



National Wildlife Federation®  
**CAMPUS**  
ecology®

**College of the Atlantic  
Bar Harbor, Maine  
Spring 2008, Climate Action Plan**

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Campus Profile**

College of the Atlantic (COA) is a small, four-year, private college with one major: human ecology. Its 300 students design their own course of study geared to investigate, and ultimately improve, the relationships between human beings and their social and natural communities. Students at COA are both reflective and active. While many students study sciences and policy, our students come to campus with the creativity of the thinking mind; we graduate musicians, poets, artists and screenwriters along with green business workers, conservationists and marine scientists. Environmentalism is inherent in everything COA does. Its mission and major draw students who are inherently aware of the impact of their actions. Recycling is standard procedure; food is composted; landscaping is organic; bikes are everywhere; the environment is protected and cared for. COA students, faculty and staff are involved in decisions about all aspects of the college, from which trees should be cut and where roads and walkways placed to the nature of any new structures. Much of the college's produce comes from its own organic farm or a kitchen garden that is part of the campus' public community gardens. Only low- or no-VOC paints and healthy cleaning products are used. Sustainability is part of purchasing decision's for furniture, office products and food. These efforts are supported by all members of the college community.

### **Contacts**

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## **GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Goals**

In October 2006, upon the inauguration of our current president, David Hales, COA pledged to become carbon net-zero by the end of the following year. We vowed to reduce and avoid all emissions that we possibly could and to offset those that we could not avoid or reduce.

### **Accomplishments**

On December 17, 2007, College of the Atlantic became net-zero for carbon emissions. This meant a year of determining our carbon footprint:

- Students assessed the commuting miles of faculty, staff and students;
- We estimated a year's worth of carbon emissions from travel by visitors to the college, including prospective students, attendees at events and lectures and research and other such trips conducted

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by students and faculty. To this figure, we added the electricity and heating emissions of all buildings on campus, as well as our farm and outlying research islands;

- We studied how we could reduce the above through greater energy efficiency, tighter buildings, flexible work plans and support for alternative transportation;
- We investigated the carbon offset market to find cost-effective, additional, quantifiable and verifiable reductions.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Major challenges were twofold. One is a fact of life: College of the Atlantic sits on an island on the coast of Maine. Winters are cold and laden with snow. Public transportation is limited, and the Maine saying, “You can’t get there from here,” is particularly apt for Bar Harbor, Maine. It is at the end of the line. COA has been blessed by the gifts of several old summer mansions, known here as cottages. They are lovely and historic but the antithesis of energy efficiency. Buildings need to be heated, snow needs to be removed, workers need to drive. Energy efficiency is a true hurdle for us, which means that for now, purchasing carbon offsets is the only way for the college to achieve carbon neutrality.

This leads to the other challenge, the carbon offset market. Our students, working with Craig Ten Broeck, our consulting advisor for sustainability, thoroughly investigated the market and considered five potential offset providers. We chose The Climate Trust of Portland, Oregon. Our funds are purchasing carbon emissions reductions that will result from a traffic signal optimization project in Portland. Reductions achieved by this project will be replicable in other cities. The offsets we purchased are both quantifiable and verifiable.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

COA President David Hales requested this action of the college’s board of trustees. They agreed. The work was done by COA students in conjunction with Craig Ten Broeck. A green business course in the winter of 2007 also examined the carbon offset market to determine the validity of offsets and the potential impact they might have on reducing carbon emissions to the atmosphere.

### **Funding and Resources**

Our offsets cost \$22,500. These offsets serve as a partial answer to the challenge of reducing carbon emissions, and not all students supported purchasing carbon offsets, preferring instead to reduce carbon emissions directly by on-campus energy efficiency improvements. We took both courses of action. The college entered into a \$200,000 facilities improvement program with Johnson Controls, Inc., to improve the energy efficiency of our major buildings. These improvements, which include, among other actions, lighting retrofits, insulation improvements, air infiltration reduction and use of destratification fans, will reduce COA’s energy consumption by 20 percent, with expected paybacks for most projects of less than six years.

### **Community Outreach and Education**

Beyond its efforts on campus, COA has been working nationally and locally to help other institutions further carbon reductions. It is a founding member of the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment and a member of the Maine Governor’s Carbon Challenge program. Maine’s governor, John Baldacci, said of our efforts: “College of the Atlantic is demonstrating unprecedented success in meeting the goals of carbon reduction and the State of Maine is pleased with its partnership with the college.” COA has become something of a model for other institutions; our media outreach has literally gone around the world. Our personal outreach has likewise extended around the world as we speak with other institutions that are working on similar efforts.

We have extended our efforts to reduce electricity consumption and greenhouse gas emissions to the local business community by partnering with the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce to offer a free light bulb exchange program. One thousand compact fluorescent light bulbs were purchased for the community and exchanged for incandescent bulbs.

### **Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint**

We have addressed global climate change—directly! We have eliminated 2,488 tons of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere this year through participation in The Climate Trust offset project. We will further reduce an estimated 600 tons of emissions over the next year through our purchase of renewable electrical energy and the energy efficiency improvements currently being made to our buildings. We will continue to look for additional reductions.

### **CLOSING COMMENT**

As President Hales has said, “Business as usual will not provide a secure, affordable and reliable source of energy to the nation. American institutions of higher education have a responsibility to become leaders in shifting away from a fossil fuel energy base to one that is renewable.” He adds that while some media outlets now like to think of this goal as a contest, “The key is to do what you can in a way that makes sense for your own institution.”