

Arizona's climate is changing. Statistics show that we are on average 2.7 °F warmer now than a century ago. This is causing major problems for our wildlife, wildlands, and the outdoor heritage we enjoy in Arizona.

Ongoing drought conditions are affecting many wildlife populations. Forests throughout Northern Arizona are dying off from beetle infestations that are partially caused by warmer winter temperatures. Wildfires like the Rodeo-Chediski fire near Cibola in 2002 are getting bigger and burning unnaturally hotter. Habitually low water levels in Lake Mead and Lake Powell are impacting fish production and reducing boating opportunities. The list goes on and on.

In Arizona the topic of climate change remains controversial. The "sky is falling" mentality of the left combined with the "head-in-the-sand" naysayers on the right prevent reasoned discussion. With Arizona's outdoor heritage at stake, this is a shame. Left unaddressed, the climate issue will severely impact our natural surroundings and the hiking, camping, fishing, hunting and boating opportunities that Arizona is famous for.

Whether or not you believe that carbon emissions are causing Arizona's climate to change, it is undeniable that Arizona is warming. We must take steps to help our wildlife and wild places adapt to the hotter temperatures. Key migration corridors and important habitats for fish and wildlife must be conserved to maintain viable populations and diversity. Invasive plants such as yellow star thistle, cheatgrass, and other noxious weeds need to be controlled. Man-made water sources may be needed in areas where natural water sources have dried up.

I don't have all of the answers on how to do this, but I know a lot of good people in Arizona who can contribute to this discussion—hunters, anglers, farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, land trust officials, public land managers, state wildlife officials, and many more. We must come together for a discussion about the best ways to keep our wildlands healthy and to provide habitats that are resilient to warming temperatures.

We need new sources of funding to conduct the conservation and restoration activities essential to protect our valued resources in the future. Governor Napolitano has been working with six other western governors on a project that will provide some of the key answers. The Western Climate Initiative is a big step in the

right direction. The report is due for release later this week by the Western Governors Association.

At its heart, the Western Climate Initiative is a cap-and-trade system to reduce carbon emissions by 15% by 2020. The last draft stated that some carbon emitting industries may need to purchase "allowances to pollute" through an auction, and the proceeds of these auctions would be directed by each state towards various "public purposes", one of which would be "adaptation to climate change".

If included in the final plan, this would be an excellent start to a state-wide conservation adaptation strategy. This should be one issue related to climate change that we can all agree on. The state legislation and rule-making needed to formally implement it needs to move along promptly.

Certainly there remains doubt by some about the role of carbon emissions and our warming climates. This doubt may cause you to hesitate to support the cap proposed by the Western Climate initiative. From my perspective it's a huge gamble to do nothing to reduce carbon emissions, waiting on science to be absolutely certain one way or another. I'm unwilling to gamble with our outdoor heritage and the populations of fish and wildlife that are a vital part of Arizona's wildlands.

This is particularly true since most climate scientists are in the camp that believes human caused emissions are at least partially responsible for the changing climate, including Arizona State University's Dr. Jonathan Overpeck, the National Academy of Sciences, and the hundreds of scientists on the International Panel on Climate Change.

In my mind the question isn't, should we work to cut carbon emissions? Instead, the question is, how can we do it in a way that enhances our national security, protects our economy, provides for good paying jobs, and conserves the natural resources we value so much as Arizonans?

I view the Western Climate Initiative as a starting point from which we move forward. Instead of old-fashioned "command-and-control" regulations, it will incorporate a trading component that will allow for market-based incentives, which will drive new technologies and green jobs. I hope to see more "allowances to pollute" auctioned instead of given away to industry. The Western Climate Initiative won't be perfect. It will be a compromise plan that considers all affected stakeholders.

As we proceed I hope our discussion on the topic will be problem-solving instead of polarizing. After all, it is our outdoor heritage that is at risk and that is irreplaceable.

Ryna Rock, President  
Arizona Wildlife Federation  
2990 Shady Ln.  
Camp Verde, AZ 86322928-567-0665