

# Climate First!



## ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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# A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Activists Get Momentum from a New President, Vaccine Rollouts, and Net Zero Emissions Plans

A pandemic-challenged United States moved into 2021 with hope as vaccine doses began to be administered en masse to its citizens. For activist climate organizations, including Climate First!, some of that hope fueled a return to their “bread and butter” work – organizing in-person protests and rallies instead of virtual campaigning.

Climate activists also breathed a sigh of relief early in the year when the new President quickly passed numerous [executive orders](#) to address global warming, including moving the U.S. back into the Paris Climate Accord, quashing the dirty [Keystone XL pipeline](#), suspending [new oil and gas leases](#) on federal lands and waters, among other things. Biden, in his public statements and actions, seemed to be making it clear that he would begin to end the federal government’s strong support of the fossil fuel industry, and move to address the climate crisis.

Activists saw another sign of optimism in March when [Wells Fargo became the last](#) of the six largest U.S. banks to pledge that all its operations – including financing fossil fuel companies and projects – would reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. When the six major banks in the country – companies that [invest multi-billions of dollars](#) a year in climate-wrecking fossil fuels – all promise to end their carbon emissions in roughly 30 years, one couldn’t help but be more hopeful about the future of the earth.

As the year wore on, however, it became painfully clear that “all things climate” were more complicated than at first blush. Despite the President’s good intentions, he wasn’t able to keep all his promises to save a deteriorating climate. With a [fossil fuel industry determined](#) to delay, if not prevent, the transition from dirty to clean energy, and a U.S. Senate in which all Democrats’ votes would likely be needed to pass any climate legislation, it was difficult for Biden to begin moving the U.S. economy away from fossil fuels. And while his desire to address global warming was certainly evident late in the year at the climate talks ([COP26](#)) in Glasgow, Scotland, he certainly wasn’t always consistent vis-a-vis the issue. Most troubling, for example, he ignored activists’ calls to stop the construction and then operation of the [Line 3 pipeline](#), as well as the already–operating Dakota Access pipeline.

And regarding the guarantees by the six biggest U.S. banks that their entire business – including the financing of fossil fuel companies and projects -- would reach net zero planet-warming emissions by 2050, one had to remember those devilish details. [Critics](#) of the net zero plans argued, [among other things](#), that they could permit a lender to delay reducing their emissions – U.N. scientists have said that large emission [cuts have to start immediately](#) -- or even avoid reducing them at all by using offsets, such as planting trees or carbon capture technology. Thus, the details of the net zero plans were critical to how effective they would be in limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C.

Despite these challenges, as well as a year of record-breaking [climate-fueled disasters](#), and a challenging prognosis from [United Nation's climate scientists](#) regarding how the world could avoid going beyond 1.5 degrees C of warming, there were some notable [bright spots in 2021](#) resulting from the work of U.S. climate activists. Organizers scored divestment victories at Harvard – the U.S.' largest academic endowment -- and other schools; local communities – including some communities of color – stopped extractive infrastructure from being built in their neighborhoods; activist investors won three of twelve seats on ExxonMobil's Board of Directors; Indigenous groups in Maine and Minnesota re-acquired lands wrongly taken from them many years ago; and lastly, one major U.S. bank, Citigroup, announced in mid-January 2022 an absolute carbon emissions [reduction target](#) for its energy financing which none of the other major U.S. banks had done in their net zero plans. While much more needs to be done over the next decade or two to save the climate, grassroots organizing was definitely making a difference. And Climate First! was part of that story in 2021.

Ted Conwell

Executive Director

President - Board of Directors

## MEASURABLES FROM 2021

In mid-March, in view of the ongoing U.S.' vaccination program, Climate First! returned to organizing in-person actions for the first time in about a year. It was the start of a busy year for our #DefundClimateChange campaign, an effort to encourage large U.S. banks to transition away from funding fossil fuels, and into financing renewable energy.

During the year, Climate First! activists:

- organized 76 bank actions, nearly all in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Many of the actions were part of a “bank walk” in which activists walked to numerous close-by bank branches, all as part of one event.
- the prime target of our bank actions was JP Morgan Chase (AKA “Chase Bank”) -- followed by Wells Fargo -- due to its far and away leading position in financing fossil fuels.
- also began visiting branches of other major U.S. banks -- Bank of America, Citigroup, and TD Bank -- since they were also involved in massive amounts of fossil fuel financing, and/or funding a dirty pipeline project or two.
- had conversations with at least 53 branch managers (or their stand-ins).
- left relevant documents with lenders' employees in at least 50 actions. The document package usually contained a formal “demand” letter that had been previously sent to the bank's CEO, and a [formal report](#) on the top U.S. banks that invest in fossil fuels.
- attended six non-bank climate events, five of them in Washington, D.C.

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021

## MARCH



Climate First! held its 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting online. One of its Board members, Eugene DePasquale -- a former state legislator, Auditor General, and U.S. congressional candidate from Pennsylvania -- gave the keynote speech. In his interesting talk, Eugene shared with us how as Auditor General he built new allies by focusing on the financial costs to taxpayers of climate change.

*Image: Keynote speaker, Eugene DePasquale, attending Climate First!'s virtual 8th Annual Meeting; 3-14-21.*

Less than a week after the Annual Meeting, Climate First! was back in the streets for the first time in a year as part of Fridays For Future's "Global Climate Strike". Our activists ran seven actions at branches of Chase Bank, Wells Fargo, Citigroup, and TD Bank in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. In the actions, we followed the usual game plan: attempt to talk with the branch manager about his employer's massive investments in climate-polluting fossil fuel projects (such as Line 3) and drop off documents outlining our demands.



*Image: A bank action in downtown Silver Spring, MD; 3-19-21.*

## APRIL

On April 1st, Climate First! attended a “Build Back Fossil Free” rally in Washington, D.C. in front of the Army Corps of Engineers headquarters. The crowd called for the federal agency to shut down the Dakota Access and Line 3 pipelines. Later, we all marched to Black Lives Matter Plaza near the White House.



*Image: Marching through China Town in Washington., D.C.; 4-1-21.*

On April 22nd, Earth Day, Climate First! pointed its #DefundClimateChange campaign directly at the Number One “banker” of fossil fuels of any bank in the world – JPMorgan Chase. Our action leaders visited 14 Chase Bank branches in Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia. And then one week later, in the spirit of Earth Day, an action was run at a Chase branch in Oakland, CA.



*Image: An action in Silver Spring, MD; 4-22-21.*



In early May, Climate First! ran, or assisted with, 11 actions at Wells Fargo bank branches in Maryland and Washington, D.C. as part of the “Stop the Money Pipeline” (STMP) coalition’s “Global Day of Action vs. Line 3.” STMP is a nationwide coalition of over 200 groups working to get U.S. banks to divest from fossil fuels, and we have often worked with this powerful group in our current bank campaign.

## STOP THE MONEY PIPELINE



*Image: Climate First! marched to three Wells Fargo branches with the Line 3 snake, as part of a ShutDownDC event in Washington, D.C.; 5-7-21.*



*Image: We ended the day at a Wells Fargo branch in Takoma Park, MD; 5-7-21.*



In early June, Climate First! participated in STMP's "greenwashing" campaign vs. Chase Bank by delivering an award (see it below) and other information to 11 of its branches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.



Image: A certificate of achievement award; 6-3-21.

## JULY

Continuing our work with the ever-growing STMP coalition, in mid-July, Climate First! organized eight bank actions during the coalition's week-long "Artful Protests vs. Banks Funding Line 3". And during the week of action, we ran our first "bank walk" where we shared our message with *five different* banks. All, except one, were within a short walk of each other.



*Image: The first stop on our bank walk in downtown Silver Spring, MD; 7-16-21.*

## AUGUST

With the climate talks coming at the end of October in Scotland, the STMP coalition created a “Deadline Glasgow” campaign to highlight the importance of the international gathering to saving the climate. Climate First! organized another bank walk in mid-August where we visited branches of five major U.S. banks in Washington, D.C. Anticipating that banks would learn about the upcoming nationwide bank campaign and lock down targeted branches, we strategically sent a team of one or two people ahead of the main group to talk to the bank’s branch manager before the bank was shut down, with police at the front door. The strategy mostly worked, as we successfully talked with the managers at four of the five banks during our walk; Chase was the only bank that we were unable to enter.



*Image: Our 4<sup>th</sup> stop on a bank walk in Washington, D.C.; 8-13-21.*



## SEPTEMBER

Organizers with the Deadline Glasgow campaign scheduled a “Week of Actions” against Line 3 in September. And Climate First! organized 11 bank actions in Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., visiting banks funding the dirty tar sands oil project. During the busy day, we spoke with 11 branch managers, and delivered a petition and associated documents to 10 of the employees.



Image: 2<sup>nd</sup> stop on a bank walk in Washington, D.C.; 9-17-21.

## OCTOBER

One of the most popular annual festivals in the Washington, D.C. area returned in early October – the Takoma Park Street Festival – and Climate First! was part of it again. We talked with lots of people interested in the climate issue, and enlisted some new volunteers.



*Image: Our volunteers kept busy during the crowded festival in Takoma Park, MD; 10-3-21.*

In mid-October, Climate First! ran three bank walks during Build Back Fossil Free's "Week of Action", including two in Maryland and one in Washington, D.C.



*Image: One stop on the bank walk in Bethesda, MD; 10-15-21.*



Later in the month, we attended the Fridays for Future's (FFF) "Global Climate Strike" in Washington, D.C. The young activists organized an impactful event.



*Image: This speaker at the FFF rally in Washington, D.C. was particularly dynamic; photo by ShutDownDC; 10-22-2021.*



## NOVEMBER

In late 2021, Climate First! shifted its strategy somewhat in its #DefundClimateChange campaign. After receiving overtures from a Bank of America executive (who handled environment, social, and governance [ESG] matters for the bank) regarding our letter to his CEO, we agreed to a telephone meeting to discuss our requests that the lender back-off from financing fossil fuels. The early November discussion was a productive one which ended with an intention to talk again in the future.

## DECEMBER

In mid-December, Climate First! attended its last action of the year in a “National Day of Action” against Line 3 and fossil fuel infrastructure on the Gulf coast. The nighttime event at the Army Corps of Engineers headquarters in the nation’s capital was well-organized, with projections of narratives, speeches, attendee participation, singing, drumming, among other things. It was quite a moving action.



*Image: A “Vigil for Water” in Washington, D.C.; 12-14-21.*

## LOOKING AHEAD

In the coming year, Climate First! will continue to push five major U.S. banks -- JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citigroup, and TD Bank -- to stop funding climate-wrecking fossil fuel companies and projects. And in light of a 2021 International Energy Agency (IEA) [report](#), which said that investment in new fossil fuel production had to end immediately for the world to avoid exceeding 1.5 degrees C of warming while it strives for net zero emissions by 2050, Climate First! will—specifically—push the lenders to *not* fund any *new* fossil fuel projects.

We also will continue our discussions with Bank of America ESG executives about how the lender will achieve its emissions reduction goal, and attempt to create similar dialogues with other major U.S. banks.

Amid the economic and political realities in the U.S., climate activists and their supporters have worked tirelessly to move the country quickly towards successfully addressing one of the greatest threats that the world has ever faced. Due to their undying commitment, Climate First! remains guardedly confident that nations of the world will be able to keep the rise in global temperatures near, if not at, 1.5 degrees C, a goal that governments agreed to in the Paris Climate Accord in 2015.

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Climate First! expresses its sincere gratitude to the following: its Board of Directors, which set the direction for the nonprofit over the past year, while its individual members worked on various critical projects; its staff and many volunteers who gave innumerable hours to Climate First! during a busy 2021; and its financial supporters, whose generous donations permitted the organization to continue its work trying to save the earth's climate.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS – DEC. 31, 2021

Ted Conwell, President (MD)

Molly Snyder, Secretary (NY)

Carrie Biggs-Adams, Treasurer (CA)

Sasan Dehghan (MD)

Eugene DePasquale (PA)

Fred Krimgold (VA)

**Climate First! strives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote clean energy, by organizing grassroots efforts that encourage corporations and local governments to think climate first and take concrete steps to help sustain climate stability.**

**Contact info**

Ted Conwell

Executive Director

Climate First!, Inc.

[facebook.com/Climate1stUSA](https://facebook.com/Climate1stUSA)

[@Climate1stUSA](https://twitter.com/Climate1stUSA)

[instagram.com/climate1stUSA/](https://instagram.com/climate1stUSA/)

# Climate First!

12/31/2013

12/31/2014

12/31/2015

## Operations Statement

Income from Donations	2,851.80	4190.00	7,596.00
Income from Grants			500.00
Income from Item Sales	<u>430.00</u>	<u>90.00</u>	<u>80.00</u>

Total Income	3,281.80	4280.00	8,176.00
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## Expenses

Operations			
Cost of Items	491.40	0.00	70.20
Registrations (IRS, Reg Agent, MD)	1,017.00	189.00	189.00
Memberships	100.00	227.00	118.00
Outreach incl Web	385.00	135.85	306.78
Professional Fees	0.00	310.00	265.00
Other Operating Costs	280.85	378.16	1,824.45

Total Operations Costs	2,274.25	1,240.01	2,773.43
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Programs	575.15	1377.34	2,251.11
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Fund-Raising Commissions			777.50
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Fines and Penalties			100.00
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Total Expenses	<u>2,849.40</u>	<u>2,617.35</u>	<u>5,902.04</u>
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Net Income	<u>432.40</u>	<u>1,662.65</u>	<u>2,273.96</u>
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Beginning Fund Balance	0.00	432.40	2,095.05
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Net Income	<u>432.40</u>	<u>1,662.65</u>	<u>2,273.96</u>
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Ending Fund Balance	<u>432.40</u>	<u>2,095.05</u>	<u>4,369.01</u>
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# Climate First!

12/31/2016

12/31/2017

12/31/2018

## Operations Statement

Income from Donations	8,408.00	7,313.78	10,491.86
Income from Grants	0.00	0.00	0.00
Income from Item Sales	<u>50.00</u>	<u>40.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>

Total Income	8,458.00	7,353.78	10,491.86
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## Expenses

Operations			
Cost of Items	35.10	28.08	0.00
Registrations (IRS, Reg Agent, MD)	243.04	224.23	189.00
Memberships	100.00	95.00	100.00
Outreach incl Web	474.94	1,955.87	567.44
Professional Fees	330.00	231.00	280.00
Other Operating Costs	2,510.90	6,134.50	4,753.54

Total Operations Costs	3,693.98	8,668.68	5,889.98
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Programs	737.27	1,579.13	836.84
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Fund-Raising Commissions	1,101.78	0.00	0.00
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Fines and Penalties	0.00	0.00	0.00
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Total Expenses	<u>5,533.03</u>	<u>10,247.81</u>	<u>6,726.82</u>
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Net Income	<u>2,924.97</u>	<u>-2,894.03</u>	<u>3,765.04</u>
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Beginning Fund Balance	4,369.01	7,293.98	4,399.95
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Net Income	<u>2,924.97</u>	<u>-2,894.03</u>	<u>3,765.04</u>
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Ending Fund Balance	<u>7,293.98</u>	<u>4,399.95</u>	<u>8,164.99</u>
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# Climate First!

12/31/2019

12/31/2020

12/31/2021

## Operations Statement

Income from Donations	3,520.33	4,719.44	6,779.10
Income from Grants	0.00	1,415.00	4,015.00
Income from Item Sales	<u>133.00</u>	<u>10.00</u>	<u>70.00</u>

Total Income	3,653.33	6,144.44	10,864.10
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## Expenses

Operations			
Cost of Items	0.00	7.02	49.14
Registrations (IRS, Reg Agent, MD)	299.00	199.00	199.00
Memberships	0.00	100.00	100.00
Outreach incl Web	494.81	493.84	841.85
Professional Fees	280.00	280.00	280.00
Other Operating Costs	5,496.85	4,696.66	3,419.64

Total Operations Costs	6,570.66	5,776.52	4,889.63
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Programs	887.34	149.53	2,846.13
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Fund-Raising Commissions	0.00	0.00	0.00
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Fines and Penalties	0.00	0.00	0.00
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Total Expenses	<u>7,458.00</u>	<u>5,926.05</u>	<u>7,735.76</u>
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Net Income	<u>-3,804.67</u>	<u>218.39</u>	<u>3,128.34</u>
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Beginning Fund Balance	8,164.99	4,360.32	4,578.71
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Net Income	<u>-3,804.67</u>	<u>218.39</u>	<u>3,128.34</u>
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Ending Fund Balance	<u>4,360.32</u>	<u>4,578.71</u>	<u>7,707.05</u>
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