



# Climate Action Plan: Executive Summary

Skagit County, Washington · March 16, 2010

**G**lobal climate change is the greatest challenge of our generation. Within a century, warming of the Earth's atmosphere is projected to cause extreme weather events to become frequent, to cause glaciers across the countryside to disappear, to make once-vibrant species scarce or extinct, and to increase sea level at a catastrophic rate.

## Causes of Climate Pollution

Many of these changes have indeed already begun. Scientific observations show global temperatures have undeniably been increasing over the past 50 years. The main cause: carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) with important contributions from the clearing of forests and agricultural practices.<sup>1</sup> In Washington State, transportation (46%) and electricity generation (20%) comprise the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Even here in the Pacific Northwest, over half of our electricity is generated from fossil fuels.

## Targets for Reducing Climate Pollution

Carbon dioxide is now concentrated in the atmosphere at 386 parts per million (ppm) and is increasing every year.<sup>3</sup> Scientists predict that if we exceed 450 ppm, we may never be able to reverse the problems we've created. Among many possibilities, physical risks include frequent and se-

vere climate events, receding glaciers and ice sheets, rising sea levels, and food shortages. At the rate we're going, this could happen in less than sixty years.

Globally, if we are to reverse our destructive course, we must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% from current levels in just forty years.<sup>4</sup> This is probably the most challenging technical, political, and social problem the world has ever faced.

If we fail to act in a constructive and timely manner, we risk not only catastrophic changes in the weather and climate, but significant financial costs associated with regulation to force changes in behavior, and the increasing economic burden to adapt and respond to the physical effects brought on by climate change.

## Taskforce Recommendations

The Skagit County Commissioners understand that Climate Change is an immediate problem that needs tackling at the local level. They have established a Taskforce to recommend suitable strategies. In creating these recommendations, the Taskforce is mindful that Skagit County government has no direct control over climate pollution from transportation and electricity generation. Statewide, such sources constitute two-thirds of the problem, and the County should strongly support state and federal mandates to tackle these major issues.

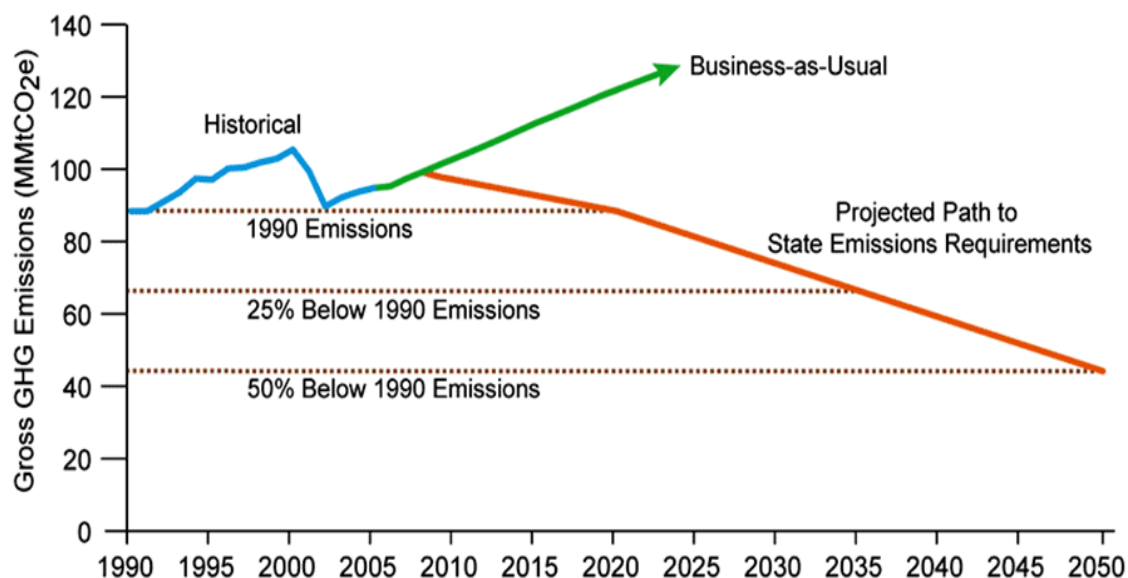


Figure 1. Washington State's historical greenhouse gas emission reduction goals for the years 2020, 2035, and 2050. The significant drop after 2000 is attributable to closing of an aluminum plant.

For the things we can influence, the Taskforce has devised policies and projects that will enable county government to establish a leadership role in local sustainable practices. The Taskforce's mandate was to identify ways our county, as individuals and as a local government, can:

- Use energy more efficiently and therefore use less
- Encourage the use of renewable energy
- Reduce energy use through building codes
- Provide carbon sequestration through land use policy
- Reduce commute miles through improved urban and rural planning
- Provide better mass transit opportunities and other low-carbon methods of transportation
- Reduce the purchase of products that emit significant greenhouse gas emission, or required significant emissions during manufacture
- Use best waste management practices
- Lead by example through county outreach and education regarding how and why to reduce global warming pollution in all aspects of daily living

Everyone contributes to the problem of climate pollution in a measurable way every day. Educating the public on the causes and effects of climate change and the importance of adopting new habits is essential for citizens to reduce their carbon footprints.

The policies recommended by the Taskforce can put us on the right path towards reducing climate pollution and can provide tangible benefits for the citizens of Skagit County. The Taskforce hopes to create a culture within Skagit County that takes climate change seriously. Adoption of these recommendations is likely to lead to more job opportunities and more advanced entrepreneurial activities. This effort should be one that draws the community together to conserve, protect, and diligently manage the natural resources around us in a sustainable fashion.

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- <sup>1</sup> Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States. US Global Change Research Program 2009.
  - <sup>2</sup> Growing Washington's Economy in a Carbon Constrained World. WA DOE & CTED. Dec 2008 Publication # 08-01-025.
  - <sup>3</sup> NOAA. Trends in Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> – Mauna Loa. Earth Systems Research Laboratory. 2009.
  - <sup>4</sup> Gupta, S., D. A. Tirpak, N. Burger, J. Gupta, N. Höhne, A. I. Boncheva, G. M. Kanoan, C. Kolstad, J. A. Kruger, A. Michaelowa, S. Murase, J. Pershing, T. Saijo, A. Sari, 2007: [Policies, Instruments and Co-operative Arrangements](#), page 776. In Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [B. Metz, O.R. Davidson, P.R. Bosch, R. Dave, L.A. Meyer (eds)], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.



Skagit County residents rally to lower atmospheric greenhouse gas to 350 ppm at the Skagit Cool Climate Café on November 1, 2009. The Skagit County Commissioners have formed a cool climate team to see who can most reduce their household greenhouse gas emissions. Photo copyright Vince Streano. Used with permission.