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

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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, Kansas experienced two flooding events, seven severe storms, and one drought. The damages of these events led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• Kansas is projected to see worsening summer droughts, which would adversely affect the state’s robust agriculture industry. Agricultural yield is expected to decrease between 2 percent and 12 percent for some crops, including soybean and maize. Kansas ranks in the top five states facing the greatest drought threats in the country.

• More than 130,000 people in Kansas live in areas with an elevated risk of inland flooding.
  • In 2019, floods damaged 11 dams in Kansas and racked up $15 million in infrastructure damages in the state.

• The threat of wildfires in Kansas is expected to quadruple from 2000 to 2050, which places 15 percent of the state’s population at an elevated risk.

Temperature

• Kansas currently experiences 35 days of dangerous heat per year, and projections indicate that number will double to 70 such days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 70,000 people in Kansas who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.
Wichita, Kansas, has seen a seven-day increase in the annual average number of days ideal for mosquito season since 1980, increasing the threat of mosquito-related viruses.

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**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 Kansas’s residents nearly $215 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 Kansas’ economy relies heavily on its tourism, agriculture, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.
  
  - **Tourism**: Kansas’ tourism sector employs more than 96,000 people and, in 2018, generated an economic impact of $11 billion.
  
  - **Agriculture**: The agriculture industry in Kansas creates 245,000 jobs in the state and generates an annual economic impact of $65 billion.
  
  - **Outdoor recreation**: The outdoor recreation industry in Kansas generates 71,000 direct jobs and more than $7.3 billion in consumer spending.

**Air quality**

- Mercury emissions in Kansas 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 Kansas, where 1.3 million tons of coal ash are generated annually. All 13 coal ash ponds in the state are at least 20 years old, and eight of them are more than 30 years old. Older coal ash ponds are more likely to have structural integrity issues and may also lack the lining to prevent chemicals from leaching into groundwater.