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

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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, Rhode Island experienced two severe winter storms. The damages of these events led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• Heat wave days are expected quadruple by 2050 in Rhode Island, from an average of 10 days per year to 40 days per year.

• In March 2010, Rhode Island’s temperatures were 5.5 degrees Fahrenheit higher than normal, making it the warmest year on record. The same month, the state recorded 16 inches of rain, four times that of normal levels, which led to extreme flooding throughout the state.

Temperature

• Rhode Island currently averages three days per year when heat exceeds dangerous levels, but projections indicate that number will quadruple to 12 days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the more than 25,000 people in Rhode Island who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.

• By 2100, Rhode Island’s summer temperatures will increase by 9.1 degrees Fahrenheit, resembling current temperatures in Deerfield Beach, Florida.

• From 1980 to 1989, Rhode Island witnessed, on average, 97 days per year that were ideal for mosquitoes. Since 2006, the mosquito-breeding season has grown to 113 days per year, increasing the threat of mosquito-borne diseases.
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 Rhode Island residents $35.7 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 Rhode Island’s economy relies heavily on its agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.

  • Agriculture: With 68,000 acres of farmland across the state, agriculture in Rhode Island generates an economic impact of more than $268 million annually.

  • Tourism: In 2018, visitors generated nearly $811 million in state and local tax revenue and supported more than 86,000 jobs.

  • Outdoor recreation: The outdoor recreation industry in Rhode Island generates 37,000 direct jobs and more than $4 billion in consumer spending.

Air quality

• Since 2017, the Trump administration has reversed or is in the process of reversing 27 air pollution and emission regulations. This is especially concerning because the American Lung Association gave an F grade for air quality to three counties in Rhode Island in 2019, affecting about 87 percent of the population. The increased levels of ozone and particulate matter in the state are especially concerning for the more than 100,000 residents in Rhode Island with asthma and 55,000 adults with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Water quality

• Since 2019, the Trump administration has been in the process of weakening legislation regarding lead pipes. The proposed legislation gives companies twice as much time to remove lead pipes in systems testing for high lead levels. This is especially concerning in Rhode Island because of the alarming exposure rates in younger children. With only a few hundred of the state’s 28,000 private-side lead lines being replaced annually, this legislation will only continue to cause damaging health effects.