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## NEWS

### MOUNTAINFILM

#### Bill McKibben: holding our feet to the fire

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#### *Activist, author Bill McKibben talks about the number 350*

By Katie Klingsporn  
Associate Editor

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One of the most striking characteristics of Bill McKibben's work is that it is ever expanding, ever pulling the lid off things and ever searching for solutions to some of our most confounding problems.

It must be exhausting. But McKibben, a Mountainfilm special guest, doesn't stop. The writer, environmentalist and activist has written more than 10 books, including "The End of Nature," widely regarded as the first book for a general audience about climate change; "Enough," about the existential dangers of genetic engineering; and "Hope, Human and Wild," about people living more lightly on the Earth. McKibben is one of those gifted writers who manages to marry great ideas with simple prose, rendering complicated issues digestible.

Along with books, McKibben has written scores of essays and articles for magazines like The New Yorker, Harper's, Orion Magazine and Atlantic Monthly. In the summer of 2006, he helped lead a five-day walk across Vermont to demand action on global warming that some accounts called the largest demonstration to date in America about climate change. He followed that up by founding [stepitup07.org](http://stepitup07.org), which demanded that Congress enact curbs on carbon emissions, and, with six college students, organized 1,400 global warming demonstrations across America in a single day.

McKibben's latest book, "Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future," is a masterfully woven manifesto that offers the challenge of moving beyond growth as the great economic ideal, and instead creating a system of small and tightly-knit local economies, where regions grow more of their own food, generate more of their energy and even create more of their culture.

And now McKibben, currently a scholar in residence at Middlebury College, has embarked on a new endeavor — an ambitious grassroots campaign aimed at gathering worldwide support of effective climate policy.

Here, McKibben talks about the new campaign — [350.org](http://350.org) — in an e-mail correspondence with The Daily Planet.

Tell us about [350.org](http://350.org). How did it come about, and what are its goals?

It evolved in the months after the rapid and frightening melt of Arctic ice in the summer of 2007. We decided we needed an international campaign to pressure negotiators into a much tougher climate treaty — one that reflects the new reality of the planet. That reality is expressed by this number, 350 — it's the most carbon, expressed in parts per million, that scientists tell us is safe to have in the atmosphere. And we're past it — at 387 and climbing — which is why the Arctic melts, why drought descends on the southwest, why the oceans acidify. On Oct. 24 we'll have a huge global day of action — climbers high in the Himalayas, 350 scuba divers on the Great Barrier Reef, rallies in cities and towns large and small — and with any luck the most important number in the world will also be one of the best-known by the time we're done. It's a fairly audacious attempt at a global grassroots movement in next to no time, and it seems to be working.

How can people get involved, and how can people create the political will to meet this 350 goal?

Two ways. One, by signing up to do an action in their community. At the [350.org](http://350.org) Web site we can help people in a particular place track each other down and coordinate their work. It's very easy to sign up. Two, by forwarding the idea to people all over the world. That's easy to do at the Web site, too — anyone with an e-mail account is more connected to the world than the most connected person on the planet two decades ago. We've got to take advantage of that connectivity — it's our one wild card.

Will leaders around the world listen?

Only if it's big enough and loud enough. In the spring of 2007 we organized something similar across the U.S. — we called it StepItUp, and we had 1,400 simultaneous rallies. That was enough to get Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton to dramatically change their climate policies, and we're seeing the benefit now!

What will it take to get that number down to 350?

The innovation and entrepreneurship unleashed by getting the price of carbon right.

And the event on Oct. 24. Why that date?

It's six weeks before the world's leaders meet in Copenhagen to hammer out a final climate treaty. So it's about the last moment to really put some pressure on!

Look for Bill McKibben at Friday's Mountainfilm Symposium, where he is the keynote speaker; at Saturday morning's breakfast talk at the Ah Haa School, and at a presentation at the Palm on Saturday at 12:30 p.m.

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