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

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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, North Carolina experienced five tropical cyclones, five severe storms, two winter storms, and one freeze. The damages of each event led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• In September 2018, Hurricane Florence struck North Carolina, leading to 42 deaths and estimated damages of $16.7 billion. Florence was the most costly storm in the state’s history and one of the most expensive in the United States. The hurricane flooded 74,563 structures, and more than 5,000 people were reportedly rescued from the flooding.

• North Carolina’s sea level has risen 11 inches since 1950, and forecasts project that it will have risen another 6 inches by 2032. North Carolina is preparing to spend more than $2 billion on solutions for sea level rise.

• Currently, 122,000 North Carolinians are at risk of coastal flooding. By 2050, that number is projected to grow to 166,000.

Temperature

• North Carolina currently experiences 10 days of dangerous heat per year, but projections indicate that number will increase sixfold to 60 such days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 300,000 North Carolinians 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 North Carolinians more than $1 billion 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 North Carolina’s economy relies on its tourism, agriculture, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions and are threatened by the extreme weather events and higher temperatures driven by a changing climate.
  • **Agriculture:** In 2013, agriculture and agribusiness injected $76 billion into the state’s economy and supplied 17 percent of all of the state’s jobs.
  • **Tourism:** In 2017, North Carolina’s tourism sector supported 225,000 jobs in the state and generated $23.9 billion in revenue.
  • **Outdoor recreation:** The outdoor recreation industry in North Carolina generates 260,000 direct jobs and $28 billion in consumer spending.

Air quality
• Mercury emissions in North Carolina decreased from 2011 to 2017 by 70 percent, yet the Trump administration just undermined limits on the amount of mercury and other toxic emissions that are allowed from power plants.

Water quality
• In 2019, the Trump administration released a series of proposed changes loosening regulations on coal-powered plants and the disposal of coal ash, which can threaten drinking water quality. These deregulations are particularly dangerous for North Carolina: In 2014, 39,000 tons of coal ash spilled into water supplies, polluting a reservoir with mercury, cadmium, arsenic, and other heavy metals.