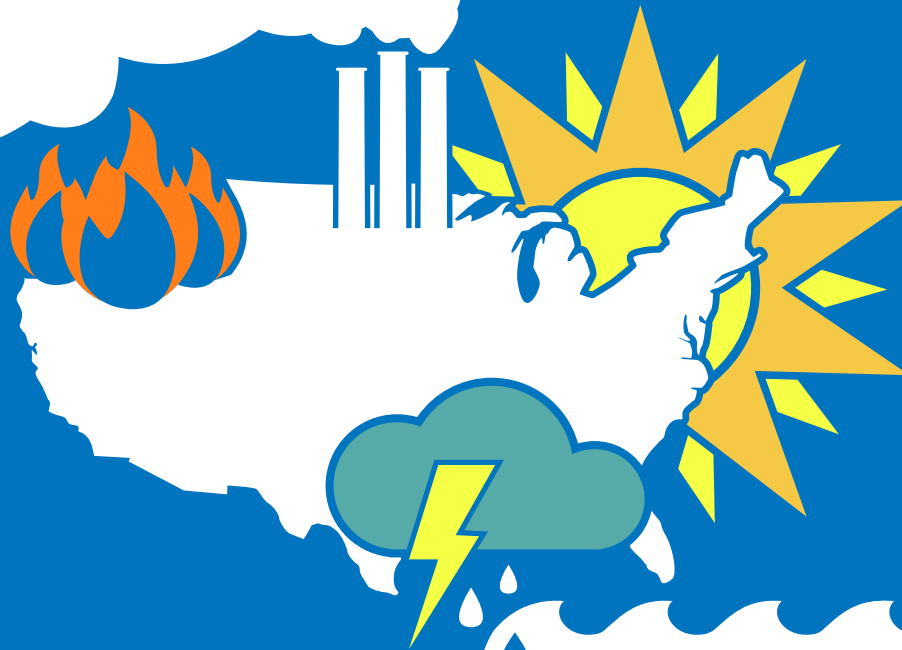


Climate
Change

Build
THE Change



in the
United States





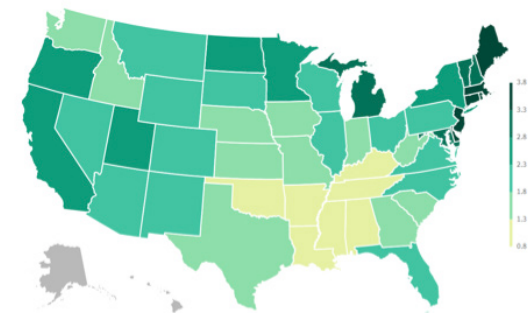
Climate Change

- Climate change refers to big changes in Earth’s climate, such as increases or decreases in temperature and rainfall. Human activities like burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests, and construction contribute to climate change.
- Carbon dioxide is a gas produced by deforestation and the burning of oil, coal, and gas. Carbon dioxide traps heat in the atmosphere and increases temperatures.
- The last time the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere changed so dramatically and quickly was 66 million years ago, at the end of the age of the dinosaurs.
- The oceans absorb 1/4 of the carbon dioxide produced by humans and more than 90% of the extra heat from global warming.
- As the oceans warm and become more acidic, reefs and other marine ecosystems are damaged or destroyed.

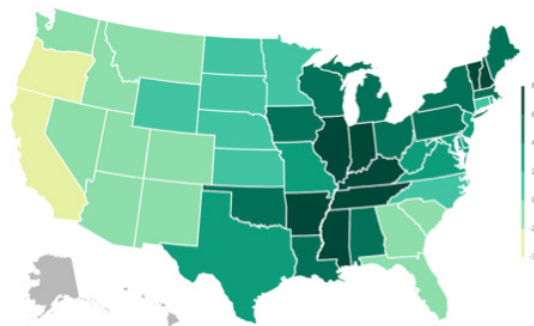
IN THE U.S.

IT’S GETTING HOTTER:

- 2020 was the second-warmest year on record.
- All states have become warmer over the past 100 years.
- Heat waves are happening 3 times more often than they did 60 years ago.



CHANGE IN AVERAGE TEMPERATURE (°F) 1896-1910 TO 2006-2020



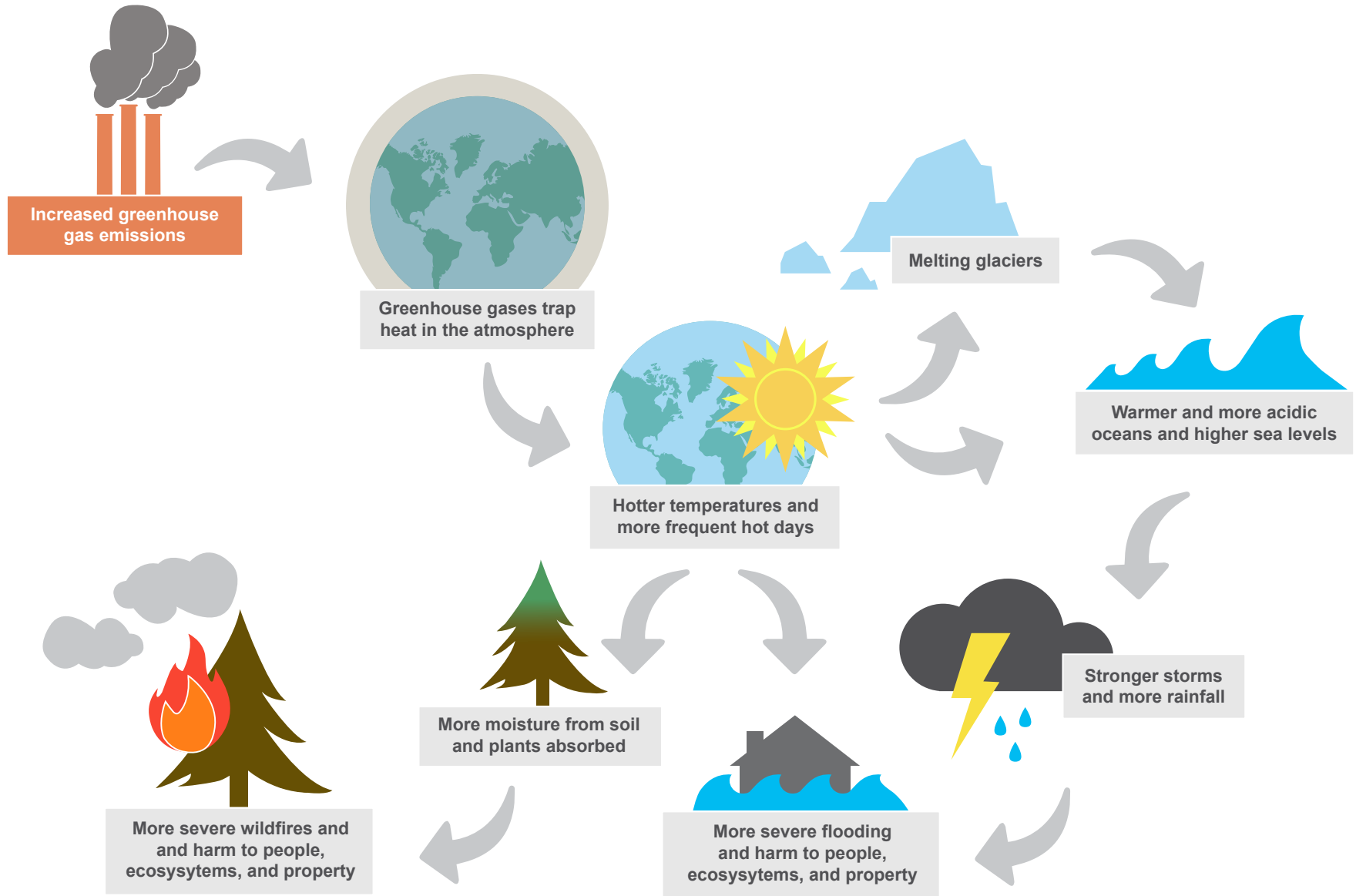
CHANGE IN AVERAGE PRECIPITATION (IN.) 1896-1910 TO 2006-2020

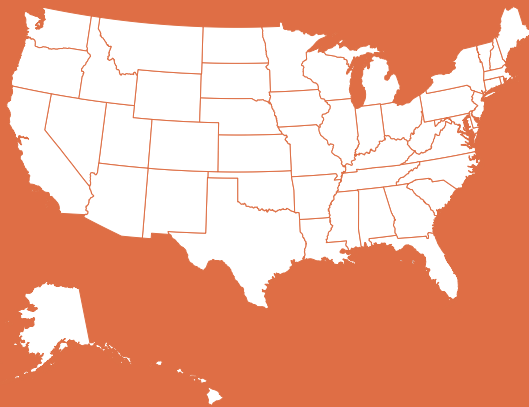
IT’S GETTING WETTER:

- Average rainfall is 5% higher than it was 100 years ago.
- In many coastal areas, coastlines are retreating as seas rise and land sinks.
- Flooding from storms like hurricanes is more frequent and destructive.

Source: usafacts.org & Science Daily

I. CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECTS US ALL, NO MATTER WHERE WE LIVE





The United States is the fourth largest country in the world in terms of land area, with many different regions, climates, and environments. All Americans are affected by climate change, but the effects are different depending on where you live.

Urban Areas

Climate change and pollution are serious problems in cities. People who live in cities are exposed to greater levels of pollution, especially if they do not have enough insulation or air conditioning in their homes. Many people in urban areas also have pre-existing health conditions, like asthma. Asthma is made worse by poor air quality caused by pollution and wildfires.

Heat is also a big problem in cities, which are often hotter than the surrounding areas. Cities have more people and vehicles, which create energy. We feel this energy as heat. Cities also have more sidewalks, buildings, streets, and parking lots, which absorb heat from the sun. This is why cities are sometimes called Urban Heat Islands.

Source: [NASA Climate Kids](#)

Click on the hyperlinked words to see definitions.

The Midwest

The climate in the Midwest is changing in many ways that affect public health and farming. The region is getting hotter and wetter. The spring and winter have more rain, severe storms, and flooding. Heavy rain and flooding are bad for farming because erosion reduces the amount of land available for crops. Farmers also have less flexibility in when they plant their crops. Hotter temperatures and more carbon dioxide in the air make it harder for crops like corn and soybeans to grow. Farmers will struggle to earn a living if they can't produce as many crops as they used to.

Source: [EPA](#), [UCS](#), & [Climate.gov](#)

The Great Plains & Rural Areas

The Great Plains are experiencing climate change in the form of warmer winters, more droughts, and changes in water supply. The economies in rural communities often depend on agriculture, which is affected by changes in temperature and water supply. Many rural households suffer from energy poverty, which is when families cannot afford to stay warm in the winter or cool in the summer.

Source: [CNBC](#)

The East Coast & Coastal Areas

From Maine to Florida, the East Coast is experiencing higher sea levels as well as more hurricanes, storm surges, and flooding. The Mid-Atlantic and Southeast are losing coastal areas as land sinks and the seas rise. Recent hurricanes and strong storms have damaged the economy and the environment and caused deaths. Huge storms hurt the economy because they destroy businesses and homes. It is expensive and time-consuming to rebuild.

Source: [EPA](#)



The West Coast & Arid Climates

The West Coast, particularly the Southwest, is dealing with heat waves, wildfires, and droughts. Recent heat waves are more frequent and both hotter and longer than in the past. The competition for much-needed water affects cities, farmers, and wildlife. Since 1983, there have been an average of 70,000 wildfires per year, with many of the most severe in California and Oregon.

Source: [globalchange.gov](#)

U.S. Tropical Islands, including Puerto Rico, Hawaii & Guam

Many of these islands have low elevation and communities built right next to the coastline. This means rising sea levels are a serious threat to humans and ecosystems. The natural environment, like coral reefs and mangrove forests, will be harmed by ocean acidification and warmer ocean water. Climate change will affect jobs because many people work in the tourism industry.

See [Part V](#) for details about how climate change is affecting specific states.

DID YOU
KNOW

?

Hurricanes

- Hurricanes are large storms with strong winds that form over warm waters in tropical areas.
- A category 5 hurricane has winds up to 157 miles per.
- The strongest hurricanes (Categories 4 & 5) have become more frequent since the 1980s.
- Just 6 inches of moving water can knock a person to the ground. A car can be swept away in just 2 feet of water.

Source: [The Washington Post](#)



Watch National Geographic's [Hurricane 101](#) to learn more about how hurricanes form and the dangers of storm surge.

II. ACTIVITY: CLIMATE CHANGE & YOUR COMMUNITY

As a country, we need to consult the experiences and wisdom of older generations and consider how our current behaviors and values will impact future generations.

THE SEVENTH GENERATION PRINCIPLE

is based on an ancient Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) philosophy that the decisions we make today should ensure a sustainable world **seven generations** into the future.

If the planet continues to warm at the same rate it has been, the average 6-year-old will live through roughly three times as many climate disasters as their grandparents. They will see twice as many wildfires, 1.7 times as many tropical cyclones, 3.4 times more river floods, 2.5 times more crop failures and 2.3 times as many droughts as someone born in 1960

Source: [Science](#)



Interview an older relative or person in your community about changes in the weather and climate during their lifetime. You can also ask about issues like recycling, traveling (Did you travel more or less frequently?), and shopping (Did you buy more or fewer things? How has packaging changed?).

In general, is it warmer or cooler than when you were younger?

Do you notice any specific changes based on the seasons?

Do storms seem more frequent and/or stronger than they used to be?

How has the air quality changed over time?

Do you buy more or fewer items than you used to?

If you recycle, when did you start? Have there been changes in what you can recycle?

How often did you travel when you were younger compared to today? Do you take buses, trains, subways, or airplanes more or less frequently?

How has the cost of gas, electricity, and water changed throughout your life?

Have you experienced any severe storms or climate-related events like wildfires?

III. DEFINITIONS

Asthma is a disease that affects the lungs and can make it difficult to breathe. Many factors can trigger an asthma attack, including air pollution, allergens, or certain weather conditions.

Biodiversity is the variety of species and plants that live in one environment. Climate change and pollution can harm plants and animals and even cause entire species to become extinct. Because plants and animals depend on each other for survival, losing just one species can harm many others. [Learn more about Biodiversity.](#)

Carbon Dioxide is a colorless, odorless greenhouse gas. It is produced naturally when dead animals or plants decay or break down. People are adding carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas. This extra carbon dioxide is the main cause of climate change.

Climate refers to the average weather conditions in a particular location or region at a particular time of the year. Climate is usually measured over a period of 30 years or more.

Climate Change refers to a significant change in the Earth's climate, such as temperature, precipitation, or wind. Climate change may result from natural factors or human activities. Examples of natural factors are changes in ocean currents, the Earth's orbit, or the Sun's intensity. Examples of human activities are burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests, and construction. [Learn more about Climate Change.](#)

Deforestation is the intentional act of cutting down trees in forested land. Throughout history, people have cut down forests to make space for farming and to process wood for fuel, manufacturing, and construction.

Drought is a period of unusually dry weather lasting long enough to cause serious shortages of water for ecosystems and human use, such as drinking water and water for farming.

An **Ecosystem** is all the living and nonliving things in an area. This includes plants and animals as well as water, rocks, soil, and sand. A swamp, a prairie, an ocean, and a forest are examples of ecosystems.

Energy Poverty means not having access to services and products that require energy, like heating, air conditioning, and electricity.



Environmental Racism

refers to the unequal access to a clean environment and basic environmental resources based on race. Communities of color are more affected by environmental hazards and are far more likely to live in areas with heavy pollution.

Erosion is the wearing down of land by wind or water. Erosion can be made worse by certain types of farming and logging, road building, and clearing land for development.



Fossil Fuels form deep within the Earth. Examples of fossil fuels include coal, oil, and natural gas. It takes millions of years to create fossil fuels. Dead plants and animals become trapped in layers of rock. Heat and pressure change this material into fuel. All fossil fuels contain carbon, and when people burn these fuels to produce energy, they create carbon dioxide. Coal, natural gas, and oil are fossil fuels. They are used for electricity, heating, and in transportation. Driving and flying in airplanes use fossil fuels. [Learn more about Fossil Fuels.](#)

Glaciers are large areas of thick ice that remain frozen throughout the year. Thousands of years ago, parts of the world were covered with glaciers. At other times in the past, there were fewer glaciers than there are today.

Global Warming is an increase in temperature near the surface of the Earth. Global warming has happened in the past as the result of natural causes. It most often refers to recent warming caused by human activity.

The Greenhouse Effect is a process that happens when gases in the Earth's atmosphere trap the Sun's heat. This process makes Earth much warmer than it would be without an atmosphere. The greenhouse effect is one of the things that makes Earth a comfortable place to live. [Learn more about the Greenhouse Effect.](#)

Greenhouse Gases are "heat trapping gases." They can be either natural or manmade. They trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to the greenhouse effect. Greenhouse gases include water vapor, carbon dioxide, and methane. [Learn more about Greenhouse Gases.](#)

A **Heat Wave** refers to a long period of unusually hot weather, typically lasting several days.



Hurricanes are large storms with strong winds that form over warm waters in tropical areas.

Ocean Acidification is caused by the extra carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that the oceans absorb. Coral reefs and small animals that form shells to survive cannot live in an acidic environment. This means entire food chains are affected by ocean acidification because larger animals rely on the coral reefs and small shelled animals in order to survive.

Pollution is caused by substances that make land, water, and air dirty or unsafe to use. There are different types of pollution. Factories can cause air pollution by creating chemicals that make the air smoggy and unsafe to breathe. Plastic trash is another source of pollution. Plastic never completely breaks down and ends up in landfills and oceans. Plastic trash can release toxic chemicals that hurt humans and animals.

Precipitation is rain, hail, mist, sleet, snow, or any other moisture that falls to the Earth.

A **Storm Surge** is a coastal flood of rising water often caused by low-pressure weather systems, such as hurricanes. It is measured as the rise in water level above the normal sea level and does not include waves.

Urban Heat Islands is a term to describe how cities and urban areas are usually a lot warmer than the rural areas that surround them. Energy from people, cars, roads, and buildings create energy that we feel as heat. [Learn more about Urban Heat Islands.](#)

IV. STATE ACTIVITY

Find your state in the chart below and read about the ways climate change has already impacted and will continue to impact the communities and ecosystems near you. Choose an area to research in more detail. Share what you learn by writing a story, drawing a picture, or building something that shows the effects of climate change in your state.

POSSIBLE AREAS OF FOCUS:

- Health (heat-related diseases, mold, pollution)
- Property damage (fires, floods, hurricanes)
- Local ecosystems (forests, oceans, rivers, and lakes)
- Local economies (tourism, farming, construction, and fishing)
- Water supply (droughts, changes in snowmelt)

EXAMPLE

How Climate Change Affects Farming in Iowa

Michaela is a farmer in Iowa. One of her main crops is corn. There was a lot of rain and flooding recently. Michaela had to wait to plant the corn because of the rain. She also had less land to farm because of erosion. The wet weather caused mold to grow, and the mold ruined part of her crop. Michaela worked just as hard, but she produced fewer crops and earned less money.



V. CLIMATE CHANGE IN U.S. STATES & TERRITORIES

The U.S. is experiencing the effects of climate change in many ways, including:



Increasing
temperatures



More frequent extreme
weather events like
hurricanes, floods,
and droughts



Increased rainfall and
heavy downpours



More frequent and
more severe fires



Rising
sea levels

What climate change means for you and your community:

Your favorite beach
may slowly disappear
or become unsafe.



You may not be able to play
in the snow in the same
places as before. Winter is
getting shorter, and some
mountains may not have
as much snow as the
climate changes.

You may not be able to
catch the same types of
fish if the oceans and
rivers change.

You may have to stay inside
to play more often because
hot days are hotter
and more frequent. It's
dangerous to be outside
when it's very hot.

Smoke from wildfires may
mean you have to wear a
mask when outside or stay
inside to play.

Air pollution may make
it harder to breathe,
especially if you have
asthma. You might have to
play inside more often.

If you live someplace
that has wildfires,
storms, or flooding, you
may worry about your
home being damaged
or think about moving
someplace safer.



ALABAMA

Rainstorms are more intense, and floods are more severe.

Along the coast, the sea is rising.

Summers are hotter and drier.



ALASKA

Weather and natural resources have been affected by shrinking summer sea ice and glaciers.

Alaska is warming at double the rate of the rest of the U.S.

Native communities will lose access to traditional foods and fishing areas.



ARIZONA

Drought and rising temperatures have led to serious wildfires.

Heat waves are becoming more common.

The changing climate may reduce the water in the Colorado River, which will threaten livestock and turn some grazing land into deserts.



ARKANSAS

There will be water shortages caused by increasing populations and changes in how land is used.

There will be higher risk for extreme weather events like hurricanes.



CALIFORNIA

Drought and rising temperatures have led to serious wildfires.

The 2020 fire season broke records, burning more than 4 million acres—an area larger than the state of Connecticut.



COLORADO

Drought and rising temperatures have led to serious wildfires.

Rising temperatures and recent droughts in the region have killed trees by drying out the ground, increasing the risk of forest fires, or enabling outbreaks of forest insects.



CONNECTICUT

Climate changes include heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.



DELAWARE

Climate changes include heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Hot days and heavy rainstorms are more frequent.

The tidal Potomac is rising about one inch every eight years.

In the coming decades, changing climate is likely to increase tidal flooding and cause more heavy rainstorms and sewer overflows.



FLORIDA

Climate change issues include water shortages caused by increasing populations and changes in how land is used.

There is higher risk for extreme weather events like hurricanes.

In the coming decades, rising temperatures are likely to increase storm damage and harm coral reefs.



GEORGIA

Water shortages are caused by increasing populations and changes in how land is used.

Sea level is rising more rapidly in Georgia than along most coasts because the land is sinking.

In the coming decades, Georgia will become warmer, and the state will probably experience more severe floods and drought.



GUAM

Guam and other U.S. territories in the Pacific will likely see damage or destruction of coral reefs, increased damages from flooding and typhoons, reduced availability of fresh water during the dry season, and increased temperatures.



HAWAII

Hawaii has less freshwater and warmer temperatures. These changes will cause problems for people and the environment.

The waters around Hawaii are warming, which is harming Hawaii's coral reefs and marine ecosystems.





IDAHO

The water Idaho uses for agriculture and public supplies comes from mountain snow that melts in the spring and summer. The water runs off into rivers and fills reservoirs.

Changes in when snow melts are reducing the supply of water in the summer and hurting ecosystems and businesses, including skiing.



ILLINOIS

The state is experiencing an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.

In the coming decades, the state will have more extremely hot days, which may harm public health in urban areas and corn harvests in rural areas.



INDIANA

The state is experiencing an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.

In the coming decades, the state will have more extremely hot days, which may harm public health in urban areas and corn harvests in rural areas.



IOWA

The state is experiencing an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.

In the coming decades, the state will have more extremely hot days, which may harm public health in urban areas and corn harvests in rural areas.



KANSAS

The state is getting warmer, and the soil is becoming drier.

Rainstorms are becoming more intense, and floods are becoming more severe.

In the coming decades, summers are likely to become hotter and drier, creating problems for agriculture.



KENTUCKY

The state will face water shortages caused by larger populations and changes in how land is used.

The state has a higher risk for extreme weather events like hurricanes.

In the coming decades, the changing climate is likely to reduce crop yields and threaten some aquatic ecosystems.



LOUISIANA

In some areas, the ocean is 24 inches above 1950 levels, partly because of construction that has eroded the coastline and caused land to sink.

Louisiana's erosion is made worse by faraway melting glaciers and the fact that ocean water expands as it warms.



MAINE

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.



MINNESOTA

There is an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.



MARYLAND

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.

Higher water levels are eroding beaches and submerging lowlands.

In the coming decades, climate change will likely harm ecosystems and negatively impact fishing and farming.



MASSACHUSETTS

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.

In the coming decades, climate change will likely harm ecosystems and negatively impact fishing and farming.



MICHIGAN

There is an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.

In 2020, the Great Lakes never froze because it was such a hot year.



MISSISSIPPI

The state is experiencing water shortages caused by increasing populations and changes in how land is used.

There is increased risk of extreme weather events like hurricanes.

The changing climate is likely to increase damages from tropical storms, reduce crop yields, harm livestock, increase the number of very hot days, and increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.



MISSOURI

There is an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.



MONTANA

The state is experiencing rising temperatures, which have increased the demand for water and energy and affected farming.



NEBRASKA

The state is experiencing rising temperatures, which have increased the demand for water and energy and affected farming.



NEVADA

Drought and rising temperatures have led to serious wildfires.

Ranches and farms will be less productive.



NEW HAMPSHIRE

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.



NEW JERSEY

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.

Higher water levels are eroding beaches and submerging lowlands.

In the coming decades, climate change is likely to harm ecosystems and negatively impact fishing and farming.



NEW MEXICO

Drought and rising temperatures have led to serious wildfires.



NEW YORK

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.

Higher water levels are eroding beaches and submerging lowlands.

In the coming decades, climate change is likely to harm ecosystems and negatively impact fishing and farming.



NORTH CAROLINA

There is an increased risk of severe storms and flooding.

The changing climate is likely to increase damages from tropical storms, reduce crop yields, harm livestock, increase the number of very hot days, and increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.

One study of a “hot spot” along the Outer Banks of North Carolina found that sea levels were rising as fast as an inch per year.



NORTH DAKOTA

Rising temperatures have increased the demand for water and energy and affected farming.

Rainstorms are becoming more intense.

In the coming decades, increased rainfall may benefit some crops but also increase the risk of flooding.



OREGON

There are changes in when snow melts, reducing the supply of water in the summer and hurting ecosystems and businesses.

Wildfires are becoming more common.



OHIO

In the coming decades, the state will have more extremely hot days, which will affect the health of people in cities and impact corn harvests in rural areas.

Ice cover on the Great Lakes is forming later and/or melting sooner.

In the coming decades, the state will have more extremely hot days, which will affect the health of people in cities and impact corn harvests in rural areas.



OKLAHOMA

Rising temperatures have increased the demand for water and energy and affected farming.



PENNSYLVANIA

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.



PUERTO RICO

Recent hurricanes Irma and Maria resulted in many deaths and the destruction of property and resources.

The sea is rising and warming, and heavy rainstorms are becoming more severe.



RHODE ISLAND

The state is affected by heat waves, increased rainfall, and flooding from storm surges and higher sea levels.



SOUTH CAROLINA

There are water shortages caused by increasing populations and changes in how land is used.

There is a higher risk for extreme weather events like hurricanes.



SOUTH DAKOTA

There is an increased risk of severe storms and flooding.

The changing climate is likely to increase damages from tropical storms, reduce crop yields, harm livestock, increase the number of very hot days, and increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.



TENNESSEE

The state is experiencing water shortages caused by increasing populations and changes in how land is used.

There is an increased risk of severe storms and storm damage.

On August 21, 2021, a torrential rainstorm caused major flooding when more than 17 inches of rain fell on a single day.

The rainfall caused rivers to overflow and flooded areas that were never considered flood plains. More than 21 people died, and hundreds of homes were destroyed, including structures that had stood for one hundred years.



TEXAS

Rainstorms are becoming more intense.

Floods are becoming more severe.

Along much of the coast, the sea is rising almost two inches per decade.

Storms will likely become more severe, deserts may expand, and summers are likely to become hotter and drier. These changes will create problems for agriculture and public health.



UTAH

Drought and rising temperatures have led to serious wildfires.



VERMONT

Spring is arriving earlier and bringing more rain.

Heavy rainstorms are more frequent.

Summers are hotter and drier.



VIRGINIA

The changing climate is likely to increase damage from tropical storms, reduce crop yields, harm livestock, increase the number of very hot days, and increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.



WASHINGTON

In the coming decades, coastal waters will become more acidic, streams will become warmer, populations of several fish species will decline, and wildfires may be more common.



WEST VIRGINIA

The state is getting warmer, and there are more heavy rainstorms. In the coming decades, a changing climate is likely to increase flooding, harm ecosystems, and threaten recreational activities.



WISCONSIN

There is an increase in extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, and floods.

In 2020, the Great Lakes never froze because it was such a hot year.

In the coming decades, the state will have more extremely hot days, which may harm public health in urban areas and corn harvests in rural areas.



WYOMING

Rising temperatures have increased the demand for water and energy and affected farming.

Sources: [globalchange.gov](https://www.globalchange.gov), [EPA](https://www.epa.gov), and *The Washington Post*
For more information about how climate change is effecting your community, use the [EPA's interactive map](#).

VI. RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

[Climate Change Resources for Educators and Students | US EPA](#)

Resources about the science of climate change and how to protect ourselves and our communities

[Air Quality and Energy Choice STEM Activities for Educators | US EPA](#)

Hands-on activities for teachers and others to use in the classroom and other educational settings

[For Educators: Grades 6-12 | Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#)

Accessible, interactive materials developed based on recommendations from educators across the U.S. The resources are designed for middle and high school students and are adaptable for younger learners.

[Education Resources | Department of Energy](#)

Information about renewable energy and links to STEM lessons and activities

[Educator Resources | Solar Decathlon](#)

Teacher resources to explore energy, building science, and solar energy in the classroom from the U.S. Department of Energy

[Climate Change for Kids: OLogy | AMNH](#)

Games, stories, activities, and videos about climate change and other related topics from the American Museum of Natural History

[Home | NASA Climate Kids](#)

Interactive games and activities about weather, climate, atmosphere, energy, water, plants, and animals

[EIA Energy Kids - Energy Kids: U.S. Energy Information Administration \(EIA\)](#)

A teacher guide that offers lessons about energy for a variety of ages and subject areas

[A Climate Change Guide for Kids | The New York Times](#)

A beautifully illustrated guide to climate change and what we can do about it

[WaterSense for Kids | US EPA](#)

Resources for educators and games and activities for kids that explore our relationship to a valuable and limited resource

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