



A DIRE CLIMATE FORECAST

The federal government in late November released a long-awaited report with an unmistakable message: The impact of climate change, from deadly wildfires to increasingly debilitating hurricanes and heat waves, is already battering the United States, and the danger from more such catastrophes is increasing.

The report's authors, who represent numerous federal agencies, say they are more certain than ever that climate change poses a severe threat to Americans' health and pocketbooks, as well as to the country's infrastructure and natural resources. And while it avoids policy recommendations, the report's sense of urgency and alarm stand in stark contrast to the lack of any apparent plan from President Trump to tackle the problems, which, according to the government he runs, are increasingly dire.

The congressionally mandated document - the first of its kind issued during the Trump administration - details how climate-fueled disasters and other types of worrying changes are becoming more commonplace throughout the country and how much worse they could become in the absence of efforts to combat global warming.

Already, western mountain ranges are retaining much less snow throughout the year, threatening water supplies below them. Coral reefs in the Caribbean, Hawaii, Florida and the U.S. Pacific territories are experiencing severe bleaching events. Wildfires are devouring ever-larger areas during longer fire seasons. And the country's sole Arctic state, Alaska, is seeing a staggering rate of warming that has upended its ecosystems, from once ice-clogged coastlines to increasingly thawing permafrost tundras.

The National Climate Assessment's publication marks the government's fourth comprehensive look at climate-change impacts on the United States since 2000. The last came in 2014. Produced by 13 federal departments and agencies and overseen by the U.S. Global Change Research Program, the report stretches well over 1,000 pages and draws more definitive, and in some cases more startling, conclusions than earlier versions.

The authors argue that global warming "is transforming where and how we live, and presents growing challenges to human health and quality of life, the economy, and the natural systems that support us." And they conclude that humans must act aggressively to adapt to current impacts and mitigate future catastrophes "to avoid substantial damages to the U.S. economy, environment, and human health and well-being over the coming decades."

"The impacts we've seen the last 15 years have continued to get stronger, and that will only continue," said Gary Yohe, a professor of economics and environmental studies at Wesleyan University, who served on a National Academy of Sciences panel that reviewed the report. "We have wasted 15 years of response time. If we waste another five years of response time, the story gets worse. The longer you wait, the faster you have to respond and the more expensive it will be."

That urgency is at odds with the stance of the Trump administration, which has rolled back several Obama-era environmental regulations and incentivized the production of fossil fuels. Trump also has said he plans to withdraw the nation from the Paris climate accord and questioned the science of climate change just last month, saying on CBS's 60 Minutes that "I don't know that it's man-made" and that the

warming trend "could very well go back."

Furthermore, as the Northeast faced a cold spell this week, Trump tweeted, "Whatever happened to Global Warming?" This shows a misunderstanding that climate scientists have repeatedly tried to correct - a confusion between daily weather fluctuations and long-term climate trends.

(By Brady Dennis and Chris Mooney - Philadelphia Inquirer - 11/25/18)



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