur-

ring, is very likely caused primarily by the emission of greenhouse gases from human activities, and poses significant risks for a range of human and natural systems."

The Trout Unlimited report "Healing Troubled Waters" agrees by saying "The science is clear that human-caused climate change is already occurring and that impacts will increase in the future. Trout and salmon are especially vulnerable to climate change because they are dependent on an abundance of clean, cold water."

Unfortunately, the most recent science is also the most disturbing. The "National Climate Assessment" report released May 2014 doesn't predict that climate change is coming. It's already here. Hotter summers. Catastrophic droughts. Extreme wildfires. Unprecedented floods. Monster storms.

The report was produced and approved by a team of over 300 climate scientists. It was subjected to extensive review by the public and by scientific experts in and out of government, including a special panel of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. And when the empirical evidence we see with our own eyes confirms the scientific reports produced by the most prestigious scientific panels in the world, then the skepticism of individual pundits however well-intentioned, should give way to acceptance and action.

Here's the crux of our situation. If we don't work together to lower our greenhouse gas emissions, we could lose most of the fisheries we know and love. And that's not 500 years from now, or 100 years from now, but within the next few decades.

That's in our lifetimes, and more importantly the lifetimes of our children.

So is there an ounce of good news? Yes, there is. Like any talented medical team, our scientific community has diagnosed the problem and told us exactly how we need to respond. And in a striking bit of good luck, the remedy tastes more like chocolate than cod liver oil.

Here's the prescription:

- 1) Raise** a little hell. If we don't fight for ourselves and our fisheries, we won't have anyone to blame when that "radically different" world knocks on our door.
- 2) Stop** treating the atmosphere like an open sewer and dumping unimaginably huge quantities of CO₂ into the air.
- 3) Stop** wasting energy. We all need to become more energy-aware and energy-efficient in our daily lives.
- 4) Shift** from carbon-intensive fossil fuels to clean, renewable, energy sources like solar, wind, and geothermal.
- 5) Change** the conversation. Climate change should not be a partisan issue, and America should be a global leader.

Right now, we have the opportunity to break our addiction to fossil fuels, to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, and to position the United States as a clean energy leader. If we're successful, we can jumpstart our economy at the same time we protect our waters and defend our angling heritage. But we don't have a second to waste. And if we don't act—if, through laziness or skepticism, we opt for business-as-usual . . . well, it's not going to be pretty.

At the end of the day, we all want the same thing. Great fishing. Clean water. A strong, vibrant economy and a healthy natural world for our kids & grandkids.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, there are more than 33 million anglers in the U.S. If we stand together, we can protect our rivers & streams, strengthen America's financial house, and give our children and grandchildren a shot at a decent future.

The cavalry isn't coming over the hill. No hero on a white horse is going to ride up and save us. Either we tackle climate change while we still have the chance, or we watch everything we care about turn to dust and ashes. Let's get to work. 🐾

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Photo | Randy Beacham

▶ **More frequent** and severe droughts are one symptom of global climate change. Here, the Missouri River Breaks National Monument suffers the effects of heat and low water.

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