MY TURN

From climate despair to local action

By NANCY HAZARD

Winter is also a great time for planning. Explore how to get off fossil fuels, learn about the beauty and benefits of native plants and dream about adding trees and shrubs to your yards.

In the last two months, several reports caught my eye — scientific studies about benchmarks I've been watching for the last 30 years about the health of our planet — and the news is scary!

■ On Dec. 18, 2024, EcoWatch carried the story that in 2024, NOAA found that the arctic tundra is no longer a "carbon sink," but a "carbon source."

■ On Jan. 10, 2025, Nature Magazine reported that we have passed the goal set by the U.N. of 1.5oC as the maximum safe global temperature increase.

■ On Jan. 11, 2025, Science Focus magazine reported that scientists are seeing that the Gulf Stream, which brings warmth to Europe and our Northeast states, has slowed by 15%.

All these things are caused by our warming planet, which as reported often, has been caused by human-emitted carbon, methane and other greenhouse gases, as well as the reduction of vegetation that absorbs and stores carbon.

While I mourn that Donald Trump pulled us out of the U.N. Climate talks and the Paris agreement and that we will lose our voice internationally, past federal and state government decisions have empowered us to take action now.

For example, in Massachusetts, in 2003 a law was passed that required our electric utility companies to increase the amount of carbon-free electricity generated by wind, water, and solar each year. Today, statewide, 30% of our electricity is carbon-free. Going forward, they must increase zero-carbon electricity by 3% each year, so we can all have 100% zero-carbon electricity by 2050.

Now it is our turn. We need to use this zero-carbon electricity instead of oil, gas, and gasoline in our homes and for getting around.

The government is offering a helping hand through government-created utility programs and funds from the Inflation Reduction Act IRA to upgrade our buildings, purchase electric vehicles, and improve public transit. Since buildings and transportation use about 80% of the fossil fuels emissions in Massachusetts, taking advantage of these programs would go a long way to reducing new climate change emissions.

This will not only safeguard our planet and ourselves, but help our pocketbooks as well.

The Greenfield 2007 Energy Audit found that in 2008, $67 million left our community to pay for fossil fuels that we used. Let's keep that money at home! Additionally, climate-induced storms and fires are causing tragedy and costing us millions of dollars.

It is well known that action is the best antidote to despair. Here are some suggestions.

■ Check out the video of Greening Greenfield's Energy Fair held last fall, and the info packet. They explain how to find financial assistance to make the change to zero-carbon electricity. You can find these resources on both Greening Greenfield and FRCOG's websites.

■ Switching to electricity, however, is not enough. For years the U.N. has held poorly reported conferences to address an equally pressing crisis — that of the loss of biodiversity. Much has been learned about the need to restore habitat native to each area, not only to address the loss of 30% of our birds since 1970, but also to increase nature's ability to draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and sequester it.

■ In Greenfield, we've been making a start. Over the past five years, the city, the Greenfield Tree Committee, and residents have collaborated to plant over 800 street trees that provide summer shade and habitat for native butterflies and moths, bees, birds, and other critters.

■ This winter, two community groups are cutting invasive shrubs in our parks to make room for native habitat to return and thrive. You can find out more and how to get involved by going to the Nature section of Greening Greenfield's website or searching for "building pollinator corridors in Greenfield."

■ In May, the city, in collaboration with Youth Climate Action Franklin County and Greening Greenfield, will invite residents to help plant 700 trees and shrubs as a first step to restoring Millers Meadow on the Green River.

So let's roll up our sleeves! If you are looking for ways to meet others and get outdoors, please join winter invasive plant clipping efforts, and spring tree planting. Winter is also a great time for planning. Explore how to get off fossil fuels, learn about the beauty and benefits of native plants and dream about adding trees and shrubs to your yards.

Finally, please join Greening Greenfield on Feb. 24, for our second talk in a series on supporting birds in our community. Check it out at www.GreeningGreenfieldMA.org.

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