



Fire on Planet Earth: 2020

4 December 2020

James Hansen

Reversing climate change is possible, sensible and necessary. A year ago, when I was in the middle of writing *Sophie's Planet*, I thought that I may have a hard time selling people on the fact that we must go back at least to mid-20th century climate for the sake of preserving shorelines and our coastal cities. That sell should be a bit easier now that people have a better, bitter taste of increasing climate extremes. That still does not mean it will be easy.

There is still science to be done to make the case fully persuasive and define the most efficient pathway for getting there. We submitted a letter proposal ([Aerosols, the Ocean and Ice](#)) to a philanthropist this year, which did not get funded. I believe the best way for me to make the case for this research and application program is to complete *Sophie's Planet*. The book is being written at the level of a university student – aimed especially at young leaders – so I believe that it will be understandable by potential funders. The climate problem is complex because of its many facets – it involves science, energy, economics, politics, and more – but I hope that by describing my experience I can help illuminate the problem and solution. We sent out draft [Chapters 40 & 41](#) for fact checking this week. Remaining chapters, describing needed science and policy, are partially written.

I am not going to write a long story here as I did in [Fire on Planet Earth](#) last December – that story is still relevant. There are many reasons for optimism this year including young people in policy ([Student Leadership](#)), young women in technology ([Progressive Policy Agenda](#)), and science ([Sentinel for the Home Planet](#)). But we have a difficult task to help people understand what is needed to assure that young people have a bright future on our remarkable planet.

Last December I made an emergency appeal for funding support of Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions, after we lost two of our long-term major funders ([Two Gentlemen](#)). We were gratified by the outpouring of support of more than 100 donations and matching support from the Grantham Foundation, which allowed us to continue our program through 2020.

This year we are in about the same situation as last year – we do not have quite enough funding for Columbia to renew appointments through June 2021. I hope that you may consider a donation to either my CSAS program at Columbia University (supports Pushker Kharecha – my

deputy and expert in carbon cycle and energy – and Makiko Sato – physicist and data expert) or my non-profit CSAS.inc (which supports our communications consultant Eunbi Jeong and our work with attorney Dan Galpern on legal cases aimed at affecting the policies of the fossil fuel industry and governments, and supports other expenses – computers, copiers, travel, etc. – without overhead.)

The CSAS.inc is supported by a wonderful group of climate experts and advocates including Betsy Taylor (President), Bill McKibben (Vice President), Larry Travis (Treasurer), Jay R. Halfon (Secretary), Jim Miller, and Jeff Sachs. You can learn more about them [here](#).

Sophie's Planet will be a de facto proposal for longer term support, as it will be the best case that I can make for what needs to be done this decade. I hope that I can use it to generate interest and longer-term support from a philanthropic organization or individuals.

The work we are doing with Dan Galpern on the legal front is equally important as the science. Exxon, Shell and the other so-called “carbon majors” have profited mightily from production and marketing of oil, coal and gas. Through their campaigns of deception and manipulation they have succeeded to date in ensuring against meaningful state, federal or international restrictions on the use of their products. They pretend to be moving toward becoming energy companies – putting images of windmills on their websites – while mainly continuing business-as-usual. But if legal liability is imposed on the carbon majors to clean up their mess, they may begin to get serious about clean energy. Carbon dioxide removal is expensive.

We are considering two basic approaches: (1) One or more cases by a highly vulnerable nation or group of nations brought in their jurisdictions and enforced worldwide, and (2) One or more cases by highly impacted individuals brought in a jurisdiction in which one or more carbon major defendant(s) are domiciled, but again enforced worldwide.

Towards those ends, Dan and I attended recent conferences of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the 2019 Conference of the Parties in Madrid ([Wheels of Justice](#)). Our purpose was in part to forge connections with one or other nation that might be willing to take on the fossil fuel giants. That's admittedly a big ask, given the political reach and power of the carbon majors and the continuing high dependency of most national economies on fossil fuels. Nevertheless, Galpern's advocacy reached the cabinet level in one South Pacific Island state before a change in government – unrelated to the proposal – displaced our principal champion there. Independently, a cabinet-level official in a Latin American nation has seriously considered this proposed line of action. We will continue this international advocacy in 2021, while also preparing for the contingency that the case might need to be brought by one or other set of individuals.

Due to COVID-19, we are unable to access our office and therefore we encourage donors to use the online giving options, which provide fast, contactless gift processing.

Contributions to CSAS at Columbia University can be made directly at <https://csas.givenow.columbia.edu/#>. This is the safest and fastest way to give directly to our Columbia program. Should you still prefer to send a check, please make it **payable to** “The Trustees of Columbia University” and include **a note** on the memo line that the gift is for “Earth Institute's Program on Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions.”

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Donation instructions are also on our giving page: <https://csas.earth.columbia.edu/giving>.
Pushker Kharecha pak2111@columbia.edu also can provide assistance.

Contributions to CSAS.inc. can be made directly at <https://donorbox.org/support-climate-science-awareness-and-solutions>. Online contributions help us with faster and contactless gift processing. Should you still prefer to send a check, please use the temporary address below.

Please write "Gift to Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions" on the memo line and send it to:

Dr. James E. Hansen
Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions
560 Riverside Dr. #21B
New York, NY 10027

Donation instructions are also on our giving page:

<https://www.climate-science-awareness-solutions.org/donate>. Eunbi Jeong
(csasinc.jeong@gmail.com) can provide additional information if you have any questions.