



NO EASY TASK

The man whose job it is to save winter wants to mobilize millions of people

as told by *Mario Molina*

Mario Molina has a big job. As executive director of the climate advocacy nonprofit Protect Our Winters, Molina has been working overtime to encourage the 50 million Americans who say they participate in outdoor recreation to vote for climate-forward candidates. His vision? Convince that massive group of passionate, outdoor-oriented people to use their influence across party lines to push the lever on climate policies and protect the wild places that mean so much to them. Molina, who hails from the highlands of Guatemala, now lives with his family in the tiny town of Rollinsville, Colorado, in the hills above Boulder, where he spins early morning backcountry laps before getting to work. —*Megan Michelson*

My background has always been in the outdoors, the environment. But after 15 years of traveling the world, I was seeing all these impacts—the Great Barrier Reef in Australia threatened by warmer waters, the hurricanes in the Dominican Republic, the glacier recession in the Andes Mountains. The most common pressing threat was climate change. I realized we can't solve any of the other environmental problems without addressing climate change first.

If you're going to work in climate change, you have to be hopeful. Otherwise, you'll end up at the bottom of a bottle or in serious therapy. To me, there are two qualities that are integral and precede hope. One is gratitude, being grateful for what we have now, rather than consistently focusing on what we fear in the future. The other is courage. Just 20 seconds of courage of calling your senator can go a long way. If we had 25 million people who ski or snowboard drum up 20 seconds of courage, we could make a big impact.

What I've learned is that skiers, trail runners and climbers all have a deep appreciation for the landscapes that allow us to practice the activities we love. I've learned that if you start by finding the common ground—rather than hitting people over the head about what the problem is or what we have to do—then that's a better place to start the conversation. You can't just say the sky is falling. You have to connect on that common ground first.

People often ask, "How long do you think we have?" I think there's this perception that there's a tipping point when everything is going to change all at once. But the reality of what we're experiencing is everything is changing all the time. People also think we have time, that we can take small steps and climate change will work itself out. But we don't have time. We need



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to realize that it's urgent, and we have to deal with it right now.

Making personal changes for a more sustainable lifestyle can be beneficial. I find flying less gives me more time. I take a cold shower in the mornings because I find it invigorating. For every action we take, there's a positive reaction. Nobody should feel embarrassed because they can't make certain choices. Some of us have to fly or drive for work. But there are plenty of situations where we do have a choice. It's about progress, not perfection.

I can always center my values around the experiences I have outdoors. There is a set of values and principles that are necessary to enjoy and be safe in the backcountry, things like discipline, determination, self-awareness, a positive attitude, camaraderie. Those are transferable values to life, too. Those are the same values and principles I want to pass along to my daughter.

There's this book, *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. His idea is you build good habits a little bit at a time. To me, it's this idea of incremental improvements over long periods of time that can lead to change. It's all about your rituals and habits, which require discipline, setting goals, paying attention to your progress. There's also this other expression that I like, "Discipline is the bridge between potential and results." ❄️

[Facing Page] Mario Molina wants you to vote for climate action. [📍] **Mike Thurk**

[Top] When not working to save winter, Molina can be found playing in the season's most valued resource. [📍] **Courtesy POW**

[Bottom] Molina trades his snowsuit for a suit and tie to address the House Special Select Committee on the Climate Crisis and the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition in Washington, D.C. [📍] **Jesse Dawson**