

An Honest Response to Bill Hedden, the Grand Canyon Trust & 'A Just & Healthy Future for the 100%'

Doug Meyer

Formed in the mid 1980s in order to dispel the environment vs. economics tradeoff in the public's mind, the Grand Canyon Trust has been a rich man's dream organization from the beginning. Make no mistake, a gullible consumer society believing what it wants to believe is a necessary condition here, and many of the philanthropists supporting GCT might still swear by the group's founding principle, which argued that endless economic growth could be decoupled from environmental impact.

God only knows the extent of conscious deception on the part of GCT backers over the years. But one thing is certain, now that their basis has been exposed as myth, and the signs of global environmental collapse are everywhere, the death of the Grand Canyon Trust's founding philosophy hasn't reached the desk of its Executive Director, Bill Hedden.

On April 27, 2012, Hedden delivered "a most thoughtful and provocative speech," according to the Trust's facebook administrator, titled, "A Just and Healthy Future for the 100%." He spoke at The University of Colorado Law School symposium in honor of GCT Trustee David H. Getches. His remarks began with a troubling observation:

"Three years ago," he said, "I asked a neighbor's grown daughter why the food security movement struck such a chord with young people these days. She answered simply, 'Because we know that you guys aren't going to do anything about climate change, and when everything falls apart we want to be able to feed ourselves.'

"Of course, in those days, we believed that the Congress would surely pass legislation to curb our domestic carbon emissions, and somehow international agreements would pull us out of a planetary climate nosedive. But the intervening years have shown us that my neighbor's daughter was right..."

Bill Hedden observed that, "These are hard things to think about."

I am sure it is extremely difficult for Hedden to consider these "hard things." I hope you'll read his speech of April 27 about being awakened to the urgency of the global warming problem through a series of confrontations with the younger generation. Then come back here for a better understanding of the catastrophe that has already occurred.

—Doug Meyer

Read Bill Hedden's speech here:

'A JUST AND HEALTHY FUTURE FOR THE 100%'

<http://www.grandcanyontrust.org/news/2012/05/a-just-and-healthy-future-for-the-100/>



AND MY RESPONSE...

I don't have any kids myself, and that's what lets me respond to Bill Hedden's mea culpa to the younger generation and ever more heart-breaking call to action on their behalf. Let's get this straight from the top: not having kids is a huge advantage here because my view of the future is unobscured by what I would otherwise need to believe if I had children to be concerned about. I'm free to arrive at any conclusion, allowing the facts as I perceive them to be my guide. The loving parent, Bill Hedden obviously being one, probably isn't capable of sharing my perspective of climate change and what it means for our civilization. In fact, it appears that Hedden (the conservationist!) only allowed himself to begin to see the magnitude of the issue after the younger generation

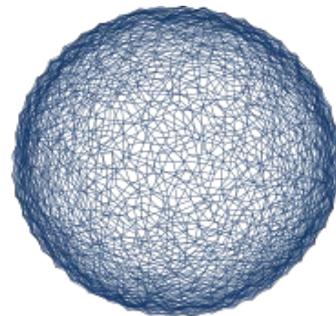
exposed his protective blanket of misinformation and started hammering him on his feeble efforts to save the planet.

But despite what he's learned, and despite the looming global calamity he acknowledges, Hedden still relies on the much too easy carbon pollution narrative of his own generation and ends up failing young people once again. Amazingly, on the issue of global warming, the executive director of the Grand Canyon Trust just doesn't get it. Perhaps that's because he's been selling the public for years on the idea that they could make a difference if they bought a hybrid vehicle, or bought a backyard wind turbine, or bought a piece of paper certifying that a tree was planted somewhere to "offset" one's emissions. Or maybe it's just because what follows is beyond what "we normally allow ourselves to understand".

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For example, one of the most endearing aspects of Hedden's talk is its lack of memory of key details surrounding recent global climate efforts, which we're sure GCT at least watched closely. Though he does remember that just a few years ago our generation hoped for a global deal on carbon emissions, he does not apparently recall either that a) the proposed deal was nowhere near what the science said needed to be done while leaving all the hard work to future generations, or b) what the consequences would be for the Earth when such reductions were not immediately forthcoming. In the face of this colossal failure of humanity's current power structure, Hedden spends no time analyzing where his own organization, funded mostly by the 1%, fits in the scheme of things, and his message is now pathetically reduced to urging that people be the change they want to see in the world! Such a massive disconnect between reality and advocacy is often called greenwash. I think young people are at least owed the truth behind this failure.



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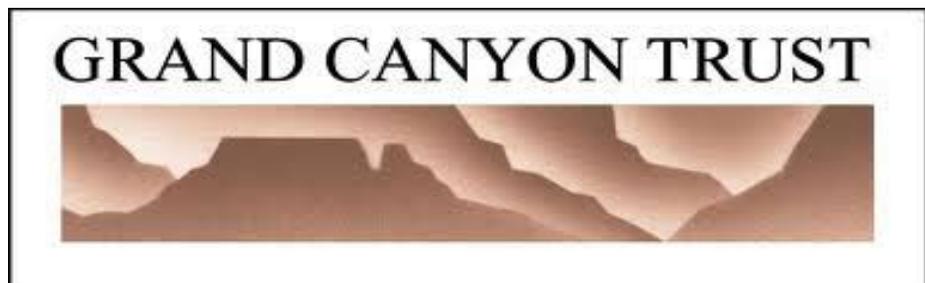
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Can we hazard a guess at how many times in the last twenty years Bill Hedden has sat in Grand Canyon Trust conference rooms watching videos on climate change? I can't, but I'll venture one thing about those videos: they generally avoided topics like ocean thermal inertia, or an in-depth look at all of the forcing components (measured in watts per square meter), or carbon cycle issues like ocean outgassing of CO₂ during (theoretical) atmospheric drawdown attempts. Hedden says that he relies, among other things, on James Hansen's

speeches, but I have to wonder if he's also read his book and papers, since everything I discuss here comes from those sources.

Virtually all activists make the same mistake regarding climate inertia, and this talk is no exception. On the Colorado Plateau, he tells us that "Native grasses will be extirpated from the region within 30 years, taking the habitat for the rabbits and mice, which feed the coyotes and snakes and foxes and raptors. That is what it means to wreck the base of the food chain." Fair enough, but because of ocean inertia, most climate impacts to occur in the next 30 years are going to happen regardless of what humanity does over that period. So if Hedden's science is right, and if exotic grasses can't provide habitat either, then it's likely already too late for most of the mammals on the Colorado Plateau. This idea cannot be emphasized enough. If there are any tipping points driven by atmospheric temperature that are lurking out there in the next few decades, then we've probably already passed any opportunity to avoid them.

Second, there is a very inconvenient truth for environmentalists in the components of overall climate forcing. Not talking about it has the effect of a huge lie on one's environmental audience, whether the omission is intentional or not. Humanity has accidentally raised an extremely short-lived "aerosol parasol" over its head which blocks roughly half of the warming that would otherwise be occurring due to greenhouse gases. And the source of the parasol is fossil fuel emissions. If James Hansen's view someday prevails, and somehow unified humans decide that overall climate forcing must be reduced this century, then a realistic reading of the forcing equation means that any global warming solution must, in addition to massive emissions reductions, include some sort of geo-engineering of the planet's atmosphere. Such a desperate and extremely dangerous yet essential human messing with Earth's climate goes against everything environmentalism was supposed to stand for. What would Hedden's 7 billion people making a difference say once they notice that the sky is turning white? Of course, his speech conflates "saving ourselves" with "saving the planet" and perhaps you have to be pretty old to care about that distinction anymore. I just see human hubris, the very same thing that brought us here to the edge.



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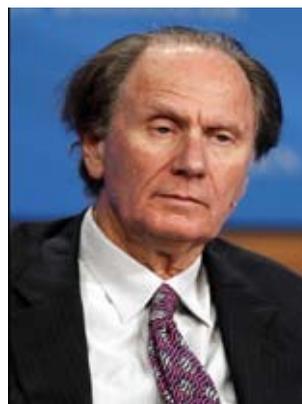
There's one last climate truth that needs discussing due to it being left out (as usual) from this latest "progressive" speech on global warming. The issue is that carbon, once released from long term storage underground when humans burn fossil fuels, cycles between the atmosphere and other short term storage, such as the surface ocean and forests. In other words, it won't be long before carbon in a tree or in the ocean is back in the atmosphere, while only the Earth's natural processes can return carbon to long term storage. So not only have we already initiated irreversible climate impacts, we really have no practical way of achieving geo-engineering by extraction of CO₂ from the atmosphere. In the words of James Hansen:

"At present there are no technologies capable of large-scale air capture of CO₂. ... The cost of removing 50 ppm of CO₂, at \$500/tC, is ~\$50 trillion (1 ppm CO₂ is ~2.12 GtC), but more than \$200 trillion for the price estimate of the American Physical Society study. Moreover, the resulting atmospheric CO₂ reduction is only ~15 ppm after 100 years, because the extraction induces counteracting changes in the other surface carbon reservoirs – mainly CO₂ outgassing from the ocean The estimated cost of maintaining a 50 ppm reduction on the century time scale is thus ~\$150-600 trillion." (my emphasis)

By contrast, Hedden's view is of a series of unnerving climate symptoms showing the vulnerability of human food supplies to rising temperatures and melting ice and suggesting by their magnitude that things are beginning to spiral out of control. But we also get the sense that the problem could be solved if the now 7 billion people on the planet would start making lifestyle changes and tell their local politicians to outlaw fossil fuels. After all, "the answers usually aren't complicated". Until that happens, he recommends "an unprecedented joining together to save ourselves, using all the resources of technology and

love available to us." (There's always a certain whiplash effect in trying to comprehend anything from GCT, don't you think?)

At least Hedden honestly reveals some feelings of helplessness and futility in his professional work ("rearranging the deck chairs"), and this is refreshing, given that GCT apparently continues its long relationship with David Bonderman, who, with a net worth around \$1.9 Billion and, as one of the world's well known private equity players, symbolizes the global economic juggernaut that is wrecking planet Earth. If young people want to know why the Grand Canyon Trust isn't doing anything about global warming, they need look no further. Bonderman, among his so many other business interests, is heavily invested in coal around the world, everything from mining it, to shipping it, to burning it; if it's a coal sector, he's probably making money from it. And some of that money ends up as a big chunk of the income column at GCT.



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Is there any wonder then why Hedden does not mention James Hansen's call for an accelerated (starting in 2010) two-decade decommissioning of all of the world's coal-fired power plants? This is not a mere recommendation, as Hansen wrote four years ago that "continued growth of greenhouse gas emissions, for just another decade, practically eliminates the possibility of near-term return of atmospheric composition beneath the tipping level for catastrophic effects." But such a rapid global shutdown of coal, without a realistic baseload power substitute, would of course likely mean the end of industrial civilization as we know it. Hedden himself admits that "Without massive action, most scientists believe we are headed toward atmospheric CO₂ of at least 650-700 ppm, levels where the fossil record shows that delicately named non-linear scenarios kick in." I ask the reader then, given his sincere concern for climate effects beginning to get out of hand, is he being clear enough in describing what will need to happen to our civilization, one way or another?

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This is where the young protester, remembering the futility of Occupy last fall, may want to keep Hedden at arm's length, instead of linked arm in arm. Trying to explain the title of his talk, which remarkably joins the 1% and the 99% together in perhaps "not enough lifeboats", we can only guess how that's going to work out. At least the notion of our doom is starting to cross Bill Hedden's mind. Too bad he can't quite admit why.

NEXT PAGE...A look at GCT's board of directors and some links to Mr. Bonderman.

