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

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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, Virginia experienced three tropical cyclones, six 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 2018 Hurricane Michael struck Virginia and surrounding regions, leaving 20,000 Virginians without power and causing more than $25 million in damage across the Eastern Seaboard.

• Since 1950, the sea level around Hampton Roads, Virginia, has risen by more than 14 inches and is projected to rise another 6 inches by 2030. Virginia is planning to spend more than $4 billion on solutions for sea level rise.

• The Hampton Roads area is the second-largest population center at risk from sea level rise in the United States.

• Currently, 164,000 people in Virginia are at risk of coastal flooding. By 2050, that number is projected to nearly double to 301,000.

• Currently, Virginia has 450 square miles in its 100-year flood plain. By 2050, this number is projected to increase to 600 square miles—nearly 10 times the total area of its capital city, Richmond.
Temperature
• Virginia currently experiences fewer than 10 days of dangerous heat per year, but
  projections indicate that number will increase fourfold to more than 40 such days
  per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 160,000 people in
  Virginia 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 Virginia
  residents $587.7 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 Virginia’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 2017, Virginia’s tourism sector employed nearly 232,000 people
    and generated an economic impact of $25 billion.

  • **Agriculture:** The agriculture industry in Virginia employs nearly 334,000
    people and generates an economic impact of $70 billion annually.

  • **Outdoor recreation:** The outdoor recreation industry in Virginia generates
    197,000 direct jobs and nearly $22 billion in consumer spending.

Air quality
• Mercury emissions in Virginia decreased by more than 71 percent from 2011 to
  2017, 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 dangerous for Virginia:
  According to a 2014 report, there are 30 coal ash ponds in the state and 2.4 million
  pounds of coal ash generated annually.