

# On the March for Climate Change Action

By Richard W. Franke

*This is the latest installment in our Signs of Sustainability series, organized by Sustainable Tompkins. Visit them online at [www.sustainabletompkins.org](http://www.sustainabletompkins.org).*

Journalist, author and climate activist Bill McKibben and thousands of others are organizing the largest-ever climate justice demonstration on Sunday, Sept. 21, in New York City. The People's Climate March will coincide with the United Nations Climate Summit that will take place starting Sept. 23 at U.N. headquarters in the city ([www.un.org/climatechange/summit/](http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit/)).

The mass march is the culmination of a week of climate change protest and actions in New York City. Details for the actions will be available on the 350.org website (<http://350.org>); there is also information about the route of the march that is currently being negotiated with the city. It's not too soon to make plans to go. Tompkins County should provide a strong contingent, consistent with our area's impressive record of actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while simultaneously planning as best we can to mitigate the unavoidable consequences of climate change in our area. We have a

vigorous county energy plan, a city/town sustainability officer and Sustainability Center, thriving local climate-justice and social-justice organizations such as Sustainable Tompkins, Building Bridges and many others, active solar buying clubs, three EcoVillages, vigorous local food and food justice work, the local community-owned Black Oak Wind Farm almost under construction and numerous other small-scale initiatives.

Global warming and the ensuing climate change it is causing, however, also require national and international actions on a massive scale. McKibben laid out some of the parameters in his July 19, 2012, Rolling Stone article titled "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math" ([www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719](http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719)). This article is also linked at 350.org. To avoid a greater than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F) increase in average global temperature, computer models suggest we can release only 535 gigatons (giga=billion) of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere over the next few decades. But 2,795 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> are in proven reserves of fossil fuels.

How do we keep those 2,260 "extra" gigatons out of the atmos-

phere? Organizations and individuals at all levels must pull investments out of fossil fuels and reinvest them in low- or no-carbon energy production. Greater efficiency in energy use is also needed. Technically, we know how to do these things.

In March 2013, Stanford University engineering and atmospheric sciences Professor Mark Z. Jacobson and 12 other scientists published an article in the academic journal Energy Policy arguing that New York State's entire energy infrastructure could be 100-percent powered by wind, water and sunlight by the year 2030 ([www.stanford.edu/group/efmh/jacobson/Articles/I/NewYorkWWSEnPolicy.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/efmh/jacobson/Articles/I/NewYorkWWSEnPolicy.pdf)). Jacobson et al. argue that in addition to saving the atmosphere, such an infrastructure would create jobs and improve public health. Recently, they have established "the solutions project" to illustrate how their ideas could be implemented across the entire U.S. (<http://thesolutionsproject.org/>). By extrapolation, solutions could be applied worldwide. Simultaneously with the U.N. Climate Summit, another group, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, will issue a somewhat less ambitious but important Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project (<http://unsdsn.org/what-we-do/deep-decarbonization-pathways/>) proposal.

These and other recent studies and reports indicate that many of the engineering and policy choices are well developed and understood. What is needed now is a giant pub-

lic push. Actually, several. Like the People's Climate March.

The march also has the potential to help unite environmental and social justice activists who have sometimes felt alienated from each other in the past. One sign of this is the strong support for the People's Climate March by Eddie Bautista, executive director of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance ([www.earthstrand.org/journal/index.php/elist/elistRead/lacing\\_up\\_for\\_historic\\_climate\\_justice\\_march/](http://www.earthstrand.org/journal/index.php/elist/elistRead/lacing_up_for_historic_climate_justice_march/)), a federation of activist organizations that emphasizes bringing greater justice to the poor and to people of color.

Like other mass demonstrations in recent history, the People's Climate March has the potential to energize and activate people far beyond its street activists and far after the march day. It can help create a cultural mood of activism, and it reminds the participants that we are part of something big. I hope to see you there. No, actually, I hope it's so big that I can't find you amongst the tens of thousands of people chanting and carrying placards on Sept. 21. Instead, I'll see you at a follow-up meeting in Tompkins County to hear your experiences and feelings about how to move forward.

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