



The Climate Challenge [KUFM editorial 7/19/06]

by Garrett Budds
National Wildlife Federation

Introduction

With weekend temperatures forecast to climb above 100 degrees, I find it an opportune time to tell you all about an upcoming event that will serve to inform, educate and discuss Montana's changing climate. On September 22nd through 24th, a broad coalition of co-sponsors will proudly present *The Climate Challenge: Strategies for Montana's Future*, a conference and workshop being held in Helena's Red Lion Inn.

Background

Montanans are already feeling the effects of climate change. Science tells us these effects will only increase in the coming years. We all need to know what to expect from these effects; what steps we can take to help mitigate some of the impacts; and policies we can adopt at a state level that will help address these issues.

"The Climate Challenge: Strategies for Montana's Future," is a collaborative conference implementing a progressive, proactive approach, and will address the growing global climate challenge. Under the guidance of experts from agriculture, industry, economics and conservation, participants will use information exchange and interactive break-out sessions to produce a working strategy for Montana. This strategy will take the form of a Montana Climate Challenge Document.

The changing climate is of grave concern to us all. Farmers, ranchers, industries, businesses, recreationists, anglers, hunters, the elderly and many others will undoubtedly feel the effects of climate change in the coming years. The time has come to decide what we are going to do about it.

The diverse coalition of cosponsors including The Montana Farmers Union, The Montana Grain Growers, The National Center for Appropriate Technology, the Northern Plains Resource Council, the Montana Wood Products Association, the National Wildlife Federation, along with more than twenty other groups, are working together to address the concerns of Montanans from every walk of life. Sponsorship opportunities are still available, interested groups should visit www.mtclimatechallenge.org and click on the Sponsors link for information.

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Speakers and Panel Background

The conference begins Friday evening with a reception and hosted mixer for conference registrants at 6:00 PM at the Myrna Loy Center for the Performing and Media Arts (15 N. Ewing St., Helena, 406-443-0287) followed by a special screening (at 7:30) of the acclaimed film on climate change "An Inconvenient Truth".

Saturday morning will begin with an opening address by Bill Gerwing, Director of Environmental Policy for BP America. Saturday's morning panel will present pertinent information concerning Montana's climate challenges. The morning Challenges Panel will be moderated by Bob Brown, Senior Fellow for Public Policy, at the O'Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West. Panel members include:

- Dr. Steve Running, a leading Climatologist, at University of Montana, Missoula, who will provide a climate change science overview.
- Dr. Dave Naugle, a Wildlife Biologist at the University of Montana, Missoula who will discuss wetlands and waterfowl. And...
- Dr. Vince Smith, an Economist at Montana State University, Bozeman, who will discuss agricultural economics.

Following lunch will be an afternoon address.

Saturday's early afternoon session will present solutions to the challenges discussed that morning. The Saturday afternoon Solutions discussion will be led by Tracy Houck of the Montana Farmers Union. This panel will feature:

- Jerome Ringo, President, Apollo Alliance, Washington, DC – who will focus his discussion on creating good jobs and energy independence.

Late Saturday afternoon break-out groups will discuss the effect of climate change on Montanans. Experts will lead each group discussion, providing the opportunity for feedback from conference participants. These discussions will hone the wording of each respective section of the Montana Climate Challenge Document.

A reception will follow the Saturday Session.

On Sunday morning, the break-out groups will report their results, which will be integrated into a final document. Ginny Tribe will facilitate the integration of each groups work. We expect this final document will be of use to both policy and law makers. Governor Schweitzer recently appointed an 18-member "Climate Change Advisory Committee." We see the Montana Climate Challenge Document as a valuable tool for the Committee to use in achieving the goals tasked by the Governor.

The conference will conclude at noon on Sunday.

We encourage any and all interested citizens or groups to attend the conference. Again, more detailed information on the conference agenda, speakers, and what we hope to achieve are available at www.mtclimatechallenge.org. Please visit the website, as conference information is updated daily.

This has been Garrett Budds on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation here in Missoula, thanks for listening.

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