



**Woodwell
Climate
Research
Center**



**A natural leader in Edward
Alexander / 02**

**Summer 2026: Fund for
Climate Solutions awards four
new grants / 03**

**Jack Hurd announced as Chief
Operating Officer / 05**

Notes from the Field

Month in Review • September 2026
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A natural leader in Edward Alexander

plomacy, across the table from figures like Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He co-chaired the Arctic Council's Chairship Initiative on Wildland Fire, served for seven years as 2nd Chief of the Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in, and was appointed by the United Nations to represent the Arctic on the International Indigenous-Led Fire Adaptation Network. He is also a wildland firefighter—someone who does not merely study the changing Arctic but who confronts it directly.

That combination is rare. At Woodwell, Edward works with the Permafrost Pathways team on the climate impacts of wildland fire and the abrupt permafrost thaw that follows it, weaving together scientific analysis, Indigenous Knowledge, and Indigenous management practice. He pairs a scientist's rigor with a diplomat's fluency and a firefighter's pragmatic approach. He is, quite simply, a natural leader, and I count him an inspiration.

It helps to know where this comes from. I had the privilege of meeting Edward's father, Clarence Alexander, in 2007 at the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council Summit in St. Mary's, Alaska. Clarence, a former Grand Chief of the Gwich'in and longtime First Chief of Fort Yukon, helped found the YRITWC, an alliance of some seventy Tribes and First Nations dedicated to protecting the waters of the Yukon River Watershed. In 2011, he received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Obama for a lifetime of environmental and tribal-rights leadership. Edward carries that inheritance forward, charting his own path but continuing to honor that legacy.

Why does this matter so much for Woodwell? Because the questions at the center of our permafrost science are not only physical questions. They are also questions of justice. The Arctic is warming four times faster than the global average, and the people who have stewarded these lands for millennia are on the front lines of that change. Edward embodies the truth that rigorous climate science and Indigenous leadership are not separate enterprises, but instead are strongest when joined together.

That leads me to the question I keep asking: what can I do to support Edward so he can have the greatest impact? The challenge is not to overly direct someone of Edward's caliber but to clear the path, to give him the resources and the trust to bring his full self and his community's wisdom to our shared work. If we get that right, Woodwell will be better for it, our science will be better for it, and the world will be better for it.

We talk often about the urgency of our mission. Edward reminds me that the mission is also about people, about whose knowledge counts, whose future is at stake, and whose leadership we are wise enough to follow.

Onward.



Max

Dr. Max Holmes
President & CEO

Supporting leading-edge research and policy work

Twice a year, grants are awarded internally at Woodwell to promising new research projects through the Fund for Climate Science's competitive application process. The latest round of grants will support building policy engagement skills, improve fire preparedness, and update carbon budgets. The success of these projects on the leading-edge of research and policy work can lead to further funding for continuation of the work, proving Woodwell's leadership in current climate work and as a trusted source of research and results.



Summer 2026: Fund for Climate Solutions awards four new grants

The funding supports building policy engagement skills, improving fire preparedness, and updating carbon budgets

Margaret Lin Communications Manager

Thanks to the generosity of the Woodwell donor community, the second round of 2026 Fund for Climate Solutions (FCS) awardees has been announced. The FCS supports innovative, solutions-oriented climate science through a competitive, cross-disciplinary process. With more than \$10 million raised to date, donor support has already fueled 88 research grants and leveraged millions of dollars in additional research grants since the program's launch in 2018.

This most recent round of grants is supporting Woodwell experts in building policy engagement skills, improving land managers' preparedness for future fire seasons, and updating carbon budgets based on the newest science.

Woodwell Policy Fellowship: A Pilot Program to Advance the Internal Science to Policy Pipeline

Lead: Laura Uttley

Since the Center's founding by Dr. George Woodwell, our leadership, scientists, and researchers have engaged with local, state, federal, and international policymakers to facilitate the development of science-based policy solutions. This project will **develop an internal Policy Fellowship pilot program** to amplify Woodwell Climate's science in decision-making and better position our scientists and researchers for engagement and advocacy opportunities. A cohort of five to ten science staff will collaborate with the Policy and Government Relations team through attending monthly webinars on federal and international processes, developing policy briefs relevant to their work, and participating in either COP32 or Woodwell's

2027 DC fly-in. This Policy Fellowship will leverage the diverse backgrounds and experiences of Woodwell Climate scientists to ensure robust climate science is complemented with compelling narratives and public policy applications.

The 2024 Amazon fire crisis: A postmortem to advance proactive management

Lead: Dr. Manoela Machado

Despite 2024's lower-than-average deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon, wildfires there reached record levels. For every hectare of forest lost to deforestation, 11 hectares were affected by wildfire—an unprecedented proportion. Leaders from Prevfogo (National Center for Prevention and Combat of Forest Fire) have called for scientific evidence that can help aggregate data on burned area, land tenure, agency mandates, and resource constraints in order to reinforce requests for increased budgetary support and avoid a repeat of the 2024 season during the anticipated 2026–2027 El Niño year. The project team will **create maps of the 2024 fire crisis to support proactive preparedness** for future fire seasons. These maps will identify where fire risk and occurrence, institutional responsibilities, and operational capacity may be misaligned, supporting proactive planning, improving coordination, and justifying targeted funding for agencies preparing for future fire crises.

Permafrost emissions and remaining carbon budgets under peak-and-decline pathways

Lead: Dr. Christina Schädel

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Seventh Assessment report (AR7) is underway, and a key priority of the report is examining overshoot pathways. Overshoot, or peak-and-decline pathways, describe climate scenarios where global temperatures temporarily exceed 1.5 or 2°C before declining as a result of mitigation actions (emissions reductions and carbon dioxide removal). This project will **create the first synthesis of overshoot models of permafrost emissions**, and calculate how including permafrost emissions impacts global carbon budgets. Using this model synthesis, the team will develop policy-relevant visualizations, conference presentations, and a peer-reviewed manuscript to inform IPCC AR7 and UN assessments of global progress on climate goals.

Forest carbon allocation decoupling under climate extremes: Implications for carbon budgets, forecasting and forest management

Lead: Kathleen Savage

When trees capture carbon from the atmosphere, they can store it aboveground in their trunks and branches, where it can persist for a long time, or belowground in their roots, where it can return to the atmosphere more quickly. Recent studies have shown that under extreme conditions like drought, trees shift to storing more of their carbon in their roots instead of in wood growth. However, current ecosystem models don't reflect this

allocation shift. This project will study long-term forest carbon data from Howland Research Forest in Maine to better understand carbon allocation changes, how they vary across management practices, and their implications for forest management and conservation goals. The team will host a two-day workshop to present their results to forestry managers, conservation organizations, and policymakers. They will also visit Washington, D.C. to deliver insights directly to federal policymakers.

In the news highlights

In August, a team of well-regarded journalists joined the EVOME project as Journalism Fellows at Alaska's Toolik Field Station for two weeks in a hands-on experience. Stories by the journalists have begun to appear in publication:

- Seth Borenstein wrote for the *Associated Press* about the tundra's tiny plants
- Denise Hruby has written two stories for the *Miami Herald*, one on connecting permafrost thaw and sea level rise and another about Florida Atlantic University research investigating parasitic plant relationships

For an article covering the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, Inside Climate News quoted Dr. Jennifer Watts about the benefits of rangeland conservation.

Dr. Anna Liljedahl co-authored an article in *The Conversation* describing a new tool on the Permafrost Discovery Gateway, which maps abrupt lake drainage to reveal permafrost thaw in near-real time.

Dr. Brendan Rogers co-authored an article for the World Economic Forum on why boreal forest fires matter to the whole world.

An *Atlantic* article about how climate change is causing significant changes to Earth's landscapes quoted Dr. Sue Natali about permafrost thaw and how it's accelerating.

Past events



UNCCD COP17 Conference

Dr. Matti Goldberg gave a keynote speech to open a government-civil society plenary discussion on pastoralism at the UNCCD COP17 (UN Convention to Combat Desertification) conference.

Learn more about our engagements at COP17: woodwellclimate.org/unccd-cop-17





Jack Hurd announced as Chief Operating Officer

Hurd will lead daily operations across the Center and oversee the expansion and implementation of Woodwell's strategic plans

Woodwell Climate announces the appointment of Jack Hurd as Chief Operating Officer. Hurd has decades of experience working on environmental conservation, climate change mitigation, and community development for major nonprofits and NGOs across the globe, and will bring his deep expertise in blending international programmatic experience with world-class operational leadership to the Center.

"We are thrilled to welcome Jack to the Woodwell leadership team at this pivotal moment for our work and organization," said Max Holmes, President and CEO of Woodwell. "Jack's proven track record of building and mentoring successful teams, managing complex operations across continents, and establishing financial sustainability in top-tier environmental organizations makes him the ideal leader to drive our operations and scale our global scientific impact."

Hurd's role will include overseeing daily operations, executing Woodwell's strategic priorities, stewarding the operating budget,

exploring new opportunities to diversify revenue through strategic partnerships, and leading Woodwell's team of scientists, helping to ensure Woodwell's research drives measurable change.

"The Woodwell Climate Research Center occupies a uniquely vital position in the climate space by ensuring that rigorous scientific exploration has a clear line of sight to its eventual application—whether in policy, corporate strategy, or public literacy," said Hurd. "I am incredibly eager to collaborate with Woodwell's world-renowned scientists and staff to complement this outstanding scientific foundation with operational excellence, maximizing our impact at a time when actionable climate solutions are urgently needed."

Hurd joins Woodwell from the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Geneva, Switzerland, where he served as Head of the Earth Systems Agenda, and previously held leadership roles at Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy. He assumed the Chief Operating Officer role on August 31, 2026.

Upcoming events

Woodwell Climate Conversations



WEDNESDAY, September 30 ■ 5-7 pm in-person and livestream

When climate change gets personal

Climate change is global. But the way we experience it is personal—and profoundly local.

Join Max Holmes and the Woodwell Climate Risk Team to learn more about their work with Eudora and Wilmot, Arkansas, two small communities in the Mississippi Delta, working to better understand their climate future.

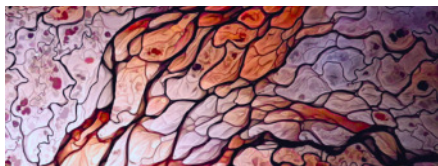
woodwellclimate.org/climate-change-personal

supported by Chris and Lisa Kaneb



Naturescape Gallery

Cape Cod Museum of Natural History
Brewster, MA



September 9-October 31 ■ Wednesdays-Sundays, 10am-3pm

Cartographies of Arctic Change exhibit

On Saturday, October 17 at 1pm, Fiske will host "Putting Science on the Map," an exploration of commonly used tools and techniques for making beautiful maps, as well as the challenges, success stories, and failures faced in nearly two and a half decades of making maps for Woods Hole scientists.

woodwellclimate.org/cartographies-of-arctic-change



cover: Evolving Meta-Ecosystems (EVOME) Institute graduate student researcher Maddy Frey shows Toolik artist Jessie Sheldon terrestrial invertebrates collected in a pitfall trap near the Toolik Field Station in Alaska. / photo by Maura Barry

Learn more about EVOME at: evome.woodwellclimate.org

Donations play an important role in securing the future of Woodwell Climate Research Center's work—and help safeguard the health of our planet for generations to come.

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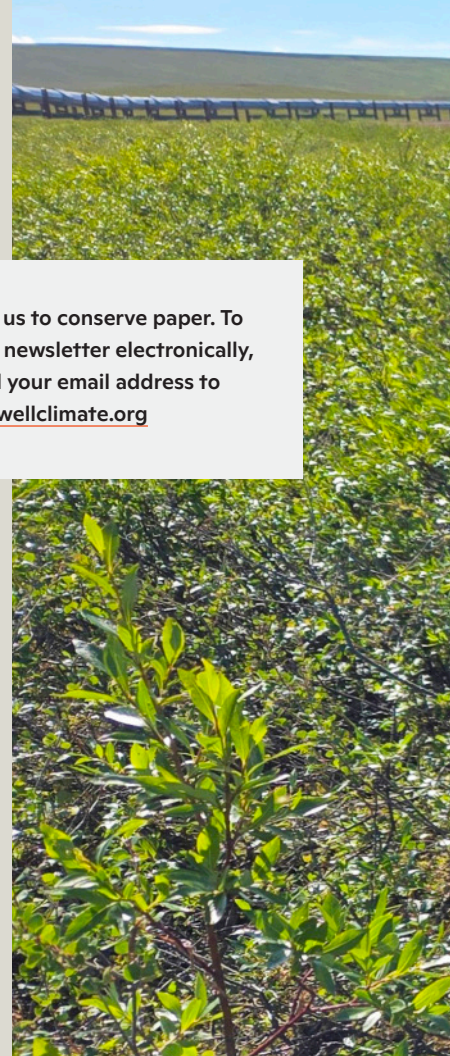
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