

In 'Drawdown,' Paul Hawken Ditches the Rhetoric to Offer 100 Practical Climate Solutions

Source: mnn.com

Published: May 4, 2017



Paul Hawken's (right) latest book has a number of ways to remedy climate change. (Photo: Ken Edelstein)

By [Lloyd Alter](#)

Paul Hawken has a message for all you climate warriors.

Stop calling yourselves warriors!

The eco-business philosopher — author of “The Ecology of Commerce,” “Natural Capitalism” and other popular works — has just kicked off his tour for a new book. Maybe it should be called a “movement tour.”

Before launching Project Drawdown, the general idea had been bouncing around Hawken’s head for more than a decade. It’s a simple concept, really. “Do the math” to identify the 100 most effective, readily achievable steps to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Rank those solutions (based on their potential impact on global warming). Then, present them as a plan to “drawdown” greenhouse gases from the historic levels to which human beings have hiked them.

The project took shape in 2013, after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its Fifth Assessment, Hawken told an audience recently at the Carter Center in Atlanta. [The Fifth Assessment](#) was a daunting document. It was the most comprehensive compendium of peer-

reviewed research in human history. And it leaves little doubt that we're already changing the climate, that that's bad news, and that things will get worse the longer we put off serious action.

But Hawken says the report didn't depress him. The response to it did. Friends — many of them scientists and environmental leaders — anxiously approached him at various events and whispered: "Game over."

"And this wasn't just one person," he stresses. "It was weird."

Worse still were the impractical bits of advice trotted out by leading organizations: "Forego fossil fuels." "Move closer to work." "Change the car you drive." "Consume less." "Be efficient."

"These aren't solutions," he told the Atlanta audience. "They're proverbs."

Paths to progress



*Wind energy would've been the top solution to the problem if you combined both offshore and onshore turbines.
(Photo: Ian Dick/flickr)*

So Hawken put together his own nonprofit to come up with a more practical and well-documented plan. What steps really could do the most, either to reduce greenhouse emissions or to pull them out of the atmosphere? Which of them could be measured? Which were scalable? Which were economically viable? Which could be achieved — now — in the real world?

Some 70 researchers and scientists came on as fellows to analyze potential solutions. Nearly 150 prominent people — ranging from atmospheric scientist Michael Mann to food writer Michael Pollan to climate activist Bill McKibben to quarterback Tom Brady — were roped in to serve as advisers. A staff was hired to convey the findings with striking images and in clear, accessible language that, as Hawken put it, “even a ninth grader” could understand.

The result is “[Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming](#).” It could have been boring. But instead it’s a beautiful book chock-full of digestible information and surprises.

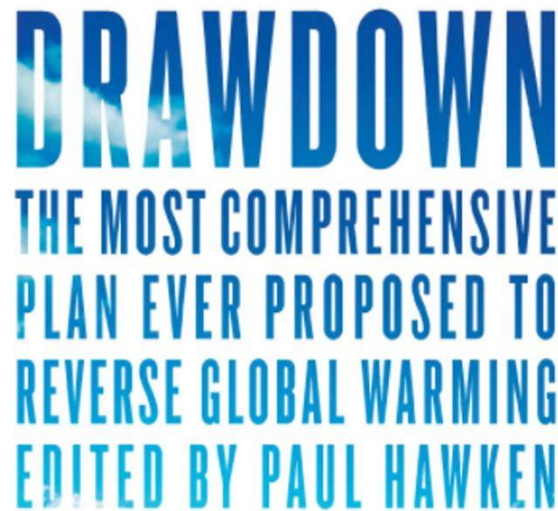
One of those surprises: Hawken notes that some of the largest impacts could be bundled together as “empowering girls and women.” The research concluded that specific steps toward “Family Planning” and “Educating Girls” each would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 59.6 gigatons between now and 2050.

The No. 1 solution sounds so mundane that it’s also surprising. It’s called “Refrigerant Management.” If hydrofluorocarbons were phased out of air conditioners, freezers and other equipment more quickly than already mandated by international agreement, and if that process was carefully managed to prevent the hydrofluorocarbons from escaping, the equivalent of 89.74 fewer gigatons of carbon dioxide would reach the upper atmosphere.

Other solutions include more familiar standards among climate fixes. Those [related to buildings, cities and energy](#) comprise about a third of the list of 100. Hawken points out that if you combined “Wind Turbines (offshore)” and “Wind Turbines (onshore),” wind energy in general would end up the top solution. And the cost-benefit analysis of “Drawdown” concludes that more wind turbines would save money in the long run.

Some of the most intriguing solutions didn’t even make the list because there wasn’t enough research to quantify them. “Drawdown” groups those together under a separate category called “Coming Attractions.” There’s sure to be lots wry commentary about one of them, which Hawken dubbed “A Cow Walks onto a Beach.” It’s based on recent research finds that cows, sheep and goats that eat seaweed burp less. The science is preliminary, Hawken notes, but the initial findings are encouraging.

His larger point is that “Drawdown” is based on concrete numbers drawn from concrete research on here-and-now solutions — and that this research-culling approach will continue to yield more promising solutions.



“The reason it’s the most comprehensive plan ever proposed is because no one’s ever proposed one — in 40 years,” Hawken quips.

Actual next steps?



Hawken is taking a more measured approach to a climate change solution. Is it forceful enough, though, to create real change? (Photo: Karla Cote/flickr)

That claim raises a question: What constitutes a “plan”? “Drawdown” presents a list of solutions. But isn’t a plan more than that? What’s next? What are steps need to be taken to get each of these solutions implemented? How will they get done?

Which brings us to a followup issue. Jargon isn’t Hawken’s only pet peeve about the way global-warming activists communicate. He also urges them to stop using confrontational, militaristic terms. It’s not a “fight,” he says. Let’s not talk about “slashing” greenhouse emissions “as if there were some sort of machete.”

The activists battling special interests to adopt wiser climate policies might take issue with that. Those ambitious wind power goals become viable only after someone works to pass laws that encourage our energy transition. For that matter, the most direct way for Americans to empower girls and women is through foreign aid and family planning — two concepts that aren’t exactly enjoying smooth sailing nowadays in Washington.

Doesn’t putting such solutions in place require a bit of a fight? And might not framing a movement as a battle help inspire the troops?

In an article last summer [in the New Republic entitled “A World at War,”](#) McKibben — the climate advocate on Project Drawdown’s advisers committee — appeared to answer those questions pretty definitively: “World War III is well and truly underway,” he wrote of climate change. “And we are losing.”

In fairness, the word choice reflects differing roles that Hawken and McKibben play in the climate movement. As a kind of prophet for sustainability in business, Hawken always has been focused on teamwork and opportunities. It's a bit of a rabbit hole for him to pick a fight with more politically-minded climate activists over whether they should call a fight a fight. But inside that bugbear, there's a message worth heeding.

Hawken is attempting to infuse the climate debate with his own tenacious optimism — powered by authoritative, useful information.

“We might be on the cusp of a very different kind of renaissance of a whole new set of ideas,” he told the Atlanta audience. Rather than view ourselves as victims, he asked, could we see climate change as the “gift” that could drive civilization toward a more harmonious relationship with nature.

And he has a response for those friends who responded with despair to the IPCC's Fifth Assessment.

“It's not ‘game over,’” Hawken said. “It's game on.”

This article no longer exists at the Source link above. It can be found in the Matteroftrust.org Resource Library.
