

Highlights from the Drawdown Georgia Launch Night

Summary

At the Drawdown Georgia launch event, John Lanier of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation and Nathaniel Smith of the Partnership for Southern Equity reflect on the research behind Drawdown Georgia and why equity has to serve as the compass guiding the state's path to a clean energy future.

Key Takeaways

- Over 18 months, researchers from Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, Emory University, and Georgia State analyzed available data to identify which climate solutions offer the greatest carbon reduction potential in Georgia, along with their financial considerations.
- The research team also examined "beyond carbon" impacts, what scaling climate solutions means for equity, inclusive economic development, human health, and the natural environment.
- Nathaniel Smith argues that equity must be the compass guiding the movement toward a clean energy future, since the world's most vulnerable communities have often been used to drive an economy that continues to harm the planet.
- John Lanier frames his work advancing Ray Anderson's legacy as fundamentally about systems change, noting that equity and environmental challenges are deeply interconnected, meaning a single intervention can often help solve multiple problems at once.
- Smith calls for humility, recognizing that no single person or community holds a monopoly on knowledge or wisdom, as part of building what he describes, borrowing from Dr. King, as the "beloved community" through Drawdown Georgia's work.

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John Lanier: So these past 18 months, these amazing researchers from Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, Emory University, and Georgia State have gone through every last bit of data they could get their hands on, to show which climate solutions have the greatest carbon reduction potential in our state, and what the financial considerations are for scaling them. And, critically, they've thought through the issues beyond carbon, wanting to know what scaling climate solutions means for our communities in advancing equity, what it means for inclusive

economic development, what it means for human health, and what it means for our natural environment in general.

Nathaniel Smith: I would submit to you all today that without a compass, we will not have the opportunity to reach the destination of a clean energy future we're fighting for. I believe, in my heart, that compass has to be equity. That compass has to be a clear understanding of the urgency of now. Our most vulnerable communities have, in many cases, been used to drive an economy that, in essence, continues to hurt our planet. Can we truly have a resilient world, a more sustainable world, a world without carbon, and have that world not also be just? We have to realize both, if we're serious about building the kind of world we want for our loved ones and the people we care about. How can we truly draw down Georgia if we don't lift up communities that have been left behind historically by an unfortunate history of structural inequity and structural racism?

John Lanier: The fundamental nature of my work, trying to advance Ray Anderson's legacy by making environmental sustainability something that becomes more and more important to our communities, I've come to realize, is fundamentally about systems change. The beauty of systems thinking, of working in systems change, is that you see how interconnected everything is. It's so easy to see issues of equity and the environment as joined systems, in fact, as the same system, with so much complex overlap that it creates real challenges, but it also means there's opportunity, that by pressing on one leverage point, you can solve multiple problems at the same time.

Nathaniel Smith: We have to be willing to humble ourselves, and understand that no one person or community has a monopoly on knowledge or wisdom, and begin the process of creating the beloved community Dr. King spoke about, through the work Drawdown Georgia can play in ensuring all people have a chance to participate in our clean energy future.

John Lanier: Well, thank you, my friend. I know this isn't the first conversation, nor will it be the last, about the intersection of equity and climate. It'll be an ongoing conversation for us to have. Thank you all.