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

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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, South Dakota experienced one severe flood and one intense drought. The damages of these events led to losses of at least $1 billion.

Impacts of climate change

Extreme weather

• In 2019, South Dakota experienced 346 wildfires, which burned 2,261 acres.

• By 2050, the severity of drought in South Dakota is expected to increase by 75 percent. This is concerning because South Dakota is ranked as one of the top three least-prepared states against drought in the country.

• 45,000 people in South Dakota live in areas with an elevated risk of inland flooding. Since 1950, South Dakota has seen a 50 percent increase in heavy downpour days.

• In September 2019, 10 to 13.5 inches of rain in a 48-hour period caused severe flooding throughout South Dakota. Unusual flooding has led to increased concern among farmers because the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported in 2019 that weather conditions prevented the usage of 4 million acres of farmland.

Temperature

• South Dakota currently averages 10 heat wave days per year, but projections indicate that number will increase fivefold to nearly 35 days per year by 2050. This endangers the lives of the nearly 25,000 people living in South Dakota who are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.
• From 1980 and 1989, South Dakota experienced an average of 59 days per year ideal for mosquitoes. Since 2006, the mosquito-breeding season has grown to 78 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 South Dakota residents $32 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 South Dakota’s economy relies heavily on its agriculture, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries—all of which are highly dependent on climate and weather conditions.
  • Agriculture: In 2019, South Dakota managed more than 43 million acres of farm and ranchland, which generated $21 million in economic impact.
  • Tourism: In 2019, the tourism industry generated an economic impact of $308 million in state and local taxes and supported more than 55,000 workers.
  • Outdoor recreation: The outdoor recreation industry in South Dakota generates 48,000 direct jobs and $4.7 billion in consumer spending.

Air quality
• Mercury emissions in South Dakota decreased by nearly 93 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 South Dakota, which generates 97,300 tons of coal ash annually. South Dakota’s Big Stone Plant has been tested for concerningly high levels of arsenic, lead, boron, and sulfate.