EXXON RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING COMPANY
P.O. BOX 101, FLORHAM PARK, NEW JERSEY 07932

M. B. GLASER
Manager
Environmental Affairs Programs

Cable: ENGREXXON, N.Y.

November 12, 1982

CO_2 "Greenhouse" Effect

82EAP 266

TO: See Distribution List Attached

Attached for your information and guidance is briefing material on the CO_2 "Greenhouse" Effect which is receiving increased attention in both the scientific and popular press as an emerging environmental issue. A brief summary is provided along with a more detailed technical review prepared by CPPD.

The material has been given wide circulation to Exxon management and is intended to familiarize Exxon personnel with the subject. It may be used as a basis for discussing the issue with outsiders as may be appropriate. However, it should be restricted to Exxon personnel and not distributed externally.

Very truly yours,

M. B. Glaser

M. B. GLASER

MBG:rva

Attachments

H. N. WEINBERG

NOV 15 1982

Distribution List:

R. W. Cohen
M. J. Connor, Jr.
E. E. David, Jr.
C. M. Eidt, Jr.
W. R. Epperly
R. L. Hirsch
T. G. Kaufmann
D. G. Levine
G. H. Long
J. R. Riley
H. R. Savage
A. Schriesheim
J. F. Taylor
D. T. Wade
H. N. Weinberg

SUMMARY

Atmospheric monitoring programs show the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased about 8% over the last twenty-five years and now stands at about 340 ppm. This observed increase is believed to be the continuation of a trend which began in the middle of the last century with the start of the Industrial Revolution. Fossil fuel combustion and the clearing of virgin forests (deforestation) are believed to be the primary anthropogenic contributors although the relative contribution of each is uncertain.

The carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere is of concern since it can affect global climate. Carbon dioxide and other trace gases contained in the atmosphere such as water vapor, ozone, methane, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, etc. absorb part of the infrared rays reradiated by the earth. This increase in absorbed energy warms the atmosphere inducing warming at the earth's surface. This phenomenon is referred to as the "greenhouse effect".

Predictions of the climatological impact of a carbon dioxide induced "greenhouse effect" draw upon various mathematical models to gauge the temperature increase. The scientific community generally discusses the impact in terms of doubling of the current carbon dioxide content in order to get beyond the noise level of the data. We estimate doubling could occur around the year 2090 based upon fossil fuel requirements projected in Exxon's long range energy outlook. The question of which predictions and which models best simulate a carbon dioxide induced climate change is still being debated by the scientific community. Our best estimate is that doubling of the current concentration could increase average global temperature by about 1.3° to 3.1°C. The increase would not be uniform over the earth's surface with the polar caps likely to see temperature increases on the order of 10°C and the equator little, if any, increase.

Considerable uncertainty also surrounds the possible impact on society of such a warming trend, should it occur. At the low end of the predicted temperature range there could be some impact on agricultural growth and rainfall patterns which could be beneficial in some regions and detrimental in others. At the high end, some scientists suggest there could be considerable adverse impact including the flooding of some coastal land masses as a result of a rise in sea level due to melting of the Antarctic ice sheet. Such an effect would not take place until centuries after a 3°C global average temperature increase actually occurred.

There is currently no unambiguous scientific evidence that the earth is warming. If the earth is on a warming trend, we're not likely to detect it before 1995. This is about the earliest projection of when the temperature might rise the 0.5° needed to get beyond the range of normal temperature fluctuations. On the other hand, if climate modeling uncertainties have exaggerated the temperature rise, it is possible that a carbon dioxide induced "greenhouse effect" may not be detected until 2020 at the earliest.

The "greenhouse effect" is not likely to cause substantial climatic changes until the average global temperature rises at least 1°C above today's levels. This could occur in the second to third quarter of the next century. However, there is concern among some scientific groups that once the effects are measurable, they might not be reversible and little could be done to correct the situation in the short term. Therefore, a number of environmental groups are calling for action now to prevent an undesirable future situation from developing.

Mitigation of the "greenhouse effect" would require major reductions in fossil fuel combustion. Shifting between fossil fuels is not a feasible alternative because of limited long-term supply availability for certain fuels although oil does produce about 18% less carbon dioxide per Btu of heat released than coal, and gas about 32% less than oil. The energy outlook suggests synthetic fuels will have a negligible impact at least through the mid 21st century contributing less than 10% of the total carbon dioxide released from fossil fuel combustion by the year 2050. This low level includes the expected contribution from carbonate decomposition which occurs during shale oil recovery and assumes essentially no efficiency improvements in synthetic fuels processes above those currently achievable.

Overall, the current outlook suggests potentially serious climate problems are not likely to occur until the late 21st century or perhaps beyond at projected energy demand rates. This should provide time to resolve uncertainties regarding the overall carbon cycle and the contribution of fossil fuel combustion as well as the role of the oceans as a reservoir for both heat and carbon dioxide. It should also allow time to better define the effect of carbon dioxide and other infrared absorbing gases on surface climate. Making significant changes in energy consumption patterns now to deal with this potential problem amid all the scientific uncertainties would be premature in view of the severe impact such moves could have on the world's economies and societies.

PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

FOR AUTHORIZED COMPANY USE ONLY

CO_2 GREENHOUSE EFFECT

A TECHNICAL REVIEW

PREPARED BY THE

COORDINATION AND PLANNING DIVISION

EXXON RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING COMPANY

APRIL 1, 1982

EC-11-5/A2

CO_2 GREENHOUSE EFFECT

A TECHNICAL REVIEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CO_2 GREENHOUSE EFFECT

Background

The buildup of CO_2 in the atmosphere has been monitored continuously at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Observatory at Mauna Loa, Hawaii, and periodically in other places since 1957. In addition to observing a trend between 1957-1979 that showed atmospheric CO_2 increasing from 315 to 337 ppm, Keeling and others also observed a seasonal variability ranging from 6 to 10 ppm between a low at the end of the summer growing season (due to photosynthesis) and a high at the end of winter (due to fossil fuel burning for heat, and biomass decay). There is little doubt that these observations indicate a growth of atmospheric CO_2 (see Figure 1). It is also believed that the growth of atmospheric CO_2 has been occurring since the middle of the past century, i.e., coincident with the start of the Industrial Revolution. There is, however, great uncertainty as to whether the atmospheric CO_2 concentration prior to the Industrial Revolution (ca., 1850) was 290-300 ppm which one would arrive at by assuming atmospheric CO_2 growth is due to fossil fuel burning and cement manufacturing, or 260-270 ppm based on carbon isotope measurements in tree rings. The information on CO_2 concentration prior to 1850 is important because it would help establish the validity of climatic predictions with respect to the inception of a CO_2 induced "greenhouse effect".

The "greenhouse effect" refers to the absorbtion by CO_2 and other trace gases contained in the atmosphere (such as water vapor, ozone, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, freons, and methane) of part of the infrared radiation which is reradiated by the earth. An increase in absorbed energy via this route would warm the earth's surface causing changes in climate affecting atmospheric and ocean temperatures, rainfall patterns, soil moisture, and over centuries potentially melting the polar ice caps.

Sources and Disposition of Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide - The Carbon Cycle

The relative contributions of biomass oxidation (mainly due to deforestation) and fossil fuel combustion to the observed atmospheric CO_2 increase are not known. There are fairly good indications that the annual growth of atmospheric CO_2 is on the order of 2.5 to 3.0 Gt/a* of carbon and the net quantity of carbon absorbed by the ocean is similarly 2.5 to 3 Gt/a. Thus, these two sinks (atmosphere and ocean) can account for the total fossil carbon burned (including 0.3 GtC/a** from cement manufacturing) which is on the order of 5-6 Gt/a and does not allow much room for a net contribution of biomass

* Gt/a = gigatons per annum = 10^9 metric tons per year.
** GtC/a = gigatons carbon per annum = 10^9 metric tons of carbon per year.

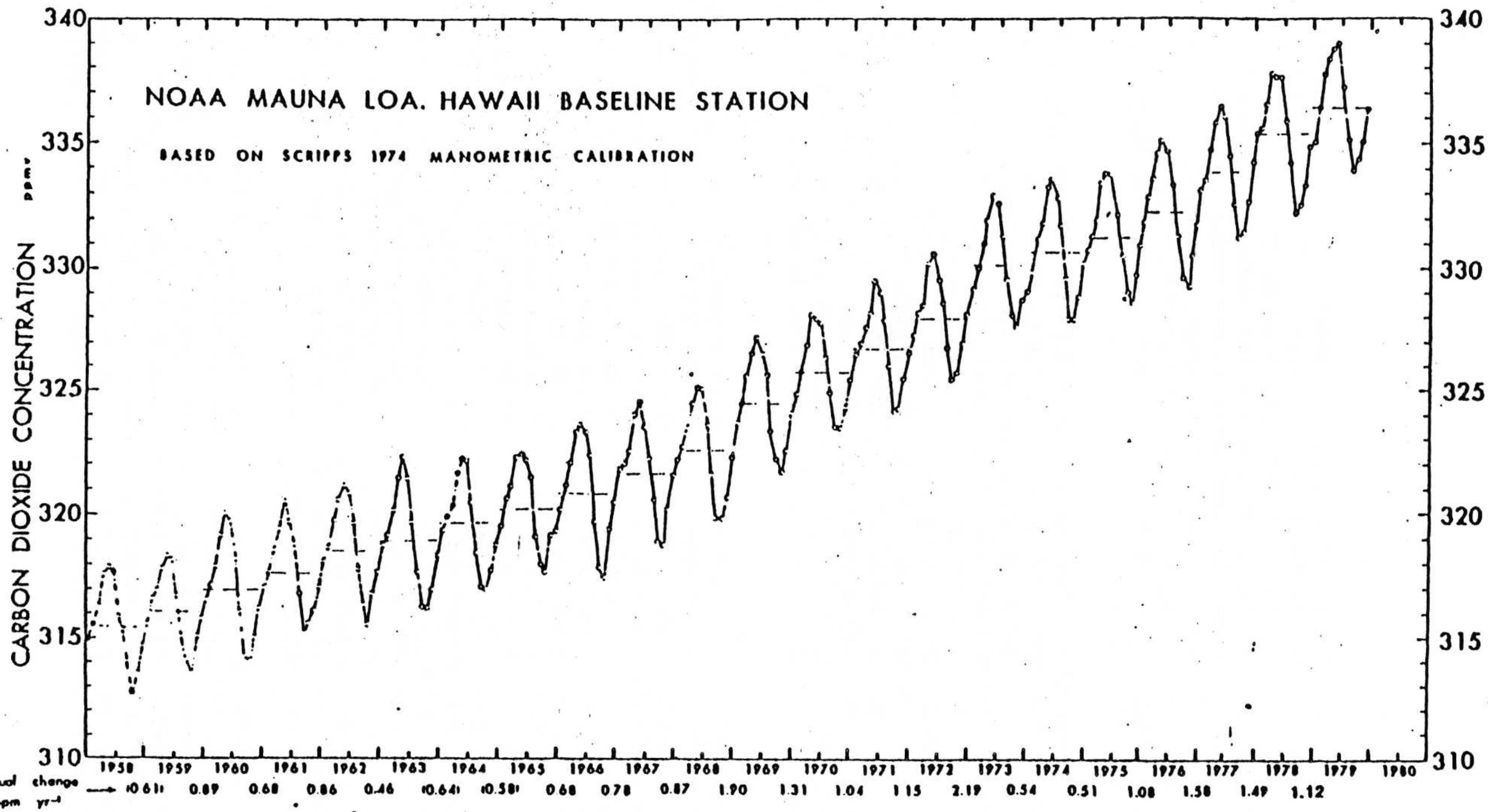


Figure 1 Modern record of atmospheric CO_2 concentrations. Mean monthly concentration measurements at Mauna Loa, Hawaii. Annual changes in parentheses are based on incomplete records; the solid dots are interpolated values (source: NOAA).

carbon. Yet, highly respected scientists such as Woodwell, Bolin and others have postulated a net biomass contribution to atmospheric CO_2 that ranges from 1 to perhaps 8 Gt/a of carbon. During 1980, a number of different groups produced new estimates of the contribution of organic terrestial fluxes to atmospheric CO_2. A consensus has not been reached, but estimates of the net annual terrestial biosphere emissions to the atmosphere now range between a 4 GtC/a source and a 2 GtC/a sink. Figure 2 summarizes the fluxes and reservoirs for the carbon cycle. It should be noted that the net biosphere contribution was assumed to be 0-2 GtC/a.

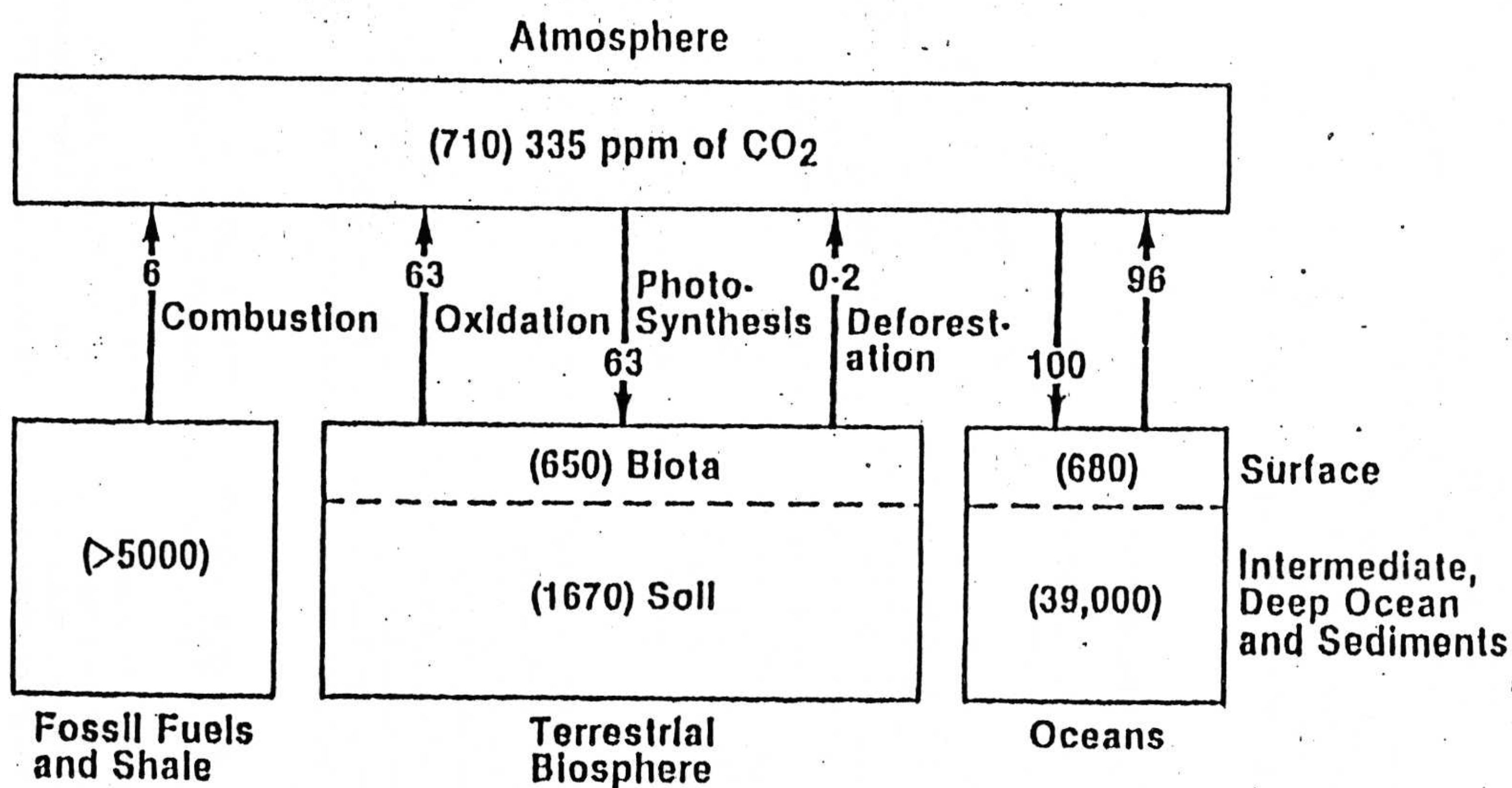
The rate of forest clearing has been estimated at 0.5% to 1.5% per year of the existing area. Forests occupy about 50 x $10^6 km^2$ out of about 150 x $10^6 km^2$ of continental land, and store about 650 Gt of carbon. One can easily see that if 0.5% of the world's forests are cleared per year, this could contribute about 3.0 Gt/a of carbon to the atmosphere. Even if reforestation were contributing significantly to balancing the CO_2 from deforestation, the total carbon stored in new trees tends to be only a small fraction of the net carbon emitted. It should be noted, however, that the rate of forest clearing and reforestation are not known accurately at this time. If deforestation is indeed contributing to atmospheric CO_2, then another sink for carbon must be found, and the impact of fossil fuel must be considered in the context of such a sink.

The magnitude of the carbon fluxes shown in Figure 2 between the atmosphere and the terrestial biosphere, and the atmosphere and the oceans are not precisely known. The flow of carbon between these reservoir pairs is generally assumed to have been in equilibrium prior to the Industrial Revolution. However, the errors in the estimated magnitude of these major fluxes are probably larger than the magnitude of the estimated man-made carbon fluxes, i.e., fossil fuels and deforestation. The man-made fluxes are assumed to be the only ones that have disturbed the equilibrium that is believed to have existed before the Industrial Revolution, and they can be estimated independently of the major fluxes. The man-made carbon fluxes are balanced in Figure 2 between the known growth rate of atmospheric carbon and the oceans. The carbon flux to the atmosphere is 6Gt/a from fossil fuels and cement manufacturing (cement manufacturing contributes about 4% of non-biosphere anthropogenic carbon) and 2Gt/a from deforestation, while 4Gt/a return to the ocean, resulting in a 50% carbon retention rate in the atmosphere. One cannot rule out, in view of the inherent uncertainty of the major fluxes, that the biosphere may be a net sink and the oceans may absorb much less of the man-made CO_2.

Projections of scientists active in the area indicate that the contribution of deforestation, which may have been substantial in the past, will diminish in comparison to the expected rate of fossil fuel combustion in the future. A few years ago a number of scientists hypothesized that a doubling of the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could occur as early as 2035. This hypothesis is generally not acceptable anymore because of the global curtailment of fossil fuel usage. Calculations recently completed at Exxon Research

FIGURE 2

Exchangeable Carbon Reservoirs and Fluxes



( ) = Size of Carbon Reservoirs in Billions of Metric Tons of Carbon

Fluxes (arrows) = Exchange of Carbon Between Reservoirs in Billions of Metric Tons of Carbon per Year and Engineering Company using the energy projections from the Corporate Planning Department's 21st Century Study*, indicate that a doubling of the 1979 atmospheric CO_2 concentration could occur at about 2090. If synthetic fuels are not developed and fossil fuel needs are met by new gas and petroleum discoveries, then the atmospheric CO_2 doubling time would be delayed by about 5 years to the late 2090's. Figure 3 summarizes the projected growth of atmospheric CO_2 concentration based on the Exxon 21st Century Study-High Growth scenario, as well as an estimate of the average global temperature increase which might then occur above the current temperature. It is now clear that the doubling time will occur much later in the future than previously postulated because of the decreasing rate of fossil fuel usage due to lower demand.

Description of Potential Impact on Weather, Climate, and Land Availability

The most widely accepted calculations carried on thus far on the potential impact on climate of doubling the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere use general circulation models (GCM). These models indicate that an increase in global average temperature of $3^{\circ} \pm 1.5^{\circ}C$ is most likely. Such changes in temperature are expected to occur with uneven geographic distribution with greater warming occurring at the higher latitudes, i.e., the polar regions. This is due to increased absorption of solar radiation energy on the darker polar surfaces that would become exposed when ice and snow cover melt due to increasing temperature (see Figure 4). There have been other calculations using radiative convective models and energy balance models which project average temperature increases on the order of $0.75^{\circ}C$ for a doubling of CO_2. These calculations are compared in Figure 5. Figure 6 summarizes possible temperature increases due to various changes in atmospheric CO_2 concentration.

If the atmospheric CO_2 content had been 295 ppm prior to the Industrial Revolution, and an average global temperature increase above climate noise is detectable at the present time, this would add credibility to the general circulation models. However, if the CO_2 concentration and been 265 ppm prior to the Industrial Revolution, then detecting a temperature effect of $0.5^{\circ}C$ now would imply that the temperature for a doubling of CO_2 would be $1.9^{\circ}C$. The projected temperatures for both alternatives fall within the $3^{\circ} \pm 1.5^{\circ}C$ range. Temperature projections for alternate scenarios will be discussed later.

Climate modeling was studied by a committee of the National Research Council, chaired by Jules G. Charney of MIT, and the conclusions are summarized in

* The "21st Century Study" referred to here and in other places in this report has been superseded by a new energy study called the "2030 Study". The new study projects energy demands that are lower than the earlier figures, but not sufficiently different to change any of the conclusions of this report.

Figure 3

GROWTH OF ATMOSPHERIC CO_2 AND AVERAGE GLOBAL TEMPERATURE INCREASE AS A FUNCTION OF TIME

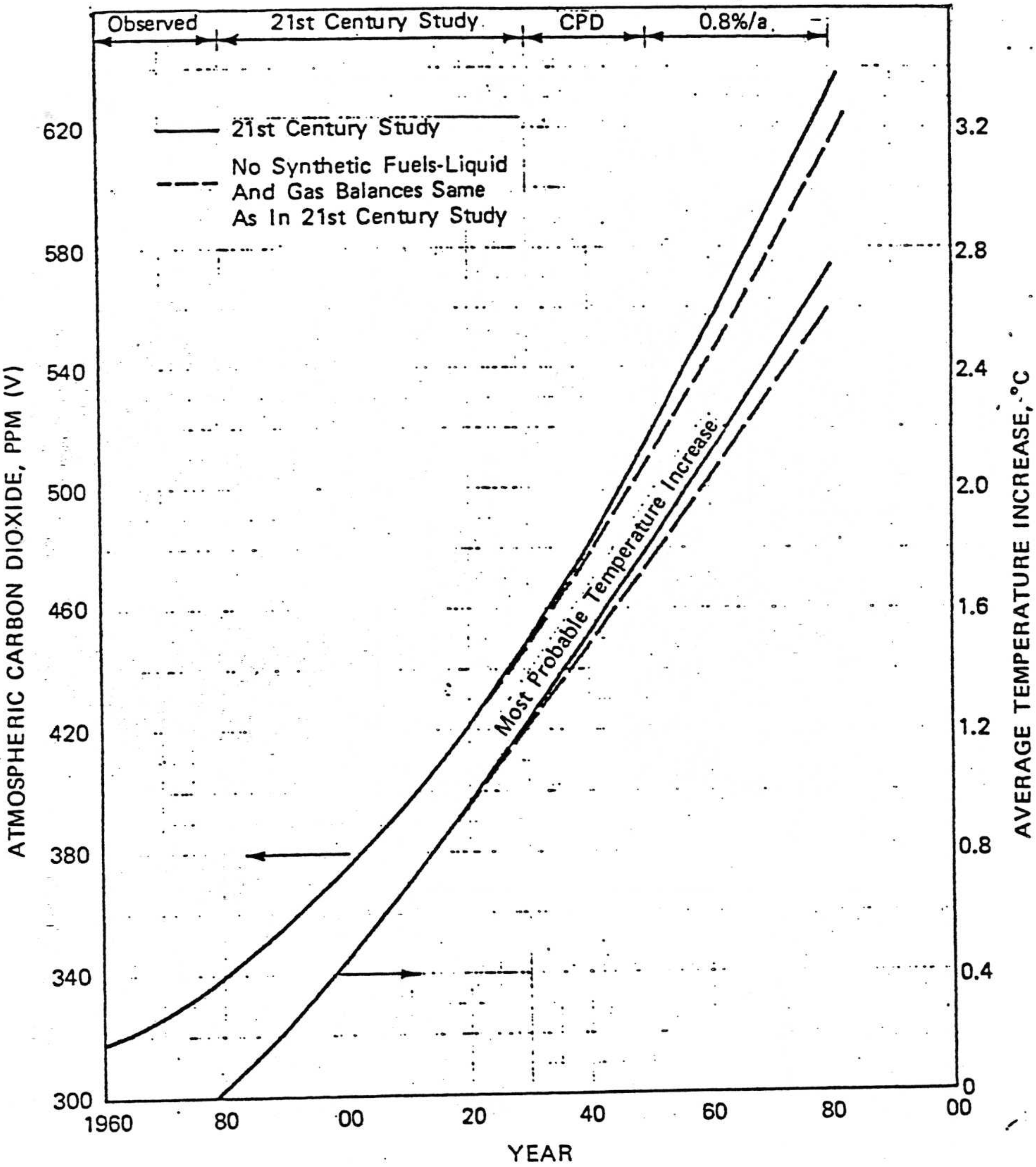
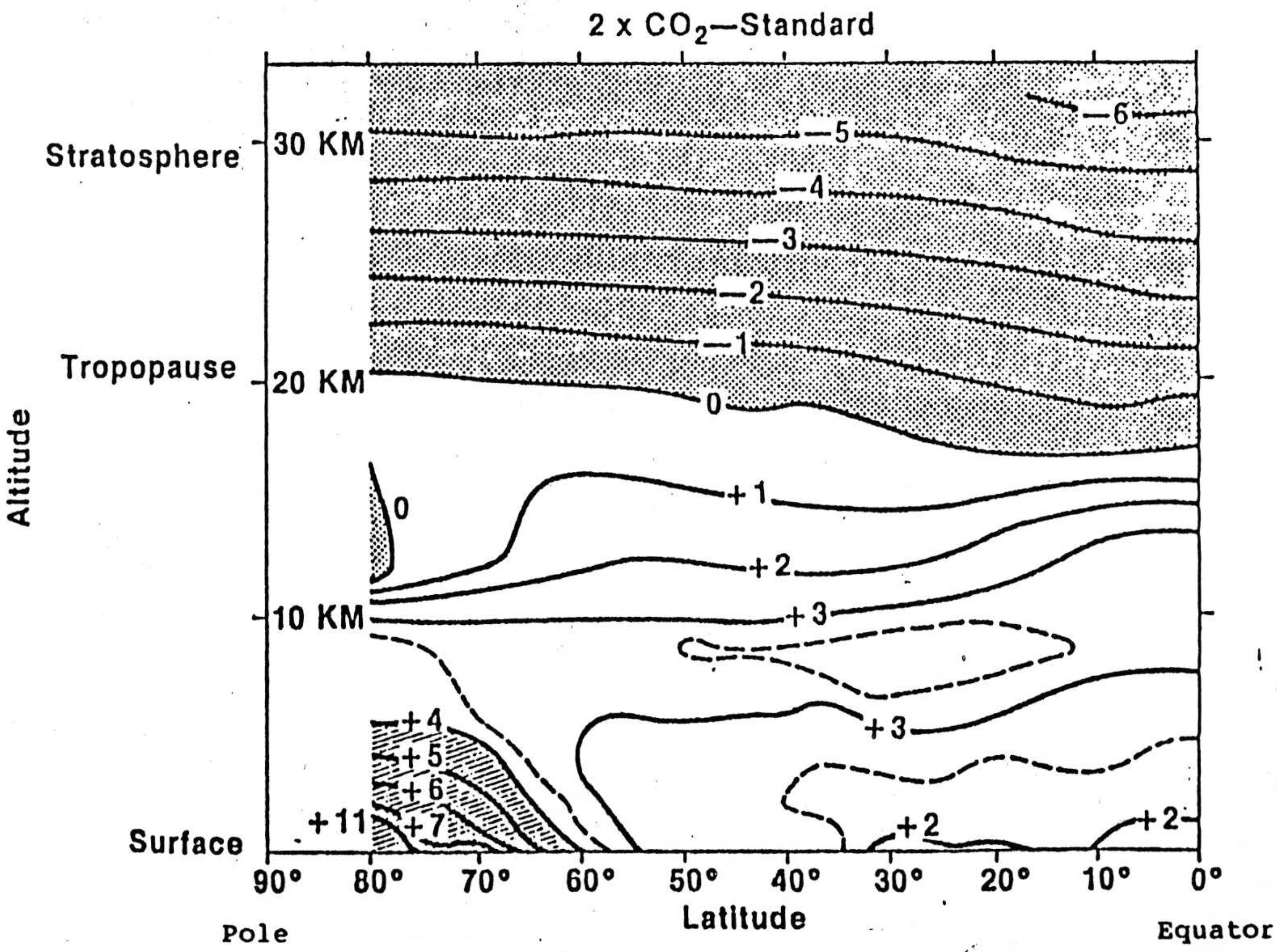


Figure 4

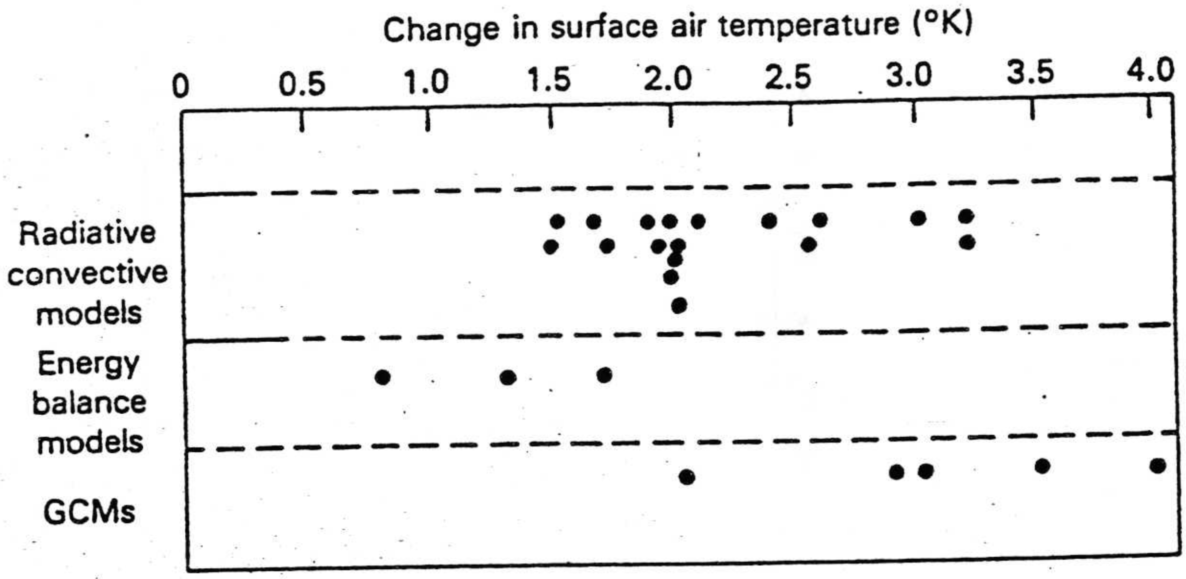
Temperature Change (^0C) Due to Doubling CO_2 Concentrations

Basis: Computed by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration using their general circulation model.



---- Decrease in Temperature

Figure 5



The change in globally averaged surface air temperature resulting from a doubling of atmospheric CO_2 as given by a variety of radiative-convective, energy balance, and global circulation (GCM) models. (From W. L. Gates, Oregon State University Technical Report no. 4.)

Figure 6

Estimates of the Change in Global Average Surface Temperature Due to Various Changes in CO_2 Concentration. Shading Shows Present Range of Natural Fluctuations.

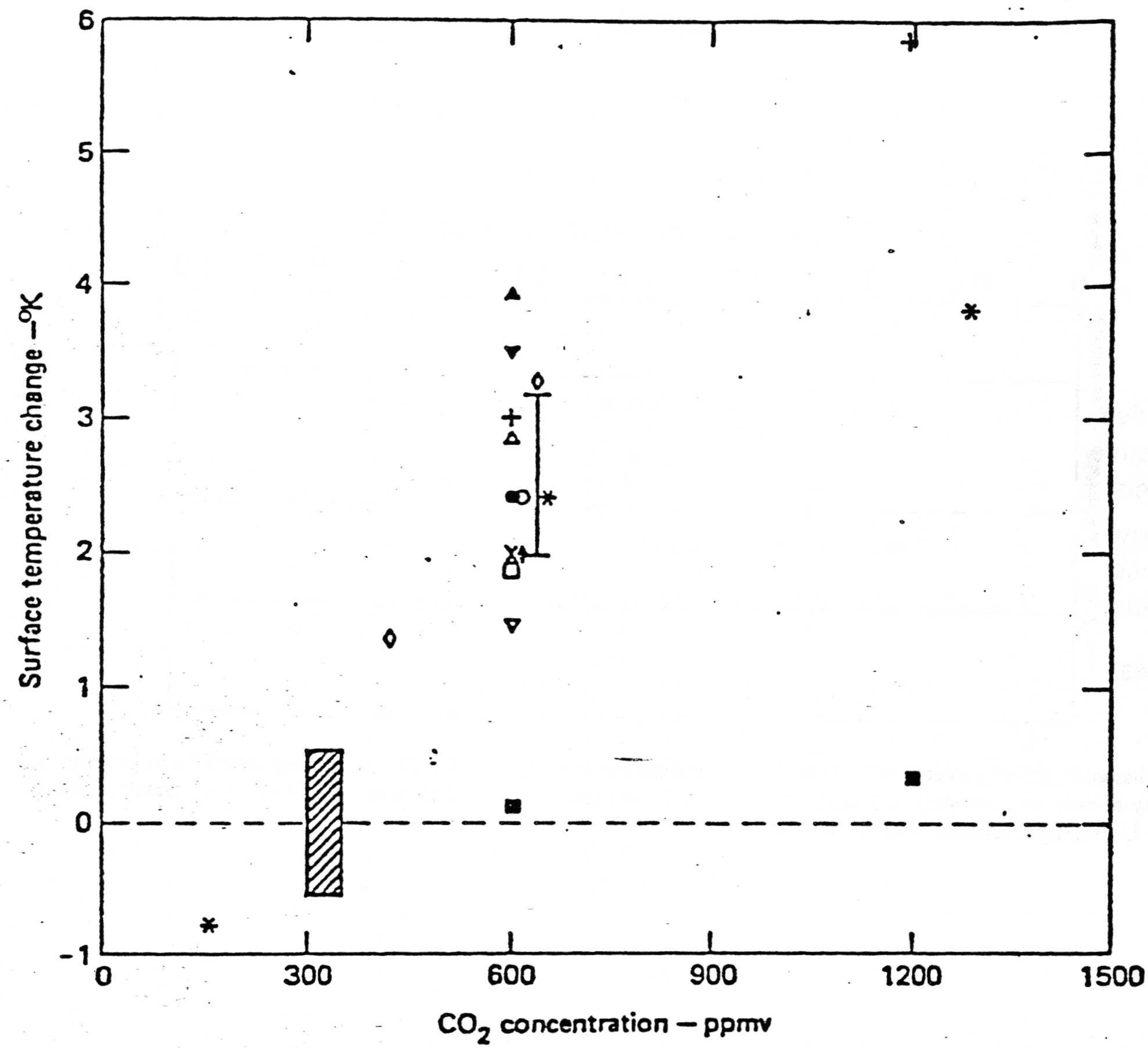
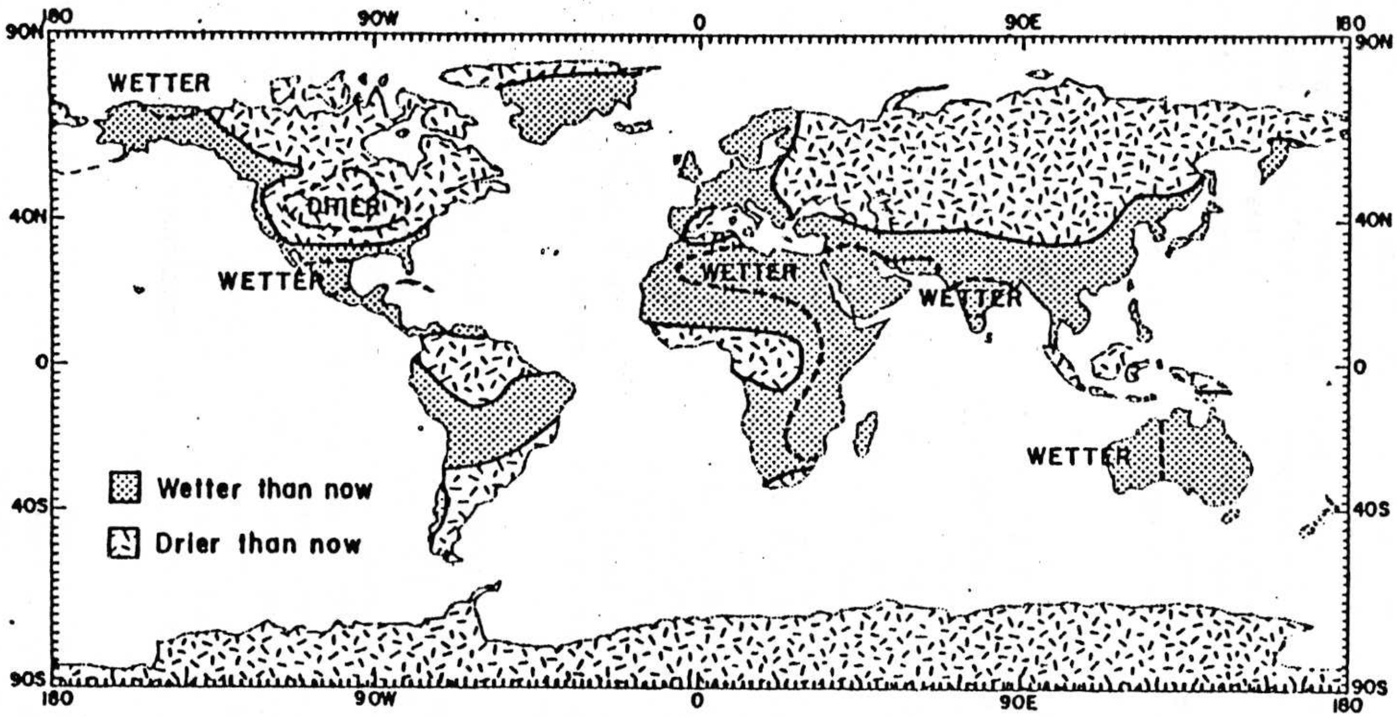


Figure 7



Example of a scenario of possible soil moisture patterns on a warmer Earth. It is based on paleoclimatic reconstructions of the Altithermal Period (4500 to 8000 years ago), comparisons of recent warm and cold years in the Northern Hemisphere, and a climate model experiment. (For a discussion of these sources of information see Appendix C.) Where two or more of these sources agree on the direction of the change we have indicated the area of agreement with a dashed line and a label.

their report titled, "Carbon Dioxide and Climate: A Scientific Assessment." This National Research Council study concluded that there are major uncertainties in these models in terms of the timing for a doubling of CO_2 and the resulting temperature increase. These uncertainties center around the thermal capacity of the oceans. The oceans have been assumed to consist of a relatively thin, well mixed surface layer averaging about 70 meters in depth in most of the general circulation models, and the transfer of heat into the deep ocean is essentially infinitely slow. The Charney panel felt, however, that the amount of heat carried by the deep ocean has been under estimated and the oceans will slow the temperature increase due to doubling of atmospheric CO_2. The Charney group estimated that the delay in heating resulting from the effect of the oceans could delay the expected temperature increase due to a doubling of CO_2 by a few decades. Accordingly, the time when the temperature increases discussed above are reached must be assumed to have occurred at an instantaneous equilibrium.

Along with a temperature increase, other climatological changes are expected to occur including an uneven global distribution of increased rainfall and increased evaporation. These disturbances in the existing global water distribution balance would have dramatic impact on soil moisture, and in turn, on agriculture. Recently, Manabe et al., using GCM's calculated that the zonal mean value of soil moisture in summer declines significantly in two separate zones of middle and high latitudes in response to an increase in the CO_2 concentration of air. This CO_2 induced summer dryness results not only from the earlier ending of the snowmelt season, but also from the earlier occurrence of the spring to summer reduction in rainfall rate. The former effect is particularly important in high latitudes, whereas the latter effect becomes important in middle latitudes. Other statistically significant changes include large increases in both soil moisture and runoff rates at high latitudes during most of the annual cycle with the exception of the summer season. The penetration of moisture rich, warm air into high latitudes is responsible for these increases.

The state-of-the-art in climate modeling allows only gross global zoning while some of the expected results from temperature increases of the magnitude indicated are quite dramatic. For example, areas that were deserts 4,000 to 8,000 years ago in the Altithermal period (when the global average temperature was some 2°C higher than present), may in due time return to deserts. Conversely, some areas which are deserts now were formerly agricultural regions. It is postulated that part of the Sahara Desert in Africa was quite wet 2,000 to 8,000 years ago. The American Midwest, on the other hand, was much drier, and it is projected that the Midwest would again become drier should there be a temperature increase of the magnitude postulated for a doubling of atmospheric CO_2 (see Figure 7).

In addition to the effects of climate on global agriculture, there are some potentially catastrophic events that must be considered. For example, if the Antarctic ice sheet which is anchored on land should melt, then this