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Climate change: It's all about the numbers

Shadia Fayne Wood, Survival Media Agency

As many as 400,000 people showed up in New York City for the People's Climate March, including busloads of Sierrans from all over the state and the nation.

by Catherine Hiller

Ultimately, it's all about the numbers. A demonstration can have inspiring speeches, gorgeous floats, and stirring bands, but to be successful, it has to attract many people. So I made it my mission to get the people I knew to come to the People's Climate March in New York City on September 21. I tried my best to get the numbers up.

Climate change is about the numbers, too: specifically the amount of carbon dioxide in the air, measured in parts per million (ppm). What is a safe ratio for a livable Earth? 350 ppm is an acceptable number, but it's already 400 ppm. A big march could spread climate change awareness, prove to politicians that people care about the issue, and possibly lead to appropriate action.

I kept posting on Facebook and Twitter. I e-mailed about 100 people with a personal plea. I knew that hearing about a specific plan can help people act, so I asked local acquaintances to join me in the first car on the 10:26 to Grand Central. I certainly hoped to recruit my best pals, but of six good friends, two were away, and the other four were mobility-impaired, with aching hip, knee, ankle and foot. (Times like this remind me that my friends and I are well past first youth.)

I spoke to some of my neighbors. They shook their heads and explained that their children had soccer practice on Sundays. I thought it best not to share my thoughts. Let's see: go to a possibly historic demonstration to save our planet and show your children what activism looks like versus *soccer practice?*

It was a perfect day for marching: cloudy and 70 degrees. My husband and I and our homemade sign waited at the Metro North station platform where the first car would stop. Not one person I knew joined us. I entered the train downcast. Once inside, though, I brightened to see other people who were going to the rally, strangers all, recognizable by their signs, comfortable shoes, and smiling faces.

A woman seated near me was there with her double stroller and blond twins. She was planning to push the stroller from Grand Central to Columbus Circle, where the march was scheduled to begin. That seemed like a long additional walk, so I told her we would help getting the stroller and the twins into the subway. I grew apprehensive when she told me another mother of twins would be meeting her at Grand Central. There would be four toddlers and two double strollers down the stairs to the shuttle, then across the longest passage in the subway system and down three long staircases to the C train. Could we really manage it? I was relieved when the mothers decided that, after all, they would walk, and I was grateful for their choice when we were on the crowded station platform at 42nd Street and could scarcely squeeze in to board the next train, where the

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Arctic ice is the key indicator of climate crisis

by Moisha Blechman

Don't be fooled by the cool comfort of the summer of 2014. It disguises a new and fundamental change in how weather is created. In fact, we should be very suspicious about that coolness we enjoyed.

After all, the planet as a whole was hotter in 2013/14 than ever before recorded. The planet is heating up. An example important to us in the East is California, our source of vegetables and fruits every winter. What will it produce this winter if it is in a state of devastating drought? What is the basis for the new weather of extremes we see everywhere? How does it work?

It all hinges on the Arctic. What global warming is doing to the Arctic is causing climate change all over the world. It is disrupting all historical weather patterns.

We have known for the past 100 years that changing the composition of the atmosphere would disturb radiative balance. Radiative balance is the crucial balance between solar energy retained by the planet and solar energy reflected to outer space. It is the bottom-line equation for a healthy planet. In response to the increase from 280 ppm of CO_2 to 400ppm of CO_2, the new atmospheric blanket is warming the earth. The Arctic has heated up by an astonishing degree and is not only continuing to warm by several mechanisms at once, but has added another of devastating consequence. Let's take a brief look at those changes.

Jet stream shifts

The first is a big change in the path of the jet stream. It is caused by a *decrease* in the difference between Arctic temperatures and mid-latitude temperatures. The big difference in temperatures between the two regions maintained a jet stream that separated the two regions with a defined circular path that traveled swiftly. It mixed temperatures and it changed the weather frequently enough to deliver the alternating mix of rain and sun we have enjoyed for millennia. The warmer Arctic has erased the temperature difference.

As a result, the jet stream has dramatically changed its path to a huge loop descending south, bringing the cool air we are experiencing in New York with it. That movement is robbing the Arctic of its cool air and pushing mid-latitude warm air into the Arctic, warming it even more. At the same time, the jet stream is no longer energized by the energy differences. It has become much slower, to the point of blocking weather changes. This is why a hot and dry period will last much longer, building up intensity, or a wet and rainy period will do the same. In that way, the change in the path and the speed of the jet stream is a big factor affecting all weather in the northern hemisphere—for the worse, and permanently. I would call it the first tipping point.

Arctic's vulnerability

Seventy percent of the global warming has been absorbed by the oceans. At first it warmed the upper regions of the water, but has started to warm its depths as well. For the moment we are spared feeling the increased heat, but as the oceans circulate, they

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Conservation Action

by Susan Lawrence, Conservation Chair

People's Climate March: next steps

You will be reading this column a few weeks after the fantastic People's Climate March (PCM) that sent the message loud and clear to the world and, most importantly, to world leaders that decisive, giant steps are necessary to greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and curb climate change. Now, how do we make that happen in our lives, our communities, our state, our nation and the world?

Take some deep breaths please, step back and think hard and out-of-the-box, creatively, on how each of us in our own way can make a difference. Let's work within the Sierra Club—so many of our members are energized by the PCM and its resonance around the world. So how can we become more engaged, empowered and act?

The Atlantic Chapter leadership, its committees and the Groups in the Chapter will be planning and working together on how we can reach out to others in the wings to say come on board and let's work together to expand our efforts on critical priorities. And we will be connecting with other key stakeholders, including other environmental organizations, environmental justice and faith based communities, and labor to link our efforts and multiply their impact.

It is very important now to support candidates for political office in this fall's elections who will work on our priorities. That means particularly in the NYS Senate, focusing our political efforts on those candidates who will help to break the roadblock that the Republican minority and the Independent Democratic Coalition have constructed to stop critical environmental legislation from coming to the floor for a vote, even when the majority of the senators support the legislation. That means supporting U.S. House candidates who will act to protect our Earth's resources and its people from climate change. That means supporting Comptroller DiNapoli and Attorney General Schneiderman for reelection.

As environmentalists, we need to consider a holistic approach to next steps. We must consider many issues/actions that are important, such as campaign finance reform, population growth, energy conservation and efficiency as well as more efficient use of natural resources, greatly reduced pollution, and massive expansion of renewable energy.

We must also reduce public subsidies for fossil fuel industries to drill, transport, and burn more fossil fuels and, instead, direct those subsidies to renewable energy. Leveling the playing field, as other countries have done, with no subsidies, would work as more and more renewables become cost effective.

We can move our communities to become as green and sustainable as possible now and, as technology advances, make that even more possible. You can work with your local governments to become "Climate Smart Communities" that take a pledge to examine their energy use and then act to conserve energy and use renewable energy in all sectors of the community, including heat, power, light, construction, transportation and other areas.*

Smart planning and zoning to stop sprawl and protect critical environmental areas helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And you can work with other key stakeholders to get your communities to ban fracking for natural gas, importation of fracking waste, and exporting water for fracking elsewhere.

For those of you involved in one way or another in working to curb greenhouse gas emissions, thank you. For those of you considering your next step to become involved, please do so and we encourage you to join the Sierra Club in our many campaigns on these issues. If we each just focus on one or two priorities and take action, we can make a difference.

**Go to our Chapter website to download our "Renewable Energy Brochure" and learn more about ways to take action. Go to www.dec.ny.gov/energy?50845.htm for information about Climate Smart Communities.)*

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press of people kept us upright.

We'd planned to meet the Clearwater contingent at 73rd Street: as they'd suggested, we were wearing dark blue to symbolize "a river of humanity." At Columbus Circle, we were told the subway train was skipping all stops until 86th Street. We realized we'd better get off the train and walk to the meeting point. When we emerged onto the street, we were dazzled by the crowds, and metal barriers made it impossible for us to go uptown. So we just joined in the throng and began walking on our own.

The crowd's diversity was immediately apparent. This was not your average protest, with 60-year-old white people and a small percentage of college students. This was thrillingly inclusive, with people of all ages who had come from near and far. The SEIU was out in force, and indigenous people led the parade. I spoke to men and women from Buffalo and Wisconsin and California. I saw signs held by nurses and scientists, by teachers and young parents, by Teamsters and socialists, and by people primarily concerned with climate justice. I saw brown faces, black faces, white faces: happy faces, all of them. I did not see the celebrities who were present—Ban Ki-Moon, Leonardo DiCaprio, Mark Ruffalo—but a group of belly dancers with diaphanous veils shimmied alongside us.

I had the sense that this march was big, really big. To manage expectations, the organizers had predicted "tens of thousands," but I was hoping for 100,000. That was the magic number for me. That would show people that although the age of vast demonstrations had passed, a number of people would still come out and rally for a bold governmental response to climate change.

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Catherine Hiller

Every so often I'd look at my phone. My cousin said he was at Columbus Circle at that moment. So was I—but it was far too crowded for us to find each other. Another cousin said he was at 84th Street. This was a especially satisfying, as for all of my efforts, he was the only person who came solely because I had asked: he had been unaware of the march before my e-mail. In one single afternoon 10 days earlier, I had heard from *seven* organizations about the demonstration—clearly, I'm on too many lists!

We were at 48th Street and Avenue of the Americas at 1:00 for the minute of silence followed by the minute of noise: shouts and drumbeats and horns to show our resolve. People were leaning out of buildings, cheering us on. We passed two large screens showing huge crowds . . . in full sunlight, though the day was gray. I realized we were seeing footage of demonstrations from around the world—thousands of actions in dozens of countries.

I glanced at my phone and saw a text from my son, Jonathan Warnow, a founder of 350.org, and the executive producer of *Disruption*, a film made to rally activists before the march. He texted: "How's the vibe? You with a lot of people? Tired? Hungry? I'm at 45th and 9th." Fenton Communications had generously let the Peoples Climate March organizers use their offices. I wrote back, "Very crowded, great vibe, but may need bathroom soon." He texted back, "I have a bathroom," and with that, my husband and I left the march to say hello to Jonathan.

In one room, about a dozen young people were tapping away on their laptops, and my son proudly introduced me to them: "This is my mother. She's here to use the bathroom."

"Thanks, Jon," I replied. "Some day, I hope to introduce you to my friends the same way."

Obsessed as always with the numbers, I asked Jonathan what he thought. 350.org had actually hired a crowd estimator (who knew this was a profession?), and when Jonathan told me his number I just shook my head. Fantasyland, I thought. I began trying to figure it out for myself. Fifty short blocks and seven long blocks. Call it 75 short blocks. If all the blocks were equally crowded at the height of the march, at, let's say, 1,000 people per short block (an optimistic number), that would be 75,000 people. A very nice showing, but nowhere near what 350.org's guy had said.

We rejoined the march and lingered by the Chapin Sisters, who were singing songs I love, some by my hero Pete Seeger. Music touches the heart as few things can, and soon I was in tears of joy about this stirring and inclusive march.

But 310,000 people, as Jon's guy had said? Nice try, but no way.

My husband woke me the next morning with the *New York Times* article about the rally. According to the paper of record, 311,000 of us were at the People's Climate March. The group Environmental Action put the number at 400,000. Either way, it was the largest demonstration in New York since the 1982 anti-nuke rally in Central Park—and the largest climate rally of all time. What a way to wake up, and what a wake-up call for the leaders of the world!

Ultimately, it's all about the numbers. The People's Climate March was massive.

Catherine Hiller, a member of the Lower Hudson Group, is a writer and editor.