A note from our President

Let’s be honest: 2020 was a year we’d all like to forget. But amidst the chaos of the global pandemic, Trump’s disastrous and divisive presidency, outrage in the streets over yet another year plagued by police brutality and systemic racism and a climate crisis spiraling out of control, our small non-profit continues to thrive and deliver on our promise to protect and restore the diversity of life.

Despite the unique challenges of 2020, in each of our four key program areas we have significant successes to report and as 2021 begins, CSE is riding a wave of growing regional and national influence that promises to keep us working hard at building the sustainable, diverse, and localized economy the world desperately needs. As always, we could not have achieved anything without the consistent and generous support of our community of friends, members, supporters and allies. We hope this year’s successes inspire all of you to continue to work alongside us and collaborate with us to accelerate the transition to a sane and sustainable world.

-John Talberth, Ph.D., President

CLIMATE JUSTICE PROGRAM

Through its Climate Justice Program (CJP) CSE is working to rapidly phase out the fossil fuel economy, promote science-based climate action plans and ensure that climate solutions are an effective tool for reversing environmental injustices. In 2020, the CJP’s work was centered around three strategic initiatives:

Fossil fuel risk bonds

In 2016 CSE published a groundbreaking report calling on governments at every level to implement a sensible ‘polluter
pays’ approach for holding owners of fossil fuel infrastructure accountable for the vast economic costs they now pass on to communities on the frontlines of their pollution and climate impacts and taxpayers who will bear the costs of removing and restoring their contaminated sites when the fossil fuel era is over. In 2020, CSE enjoyed an unprecedented level of success in promoting this policy at the federal, state, and local levels.

- Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren included CSE’s ‘fossil fuel risk bond’ (FFRB) concept in their presidential campaign platforms.
- Members of Congress are drafting legislation to implement a national-level FFRB program.
- Washington state legislators are drafting legislation to implement the FFRB program in Washington state.
- King County, Washington, unanimously adopted the FFRB program by initiating a Phase I risk assessment.
- Multnomah County, Oregon adopted the FFRB program by initiating a Phase I risk assessment.
- Natural Resource Defense Council, Friends of the Earth USA, and Sightline Institute joined with us as strategic partners.

Defending frontline communities from hazardous infrastructure

In 2020, CSE once again was a strong voice resisting new fossil infrastructure that imperils our most vulnerable communities. While there are many ongoing regional battles to report on, one standout was our success in preventing the expansion of the Zenith Energy oil terminal in north Portland. CSE played an important role in striking several blows against the facility. Following up on an October 2019 City of Portland denial of request from Zenith to build new pipes connecting its oil storage facility to a shipping terminal on the Willamette River, Zenith withdrew its application for a key chemical pipeline permit on May 11th, 2020. Around the same time, Zenith’s credit rating was downgraded to a B- and Zenith’s parent company, Warburg Pincus, announced their plans to sell Zenith.

Helping to pass the strongest climate emergency declaration in the nation

Since the fall of 2019, CSE worked with the City of Portland to develop the resolution and encouraged city staff to engage a variety of stakeholders representing marginalized and environmental justice communities. On June 30th, 2020, the Portland City Council unanimously adopted the Climate Emergency Declaration, which is probably the longest and most substantial resolution in the history of Portland City Government. The Declaration seeks to support and advance climate justice and climate action initiatives led by the community, especially Black, Indigenous and other communities of color and youth.
WILD AND WORKING FORESTS PROGRAM

2020 was a deadly year for the world’s forests. Amazon deforestation is at its all-time worst. Logging related carbon emissions in Canada are now over ten times the amount absorbed by its battered forests. Oregon’s wildfires devastated some of our finest old growth and took the life of ancient forest defender George Atiye. The Trump Administration opened up Alaska’s Tongass rainforest to more logging. Elected officials at all levels continue to be bombarded by Big Timber’s misinformation and, as a result, are increasingly embracing false climate solutions like burning trees for energy and building skyscrapers with ‘mass timber’ sourced from small diameter tree plantations.

In 2020, CSE’s Wild and Working Forests program has been on the front line of these defensive battles. But we are also working on a positive vision for the future - a comprehensive set of federal, state and local policies to turn the tide in hopes that a Biden-Harris Administration can spark a transition to a US forest agenda based on science, sustainable economics, and environmental justice. Below are a few of our key accomplishments in 2020.

Forest Carbon Coalition

CSE co-directs a 65-member national coalition promoting a US forest carbon agenda for the Biden-Harris Administration and the 117th Congress. Our strategy centers on protecting all remaining tracts of high-carbon forests and transforming industrial forest practices to climate smart alternatives. In June, the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis adopted much of the language on public lands protection and climate smart forestry that our coalition submitted to them in 2019. This gives us a significant leg up with the Biden-Harris team.

Enforcing Governor Brown’s Executive Order 20-04

In March 2020, Oregon Governor Brown issued Executive Order (EO) 20-04 to prevent the most serious, catastrophic impacts of climate change. The EO calls on all of units of state government to exercise their full authority and discretion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help impacted and vulnerable communities adapt to climate change. In May, CSE led a team of 18 conservation, scientific and community organization in submitting a detailed roadmap for how Oregon Department of Forestry can turn its historic role as an agent for Big Timber into one that leads the nation in climate smart forestry solutions.
Corporate Land Reform

No one disputes the critical importance of fundamentally changing how we grow food and meet our needs for wood in order to maximize the contribution of natural solutions to climate change. Above all, it takes a long-term commitment to the health of the land and nearby communities. But a vast amount of prime forest and farmland is now managed by Wall Street and foreign investor-driven corporations with exceedingly short time horizons and little or no interest in or capacity to implement long rotations, forest carbon reserves, alternatives to clearcutting and other practices responsive to climate change.

CSE thinks it doesn’t make sense to leave our important carbon sinks and biological reserves in corporate hands and has launched a campaign to modernize corporate forestland ownership laws in Oregon and other states to expedite the return of these lands to family, indigenous and community owners. The land reform initiative, presented at Oregon’s Community Rights Summit last November, is modeled on laws protecting small family farmers now in place in nine midwestern states. CSE attorney and Board member Richard Mietz has helped draft model legislation for Oregon based on these pioneering laws.

Oregon Drinking Water Defense

Each year tens of thousands of acres of Oregon’s drinking watersheds are clearcut without a single murmur of opposition. CSE is slowly changing this equation by building watershed-based coalitions to monitor and challenge these clearcuts and demand that public water supply managers use their authority to force logging corporations to reduce threats to water supply and water quality. This year CSE and its partners challenged clearcut logging plans spanning 26,000 acres.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Green infrastructure offers the promise of a future with fewer concrete wastewater, drinking water and stormwater facilities or flood control dams and more natural lakes and wetlands to do a better job at a much lower cost. This year, CSE began a green infrastructure evaluation for Portland’s industrial areas in anticipation of significant new funding for restoration via our fossil fuel risk bond program.
Our economic analysis and policy proposals on green infrastructure are resulting in victories for the environment in Portland, Maine. Several years ago, CSE’s Dr. John Talberth and Economics Fellow Erin Gray worked with World Resources Institute, Manomet, and other partners in Portland, Maine, to develop a plan to protect the drinking watershed for Portland via green infrastructure - in particular, protecting forests and wetlands instead of building a new water filtration plan. John and Erin conducted underlying economic analysis (called ‘green vs. grey’) that demonstrated the economic superiority of the green infrastructure option. In November 2020, the Natural Resources Conservation Service awarded an $8 million grant, with another $10.5 million in matching funds, to Portland Water District to implement the plan.

NEW MEASURES OF PROGRESS

COVID-19 and the global economic meltdown has underscored how badly nations need new measures of economic progress capable of accounting for the immense economic costs of income inequality and environmental degradation and the need to better value unpaid labor, investments in knowledge and skills, green infrastructure and protection of ecosystem services. In 2020, CSE received a major boost in our efforts to have new progress indicators ubiquitously adopted by nations and states.

- Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and other members of Congress are now considering legislation to put the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) in place at the federal level. A similar state-level variant was introduced in Minnesota. CSE has been working with Rep. Omar’s office on model legislation that would require the GPI to be part of the nation’s statistical infrastructure and used to guide budgeting decisions.

- In addition, CSE worked over the summer with renowned author Riane Eisler - author of the Real Wealth of Nations - to advance her ideas for a Social Wealth Index that can be used by nations to recognize the value of care work - caring for humanity and caring for nature. CSE developed an indicator framework for OECD countries that could serve as the basis for the SWI. Economics Fellow Dr. Nejem Raheem will be taking this project toward completion over the next year.
OUR 2020 TEAM

While some have moved on to new exciting ventures we wanted to recognize and thank the talented crew we had the honor of working with this past year and the organizations that supported their work. We also want to thank the countless individual donors, most of whom prefer to remain anonymous, whose contributions were absolutely essential to our success.

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