The impacts of climate change and the Trump administration’s anti-environmental agenda in South 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, South Carolina experienced four tropical cyclones, five severe storms, one winter storm, and one freeze. The damages of each event led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian struck South Carolina, tearing through the state with 115 mph winds and peak storm surges reaching higher than 3 feet, costing the state $41 million in disaster-related spending.

• Since 1950, the sea level around the coastal city of Charleston, South Carolina, has risen 10 inches, and forecasts project that by 2030, sea level will have risen another 6 inches. South Carolina is preparing to spend more than $2 billion on solutions for sea level rise.

• Currently, 229,000 people in South Carolina are at risk of coastal flooding. By 2050, that number is expected to rise to 285,000 people.

• Currently, South Carolina has approximately 900 square miles in its 100-year flood plain. By 2050, this number is projected to increase to 1,400 square miles—just greater than the total land area of South Carolina’s largest county.

Temperature

• South Carolina currently experiences approximately 25 days of dangerous heat per year, but projections indicate that number will more than triple to 90 such days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 160,000 people in South Carolina 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 Tennessee residents $554.9 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 South Carolina’s economy relies heavily on its tourism, agriculture, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.

  • **Tourism:** In 2018, tourism in South Carolina generated an economic impact of more than $22 billion, and domestic travel spending directly supported 130,600 jobs.

  • **Agriculture:** The agribusiness industry in South Carolina generates nearly $42 billion annually and directly supports 68,000 jobs.

  • **Outdoor recreation:** The outdoor recreation industry in South Carolina generates 151,000 direct jobs and more than $16 billion in consumer spending.

Air quality

• Mercury emissions in South Carolina decreased by more than 87 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 South Carolina, where there are 12 coal-fired power plants generating 2.2 million tons of coal ash annually, according to 2009 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calculations.