

Glen Brand, Sierra Club Maine Chapter Director
Opening Remarks

Maine Grassroots Climate Action Conference
December 6, 2014
Bowdoin College

Good morning and welcome to the Maine Grassroots Climate Action Conference! Thank you so much for braving the cold rain and demonstrating our commitment to taking local action on climate solutions.

My name is Glen Brand, and I serve as the Sierra Club Maine Chapter Director. Sierra Club Maine and 350 Greater Portland are proud to be co-sponsoring this important event.

I want to thank all of the Sierra Club Maine and 350 Greater Portland volunteers who helped to make this event possible, and I would like to recognize the elected officials here today: Rep. Mick Devin and Rep. Deane Rykerson. Thank you for attending, and I hope you will share the information and energy coming out of this event with your constituents and fellow legislators.

I'd like to set the stage for today's conference by laying out the situation we find ourselves in regarding climate action and justice.

On the one hand, the science has never been clearer or more emphatic that we have no choice but to reduce global warming pollution significantly by using energy more efficiently, and by replacing dirty fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy as soon as possible. As you are aware, climate disruption is wreaking havoc all over the planet. In Maine, we are already experiencing harmful impacts on our coasts, woods, and economy.

It is also true that people are calling out and demanding action more than ever. Many of you traveled on one of the six Sierra Club Maine charter buses to the amazing People's Climate March in New York this past fall. Many of you have been actively engaged in the fight to keep dirty tar sands out of Maine, to get institutions like Bowdoin to divest from fossil fuels, and to advocate for moving beyond dirty energy to a cleaner and more just energy world.

So it is clear that the climate movement is poised to make significant progress.

But it is also true that the Nov. election results represent real, short term setbacks and obstacles to progress on climate.

That's why I think it's so important to focus our efforts in Maine and elsewhere on local action.

The major purpose of this conference is to spark local organizing on climate action solutions in Maine communities. During the break-out sessions, you will have the opportunity to hear from Mainers who are implementing a range of community-based clean energy projects.

It is very encouraging that there are more than 100 participants at this conference from 60 different towns in Maine, with multiple conference attendees from 25 separate communities.

It is our hope that everyone here will be inspired to go back to your town and begin organizing around one of these solutions in 2015. I think of these local teams as “Climate Action Teams” (or CATS), and the Sierra Club is committed to assisting the CATs in any way we can.

Local climate solutions like energy efficiency and community solar projects, for example, improve our towns, but they also serve as models for other Maine towns who would like to replicate these successes and learn from their experiences. A single project doesn’t make a huge difference in terms of global carbon reduction, but when numerous CATs are working to achieve similar goals, we will build a groundswell of support for climate action and clean energy on the state and eventually on the national levels.

Action on climate is urgent, and we cannot afford to tread water for the next two or four years. We—Maine climate activists and citizens deeply concerned about climate disruption and our children’s future— need to lead by example, and it is my hope that together we will sow the seeds of climate solutions throughout Maine, starting today. Thank you.