

Hubbert's Peak, The Coal Question, and Climate Change

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There is a vigorous debate now about whether oil, natural gas, and coal resources will be sufficient in the future. At the same time, there is an intense effort to predict the changes in climate that will result from consuming these fossil fuels. There has been surprisingly little effort to connect these two. Do we have a fossil-fuel supply problem? Do we have a climate-change problem? Do we have both? Which comes first? We will see that the trend for future fossil-fuel production is less than what is assumed in the United Nations climate-change assessments. The implication is that an understanding of producer limitations could help us do a better job of predicting climate change. We will also see that the time scale for exhausting fossil fuels is much smaller than that for global temperature change. This means that it is critical to reduce the total fossil-fuel production, not just slow it down. One possible approach for reducing total production would be to establish fossil-fuel preserves on federal lands that would be off limits for new leases for drilling and mining.