



## Earth Day and Spotlight - Where Do We Stand?

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(700 words)

This weekend the world celebrates the 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, and this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Spotlight on Climate. Earth Day has become part of our global culture, Spotlight on Climate... not so much - yet. : ) Earth Day is dedicated to recognizing the Earth and protecting it and its living systems. It was created in response to a major oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara which hit too close to home. Twenty million people took to the streets in protest. How far have we come since that first Earth Day in 1970?

Since then, much has been accomplished, but the challenges have also grown. For most, Earth Day has brought awareness about environmental damage and provided an outlet for people to express their love for natural beauty, for the Earth, and for the life that she provides. For many it has become a day of reverence and joy but also a day of anxiety and anger about the way she has been mistreated.

In 1970 we had 3.7 billion people on Earth, and now our population has more than doubled to 8.1 billion. While we have passed the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Endangered Species Act, we still struggle to fully implement them. Certainly, these Acts have made our air and water cleaner and have protected many species, but we can easily recognize that the job is not done.

Since the 1800's our greenhouse gas emissions have significantly raised Earth's temperature above natural levels, and climate change now threatens not just our comfort, but our food supply, our homes, and all terrestrial and marine ecosystems. So far, we have raised Earth's temperature by 1.3°C and we are projected to reach 1.5°C warming sometime in 2028.

Many countries and the City of Flagstaff have set good policies for reducing emissions. The Paris Climate Accord of 2015 provided the opportunity for hundreds of countries to put limits on their emissions. Since then, countries like France and states like California have placed bans on the sale of new combustion vehicles, by 2040 for France and by 2035 in California. Flagstaff has joined countless other cities in setting the goal of net zero emissions by 2030.

The question still remains, how strongly will these good policies be implemented? While the United States is currently back on board with the Paris Climate Accord, just during our previous administration it was not. In Flagstaff a climate denier group brought a proposal to City Council last fall to undermine Flagstaff's Carbon Neutrality Plan. Fortunately, the Council denied this proposal last month.

Nonetheless, implementation of the Carbon Neutrality Plan continues to be a struggle. Since we live in a democratic society, it will take effort by many to encourage the City Council to stick to the Plan. Last spring our council rejected a petition urging them to change banks. Even though Wells Fargo has a massive carbon footprint, the council decided to keep our money there. When NAH proposed an almost billion-dollar development on the edge of town, our council accepted that proposal without even asking what its carbon footprint would be. Fortunately, Flagstaff citizens stood up and rejected that decision by a vote of 73%.

Currently Council is assessing a plan for electrifying the city's fleets. Will they keep the net zero by 2030 goal as a top priority in their decisions? We hope so, but we need to do more than just hope. We need to pay attention when City Council is making decisions on Flagstaff's carbon footprint, and we need to speak up to encourage them to implement our Carbon Neutrality Plan.

This Earth Day there are two opportunities to come out and celebrate. On Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup> Flagstaff's Sustainability Office invites you to join the community at Bushmaster Park from 11:00-2:00. The NAU GreenJacks also invite you to the Earth Jam on NAU's North Quad from 2:00-7:00 pm. Both events will have live music, dozens of organizations acting to fight climate change, and lots of good people to meet. Come and join others to celebrate the Earth and help protect her from climate change. Come to build community and reduce your anxiety and anger through action!

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Northern Arizona Climate Change Alliance, [www.NAZCCA.org/volunteer](http://www.NAZCCA.org/volunteer)

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