



Climate Change Threatens U.S. Cultural and Historic Landmarks

By Lemuel Cacho

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A group of crusading scientists warned that climate change is threatening cultural and historic landmarks across the United States.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), a DC-based nonprofit science advocacy organization, said that U.S. national landmarks face serious risk brought about by extreme changes in weather conditions.

The report, titled 'National Landmarks at Risk,' said that flooding due to rise in sea levels, coastal erosions, heavy rains and wildfires are causing irreparable damage to archaeological resources, historic buildings and cultural landscapes in the United States.

The report, however, was not peer-reviewed, but it identified 30 at-risk locations, which include places like the Statue of Liberty, Jamestown, Virginia., Cape Hatteras, North Carolina and the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Adam Markham, UCS director of climate impacts and co-author of the report, said these sites allow people to trace the history of the U.S.

Markham, citing National Park Service data, said 96 percent of national parks in the U.S. such as Mesa Verde, Bandelier, Cape Hatteras and the Everglades are located in areas where global climate change has been observed in the last 100 years.

He said massive fires have swept through these national parks in the last decade and left irreversible damage to the landscapes and, especially, cultural resources. Markham used Mesa Verde National Park, the Bandelier National Monument and other southwestern sites the resources of which - petroglyphs, pueblo masonry and pottery - were heavily damaged.

J. Marshall Shepherd, an atmospheric scientist from the University of Georgia who is not involved in the report, agrees with UCS's findings. He said the report echoes similar findings from other peer-reviewed studies and is consistent with the problems climate change poses to national landmarks including security installations.

Shepherd pointed out that that majority of the country's naval facilities are below sea level, much like the national treasures included in the report.

Some are, however, unconvinced with the report's findings. Chip Knappenberger of the Cato Institute, a DC-based free market think tank, said the UCS's report has a tendency to suffer from bias by confusing the impact of human-induced climate change with that of natural climate change.

He said that most of the report's examples were in areas where the effects of natural climate change are in the extremes.