

Sightline Institute

Cascadia Scorecard 2009 – At a Glance

Launched in 2004 by Sightline Institute, the Cascadia Scorecard is the Pacific Northwest's sustainability report card, tracking seven key trends critical to the region's future. The Scorecard's 2009 findings—published at <http://scorecard.sightline.org>—show we've made modest progress toward goals of robust human health, shared economic prosperity, and a legacy of thriving nature. Still, at the recent pace of change, it will take at least 42 years, on average—until 2050—to match what international models have already achieved.

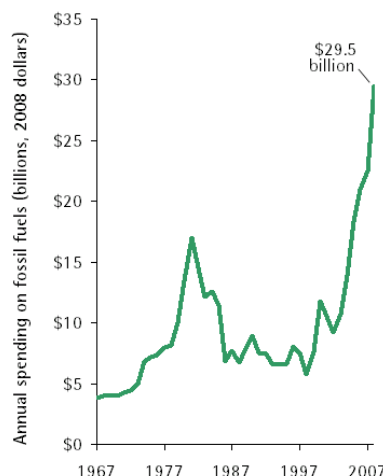
Compared with these models, Cascadia does best on human health—and worst, by far, on energy efficiency. The good news is that smart, cross-cutting policy solutions can speed our progress in several areas at once, from investing in a clean energy economy to boosting the prospects of our neediest residents.

Energy: Worst score, high economic toll

Score: 87 years to goal

Northwesterners consume, on average, the energy equivalent of 2 gallons of gasoline per person every day in nonindustrial electricity and transportation fuels—nearly double the Scorecard model, Germany. And we're paying for our inefficiency. Despite a slight dip in consumption in 2008, total spending on fossil fuels in the Northwest states soared to an all-time record of nearly \$30 billion. A cap-and-trade system for fossil fuels would help reduce the toll of our fossil fuel habit by encouraging a smooth transition to cleaner and more stable power sources.

The Northwest states' fossil fuel habit cost the region nearly \$30 billion in 2008.



Wildlife: Wolf comeback; other species struggle

Score: 68 years to goal

The five representative Cascadian wildlife populations tracked by the Scorecard average only 18 percent of their historical abundance and face a range of threats, including climate change and other rising human impacts on natural systems. We have made some progress—wolves have staged a remarkable comeback in Montana and Idaho in recent years and the fragile Selkirk caribou population has improved modestly. But orcas, salmon, and sage-grouse continue to struggle. To move these species off life support, Cascadians can work to restore the natural landscapes and ecosystems on which they depend and focus on long-term threats like climate change.

Sprawl: Steps toward walkable communities

Score: 56 years to goal

While low-density sprawl is still the norm in Cascadia's cities, compact communities are gradually gaining ground: the share of residents living in walkable or transit-oriented neighborhoods has increased in each major Northwest metropolis over the most recent decades. Still, given recent trends, it will take 56 years for the Cascadian city average to match the compact-growth record that Vancouver, BC, has already achieved. Keys to combating sprawl include strong protections for farmland and open space at the urban fringe, promoting infill development, and limiting sprawl-inducing road projects.

Population: Teen birthrates on the rise

Score: 17 years to goal

Although Cascadia's overall fertility rates are close to the international models of Sweden and the Netherlands—places with high women's status and excellent family supports—birthrates in the region have ticked upward since 2005. Moreover, teen birthrates have risen unexpectedly, reversing a downward slide that had been underway since the early 1990s. Meanwhile, the Northwest states also continue to have high rates of births from unintended pregnancies. Preventing unwanted pregnancies is a goal that can unite Cascadians of diverse values, and starts with guaranteeing universal access to affordable reproductive health services and contraceptive coverage.

Economy: Mixed results, sharp downturn in 2008

Score: 16 years to goal

Cascadia's long-term record in creating broadly shared economic security has been mixed, at best. The end of 2008 brought a sharp downturn in regional employment, reversing several years of improving economic security, and signaling an increase in financial hardships for the region's families. To achieve progress, the region's policymakers must rise to a singular challenge: ensuring that the fruits of our phenomenally productive economy are broadly shared, so that they genuinely improve the lives and livelihoods of all Cascadians.

Health: British Columbians surpass lifespan goal

Score: 9 years to goal

The people of Cascadia are living longer than ever before—a sign of robust and improving health. Northwesterners are now living an average of 79.9 years, less than a year and a half shy of the Scorecard's target set by Japan in 2001 at 81.3 years. British Columbians have passed the goal, living an average of two years longer than anyone else. To accelerate progress, Cascadian jurisdictions can increase access to preventive health care, design neighborhoods for safety and exercise, and boost the economic prospects of our neediest residents.

Pollution: High levels of PBDEs, testing for safety first

Evidence from multiple sources makes it clear that the residents of Cascadia carry a thin soup of synthetic toxic chemicals in their bodies. A recent Sightline analysis of toxic flame retardants in Northwest mothers' breastmilk helped inspire a ban of PBDEs in Washington and Oregon, which, if it proves effective, may lead to lower concentrations of the compounds in human bodies. That success may teach us to take greater initiative in combating toxics, by requiring that potentially hazardous compounds be tested for safety first.

More background on the Scorecard and Sightline

Sightline Institute launched the Cascadia Scorecard in 2004 as a new regional gauge of progress. Hailed by the *Seattle Times* as “a complex, ambitious new tool for charting the Northwest's well-being,” the Scorecard has since inspired dozens of communities and organizations to use it as a regional guide for their own measurement efforts. In February 2009, the Scorecard was launched as a complete online resource for the first time, with all data, charts, and sources available at <http://scorecard.sightline.org>.

Sightline Institute is an independent, Seattle-based nonprofit research and communications center that measures progress towards a sustainable economy and way of life in the Pacific Northwest, including British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Find out more at <http://sightline.org>.