

## EDITORIAL

### Should Environmental Professionals Get Serious about Climate Change?

John H. Perkins

As I write this piece in early August, the joys of summer in the Pacific Northwest are all around. I sit with a flannel shirt and wonder if it will get into the 70s today, even though last week's newspapers rattled on about 100-degree weather and oppressive humidity for most Americans. Climate change and global warming seem very far away.

About two months ago, however, I saw Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, a movie that I strongly recommend every person see, especially environmental professionals. This 100-minute film has only two characters: our planet Earth and our former Vice President (and, as he notes, the Former Future President of the United States). Once seen, the challenges of climate change will be with you permanently. Gore demonstrates the power of visuals and a coherent message to persuade, even when the conclusions are not happy.

Before I proceed further, I'll address the question of the film's scientific accuracy. Gore maintains that climate scientists agree with the conclusion that humans are causing climate instability that is likely to be harmful, primarily through emissions of gases such as carbon dioxide.

What do "real scientists" think about Gore's use of science? To judge by the review on the Web site RealClimate, Mr. Gore did very well on his homework.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Eric Steig, an isotope geochemist and climate scientist at the University of

Washington, said Gore had done "admirably."<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, skeptics of climate change can still be found; see, for example, the Web site JunkScience.com.<sup>3</sup> Skeptics claim to be doing good science, but their assertions are weak, as evidenced by a lack of their peer-reviewed articles. If policy is to be based on the best science available, then Mr. Gore is on the right track.

If the climate scientists are producing important information and Al Gore has captured it accurately, then what should environmental professionals be doing? More to the point, how will climate change affect the work of environmental professionals? In many ways, the readers of this journal will be affected, possibly severely. Consider a few examples.

Suppose you are a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) practitioner working on an environmental assessment of a new major highway project. In the scoping effort, should the extra carbon dioxide emissions, which a major highway will encourage or enable, be part of the assessment? In the alternatives assessment, should mass transit emitting lower carbon dioxide per passenger mile be included? Will the courts eventually decide that emissions of carbon dioxide should be assessed for this kind of project? Do you have the tools that will enable you to efficiently include these new factors?

Suppose instead that you are a land manager with the US Forest Service, the US National Park Service, or the US Department of Defense. In your projections, have you tried to include the effects of climate change? What does science say about how land under your management may change? If, for example, you manage land in Glacier National Park, how will an absence of glaciers affect your work?

Another example: suppose you are an urban and regional planner in the State of Florida or New York City. Is your master plan updated to include the effects of a 20-foot rise in sea level that may stem from melting of the ice on Greenland and Antarctica? *An Inconvenient Truth* had extremely effective graphics that showed maps of Florida and New York City before and after such a rise in sea level. Only the building of the most massive levee systems ever imagined will keep southern Florida and much of New York City from submersion if sea levels rise 20 feet. And how might you write an environmental impact statement for this system?

Consider a final example: suppose you help private companies prepare environmental management systems. Have you assessed your clients' emissions of carbon dioxide and other climate-altering gases? How will your clients alter their standard procedures if the climate grows warmer? What if the sea level rises? If climate change effects are not part of the environmental management system, is it professionally sound?

To be sure, the above four scenarios are hypothetical, but they raise issues that have a basis in science. Without paying attention to the science, one is simply hoping for good luck, especially when the scientific information is so readily available. Former Vice President Gore reminds us that the truth can be inconvenient. Responsible professionals cannot avert their eyes and hope the problem goes away.

These considerations raise two important issues for the National Association for Environmental Professionals. First, what does our Code of Ethics require of us in our profession and as an organization? Second, what should *Environmental Practice* publish to help the NAEP take a leadership

role in climate affairs? We welcome your input.

## Notes

1. RealClimate, 2006, "Climate Science from Climate Scientists," <http://www.realclimate.org>, accessed August 4.

2. E. Steig, 2006, "Review of *An Inconvenient Truth*," May 10, <http://www.realclimate.org>, accessed August 4.

3. JunkScience.com, 2006, "All the Junk That's Fit to Debunk," <http://www.junkscience.com>, accessed August 4.

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## LYNTON KEITH CALDWELL

Environmental Pioneer

November 21, 1913 - August 15, 2006

Lynton Keith Caldwell, 92, one of the twentieth century's most distinguished scholars in the fields of environmental policy, law, science, and administration, died August 15 at his home in Bloomington, Indiana. At the time of his death, he was Arthur F. Bentley Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University. During the 1960s, Caldwell was virtually a lone voice in his work to establish US environmental policy. In 1962, his groundbreaking article, "Environment: A New Focus for Public Policy?", published in *Public Administration Review*, launched what would develop into a new subfield of public policy studies. In 1972, he was the catalyst for the founding of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) at Indiana University, Bloomington. Although he officially retired in 1984, he continued until 1990 an active program of scholarly research, lecturing, writing, and mentoring students around the world. His last book, *The National Environmental Policy Act: An Agenda for the Future*, was published in 1988.

Caldwell is perhaps best known as a principal architect of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the first act of its kind in the world, signed into US law by President Richard Nixon on January 1, 1970. NEPA has been emulated by more than 100 countries. Caldwell is also credited as being the "inventor" of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Following decades of largely uncontrolled pollution of waters, soils, and air, and growing public outcry about rapid environmental deterioration, the passage of NEPA started off a decade of new Congressional activity in the 1970s that resulted in the establishment of important and enduring environmental legislation.

Caldwell earned his undergraduate degree in English at the University of Chicago in 1934, his Masters degree at Harvard in History and Government in 1938, and his PhD in Political Science at the University of Chicago in 1943; he was awarded an honorary LLD from Western Michigan University in 1997. During his career, Caldwell served on the faculties of Indiana University, the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the University of Oklahoma, Syracuse University, and the University of California at Berkeley; he had shorter appointments at some 80 other collegiate institutions both within the US and overseas. He provided services to the public through numerous venues, worked closely with several important scientific bodies, and served on the editorial boards of numerous prestigious scientific and professional journals. A lover of nature, bird watching, and botany from an early age, he founded local Audubon Society and Nature Conservancy chapters. He was a prodigious writer and author, publishing more than 200 articles and monographs and 16 books with translations in 19 languages. Caldwell leaves behind him his wife of 65 years, Helen, a son and daughter, two grandsons, a great-granddaughter, and many other relatives and friends.

- Wendy Read Wertz