

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

New report: Climate change has “moved firmly into the present” and nation needs to adapt

By Chris Adams

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WASHINGTON — Saying that climate change has moved from an issue for the distant future to one “firmly in the present,” a federal scientific panel Tuesday released a report cataloging the impacts of such changes, saying some would actually be beneficial “but many more are detrimental.”

The American Southeast and Caribbean regional is “exceptionally vulnerable” to rising sea levels, extreme heat events, hurricane and decreased water resources, the report said. Seven major ports in the region are vulnerable. And residents can expect a significant increase in the number of hot days – defined as 95 degrees or above – as well as decreases in freezing events.

“Large numbers of southeastern cities, roads, railways, ports, airports, oil and gas facilities and water supplies are vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise,” the report concluded. Among the cities most at risk: Miami; Tampa, Fla.; Charleston, S.C.; New Orleans, and Virginia Beach, Va.

The [findings come from the U.S. National Climate Assessment](#) and was the result of a three-year project involving 300 experts and top administration officials, including President Obama’s science and technology adviser and the head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The report was called for in Obama’s climate action plan that was launched last year. White House officials are set to discuss the report Tuesday afternoon.

A draft of the report had previously been released, and report authors received more than 4,000 public comments.

Climate-change skeptics already attacked the report. The Cato Institute, a Washington-based libertarian think tank, set out its assessment Monday, saying the report “overly focuses on the supposed negative impacts from climate change while largely dismissing or ignoring the positives from climate change.”

It said the “bias ... towards pessimism” has implications for the federal regulatory process because the report is cited as a primary source for the science of climate change for justifying federal regulations

“Since the [National Climate Assessment] gets it wrong, so does everyone else,” Cato’s authors said.

The report lays out climate-change scenarios that have or may impact different regions and sectors of the economy. The report on the Southeast and Caribbean itself is 22 pages; [reports on each of the regions of the country are available on the National Climate Assessment’s Web site.](#)

In the Southeast and Caribbean, for example, the report notes that the region warmed during the early part of last century, cooled for a few decades and is now warming again. The report says that global sea levels rose about eight inches in the last century and are projected to rise another 1 to 4 feet this century.

As a result, the coastline of Puerto Rico around Rincon is being eroded at a rate of 3.3 feet per year; 56 percent of Puerto Rico’s population lives in coastal communities.

In Louisiana, a state highway used for delivering oil and gas is sinking at the same time sea level rising, resulting in more frequent and more severe flooding during high tides and storms, the report said.

Throughout the region, freshwater supplies from rivers, streams and groundwater sources are at risk from accelerated saltwater intrusions due to higher sea levels.

Not all climate changes are bad, the report concludes. Some, such as a longer growing season in some regions and a longer shipping season on the Great Lakes, “can be beneficial in the short run.”

“But many more are detrimental, largely because our society and its infrastructure were designed for the climate that we have had, not the rapidly changing climate we now have and can expect in the future,” the report says.