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

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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, Washington experienced two major wildfires. The damages of these events led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• Washington faces the third overall drought threat in the United States. By 2050, Washington is projected to see an increase of more than 300 percent in the severity of widespread summer drought.

• Currently, Washington has 150 square miles in its 100-year flood plain. By 2050, this number is projected to double to 300 square miles—more than triple the land area of Seattle.

• Washington’s sea level has risen 4 inches since 1950 and is now rising by about 1 inch every five years.

• In 2019, Washington experienced 1,394 wildfires, burning 169,742 acres and ranking the state sixth for the highest number of acres burned in the United States that year.

• Washington now sees an average of 49,000 more acres burning each year on national forestlands than it did during the 1970s.

• By 2050, Washington is projected to see 18 more high wildfire-potential days. This is concerning because nearly 2.4 million Washington residents, or 36 percent of the state’s population, live in areas at an elevated risk of wildfire.

For citations, please see the web version of this fact sheet.
• With 160,500 properties facing high to extreme wildfire risk, Washington ranks the sixth-highest for wildfire risk in the country.

**Temperature**
• Washington currently averages 5 days per year when heat exceeds dangerous levels, but projections indicate that number will increase to nearly 10 days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 150,000 people in Washington who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.

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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 Washington residents $493.5 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 Washington’s economy relies heavily on its agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.
  • **Agriculture:** Agriculture in Washington generates $10.6 billion and adds 164,000 jobs, making up 12 percent of the state’s total economy.
  • **Tourism:** Tourism in Washington generates $21.4 billion in annual spending and employs 182,700 workers.
  • **Outdoor recreation:** The outdoor recreation industry in Washington generates 201,000 direct jobs and more than $26.2 billion in consumer spending.

**Toxics**
• In 2020, President Donald Trump proposed cutting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s budget by more than one-quarter and the Superfund program by more than $100 million. Washington has 69 Superfund sites, and a study found that within the state, low-income communities contain a disproportionately higher percentage of polluting facilities. Additionally, exposure to contamination from toxic sites can lead to adverse health effects such as cancer and birth defects.

**Air quality**
• Mercury emissions in Washington decreased by nearly 73 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.