

MOSCOW-PULLMAN DAILY NEWS

Letter: Consensus, consilience and climate change

Tuesday, December 31, 2015

Nearly 200 nations agreed in December to forge an extraordinary commitment in Paris on how they might cooperate to address the fact and ramifications of a changing global climate.

Yet people still assert that climate is not changing or, if it is, changes are attributable to "natural variability" rather than human activity. America leads the denial. Among 20 nations polled, the U.S. "had more climate change deniers among their respondents than any other country," according to The New York Times.

Part of the reason is that reaching consensus in science is not always easy. Science is always changing, so it's sometimes possible to question and undermine scientific results. Good science often demonstrates

that yesterday's good science wasn't quite so good after all.

Yet for more than three decades, thousands of scientists from international research organizations have analyzed and reported on climate change and generally agreed that it's happening and it's not pretty. This convergence of opinions from scientists working independently in related, but disparate, disciplines is better described as "consilience," a concept far stronger than "consensus."

"Consilience refers to the principle that evidence from independent, unrelated sources can 'converge' to strong conclusions," according to Wikipedia. This is precisely what has happened over decades with findings that climate change is anthropogenic.

The Paris conference, in its agreement, demonstrated consilience. So, what next? What can we do about it?

It will take individuals, groups, organizations, as well as government entities at all levels, working together, to mitigate effects of climate change. For example, some countries have already reported they are operating on close to 100 percent renewable energy.

To learn more about what you might do in your community, consider joining an evening course I'm teaching in January at Pullman Parks and Recreation's Pioneer Center: "Beyond Climate Change: Toward a Sustainable Civilization."

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