

Daring plan to meet climate change goals

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Three years ago the people of Sonoma County established the most ambitious goals in the United States for doing our part to put the brakes on climate change.

Elected officials from the county's nine cities and the Board of Supervisors set the target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 25 percent of 1990 levels by the year 2015.

It's a goal way ahead of what's been proposed in Sacramento or anywhere else in the country.

Now, the Climate Protection Campaign, a Sonoma-based organization that works in partnership with local governments and businesses, is releasing an action plan for meeting these objectives.



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Curbing global warming calls for monumental action -- nothing short of transforming our energy, transportation and land-use systems. That means making a serious investment. The action plan shows that reducing our global warming footprint pays back in many ways by stimulating and strengthening our economy, creating business innovation opportunities and improving our energy security and our health.

It's a bold plan and proposes embarking on the most daring and far-reaching public works project in Sonoma County history. It will, among other things, make our homes and businesses more energy efficient, change the way we travel and develop more earth-friendly ways of producing electricity.

The plan's solutions will not drain our city and county budgets. Rather, they pay their own way using a variety of financing methods. Unlike the factors that led to the current economic turmoil, the proposed solutions invest in brick-and-mortar infrastructure and build new industries that will contribute in tangible ways to our region. Implementing the plan has the potential to stimulate economic growth and create green-collar jobs.

The scoping plan for California's Global Warming Solutions Act, released in October, predicts a number of benefits to reducing greenhouse gas emissions statewide. These include projections of \$33 billion in increased economic production; an increase in overall personal income of \$16 billion; and more than

100,000 new jobs. Some experts suggest that these are conservative estimates.

In recent weeks, in the face of the global economic crisis and the presidential campaign, it's been suggested we should delay climate protection programs until teetering financial systems are stabilized.

We disagree. Global warming is not on hold, and in fact addressing it may provide some remedies for financial crisis. In many ways the battle is already being waged by the growing green movement, and the green economy is already putting people to work. Infrastructure investment and jobs creation is a proven economic stimulus strategy. We're at a historic fork in the road and the Climate Protection Campaign plan is pointing us in the right direction.

Whether or not your candidate won Tuesday, change is coming -- is here -- and the environmental crisis must have an equal place on the nation's agenda.

Details of the plan are online at www.coolplan.org. Here are some highlights:

Solutions: Voluntary energy efficiency retrofit of 80 percent of Sonoma County homes and businesses. Replace fossil-fuel generated electricity and produce 67 percent of our current energy needs with "clean" local power from solar, biofuel, wind, geothermal and other renewable sources. Increase water efficiency. Establish green building ordinances. Develop commuter trains and other public transit. Create a rental fleet of electric cars. Reduce travel by curbing urban sprawl. Encourage businesses to implement telecommuting programs. Protect and increase land devoted to agriculture and forests.

Financing: Set up a loan fund that helps property owners overcome the upfront cost of retrofitting their home or business by paying the loan back on their annual property tax bill. Use low-interest municipal bonds to fund electricity generation systems using renewable energy sources. Provide optional "pay-as-you-save" financing for purchase of energy efficient appliances that get paid back at rates lower than the utility bill savings.

The action plan estimates an energy infrastructure makeover costing \$3.5 billion to \$4 billion over 10 years. Too much? Here's some perspective. Sonoma County already spends huge sums on activities that contribute to global warming. The budget for widening Highway 101 from the Novato Narrows to Windsor is more than \$1 billion. Annual new construction costs in the county approach \$1 billion. Our collective gasoline bill is \$750 million a year.

The Climate Protection Campaign has shown us a way to shift this money from fossil fuels to renewables -- a way that will keep our dollars circulating here in our local economy.

The action plan deserves careful consideration by the community, political leadership and business. History has presented us with this monumental challenge and opportunity. We've already made the commitment to reduce our contribution to global warming. The next step is to actually do it. It is time to act.

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