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

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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, Illinois experienced two floods and 10 severe storms. The damages of each event led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• In 2019, flooding cost Illinois and the Midwest a total of $6.2 billion in damage. The flooding was the state’s worst in more than 25 years, affecting 1.4 million Illinois residents and causing more than $69 million in direct losses.

• By 2050, Illinois is projected to see a 40 percent increase in its index of the severity of widespread drought.

• In Illinois, more than 380,000 people live in areas at an elevated risk of inland flooding.

• In 2018, Illinois experienced 64 tornadoes, the fourth-highest number in the United States.

Temperature

• Illinois currently averages five days per year of heat exceeding dangerous levels, but projections indicate that number will increase tenfold to nearly 50 days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 310,000 people in Illinois who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.

• Peoria, Illinois, is the 22nd fastest-warming city in the United States.
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 Illinois residents $557 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 Illinois’ economy relies heavily on its agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.

  • **Agriculture:** Agriculture is the top industry in Illinois in terms of economic impact, contributing nearly $9 billion to the state’s economy annually. The food and fiber sector employs 1.5 million Illinois workers.

  • **Tourism:** In 2018, tourism in Illinois generated nearly $10 billion in economic impact and supported more than 342,300 jobs.

  • **Outdoor recreation:** The outdoor recreation industry in Illinois generates 200,000 direct jobs and nearly $25 billion in consumer spending.

Toxics

• In 2020, the Trump administration proposed cutting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) budget by more than one-quarter and the Superfund program by more than $100 million. Illinois has 55 superfund sites—contaminated former industry sites managed by the EPA—the ninth-highest number in the nation. Exposure to contamination from toxic sites can lead to adverse health effects such as cancer and birth defects.

Air quality

• Mercury emissions in Illinois decreased by nearly 80 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 of coal-powered plants and the disposal of coal ash, which can threaten drinking water quality. These deregulations are dangerous for Illinois, which has the highest number of leaking coal ash sites in the country. A report found that 22 out of 24 of Illinois’ coal-fired power plants have contaminated groundwater with unsafe levels of toxic pollutants.