

MOVERS

Philip Mote, director, Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon



1998-2009: Research scientist and state climatologist, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

1996-98: Research scientist, NorthWest Research Associates, Bellevue, Washington

Philip Mote wanted to use science know-how to help society grapple with complex decisions. His research into the effects of climate change on precipitation, temperature, snowpack and water resources paved his way to work on the 2007 fourth assessment report by the Nobel-prizewinning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), sharing lead authorship of the snow and ice section. As director of the new Oregon Climate Change Research Institute in Corvallis, Mote will design a research agenda to help the state and private sector incorporate climate-change considerations into their policy and investment decisions.

Mote became intrigued with mathematical descriptions of phenomena in nature while studying physics at Harvard University. On a research project measuring sea-surface temperature, he realized that ocean and atmospheric dynamics were intertwined, and that the atmosphere might hold more accessible measures of environmental patterns.

Pursuing a PhD in atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle, Mote modelled stratospheric water-vapour dynamics, which landed him a postdoc at the University of Edinburgh. Using satellite data, he discovered that air entering the stratosphere in the tropics leaves an imprint in the form of layers of dry and moist air — what a theorist colleague called an 'atmospheric tape recorder'.

Mote continued his research at geosciences group NorthWest Research Associates in Bellevue, Washington, but kept searching for more interdisciplinary work. "I knew I wanted to interface with communities, but I couldn't figure out how to get there," he says. Publicizing his interests eventually led to a post as state climatologist with the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington.

On the advice of colleague Susan Solomon, atmospheric chemist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Boulder, Colorado, he kept an active research agenda. She later prodded him to volunteer as one of the 150 lead authors of the 2007 IPCC report. "Understanding climate processes is one of the most important things that science can provide policy-makers, so I hoped Philip would bring his enthusiasm and high scientific standards to the job," says Solomon.

In his new role, Mote has big plans. "I want the institute to be nationally respected for its work on the fundamentals of climate change, and a valuable neutral resource for climate-change information," he says. ■

Virginia Gewin

RECRUITERS & INDUSTRY

No drug for job haemorrhage

A merger between pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and drugmaker Wyeth would shed some 19,500 jobs, but company executives are not saying where the cuts would be made nor how many will be in scientific positions.

Pfizer, whose specialities include drugs for neurological disorders, cancer, geriatrics and infectious diseases, announced last month that it plans to acquire Wyeth, which has a strong reputation in biologics and vaccines (see *Nature* **457**, 520-521; 2009). Pfizer says it will cut 15% of the combined workforce of 129,500, which includes about 8,200 job losses announced before the purchase.

Spokesmen say it is too early to know where cuts would be made. The merger, authorized by both boards of directors, needs a nod from Wyeth shareholders and regulatory approval, and should close by the year's end.

"We will be looking at job cuts from the manufacturing sites to the executive floor," says Ray Kerins, Pfizer's vice-president of worldwide communications.

"No specific decisions have been made regarding job reductions," echoes Wyeth's Doug Petkus. "Much has to be done regulatorily and legally. We will have nothing more to say until this transaction closes."

Over the past two years, Pfizer has

shed 16,000 employees, closed 15 manufacturing sites and culled research programmes. Wyeth has cut 3,000 jobs in the past year. Pfizer says it has refocused its drug R&D onto Alzheimer's, oncology, inflammation, pain, diabetes and schizophrenia.

Kerins did not say what areas would be cut. However, health-care industry analyst Les Funtleyder of Miller Tabak in New York says that 'quality-of-life' drugs, such as for smoking cessation or erectile dysfunction, will probably be among them, as oncology and vaccines are more likely to get reimbursement approval from insurance providers.

"R&D hasn't been that great for Pfizer lately," says Funtleyder. "It's put a lot of money in and hasn't got a lot of drugs out."

Pfizer bought Warner-Lambert in 2000 and Pharmacia in 2003. Although acquisitions may prop up drug firms' share prices and put more compounds in the pipeline, they can damage productivity and morale, Funtleyder warns. "Worried scientists are not going to be productive," he says. "You can't cut your way to prosperity. You need to keep your star scientists and researchers productive. Otherwise you can do deals until the cows come home but nothing will get done in research." ■

Karen Kaplan

POSTDOC JOURNAL

Cutting a deal for my career

I'm a theoretical biophysicist. A nomad, I've moved restlessly between biology and mechanical-engineering departments. I am probably one of a select few who have taught stream ecology, organic chemistry and engineering dynamics. After learning how to manipulate proteins with laser tweezers, I finished my first postdoc in August and soon started my second, using mechanics to understand muscle biology. It is now time to look for assistant professor jobs.

Out jumps Monty Hall from the US game show *Let's Make a Deal*. With a knowing wink, he asks the question of the moment: "Will you apply for a job in biology, mechanical engineering or ..." (dramatic pause) "... risk it all on an emerging field such as systems biology?" Flustered and giddy in the glare of the stage lights, my mind races as audience members egg me on. Wiggling an insouciant eyebrow, Monty awaits my answer as the seconds tick away.

A theoretical biophysicist looks at data and tries to find a simple mathematical model to explain them. I have no equation to predict my future. But, as I send off my first applications, I know the coming year will provide some answers. I cannot help but be excited by the transition. Watch as I attempt to metamorphose from a wriggling caterpillar into a gaudy butterfly. Come and hear my answer to Monty's question. See if I go home with the consolation prize or the new car. ■

Sam Walcott is a postdoc in theoretical biophysics at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.