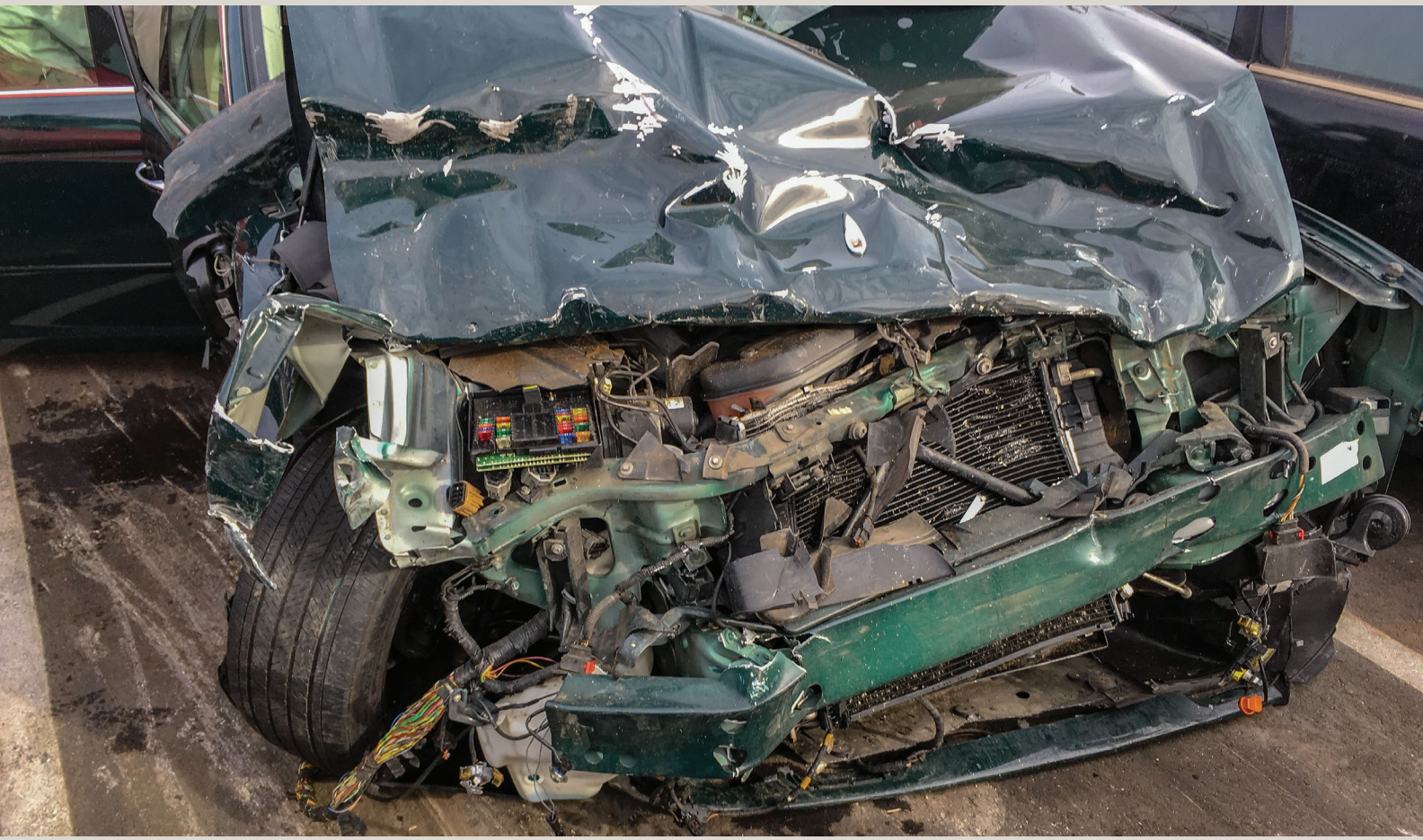
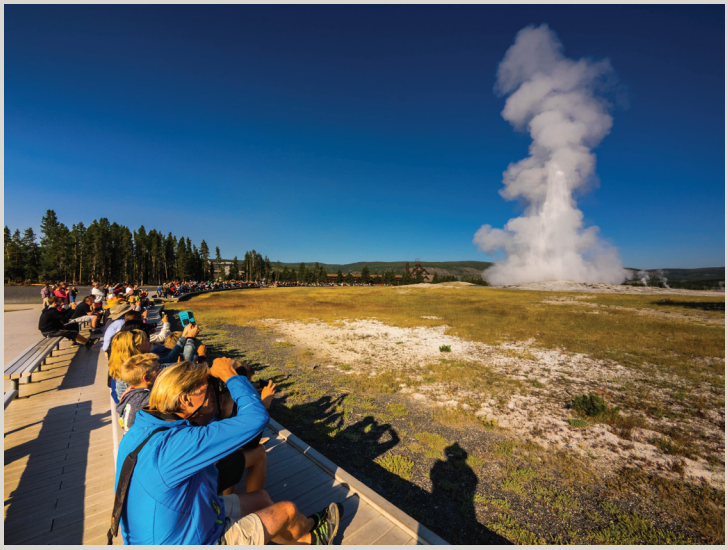
Find Hope with Climate Crisis Triage



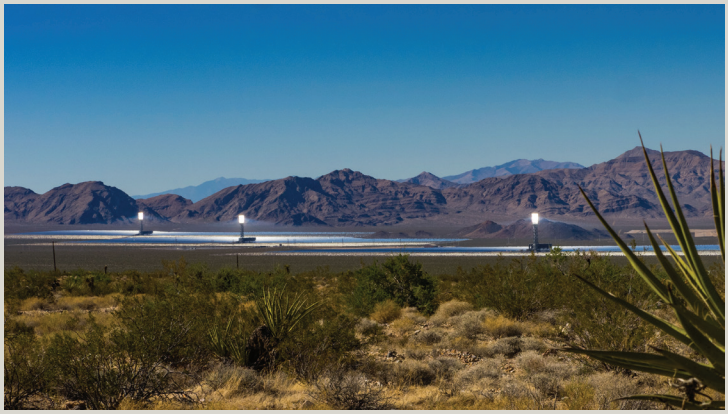
Gary E. Davis & Dorothy A. Davis

Unfortunately, people can't see Earth's climate. We see only the effects of climate, which makes detecting climate dynamics challenging to appreciate and manage. Separation in time and space between the causes and consequences of extreme weather events obscures their impacts on climate, even when those events cause crises that we can manage. Highway accident triage is a well-known and tested crisis management process; it could save humanity from an existential global climate crisis, even if we can't see the climate.



1. **Protect** the scene (Earth) from further damage—do no more harm, save all the system's parts, and preserve the best remnants, e.g., national parks, cultural icons, forest reserves, wildlife refuges, and marine sanctuaries.

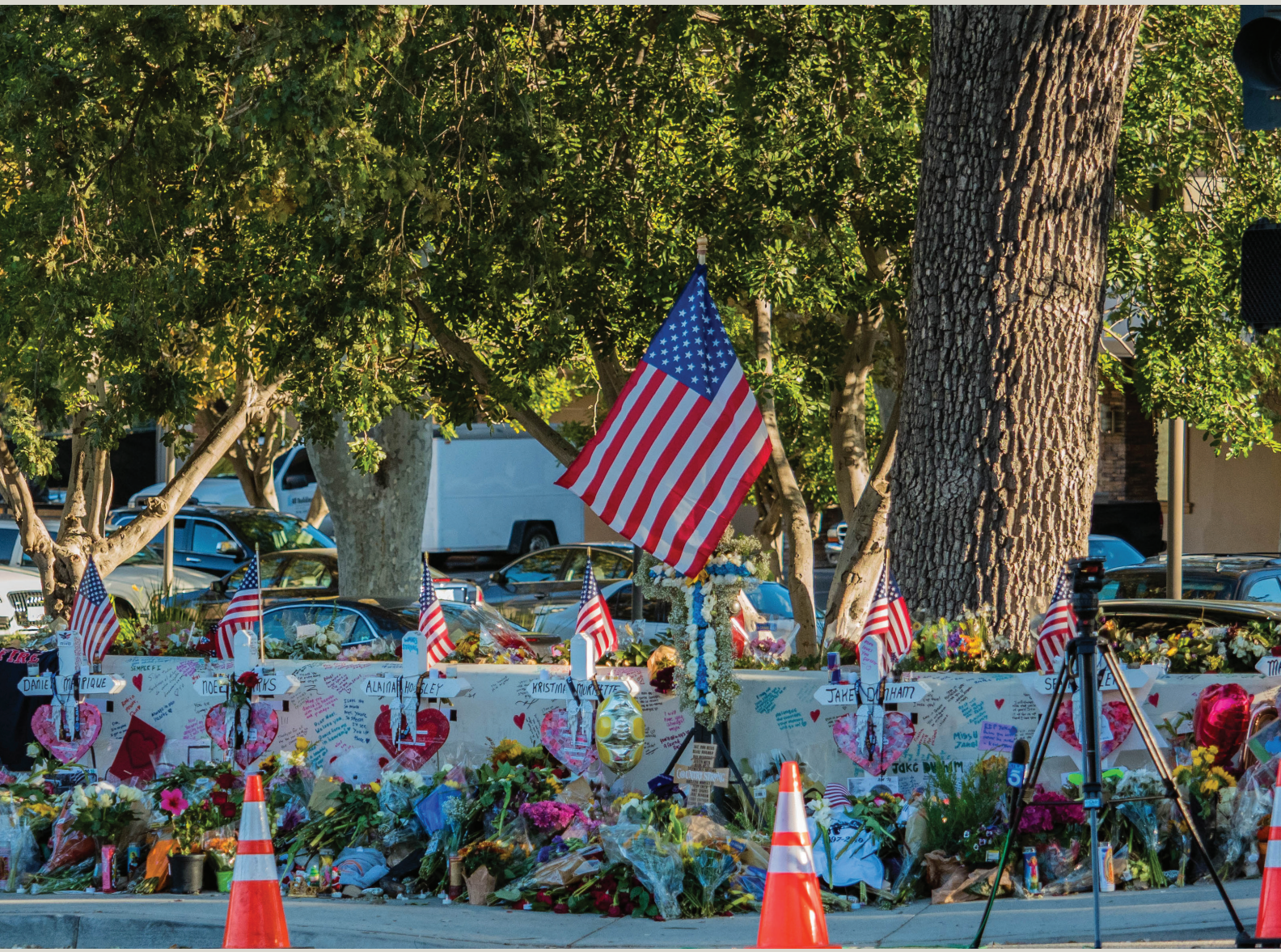
2. **Assess** the situation to identify existential threats and define realistic action options, e.g., analyze total costs of personal overnight deliveries, including potential savings by parking the delivery jumbo jets.



3. **Act** to adapt, restore, and retreat to achieve mitigation goals, e.g., produce only sustainable energy.

In continuing the metaphor, it is essential to **protect** highway accident scenes to prevent further damage and ensure the safety of emergency responders. This means restricting access to additional people and vehicles that could worsen the situation and creating a safe work zone for responders. In an environmental crisis, it's also necessary to protect the scene (Earth) by prioritizing areas that can serve as models for recovery efforts and sources of replenishment. Forest reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, refuges, and national parks offer valuable insights and benchmarks for evaluating results and setting recovery goals. Protecting and monitoring these areas can improve damage assessments and speed effective recovery responses; these are indispensable first steps.

The primary challenges to implementing this triage model globally are two-fold: First, most current environmental conservation triage schemes largely rush past the first two steps and jump immediately into bargaining for action priorities. Secondly, modern society needs to work on its collective rational analysis skills. Attempting to negotiate preferences for actions before analysis likely represents classic displacement activity, a common distraction reaction when people face overwhelming evidence of hopelessness.

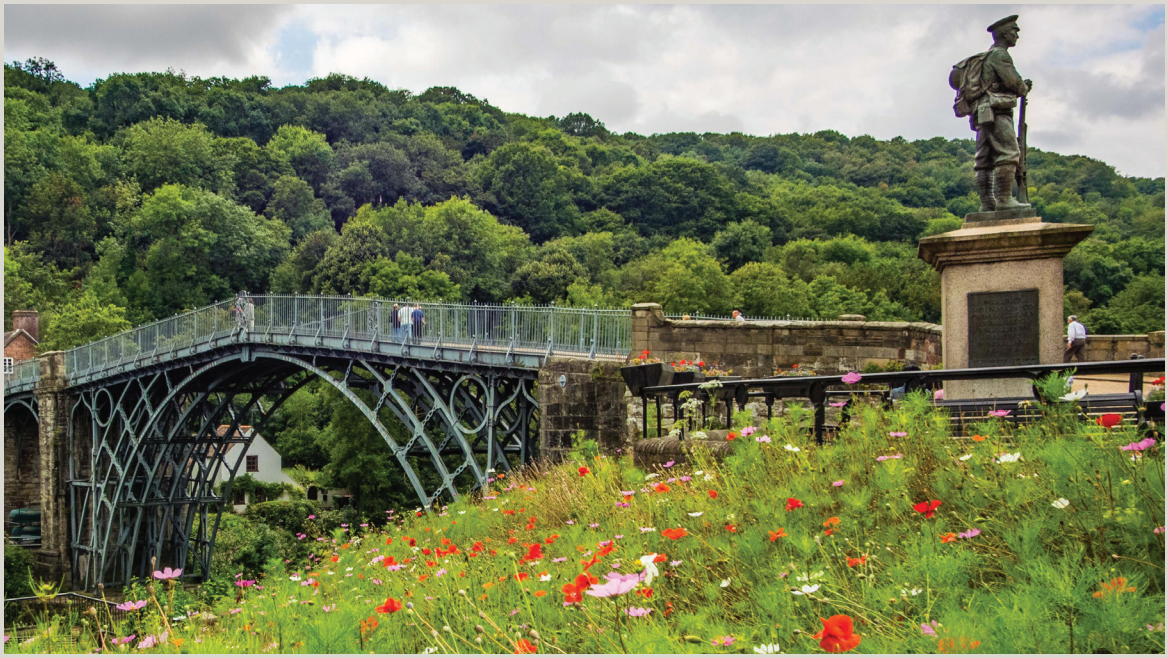


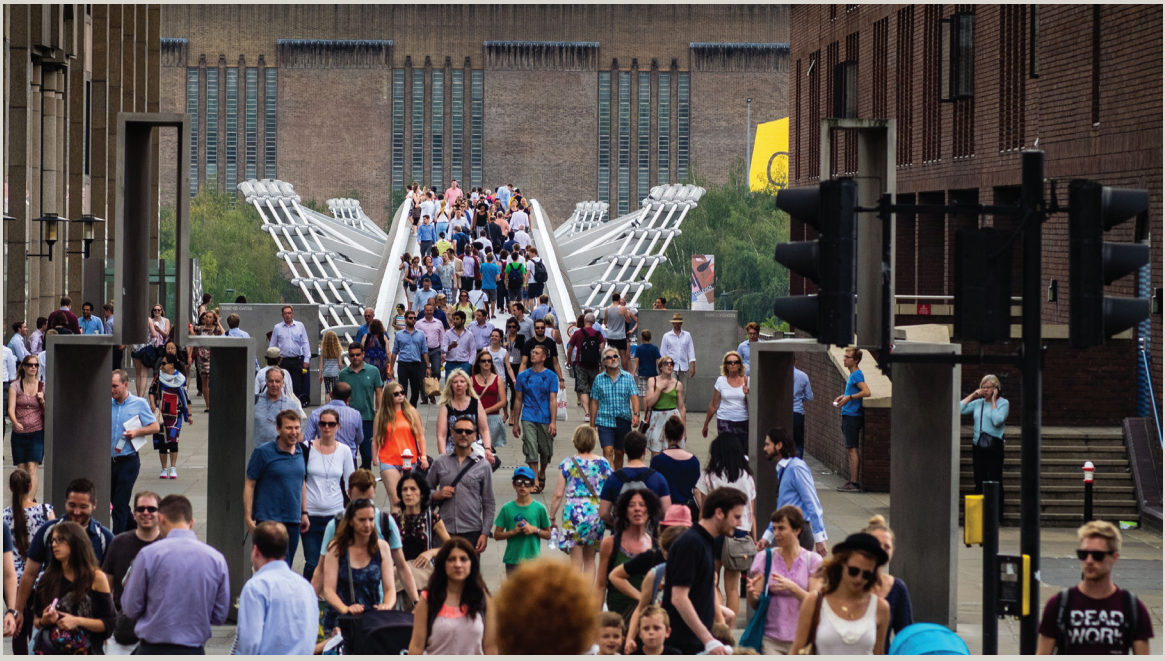
The Armed for Safety Delusion This spontaneous memorial to 12 deceased victims of the 2018 Borderline Grill shooting popped up in suburban Thousand Oaks, California; it's only one of the burgeoning hundreds of mass shootings and subsequent memorials appearing annually nationwide.

The human ability to **assess** information and discern truth is growing increasingly rare in American society. Assessing and reacting to reality has lost its logical foundation in many communities where voters need more veracity. For example, despite the harm it causes, many individuals still cling to archaic and debunked notions that governments need doomsday armaments and war powers to threaten and inflict damage on others to resolve political, economic, and social conflicts. Similarly, many modern Americans have embraced a misguided, illogical belief that increasing the number of firearms in their communities will enhance their personal safety. This fallacy was repeatedly disproven throughout the heavily armed American West of the late 1800s, such as in Dodge City, Abilene, Deadwood, and other frontier towns. Yet, this delusion has re-emerged in the 21st century, as mass shootings became commonplace, daily events and the number of guns at large exceeded the US population. This ignorance begets irrational fears that displace the acknowledgment of actual existential threats to humanity. Such illogical beliefs dangerously distract from addressing the immediate threats to human existence and obscure the necessity to confront the planet's looming inhabitability for future generations.

Beyond the Pale—Fire & Flood Without regard to political ideology, hopes, or prayers, in the 21st century one in three people on the planet face floods from mesoscale convective systems causing large, organized, long-lasting, prodigiously precipitating events; additionally, unprecedented, destructive wildland fires repeatedly explode around the globe.

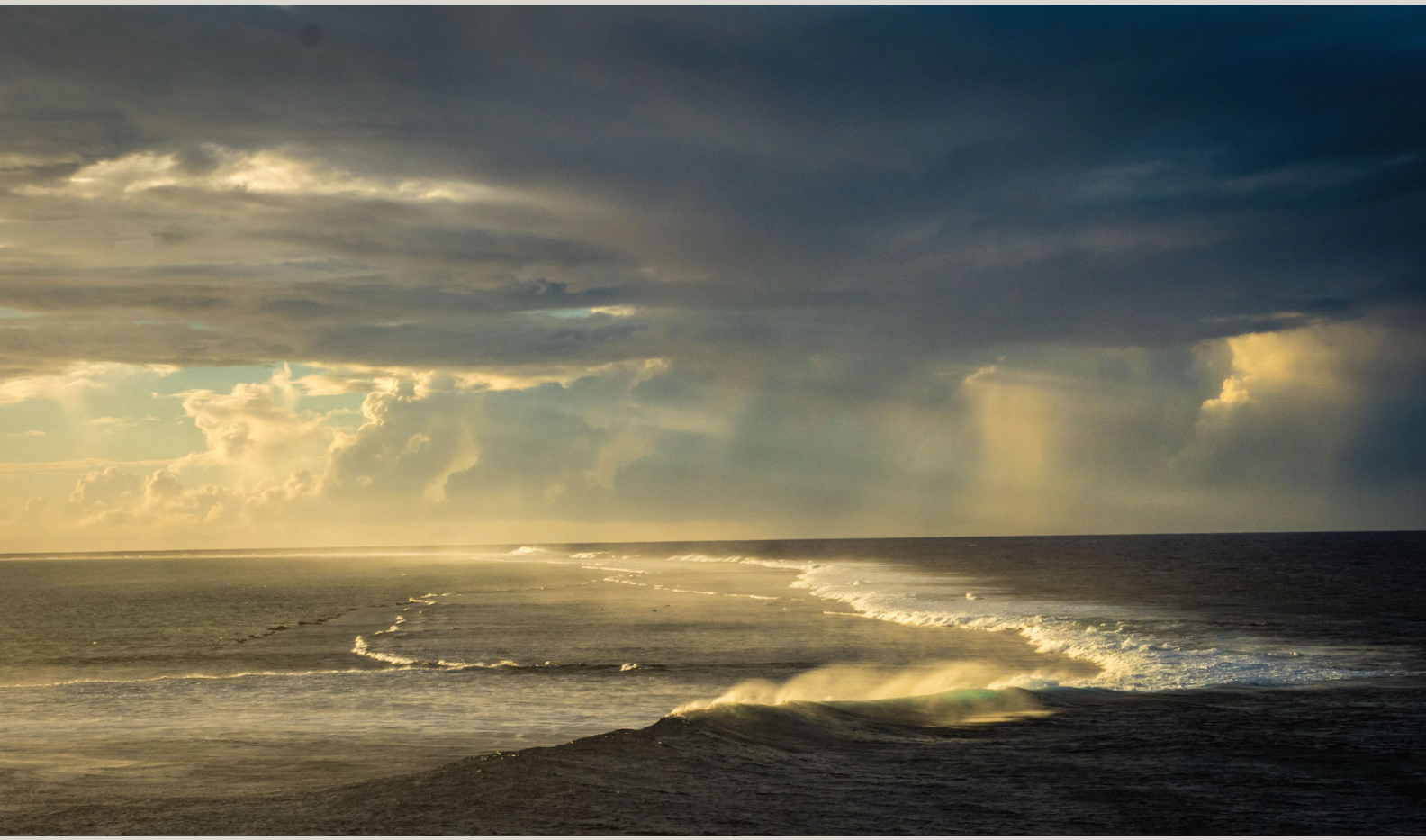
Instant **action** is crucial to change the current trajectories of Earth's life-support systems for humanity. Even after recognizing that human activities have led to catastrophically detrimental planetary environmental conditions, civilization seems to deny reality and believes negotiation with nature is possible. Even the best-informed and enlightened international discussions are rampant about whether humans should render 30% or 50% of the planet to nature. Is this not the same denial and self-delusion practiced by millions faced with overwhelming, implacable foes? Such denial of reality deeply deludes them to accept taking no action or engaging in displacement activities. Whatever our beliefs, hopes, and prayers, humans cannot bargain with nature or the planet any more than they can negotiate the behavior of storms, wildfires, or planetary climate. Evidence shows time spent dreaming to get a "better deal" will likely put human survival out of reach. People need to pay attention, engage, and act now!





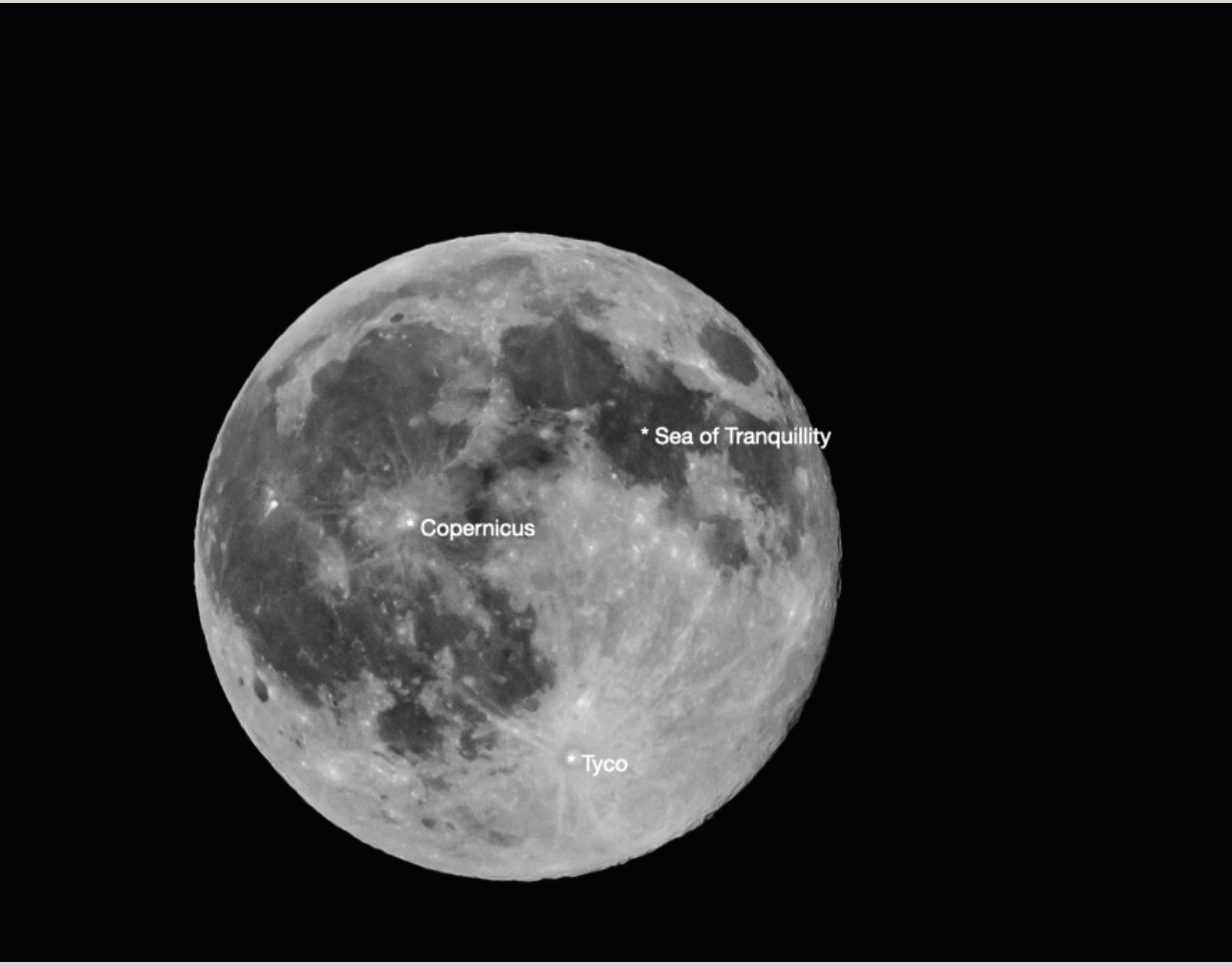
Wobbly Beginning? The Industrial Revolution spans 350 years, from Great Britain's First Iron Bridge to its Millennium Bridge across the River Thames.

Symbolized by the World's First Iron Bridge, the Industrial Revolution began in mid-18th-century Great Britain on the banks of the Severn River in Shropshire, England, boosting human-generated carbon emissions into Earth's atmosphere. This astonishing technological advancement freed humans of incomprehensible toil and hard labor and increased individual productivity but unsuspectedly launched human well-being into an alarmingly wobbly future. Three hundred fifty years later, London's landmark Millennium Footbridge, aka the Wobbly Bridge, revealed unintended consequences that such novel endeavors might portend when the futuristic structure uncontrollably wobbled with resonance during its June 2000 opening. Now stabilized, the bridge affair showed that design and engineering misjudgments could be adjusted a posteriori; however, altering rising global atmospheric carbon emissions, perhaps not so much.



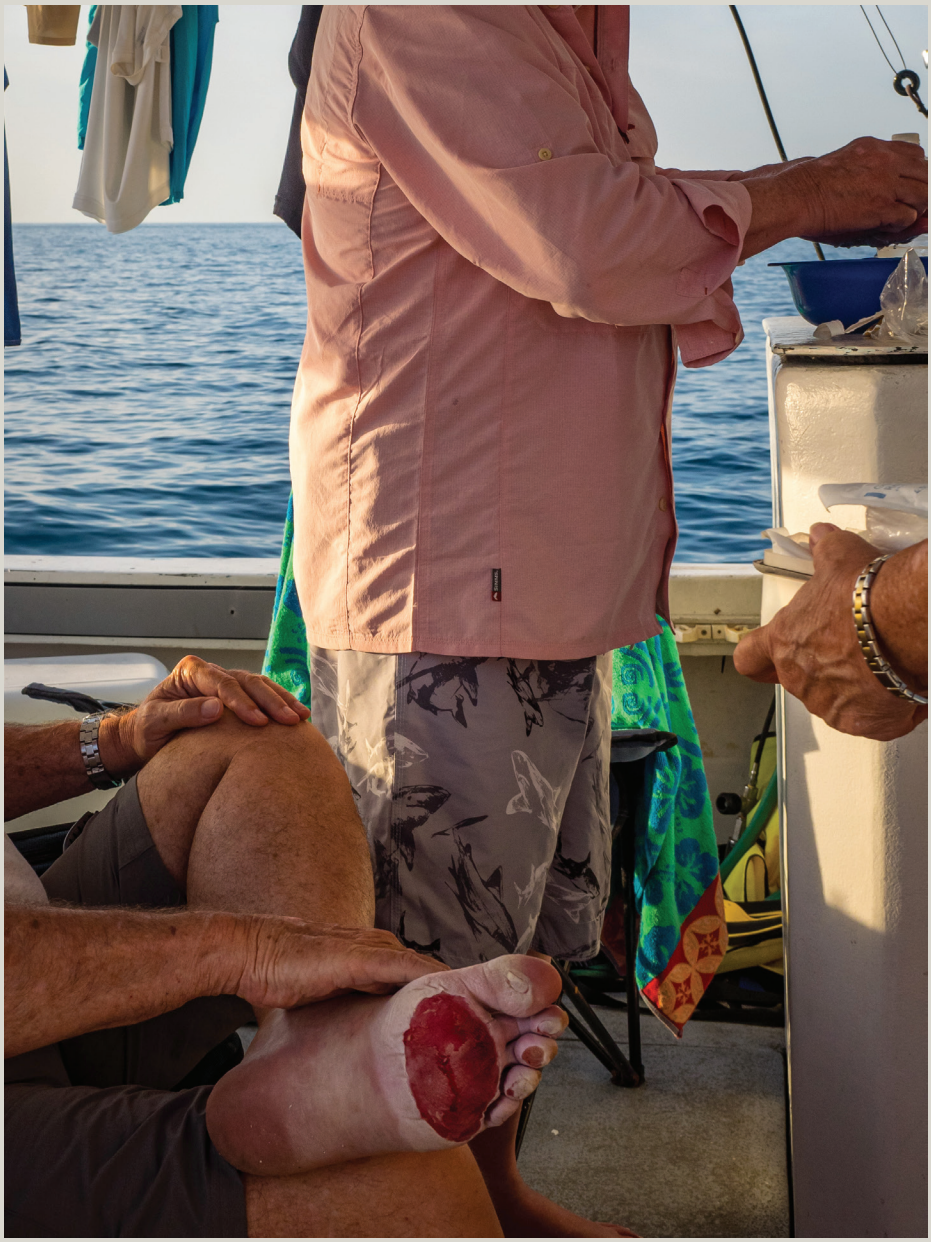
Humanity's Limited Influence Covering 70% of Earth's surface, the world's ocean interacts with the atmosphere and biosphere endlessly, with or without regard to human activities or presence.

We're all in a climate pickle together. However, 50 years of Earth Day's ubiquitous and infamous "Save the Earth!" narratives still fail to engage many people and encourage the impression that humans are separate and independent of the Earth. Once reconciled that humans are part of nature, not separate from it, the first steps needed to reduce climate-driven threats are understanding how Earth's climate system works and identifying critical points of influence. Current scientific understanding of Earth's biogeophysics indicates that the world's massive ocean is the primary driver of global climatic dynamics. Therefore, the sea is a likely place to seek influence. Nevertheless, until ocean circulation, chemistry, and atmospheric interactions are better known, strategies for changing trends of planetary heat and water distribution will remain beyond our ken. Consequently, initial human actions must focus on activities humans can effectively influence, such as adjusting societal behaviors to align with reality, restoring ecosystem integrity to slow ongoing damage, confining ourselves to smaller landscape areas, and reducing natural resource demands with a smaller human population. Few viable options remain, and even intelligent tinkering with geoengineering to alter global climate factors is existentially dangerous.



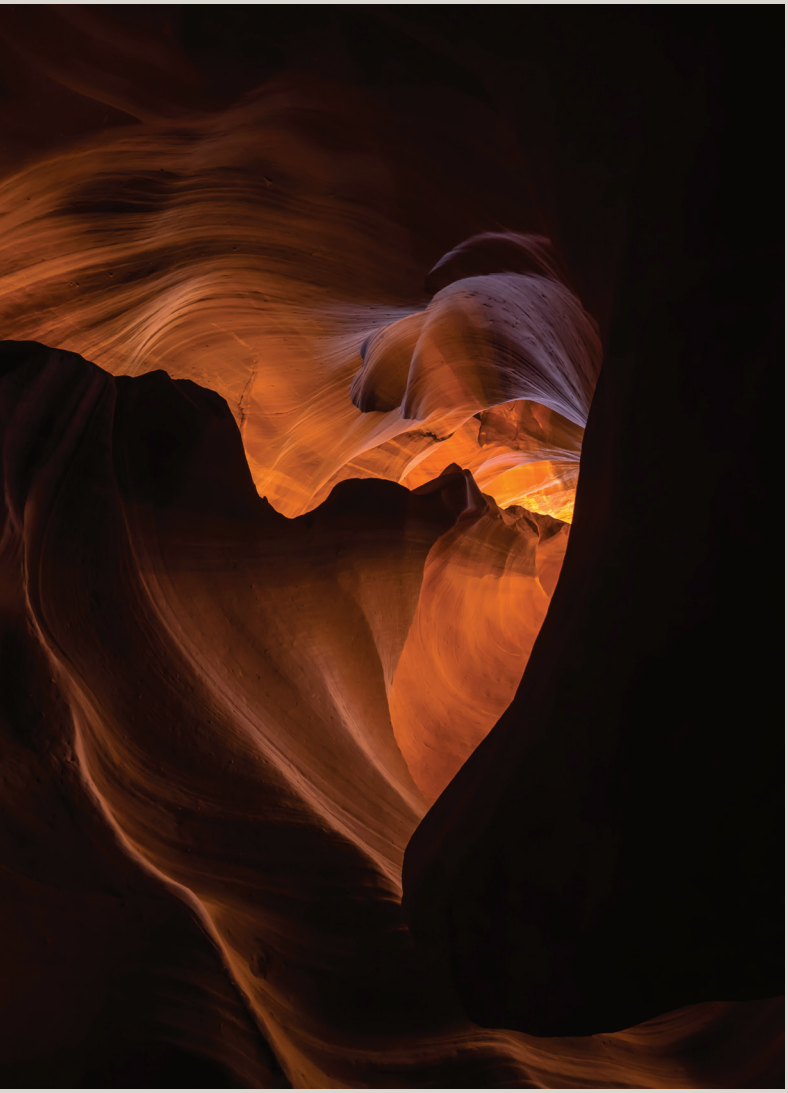
One for All, or All for One Humanity can sustainably cooperate on controversial, complex, technically tricky tasks … 50 years ago, men walked on the moon, and many nations continue to explore space cooperatively.

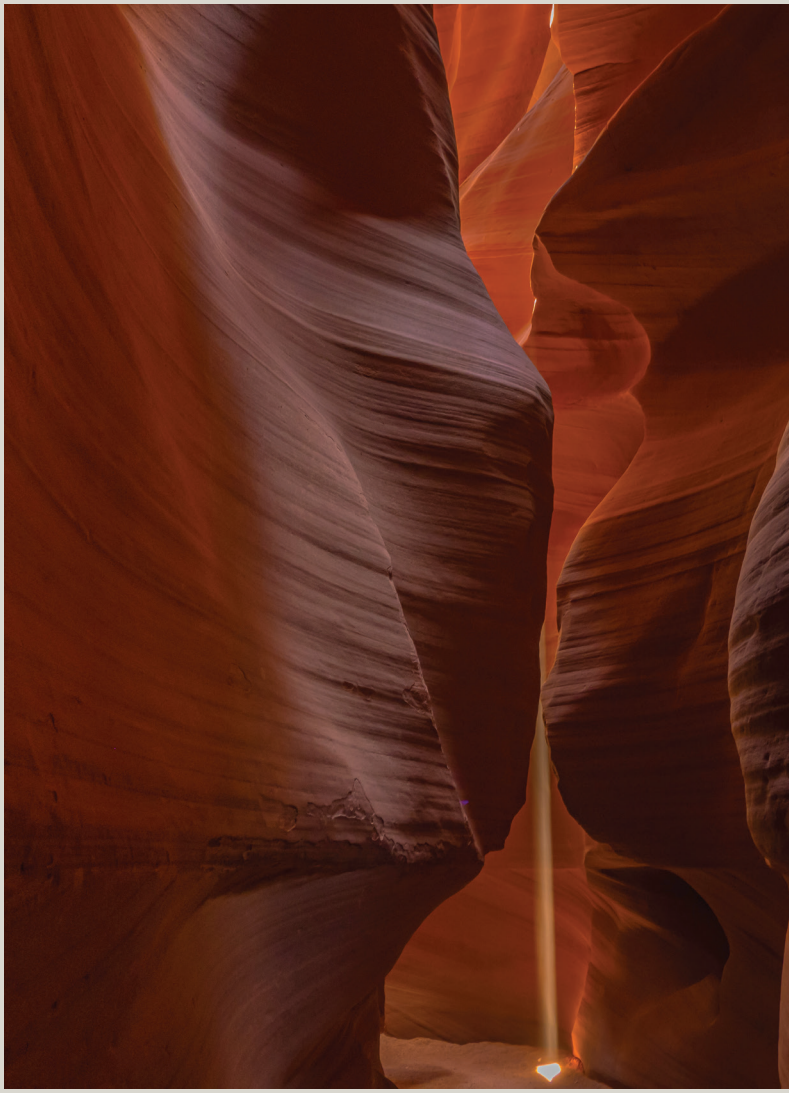
Putting the industrial carbon emissions "genie" back into the bottle will require more than recalculations and adjustments to natural systems beyond our ken and capacity to govern. It may require agreement and cooperation among the world's people at scales never before experienced or considered. Modern society can barely convince enough people in nation-states to change policies, practices, or behavior to achieve immediate, desired social outcomes, but change nature as Tennyson described it—"red in tooth and claw?" Not at all! So, is all lost? Is humanity without hope?



Adopt First Principles Do No Harm when damage cannot be reversed—if you burn your foot on hot sand, protect it from infection and change your behavior, i.e., don't keep walking on it or on the hot sand.

To survive, society must preside over efforts to align human behaviors and attitudes with the universe's reality. As in medicine, we must step back and begin with "Do No Harm" to our patient, planet Earth. Cease and desist orders are needed immediately to reduce human-caused carbon emissions, starting with those activities causing the greatest harm, e.g., non-renewable energy production, construction, and transportation. Why are these sectors first? American bank robber Willie Sutton explained such situations briefly in the 1930s. When asked by a reporter why he robbed banks, he replied, "Because that's where the money is." Similarly, to "Do No Harm," we must reduce major carbon emissions everywhere, all at once, even if it defies the laws of probability, plausibility, and coherence. Human-caused carbon emissions continue to rise; Earth's atmospheric status quo prevails because businesses hedge to delay changes in their former profitability, despite half a dozen Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessments by the best of humanity since 1990, continent-wide leadership conferences around the globe, and an alphabet soup of United Nations working groups seeking solutions.





Heart of the Matter The heart of climate crisis triage is understanding the power of truth— Does a stone canyon have a vital heart? Can people see it, believe it, and prove it to others? Must they be able to prove it?

Western civilization continues to ignore or deny the urgency of a shared human plight inherent in the planet's dynamic atmosphere. It continues trying to negotiate on behalf of nature as if it were somehow appointed the universe's agent. Overcoming hubris to improve human understanding and appreciation of the dire situation challenges fundamental perceptions of humanity's cosmology. Are people apart from the natural spirit, or an integral part of it, as Indigenous Australians espouse? When commercial tech support call center operators dispense advice, instruction, and guidance to novice customers who seek a better understanding of new devices, operating systems, etc., they often invoke RTFM* as a facetious universal response to the ubiquitous queries of "How can I…?" We've suggested, tongue in cheek, that addressing the climate crisis also begins with RTFM (*Parks Stewardship Forum* 39:1, January 2023). Action is now critical, more than the fruits of any labor; acts are inherently righteous. The Hindu deity Krishna advocates mindfulness in the present moment as the ideal path to realizing the truth. These are dark times indeed. Shall we tell our children to prepare for a bang or a whimper?

*RTFM = Read The F***ing Manual

Why vs. How Humanity needs a habitable Earth to survive. When we know ***why*** we want something, ***how*** to get it is within our grasp.

Especially in the darkest times, we discover that the most powerful human motivator is the quest for meaning, which can save us from despair. Humans together have an unbelievable capacity to endure. What keeps us going through insurmountable hardship, trauma, and loss? It's a quest for meaning, with its attendant strife, struggle, and tension. The quest for meaning reflects one's deepest values and highest aspirations: what you do, who you love, and how you respond to life's moments. Can humanity make common cause to overcome such a colossal mistake as making planet Earth uninhabitable? We believe meaning can be found in any circumstance if we endure together and find meaning in our plight. To find hope, humanity must triage the climate crisis by **protecting, assessing,** and **acting now!** A long and winding journey continues to lie ahead.