

Our Climate System is Moving Out of Control



Dr. Alan K. Betts

The last few months in New England have seen increasing wild weather as a series of major storms have moved up the east coast from Florida into Canada bringing winds and major flooding to New England. The gulf between the climate system of the past and the present is widening on both local and on global scales. Last year the mean annual global temperature reached a new high that stunned climate scientists, breaking the previous record not by a small 0.01°C but by 0.15°C. The global mean temperature increase has now reached the +1.5°C threshold that nations had promised to avoid. Much higher values lie ahead where we know the consequences will be catastrophic.

Across the world the nations met in December for the annual COP28 gathering in a fossil fuel country, Dubai with President Sultan Al Jaber as the chair, to discuss what commitments they would make. The contrast with the ongoing reality seems to me a bizarre joke. As usual there were six hundred lobbyists from the fossil fuel empire present to ensure that their interests were protected. Many fine speeches were made and a list of 'promises' was cautiously drafted.

A historic decision was made to establish a **Loss and Damage Fund** to help countries address the irreparable impacts of ongoing climate change. Nations committed hundreds of millions of dollars, but of course globally the catastrophic damage to island nations as sea levels rise, and poorer regions of the world who are not responsible for climate change, are far larger.



Heavy rains in July 2023 caused flooding throughout New England. Route 113 in Madison, NH was damaged with thousands of yards of gravel washed across the road making it impassable. (Rachel Sharples/Conway Daily Sun)

A new **Declaration on Climate and Health**, signed by 124 countries, underscored the need to prepare healthcare systems for climate impacts and emphasized government responsibility for public health. Very true, but as long as capitalism and the rich countries do not act to drastically reduce emissions of CO₂ and methane, health impacts will increase rapidly.

The COP28 summit in Dubai fell short of requiring the world to phase-out oil, coal and gas. Instead the report used weaker language, proposing to make the transition away from fossil fuels. We have promised to do this for years but actions have been far too limited, so that global temperatures will rise for decades.

Let us step back and honestly review the climate crisis which has a long history. I realized there was a crisis in 1976 when

I challenged the official framework that scientists should deal just with the facts, because the full spectrum of economic and social issues was beyond their expertise. I argued that for environmental issues, researchers would be wise to face their responsibilities up to the global scale. My PhD training from the world's greatest observational climate

scientist (Professor Frank Ludlam) was simple, "If something is critical and you understand it, you are responsible." So, in 1976, I took on the responsibility for understanding the global climate system. In 1978, the chief scientist of Exxon-Mobil told management that they were on a path to double CO₂ and this would destroy much of life on earth. His advice was ignored, and the fossil fuel energy companies have used their huge financial resources for decades to bribe politicians in the U.S. government not to interfere. Independent observers estimate that globally we are now on the path to destroy half the species on earth to keep the profits rolling, and perhaps kill billions of people, including some of our children and grandchildren.

What they did not know, however, was that on a much higher long-term level,

Mother Nature/Creator has responsibility for life on earth. She decided a few years ago to intervene to stop the massive destruction of species, and flood the coasts as necessary as a check on capitalism. I discussed this in the October *G.E.T.* article. However, understanding this is very difficult for our society which for centuries has had a male power framework. This was created by Emperor Constantine at the 325AD Council of Nicaea, who needed it for warfare, and the suppression of women and indigenous people.

So, society struggles to forecast the local and seasonal weather using traditional concepts such as the current El Nino with the historic ones as reference. However, the climate events we are seeing on the coasts and inland across the US are more extreme than what we have seen previously. Yes, we still urgently need all our creative vision to reduce fossil fuel usage and greenhouse gas production from many diverse sources. However, because of bribery and corruption we have waited too long, and now we must prepare for the consequences.

We must explain these critical issues to the younger generation who have to deal with them. The key issue is deceptively simple. If you consciously accept the role of the creator in managing life on earth, she knows at once you have joined her, and then she can help you – mostly on the intuitive level. I suggest sitting outside in the woods and connecting with the life around you that is already connected to her.

Dr. Alan Betts of Atmospheric Research in Pittsford, VT is a climate scientist. See alanbetts.com. 