

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.peninsuladailynews.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Article published May 11, 2009

Though rural, Clallam attacks climate change

By Paul Gottlieb
Peninsula Daily News

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a three-part series on local response to climate change.

By Paul Gottlieb

Peninsula Daily News

Though their annual greenhouse gas emissions weigh thousands of metric tons, the North Olympic Peninsula's two county governments -- Clallam and Jefferson -- emit a far lesser volume of climate-changing gases than urban areas.

Still, both counties have formed climate change committees and pledged to reduce their carbon footprints -- the amount of heat-trapping carbon dioxide they spew into the atmosphere that, in turn, heats the earth's climate -- by 80 percent by 2050.

Over the last 18 months, they surveyed their energy use to determine the metric tons of greenhouse gases their buildings and vehicles emit, using software provided by the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives.

They don't create enough greenhouse gases to make them fall under mandatory state Department of Ecology reporting requirements that begin in 2009, but they are among about 30 communities large and small -- Langley and Coupeville, populations under 1,000, are among them and Sequim soon will be -- that are taking steps to reduce greenhouse gases.

"It's just important not to lose the forest for the trees," said Clallam County Associate Planner Sam Fox, who also chairs the county Climate Advisory Group.

"It's not so much the direct emissions of the county as much as acknowledging what is happening on a global scale is happening here. This is an opportunity that's been presented to us now for changing our behavior, which we will have to do to reduce our impact on the planet."

Climate change is a global issue no matter where you live, said Amy Shatzkin, the International Council's regional manager for the Pacific Northwest, based in Seattle, and the group's liaison with Jefferson and Clallam counties.

"The effects are global, but aside from that issue, this is a moral imperative," Shatzkin said last week.

"It's also the issue of energy usage and management, and do we want to use this as an important tool and in using energy more responsibly and saving taxpayer dollars in doing so."

Population aside, climate change also affects natural resources near and dear to the North Olympic Peninsula, Shatzkin said.

She suggested examining the work of The Climate Impacts Group of the University of Washington (<http://cses.washington.edu/cig/>), which has conducted detailed studies of climate change and how it speeds snow-melt, warms salmon-bearing streams and causes drier weather that increases threats from wildfires, she said.

The federal government, too, will be stepping in with mandatory measures, Shatzkin predicted, as the Environmental Protection Agency has declared carbon dioxide a risk to human health.

"It is expected the federal government will create a regulation system for carbon dioxide, so local governments that are dealing with this now have an advantage in terms of dealing with expected government regulations."

But while Port Townsend and Jefferson County are jointly attacking climate change, Sequim, Forks and Port Angeles in Clallam County have gone their own ways on climate change or are heeding the concerns of constituents skeptical about the issue.

"Like all small towns, we are just trying to get through the year with budget issues and all the rest of it," Forks Mayor Nedra Reed said.

"One of the things we have found is that most of the community has mixed notions on climate change."

The Peninsula Daily News interviewed government officials from across the North Olympic Peninsula over the last several weeks to find out what they've been doing to address climate change since Nov. 19, 2007, the last time the PDN took a comprehensive look at the issue.

Monday: What Clallam County and the city of Port Angeles have done to address climate change.

Staff writer Paul Gottlieb can be reached at 360-417-3536 or at paul.gottlieb@peninsuladailynews.com.

All materials Copyright © 2008 Horvitz Newspapers.