Mitigating Climate Change

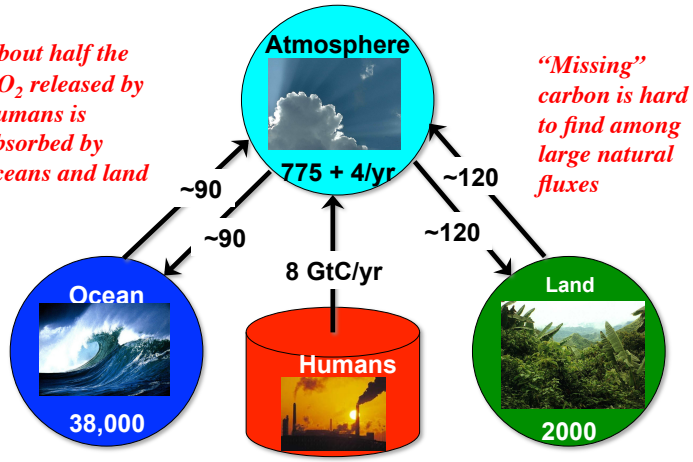
Sources and sinks of atmospheric CO2
Emissions trading
Historical and projected CO2 emissions
Climate wedges
Alternative energy

"Scientists are necessary, but not sufficient to solve the climate problem"

Dr. Ralph Cicerone,
President of the National Academy of Science, November 2007

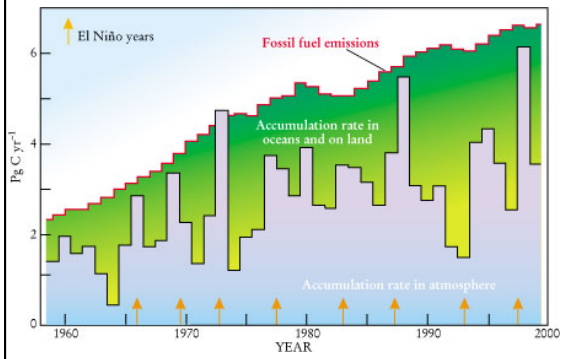
The Global Carbon Cycle

About half the CO_2 released by humans is absorbed by oceans and land



"Missing" carbon is hard to find among large natural fluxes

Variable Sinks

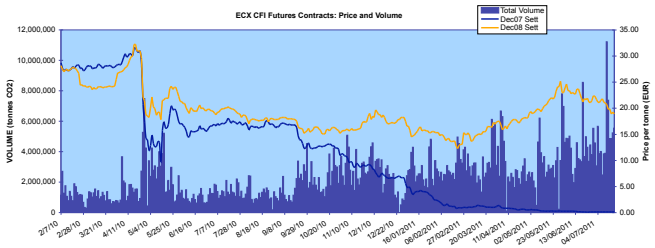


Half the CO_2 "goes away!"

- Some years almost all the fossil carbon goes into the atmosphere, some years almost none
- Interannual variability in sink activity is much greater than in fossil fuel emissions
- Sink strength is related to El Niño. Why? How?

European Climate Exchange

Futures Trading: Permits to Emit CO2



- European "cap-and-trade" market set up as described in Kyoto Protocol (http://www.europeanclimateexchange.com)
- 7/10/2009 price €16.19/ton of CO_2 emitted 12/2012 = $83.25/ton of Carbon
- Supply and demand!

Present Value of Carbon Sinks

- Terrestrial and marine exchanges currently remove more than 4 GtC per year from the atmosphere
- This free service provided by the planet constitutes an effective 50% emissions reduction, worth about $325 Billion per year at today's price on the ECX!
- Carbon cycle science is currently unable to quantitatively account for
  - The locations at which these sinks operate
  - The mechanisms involved
  - How long the carbon will remain stored
  - How long the sinks will continue to operate
  - Whether there is anything we can do to make them work better or for a longer time

Where Has All the Carbon Gone?

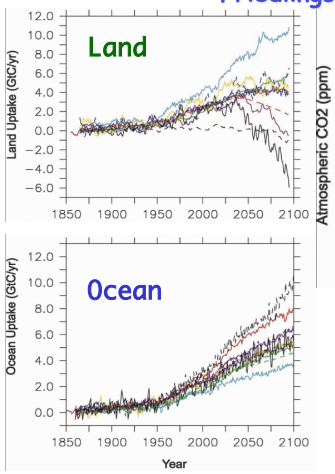
- Into the oceans
  - **Solubility pump** (CO_2 very soluble in cold water, but rates are limited by slow physical mixing)
  - **Biological pump** (slow "rain" of organic debris)
- Into the land
  - **CO_2 Fertilization** (plants eat CO2 … is more better?)
  - **Nutrient fertilization** (N-deposition and fertilizers)
  - **Land-use change** (forest regrowth, fire suppression, woody encroachment … but what about Wal-Marts?)
  - Response to **changing climate** (e.g., Boreal warming)

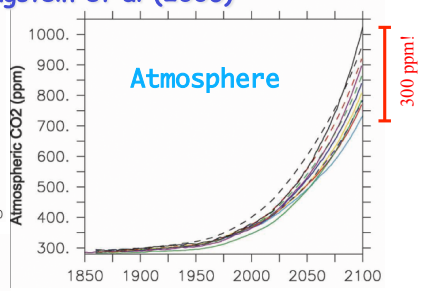
Coupled Carbon-Climate Modeling

- "Earth System" Climate Models
  - Atmospheric GCM
  - Ocean GCM with biology and chemistry
  - Land biophysics, biogeochemistry, biogeography
- Prescribe fossil fuel emissions, rather than CO2 concentration as usually done
- Integrate model from 1850-2100, predicting both CO2 and climate as they evolve
- Oceans, plants, and soils exchange CO2 with model atmosphere
- Climate affects ocean circulation and terrestrial biology, thus feeds back to carbon cycle

Carbon-Climate Futures

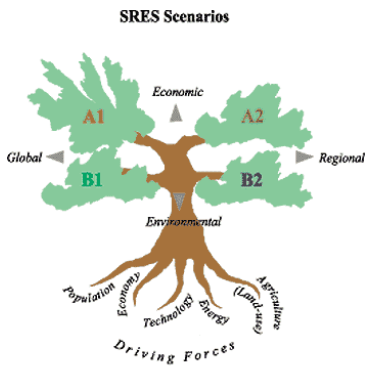
Friedlingstein et al (2006)





- Coupled simulations of climate and the carbon cycle
- Given nearly identical human emissions, different models project dramatically different futures!

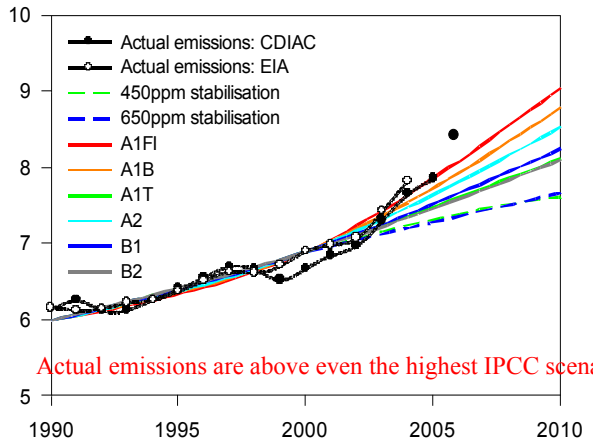
Emission Scenarios



- **A1**: Globalized, with very rapid economic growth, low population growth, rapid introduction of more efficient technologies.
- **A2**: very heterogeneous world, with self-reliance and preservation of local identities. Fertility patterns across regions converge very slowly, resulting in high population growth. Economic development is regionally oriented and per capita economic growth & technology more fragmented, slower than other storylines.
- **B1**: convergent world with the same low population growth as in A1, but with rapid changes in economic structures toward a service and information economy, reductions in material intensity, introduction of clean and resource-efficient technologies. The emphasis is on global solutions to economic, social, and environmental sustainability, including improved equity, without additional climate initiatives.
- **B2**: local solutions to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Moderate population growth, intermediate levels of economic development, and less rapid and more diverse technological change than in B1 and A1.

Each "storyline" used to generate 10 different scenarios of population, technological & economic development

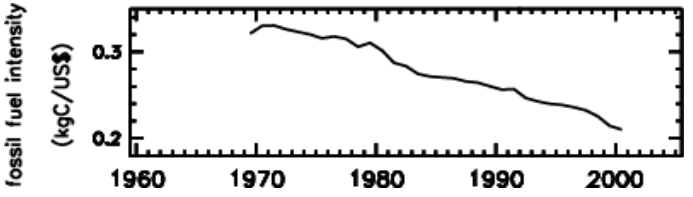
Emission Scenarios vs Reality



Actual emissions are above even the highest IPCC scenarios

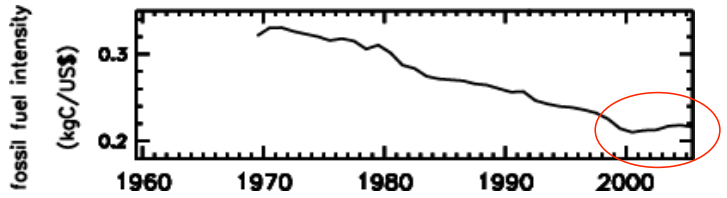
Raupach et al. 2007 PNAS

Carbon intensity of the world economy fell steadily for 30 years



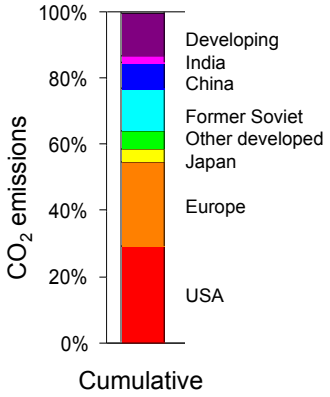
Canadell et al. 2007

Until 2000!



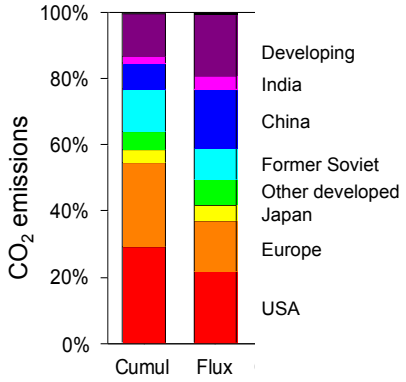
Canadell et al. 2007

Dramatic contrast – history versus future



Raupach et al. PNAS 2007

Dramatic contrast – history versus future



Raupach et al. PNAS 2007

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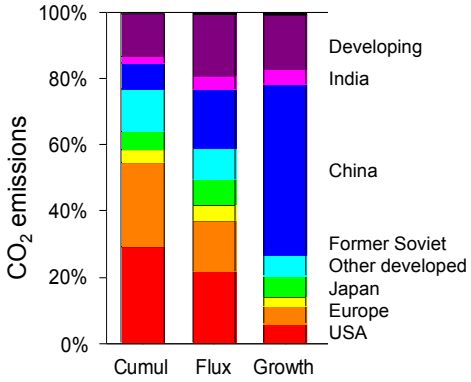

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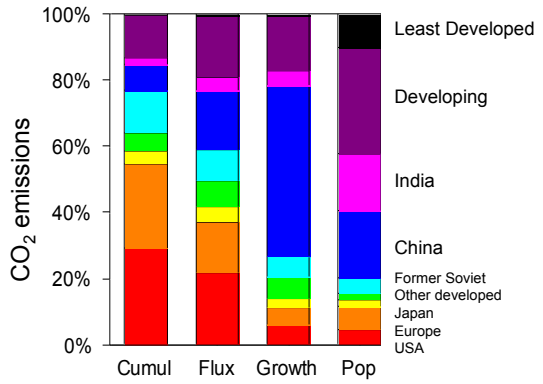
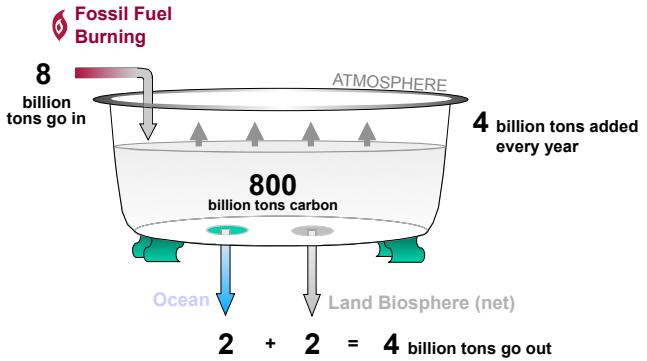
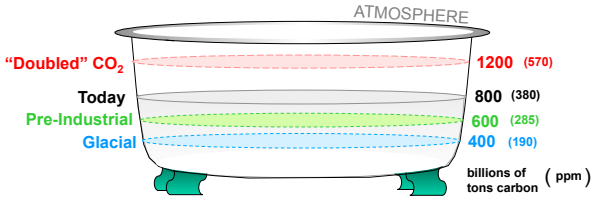


Raupach et al. PNAS 2007

CO_2 "Budget" of the Atmosphere

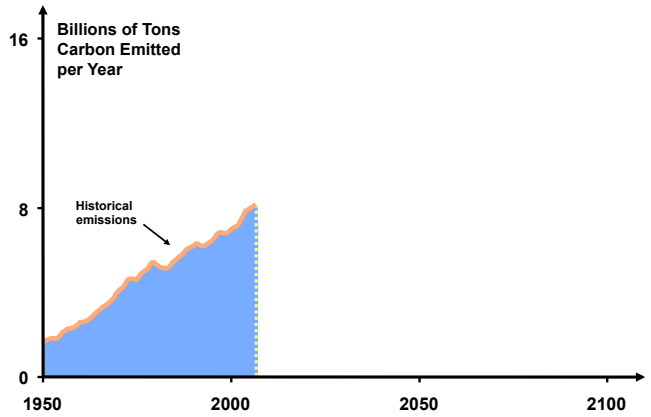


How Far Do We Choose to Go?

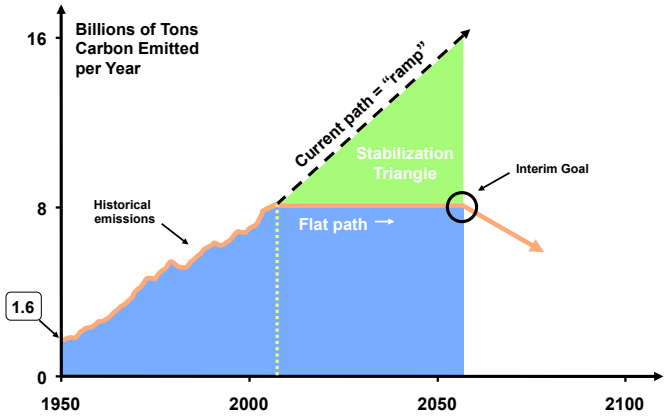


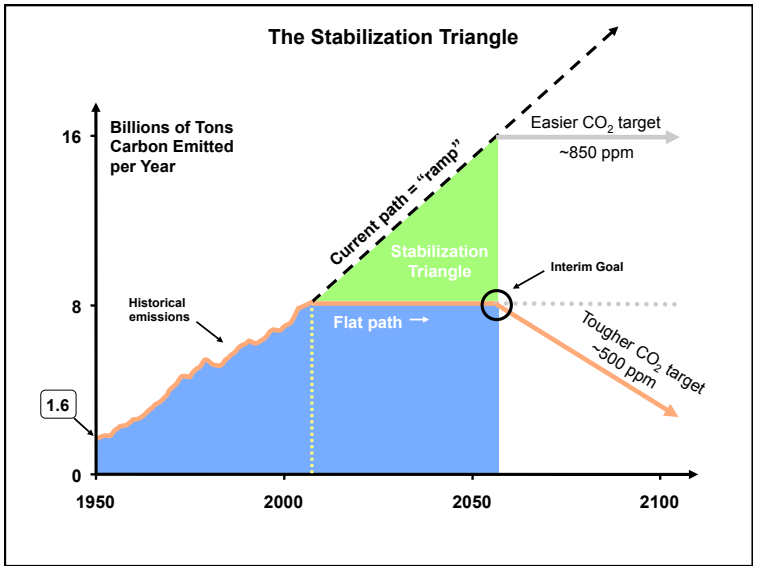
Past, Present, and Potential Future Carbon Levels in the Atmosphere

Historical Emissions

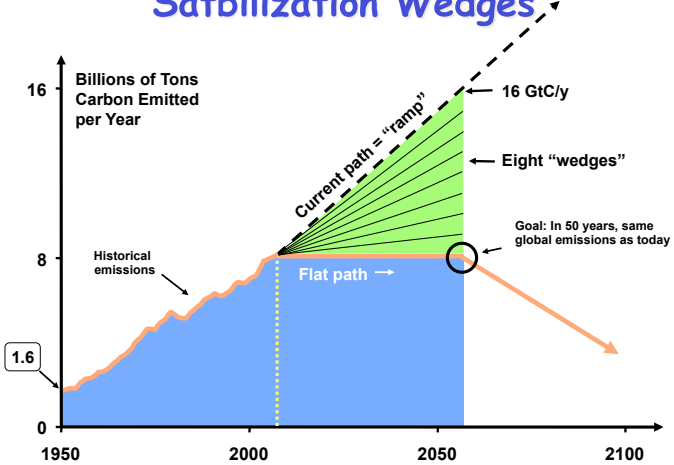


The "Stabilization Triangle"



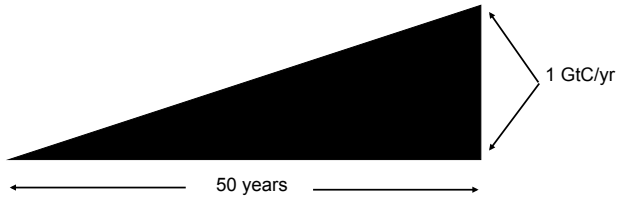


"Satbilization Wedges"



What is a "Wedge"?

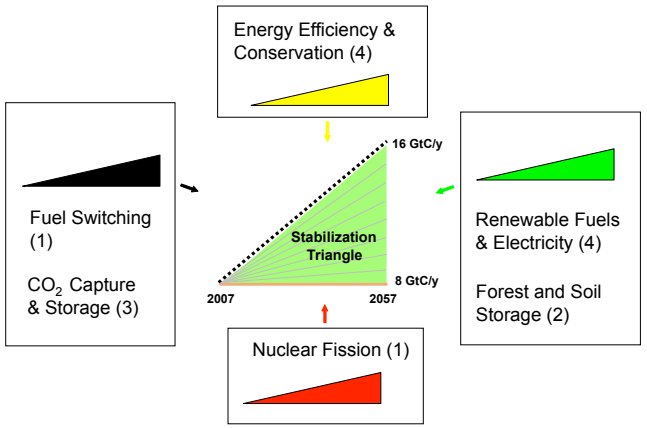
A "wedge" is a strategy to reduce carbon emissions that grows in 50 years from zero to 1.0 GtC/yr. The strategy has already been commercialized at scale somewhere.



Cumulatively, a wedge redirects the flow of 25 GtC in its first 50 years. This is 2.5 trillion dollars at $100/tC.

A "solution" to the CO_2 problem should provide at least one wedge.

Fifteen Wedges in 4 Categories



Efficiency

Photos courtesy of Ford Motor Co., DOE, EPA

Double the fuel efficiency of the world's cars or halve miles traveled

There are about 600 million cars today, with 2 billion projected for 2055

Produce today's electric capacity with double today's efficiency

Average coal plant efficiency is 32% today

Use best efficiency practices in all residential and commercial buildings

Replacing all the world's incandescent bulbs with CFL's would provide 1/4 of one wedge

E, T, H / $

Sector s affected:
E = Electricity, T =Transport, H = Heat

Cost based on scale of $ to $$$

Fuel Switching

Substitute 1400 natural gas electric plants for an equal number of coal-fired facilities

Photo by J.C. Willett (U.S. Geological Survey).

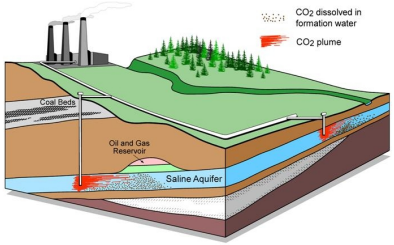
A wedge requires an amount of natural gas equal to that used for all purposes today

E, H / $

Carbon Capture & Storage

Implement CCS at

- 800 GW coal electric plants or
- 1600 GW natural gas electric plants or
- 180 coal synfuels plants or
- 10 times today's capacity of hydrogen plants



Graphic courtesy of Alberta Geological Survey

There are currently three storage projects that each inject 1 million tons of CO_2 per year – by 2055 need 3500.

E, T, H / $$

Nuclear Electricity

Triple the world's nuclear electricity capacity by 2055

Graphic courtesy of NRC

The rate of installation required for a wedge from electricity is equal to the global rate of nuclear expansion from 1975-1990.

E/ $$

Wind Electricity

Photo courtesy of DOE

Install 1 million 2 MW windmills to replace coal-based electricity,

OR

Use 2 million windmills to produce hydrogen fuel

A wedge worth of wind electricity will require increasing current capacity by a factor of 30

E, T, H / $-$$

Solar Electricity

Install 20,000 square kilometers for dedicated use by 2054

Photos courtesy of DOE Photovoltaics Program

A wedge of solar electricity would mean increasing current capacity 700 times

E / $$$

Imagine it's 1800, and you're in charge …

Somebody presents you with a grand idea for transforming the world economy:

- ✓ Dig 8 billion tons of carbon out of the ground every year
- ✓ Build a system of pipelines, supertankers, railroads, highways, and trucks to deliver it to every street corner on the planet
- ✓ Build millions of cars every year, and millions of miles of roads to drive them on
- ✓ Generate and pipe enough electricity to every house to power lights & stereos & plasma TVs

… *"and here's the itemized bill …"*

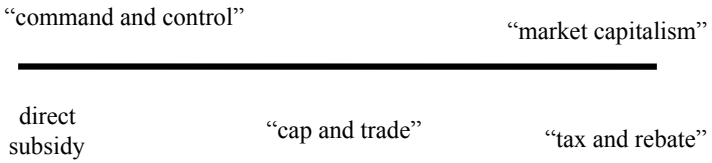
Thinking about Costs

- Our global society built that very system
- We didn't go broke building it …
- We got rich beyond the avarice of kings!
- Now we have to do it again!
- How?

Putting a Price on Carbon Emissions

- A new industrial revolution won't happen because people want to "do the right thing"
- The government can't just pass a law and create a new global energy economy, any more than they could 200 years ago
- If low-carbon-footprint goods and services cost less than "dirtier" ones, people will buy them
- The role of policy is to provide incentives, to put a price on carbon!

A Policy Spectrum



Conclusions

- Rising levels of CO_2 will cause significant climate change in the 21st century and far beyond
- The only way to mitigate these changes is to stop burning coal, oil, and gas
- This can feasibly be done using today's technology, but requires tremendous will
- Solving the climate problem will lead to a new industrial revolution, and huge wealth creation
- Dealing with this problem will be a major theme of history for centuries to come

We choose to do these things not because they are easy, but because they're hard!

President John F. Kennedy
Rice University
September 12, 1962