



## Peak Oil Forum - a final comment

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on May 12, 2006 - 1:03am

Topic: [Policy/Politics](#)

Tags: [ethanol](#), [forum](#), [global warming](#), [peak oil](#) [[list all tags](#)]

Until now I have tried to give you the fairly honest reporting of what the folks said at the Peak Oil Forum, without indulging too much in editorial comment. Since this is going up on a Friday, when our readership drops off, maybe I won't get drummed off the page until Monday, but I thought I would conclude my review of the Peak Oil and the Environment Forum with a few comments from an opinionated observer. They should not be taken as detracting from a meeting I found enlightening, and full of information and contacts.

The one thing that surprised me as much as anything over the course of the meeting is that I don't recall anyone saying "slow down." I only started noting this after a short while, but (and I apologize but I can't find the comment with the graph that was posted by someone about a week ago on this) here is the [savings](#)

The faster you drive, the more fuel you use. For example, driving at 65 miles per hour (mph), rather than 55 mph, increases fuel consumption by 20 percent. Driving at 75 mph, rather than 65 mph, increases fuel consumption by another 25 percent.

Hey, reinstate the speed limits, it works - well it works if you want to save gas, perhaps not (cynic here) if you want to get elected.

Roger Bezdek pointed out that the Hirsch Report is based on a 2% depletion, a number we have noted earlier that Saudi Arabia now admits to. The year has seen significant data that this is probably too low. The number that Chris Skrebowski uses seems to be 5% and Schlumberger have been reported as thinking it might go to 8%.

Bill McKibben, Pat Murphy and those others who said that investing in technology is a waste of time, got me irritated, and less inclined to listen to what they were saying. As Governor Schweitzer said "if you showed up at the meeting, you were part of the problem!" (Because you used energy to get there). We have to find new ways of doing things, and new technologies. The organizers had found folk that are making a difference and put them in the program, there are lots of other things that need to be done, and aren't, at least at the level that will be needed. But burying your head in the sand is river talk (to be polite) and . . . well never mind.

I don't know enough about Methanol - the fuel source that Ken Deffeyes brought up at the end of his talk, and so will go and read up some more about it. Somebody also suggested that the smart thing to drop the cost of ethanol, which I have said in the past was in part due to the \$0.15 per gal chemical used to denature it, would be to use gasoline as then denaturing agent instead. Good idea, I think.

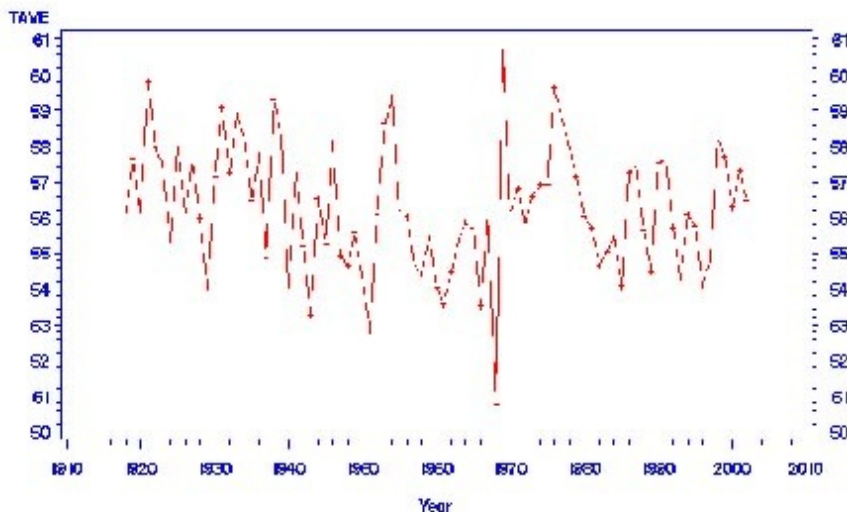
I didn't think that we had enough discussion about coal, though given that it was not until we

heard the talks that we knew that Roger Bezdek was looking to 5 100,000 bd CTL plants per year, among other things, to get us back in balance, and that there would be so much debate about sequestration. You know what, methane has been sitting in the ground for millennia and more (that's natural gas) if we replace it with carbon dioxide what logical argument can you have to say it will pose a threat? To a degree I have the same sort of argument for those who worry about burying nuclear waste. Uranium comes out of the ground, even relatively close to the surface in somewhat porous ground in Wyoming it is not a big issue. Putting it into the basalt (a much less permeable rock) and deeper is rationally safer. But I understand that this is another issue where facts are not really as good a topic to debate as opinions. Ah, well!

I thought that Michael Klare's talk on the potential for wars, was, if anything, understating the problem, particularly since he did not say anything, until the questions, about the East China Sea. As Dave has posted here in the past, this is a very volatile situation and I was surprised that it and other parts of the East got as little attention as they did. As Prof G noted on Wednesday, there are already problems in India and Pakistan, to name but two. I know, too little time, so big a topic . . .

And that brings me to James Hansen. Okay, so I'm prejudiced because he doesn't think our concerns about the Gulf Stream have any merit (despite the signs that the Gulf is getting hotter, and Europe having had some serious cold this winter). So, having just read "State of Fear" I noted that Michael Crichton had also actually given accessible historic data. I don't know where to find the historic data for Europe, but I did check up on one place in about the middle of the US. And I looked up the [historic temperature record](#). Here is what I found:

Mean TAVE Temperature mean (F) Years 1918 - 2002



Source: C. A. Williams, et al. WU-Minnn, RS WSEA, ICR Listening, NOAA, National Climatic Data Center, Asheville, NC

If you are curious, you might want to go to the site and check out the historic temperature record for someplace you might be interested in. Now, I have previously posted on glaciers retreating in Alaska, (I've seen where they are and were), but I guess, since around 1930 it was apparently hotter than now, I'm not quite as convinced as I was.

And if that doesn't make me the pariah of the week, let me just make a comment on David Pimental's presentation. I wrote that I had a rapped knuckle, because as [jdeely pointed out](#) when I used something like Pimental's numbers I was corrected.

We don't use 20 million barrels of gasoline a day, we use 20 million barrels of OIL. We consume 9,105,000 barrels of gasoline per day... or [382.4 million gallons](#)

So, Ethanol is already providing more than twice the percentage that you calculated... it doesn't look like that 5% will be much of a problem.

and

"But the renewable fuels mandate coupled with the phase-out of MTBE and state fuel requirements is expected to produce a need for about 395,000 barrels of ethanol a day, or 6.1 billion gallons in 2006, according to the [Department of Energy](#). If we really do produce this much ethanol this year then ethanol production will be about 4.2% of gasoline production on a gallon for gallon basis. 5% is starting to sound really easy!

He has more comments under the post covering Pimental's paper. And I have to agree with the sentiment that if someone whips through a paper full of statistics, and you check one or two and find them wrong, it leaves a bit of a question as to the validity of the rest. For example he quoted a percentage of energy going in for irrigation, but if I remember from one of the talks, there is only a percentage of the country, and even of some states, where irrigation is needed.

I did learn, re biofuels, the reason we don't use the more productive rapeseed in the US, relative to Europe, apparently it is too warm here. And I wished I had had more time to listen to Joseph Tainter (or that he had more time to talk).

In regard to the comments on the Canadian tar sands, and the decision as to whether they come here - it seems to me that if the Chinese have a contract for delivery, and a Canadian firm has a contract for delivery, then how can that be sent South? But then I'm not a lawyer. As to whether it is the greatest evil under the sun, no I don't think it is - it is a resource like any other, that is messy to get out and prepare, but that will, in the short term, help us out when we need the resource. Hopefully they can find technology that will reduce the environmental impact (or were we not supposed to try and find any such?) And in that regard, I don't believe that EROI numbers are immutable, and technological advances may well, as someone said, make those currently being waved around with passion, something quite different in a year or two.

Well this already too long, but, in regard to:

"O.K., Heading Out, time to come clean and admit it...you really have something of a crush on Megan Quinn, don't you..."

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He so does. It's totally obvious. =)

She, apparently gave the best end speech that some had heard, and functioned very effectively in being MC, and since I did not hear the speech, and missed her movie twice now, I thought a little extra recognition would be fair.



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