The Impacts of Climate Change and the Trump Administration’s Anti-Environmental Agenda in Iowa

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Just in the past three years, the Trump administration has attempted to roll back at least 95 environmental rules and regulations to the detriment of the environment and Americans’ public health. Moreover, the administration refuses to act to mitigate the effects of climate change—instead loosening requirements for polluters emitting the greenhouse gases that fuel the climate crisis. This dangerous agenda is affecting the lives of Americans across all 50 states.

Between 2017 and 2019, Iowa experienced two flooding events and nine severe storms. The damages of each event led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

- Iowa is projected to see worsening summer droughts which would cause adverse effects on the agriculture industry. It ranks second in the United States for total value of agricultural products sold, such as crops and livestock. It also ranks first for pork production and second for soybean and corn production.
- More than 150,000 people live in areas that are at an elevated risk of inland flooding.
  - During spring 2019, Iowa experienced major flooding events along its tributary rivers and the mainstream Mississippi River. This was due to factors such as rapid snow melt, saturated ground, and increased rainfall. Damages from these floods cost the state around $1.6 billion and damaged more than 24,740 homes.

Temperature

- Iowa currently experiences five days of dangerous heat per year, and projections indicate that number will increase more than eightfold to 43 such days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 70,000 people in Iowa who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.
Impacts of the Trump administration’s anti-environmental policies

Climate

• In March 2020, the Trump Administration announced its final rule to overturn Obama-era fuel efficiency standards for cars. These weakened fuel standards will lead to higher greenhouse gas and particulate matter emissions and will cost Iowa residents nearly $78 million annually.

• The Trump administration is attempting to gut climate considerations from major infrastructure projects by eliminating the “cumulative impact” requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act. This is concerning because Iowa’s economy relies heavily on its tourism, agriculture, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.

  • **Tourism**: Iowa’s tourism sector employs nearly 71,000 people and in 2018 generated an economic impact of $8.9 billion.

  • **Agriculture**: The agriculture industry in Iowa creates 1 in every 5 jobs in the state and generates an annual economic impact of $121 billion.

  • **Outdoor recreation**: The outdoor recreation industry in Iowa generates 83,000 direct jobs and more than $8.7 billion in consumer spending.

Air quality

• Mercury emissions in Iowa decreased by more than 89 percent from 2011 to 2017, yet the Trump administration just undermined limits on the amount of mercury and other toxic emissions from power plants.

Water quality

• In 2019, the Trump administration released a series of proposed changes loosening regulations of coal-powered plants and the disposal of coal ash, which can threaten drinking water quality. These deregulations are dangerous for Iowa, where a 2019 report found that 35 out of 39 of the state’s coal ash units are leaking contaminants into groundwater at levels unsafe for human consumption.