

# Compton Mentor Fellowship 2007-2008

## Final Report

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### Fellowship Overview

The primary objective of my 2007 Compton Mentor Fellowship was to research, design, and disseminate a *South Carolina Guide to Climate Change*. I originally proposed the creation of this guide to serve as a resource for community organizations and individuals seeking to know more about the impacts of climate change in South Carolina. However, in addition to describing these effects, the guide provides low- to no-cost solutions for homeowners and renters to reduce energy use in their homes. Finally, the guide describes opportunities for political actions and descriptions of some state and federal policies that will help reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and stimulate our economy.

I spent the first quarter of the Fellowship researching climate change impacts in the Southeast and South Carolina. This research included reviewing published literature and interviewing local scientific researchers and public officials. During this period of time, I began to collect design examples and develop a lay-out for the document.

One primary component of this early quarter extended through the first half of the Fellowship. While reviewing research and compiling descriptions of the climate change impacts, I scheduled public presentations to present and test my early findings on various audiences. At first I was only able to schedule a few presentations, but nearly each presentation resulted in another invitation to speak, exponentially increasing my speaking engagements. These talks ranged from speeches to audiences greater than 300 to small gatherings of only a handful of attendees.

The informal feedback I received from these presentations and the acquaintances I made provided valuable direction for the guide, which I desired to be a useful resource for communities across the state. After a few minor delays in perfecting the document, nearly 5,000 copies of the *South Carolina Guide to Global Warming* are finally being printed on (mostly) recycled paper and will soon be distributed in communities across South Carolina. The document is currently available online at [www.scclimatechange.org](http://www.scclimatechange.org) and will also be available on several conservation organization websites.

My work researching and preparing the Guide complimented, and was also reinforced by, two other activities that occupied my Fellowship year: community organizing and researching/advocating for clean energy policies.

### *Santee Cooper's Proposed Coal Plant*

First, I spent a substantial amount of time working with a coalition of community organizations to prevent South Carolina's state owned utility Santee Cooper from constructing a dirty, pulverized coal plant in the rural and economically depressed Pee

Dee region of South Carolina. In this effort, I have:

- published op-eds (and ghost written several letters to the editor and op-eds published under others' names) and spoken at several press conferences against proposed construction;
- researched and ghost-written a report published in the University of South Carolina's *Business and Economic Review*;
- made several public presentations about the proposed plant and collected hundreds of petition signatures opposing construction;
- spoken at two Army Corps of Engineers "Scoping Meetings"; and
- participated in a closed meeting with Governor Mark Sanford and his staff to discuss the actions of one of his agencies (Santee Cooper).

However, I appreciate the need to balance opposition with proactive support. It is clear that we will not achieve clean energy solutions to our dwindling fossil fuel resources, skyrocketing prices, and choking emissions by only describing what we're against. I have worked with allies to advocate for global warming solutions and clean energy policies in the South Carolina General Assembly, in the United States Congress, and on the campaign trail during the 2008 Presidential Primaries.

#### *2008 Presidential Primaries*

Until January 2008, when South Carolina held Republican and Democratic primaries, I worked with the John Ramsburgh of the Conservation Voters of South Carolina, who was managing the League of Conservation Voters' "Heat is On" campaign in South Carolina. Together he and I formed and co-coordinated a state-wide network of volunteers who attended presidential candidate events to ask questions about the candidates' climate action plans and national energy policies.

South Carolina hosted four debates, evenly split between both major political parties. Our coalition maintained a strong presence at each debate, where we hosted rallies and press conferences to call on candidates to propose bold climate action strategies. Lastly, I had the opportunity to join small groups of environmental leaders in South Carolina at private meetings with several of the candidates, including: Senators Biden, Edwards, Obama, McCain, and Gov. Huckabee.

The pressure of being publicly asked about ill-formed or non-existent policies exerted a toll on several candidates, whose responses improved over the course of their campaigns. In some cases, it wasn't long before our coalition's talking points were local campaign slogans. Our cumulative efforts also attracted a decent amount of media attention and resulted in several print articles and television news coverage.

#### *State and Federal Policy Advocacy*

Throughout the Fellowship year, but primarily in the second half, there have been several unique opportunities to affect state and federal energy policy. These opportunities included the 2007 energy bill and a slate of legislative proposals introduced in the SC General Assembly.

There was much overlap in my research of climate change impacts in South Carolina and both state-based and federal mitigation policies. The information I collected enabled me to co-author an article on Renewable Energy Standards for the University of South Carolina's *Business and Economic Review*. In addition, I was able to:

- schedule meetings with SC Congressmen;
- lead a South Carolina student lobby team to Congressional office visits with staffers and legislators at Power Shift 2007 in Washington, D.C.; and
- speak at a legislative briefing on environmental issues for members of the SC General Assembly;.

### **Accomplishments**

I am grateful for the opportunity to have accomplished much of what I have described above. Additionally, I am satisfied and delighted to have experienced the following specific highlights:

- Invitation to participate in round-table discussion and deliver public presentation at the Center for Humans and Nature's "Ethical, Cultural, and Civic Dimensions of Global Climate Change" Conference, featuring Wes Jackson and Bill McKibben.
- Several invitations to lecture in university classes.
- Private coalition meetings with major presidential candidates, including the presumptive nominees of both major parties.
- Substantial media attention, including several articles about the Compton Fellowship, the proposed coal plant, and my work around the 2008 Primaries.
- Nearly 10 job offers from state and regional conservation organizations that I worked with.

In all, completing the Compton Mentor Fellowship and achieving what I have profoundly increased my self-confidence and sense of personal efficacy. While I have improved several existing skills, such as researching, writing, public speaking, and networking, I have also gained new skills and found opportunities to find new applications for these skills, such as in community organizing and attracting media attention. Most importantly, I have practically applied my formal education in taking an inter-disciplinary approach to the social, economic, and political aspects of climate change.

### **Challenges**

Perhaps the support I received overshadowed the challenges I faced in completing the project, but I did not experience tremendous difficulty. Time management and juggling multiple projects simultaneously proved to be my biggest obstacles, but I satisfactorily overcame those trials. For example, I often debated whether a particular task or course of action was worth the time spent in completing it. Similarly, I struggled in discerning when and how to divide my attention among several projects and issues that constantly emerged during the fast-paced campaigns against the coal plant, targeting the presidential candidates, advocating for clean energy policies, and researching and writing the *South Carolina Guide to Climate Change*.

Additionally, effectively communicating the complex and multi-faceted issue of climate

change was initially a challenge. In fact, this challenge was the basis of the need I noticed for a public outreach guide that brought context to an amorphous and distant issue. I have much to learn, but I have made great progress in learning how to translate complex issues into simpler descriptions and messages that still reflect the nuance inherent in complex policy and scientific data.

In retrospect, there is little that I would have changed in my approach to the Fellowship. I am confident that I was able to maximize my effect in completing the project in the context of other events and issues taking places in South Carolina.

### **Mentor Relationship**

Jennifer Rennicks, Federal Policy Director with the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, was my mentor. Prior to beginning the fellowship, Jen and I enjoyed a fruitful relationship as coworkers and friends, and I had high expectations for our continued relationship. Jen was an indispensable amenity, as she provided valuable information, access to resources, and general support. She and I met in-person roughly once per month and spoke through email, telephone, and ichtat on a weekly (and often daily) basis. I contributed to a successful relationship by respecting her other obligations and providing ample time for her to respond to me.

### **Budget**

<b>Expense Category</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Actual Expenditures</b>
Housing	\$8,400	\$8,000
Food	\$6,720	\$6,000
Communication	\$900	\$700
Conferences	\$300	\$20
Books	\$700	\$550
Auto	\$4,000	\$5,000
Air	\$500	\$300
Lodging	\$500	\$371
Taxes	\$1,000	\$1070 (\$900 for 2008)
Honorarium	\$5,000	\$2,500
Computer	\$2,300	\$2,239
Office	\$2,000	\$2,000
Printing	\$3,000	\$5,500
Retreat Travel	\$1,000	\$850
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$36,320</b>	<b>\$36,000</b>