

Climate Crisis and Fossil Empire. Planet: Herald & Times-Argus April 17th, 2021

[Weekly Planet: Climate crisis and fossil empire | Perspective | rutlandherald.com](https://www.rutlandherald.com/planet/2021/04/17/planet-climate-crisis-and-fossil-empire-perspective/)

Australia is far away but it has some climate lessons for us. The fire season in the dry southern summer of 2019-2020 was horrifying and bush fires scorched a record 46 million acres, ten times as much as the 2020 California fires which set a new record on the west coast. The vast Siberian fires in 2020 also burnt through a comparable 49 million acres of the Russian landscape.

Australia is a major coal exporter and the burning of coal, a fossil fuel, is accelerating climate change and amplifying wet and dry climate extremes. Russia is also a big exporter of fossil oil and gas. So Australia and Russia are both responsible for a significant part of their self-destruction; as well as destruction elsewhere. Drought is again spreading across the western US this spring, so watch carefully, since we too have a large fossil fuel industry driving climate change. The Russian dictatorship does not have to deny anything, but Australia has a conservative government which had to deny any responsibility for climate change. However the Earth does not listen to politicians. The increasing greenhouse gases simply slow the cooling to space, the Earth gets warmer, surplus heat is stored in the oceans and climate disasters increase.

But in Australia just as the wildfire season ended, the COVID crisis struck. Remarkably, the Australian government woke up and realized they should act preemptively, which they not done with the fires. They immediately closed the Australian borders and ordered returning citizens to go into supervised quarantine. This saved the country from a COVID disaster. The US has 13 times the population of Australia but the US has had 1000 times the number of COVID cases and 600 times the number of deaths. What a difference leadership can make - if it wakes up. Even more important the Australian government gave the aboriginal people control of their own reservation borders, which they simply closed, saying “We cannot afford to lose any of our wise leaders; their wisdom is irreplaceable”. Tragically here in the US the death rate of Native Americans on reservations is double that of the white population.

There are deeper issues here. Collectively all the fossil fuel interests and their political allies deny responsibility for climate change, saying they are not responsible for the future. The fossil fuel companies know hundreds of millions of the world’s children and grand-children will die and perhaps a third of the Earth’s living species will go extinct over the next fifty years. Exxon has known this for forty years ever since their own senior scientist, James Black, told them the truth in 1978. Did they press the government to take action? No, they suppressed their scientist’s report, and for forty years have conspired with the industry to deceive the public and bribe politicians to prevent government legislation to regulate and phase out the fossil fuels.

This fossil fuel industry conspiracy I have called the Fossil Empire. They are driven by maximizing current profit, and avoiding responsibility for the costs of the accelerating climate disasters that will destroy so much. It is so cheap to bribe US politicians. By a recent count, the 139 Republicans in Congress who publically deny the science of climate change were paid a total of only \$61M by the coal, oil and gas industries. For less than half a million dollars each, these Republican are happy to lie in public and vote to destroy so much life on Earth. Yet the capitalist framework can easily address the climate crisis by placing a rising price on burning

fossil fuels, since we have estimates of the future damage from climate change. The money raised can be used to drive a rapid transition to renewable energy.

Why does the public accept this criminal conspiracy to destroy the Earth for profit? Because they too have been deceived by a second strategy. At first the Fossil Empire just denied climate change was real, but as climate disasters grew larger they shifted to the deflection strategy that works so well for industry. Deflection is when you convince the public that it is better to solve a challenging problem by individual action (since it is a free country), rather than by government regulation. Covertly selling this strategy has been an immense success. Climate activists can be encouraged to discuss and argue over whether one should travel less, buy an electric car, install solar panels, eat a vegetarian diet, have fewer children or live a simpler life. The list is endless. This strategy deflects attention from what needs to be done at the societal level to the individual level, where people can either feel they are taking useful steps, or perhaps instead feel guilty. Of course individual choices are very important, but they will not fix the huge climate crisis, which needs both national regulation and global agreements to deal with phasing out the fossil fuels.

Facing the climate crisis this decade is critical, so let us ask again. Why are we allowing the Fossil Empire to destroy so much life on Earth and the lives of our children and grandchildren for profit?