

Together in Climate Action: Northeastern North America Policy Summit

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The Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers (NEG/ECP) Updated Regional Climate Change Action Plan was created by the six New England states and five Eastern Canadian Provinces and presented to the Governors and Premiers at their 2017 NEG/ECP Conference. From this [comprehensive document](#), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) established the first, *Together in Climate Action: Northeastern North America Policy Summit*. Over a day and a half representatives of the region joined together to listen to a colorful and knowledgeable group of panelists that covered topics from carbon pricing to natural based solutions for climate resilience and mitigation. Attendees represented academic, governmental, non-profit, and corporate fields.



The first day was kicked off with a panel focusing on the challenges, opportunities, and priorities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The panel had both Canadian and US representatives including Katie Theoharides of Massachusetts who sits on the NEG/ECP Climate Change Steering Committee. Here, individuals highlighted the progress of RGGI and noted over a two billion dollar growth from the program and with the leadership change in New Jersey, there is hope that they will also join the program. Quebec also noted that the cap and trade program has been a huge success with similar growth and dedication to 100% of the revenues flowing back into climate change programs. Massachusetts noted that as the leading state in New England for clean energy and GHG emission goals, they are right on course for a 25% reduction by 2020 with 188 communities in the state adopting energy efficiency programs.

There was great discussion from these governmental officials on policies and programs but it was accurately noted that without buy-in from consumers these efforts are useless. Representatives noted that RGGI, NEG/ECP resolutions and reports, etc. are all voluntary actions between states and provinces. There are no legal ramifications which builds a strong partnership based solely on voluntary efforts. The second panel of day 1 focused on the role of regional coordination in delivering electricity. Representatives noted that greater transparency in the electricity market and the business model of utilities was needed. The tension between existing market structures and deploying technology solutions was also discussed. One panelist suggested fixing the rate of electricity to help utilities feel safe and then providing education for consumers on the utility system and pricing.

For most consumers, electricity supply and marketing is not well understood. Education can be a helpful way for individuals to feel comfortable with the process and understand how the market works. In order to supply this electricity-infrastructure is a natural result. However, consumers are very weary of new infrastructure and have moved from quoting NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) to BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone).

The second day of the summit started off by discussing the past, present and future of regional collaboration and subnational diplomacy. On the panel sat Chris Skoglund of New Hampshire who was one of the major contributors to the Regional Climate Change Action Plan of 2017 and sits on the NEG/ECP Climate Change Steering Committee.

Panelists noted that the region needs to work towards planning for the future. It was noted that building codes are one item that does not take into account the changing climate and potential threats. These codes and standards need to be updated and stronger leadership needs to come from subnational government staff in order to strengthen regional collaboration. This idea of strong leadership on a subnational level is well represented in the various committees of the NEG/ECP and was noted in the discussion.

While the majority of panels and deliberations circled around climate and energy, the final panel focused on natural solutions and engaging the community to prepare for the changing climate. The second panel of the final day focused on nature-based solutions to climate mitigation and resilience. The panel had a variety of representatives and in my opinion could have held its own conference. Panelist's area of focus included blue carbon, soil sequestration, forest management, and the connection between Native Americans and the environment.



NCS or natural climate solutions is often a forgotten area for reducing carbon but as noted by The Nature Conservancy, 12% of CO₂ in the atmosphere is from deforestation alone. Not to mention that natural based solutions have an overwhelming amount of benefits including increasing biodiversity and maintaining human recreational activities.

While it is important to discuss clean energy, natural based solutions should not be a second thought. Especially when only 10 countries in the world contain 60% of the all carbon with the US holding one of these ten spots. New technology and markets are being discussed in terms of blue carbon from our water bodies and the sequestration of carbon and local food incentives is a movement all its own. This panel fit in nicely with NEG/ECP's resolution on Ecological Connectivity that will be reported during the 2018 NEG/ECP Conference in Vermont.

Overall, MIT's Summit provided a look at a variety of paths to reduce carbon and GHG emissions as well as discuss the benefits of regional collaboration. I found the presenters and panelists to be very vocal in their opinions and found it reassuring that this platform allowed for free flowing conversations. Often times, stakeholders and panelists are reserved in their discussions but in order to transition the region to cleaner energy and preparing to adapt to the changing climate-real conversations have to happen. I look forward to MIT's next summit.