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FACT SHEET: What Climate Change Means for West Virginia and the Northeast



Today, the Obama Administration released the third U.S. National Climate Assessment – the most comprehensive scientific assessment ever generated of climate change and its impacts across every region of America and major sectors of the U.S. economy. The findings in this National Climate Assessment underscore the need for urgent action to combat the threats from climate change, protect American citizens and communities today, and build a sustainable future for our kids and grandkids.

The National Climate Assessment is a key deliverable of President Obama’s Climate Action Plan to cut carbon pollution, prepare America’s communities for climate-change impacts, and lead international efforts to address this global challenge. Importantly, the plan acknowledges that even as we act to reduce the greenhouse-gas pollution that is driving climate change, we must also empower the Nation’s states, communities, businesses, and decision makers with the information they need prepare for climate impacts already underway.

The Obama Administration has already taken a number of steps to deliver on that commitment to states, regions, and communities across America. In the past year alone, these efforts have included: establishing a Task Force of State, Local, and Tribal Leaders on Climate Preparedness and Resilience to advise the Administration on how the Federal Government can respond to the needs of communities nationwide that are dealing with the impacts of climate change; launching a Climate Data Initiative to bring together extensive open government data with strong commitments from the private and philanthropic sectors to develop planning and resilience tools for communities; and establishing seven new “climate hubs” across the country to help farmers and ranchers adapt their operations to a changing climate.

WEST VIRGINIA is part of the U.S. National Climate Assessment U.S. Northeast Region. The regional phenomena identified by the Assessment may not occur in every state that is part of a particular region. According to the third U.S. National Climate Assessment Highlights report:

“Sixty-four million people are concentrated in the Northeast. The high-density urban coastal corridor from Washington, D.C., north to Boston is one of the most developed environments in the world. It contains a massive, complex, and long-standing network of supporting infrastructure. The Northeast also has a vital rural component, including large expanses of sparsely populated but ecologically and agriculturally important areas.

Although urban and rural regions in the Northeast are profoundly different, they both include populations that are highly vulnerable to climate hazards and other stresses. The region depends on aging infrastructure that has already been stressed by climate hazards including

heat waves and heavy downpours. The Northeast has experienced a greater recent increase in extreme precipitation than any other region in the U.S.; between 1958 and 2010, the Northeast saw more than a 70% percent increase in the amount of precipitation falling in very heavy events (defined as the heaviest 1% of all daily events). This increase, combined with coastal and riverine flooding due to sea level rise and storm surge, creates increased risks. For all of these reasons, public health, agriculture, transportation, communications, and energy systems in the Northeast all face climate-related challenges.” (NCA Highlights, p. 70)

Regional Findings of the Third U.S. National Climate Assessment: NORTHEAST

- “Heat waves, coastal flooding, and river flooding will pose a growing challenge to the region’s environmental, social, and economic systems. This will increase the vulnerability of the region’s residents, especially its most disadvantaged populations.
- Infrastructure will be increasingly compromised by climate-related hazards, including sea level rise, coastal flooding, and intense precipitation events.
- Agriculture, fisheries, and ecosystems will be increasingly compromised over the next century by climate change impacts. Farmers can explore new crop options, but these adaptations are not cost- or risk-free. Moreover, inequities exist in adaptive capacity, which could be overwhelmed by changing climate.
- While a majority of states and a rapidly growing number of municipalities have begun to incorporate the risk of climate change into their planning activities, implementation of adaptation measures is still at early stages.” (NCA, Ch. 16: Northeast)

Selected Findings and Information from the Third U.S. National Climate Assessment Relevant to WEST VIRGINIA

- **Water:** “Throughout the Northeast, populations are also concentrated along rivers and their flood plains. In mountainous regions, including much of West Virginia and large parts of Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire, more intense precipitation events will mean greater flood risk, particularly in valleys, where people, infrastructure, and agriculture tend to be concentrated.” (Ch. 16: Northeast)
- **Heat Waves:** “Under both emissions scenarios, the frequency, intensity, and duration of heat waves is expected to increase, with larger increases under higher emissions. Much of the southern portion of the region, including the majority of Maryland and Delaware, and southwest West Virginia and New Jersey, are projected by mid-century to experience more than 60 additional days per year above 90°F compared to the end of last century under continued increases in emissions (A2 scenario). This will affect the region’s vulnerable populations, infrastructure, agriculture, and ecosystems.” (NCA, Ch. 16: Northeast)
- **Health:** “Since the hottest days in the Northeast are often associated with high concentrations of ground-level ozone and other pollutants, the combination of heat stress and poor air quality can pose a major health risk to vulnerable groups: young children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions including asthma.” (NCA, Ch. 16: Northeast)

- **Flood Risk:** “In mountainous regions, including much of West Virginia and large parts of Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire, more intense precipitation events will mean greater flood risk, particularly in valleys, where people, infrastructure, and agriculture tend to be concentrated.” (NCA, Ch. 16: Northeast)
- **Agriculture:** “In the future, farmers may also face too little water in summer to meet increased crop water demand as summers become hotter and growing seasons lengthen. Increased frequency of summer heat stress is also projected, which can negatively affect crop yields and milk production. Despite a trend toward warmer winters, the risk of frost and freeze damage continues, and has paradoxically increased over the past decade. These risks are exacerbated for perennial crops in years with variable winter temperatures. Increased weed and pest pressure associated with longer growing seasons and warmer winters will be an increasingly important challenge; there are already examples of earlier arrival and increased populations of some insect pests such as corn earworm. Furthermore, many of the most aggressive weeds, such as kudzu, benefit more than crop plants from higher atmospheric carbon dioxide, and become more resistant to herbicide control.” (NCA, Ch. 16: Northeast)
- **Ecosystems:** “Effects of rising temperatures on the Northeast’s ecosystems have already been clearly observed. Because species differ in their ability to adjust, asynchronies (like a mismatch between key food source availability and migration patterns) can develop, increasing species and ecosystem vulnerability. Several bird species have expanded their ranges northward as have some invasive insect species, such as the hemlock woolly adelgid, which has devastated hemlock trees. Warmer winters and less snow cover in recent years have contributed to increased deer populations that degrade forest understory vegetation.” (NCA, Ch. 16: Northeast)

Examples of Efforts Underway in WEST VIRGINIA to Address Climate Change

In **WEST VIRGINIA**, many efforts are already underway to mitigate and respond to the impacts of climate change, including:

Preparing Communities for the Consequences of Climate Change:

Many important preparedness, resilience, and adaptation efforts are already being led by local, state, and regional entities across the country. Mechanisms being used by local governments to prepare for climate change include: land-use planning; provisions to protect infrastructure and ecosystems; regulations related to the design and construction of buildings, road, and bridges; and preparation for emergency response and recovery. These local adaptation planning and actions are unfolding in municipalities of different sizes, and regional agencies and regional aggregations of governments are also taking actions. And States have also become important actors in efforts related to climate change.

Cutting Carbon Pollution in West Virginia:

In 2012, power plants and major industrial facilities in West Virginia emitted more than 82 million metric tons of carbon pollution – that’s equal to the yearly pollution from more than 17 million cars. Through the Climate Action Plan and state initiatives, there are many efforts already underway to mitigate and respond to the impacts of climate change in West Virginia, including:

- ***Investing in Clean Energy:*** Since President Obama took office, the U.S. increased solar-electricity generation by more than ten-fold and tripled electricity production from wind power. In West Virginia, renewable energy generation from wind, solar, and geothermal sources increased more than 250 percent. Since 2009, the Administration has supported tens of thousands of renewable energy projects throughout the country, including 5 in West Virginia, generating enough energy to power more than 50,000 homes and helping West Virginia meet its own goal of generating 25 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2025
- ***Improving Efficiency:*** Using less energy to power our homes, businesses and vehicles is critical to building a clean and secure energy future. President Obama has made essential investments in research and development for energy efficiency advances, and set new standards to make the things we use every day – from cars to microwaves – more efficient.
 - President Obama established the toughest fuel economy standards for passenger vehicles in U.S. history. These standards will double the fuel efficiency of our cars and trucks by 2025, saving the average driver more than \$8,000 over the lifetime of a 2025 vehicle and cutting carbon pollution.
 - Since October 2009, the Department of Energy and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have jointly completed energy upgrades nearly two million homes across the country, saving many families more than \$400 on their heating and cooling bills in the first year alone.
 - Nationally, the President’s Better Buildings Challenge partners and Better Buildings, Better Plants partners have committed to reduce energy intensity at least 20 percent in over 3 billion square feet of building space.

For more information about the third U.S. National Climate Assessment, please visit www.globalchange.gov or contact engagement@usgcrp.gov.

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