Report-in-Brief

Fifth National Climate Assessment

U.S. Global Change Research Program

Full report available online at: nca2023.globalchange.gov

Cover image

Two volunteers help demonstrate and install solar panels in Highland Park, Michigan, in May 2021. The event was hosted by the local nonprofit Soulardarity, which teaches local residents about solar power, installs solar-powered streetlights that also provide wireless internet access, and helps local communities build a just and equitable energy system. Adopting energy storage with decentralized solutions, such as microgrids or off-grid systems, can promote energy equity in overburdened communities. Photo credit: Nick Hagen.

Fifth National Climate Assessment: Report-in-Brief

U.S. Global Change Research Program

The Fifth National Climate Assessment is the US Government's preeminent report on climate change impacts, risks, and responses. It is a congressionally mandated interagency effort that provides the scientific foundation to support informed decision-making across the United States.

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Startlement

by Ada Limón, 24th Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress

It is a forgotten pleasure, the pleasure
of the unexpected blue-bellied lizard

skittering off his sun spot rock, the flicker
of an unknown bird by the bus stop.

To think, perhaps, we are not distinguishable
and therefore no loneliness can exist here.

Species to species in the same blue air, smoke—
wing flutter buzzing, a car horn coming.

So many unknown languages, to think we have
only honored this strange human tongue.

If you sit by the riverside, you see a culmination
of all things upstream. We know now,

we were never at the circle's center, instead
all around us something is living or trying to live.

The world says, What we are becoming, we are
becoming together.

The world says, One type of dream has ended
and another has just begun.

The world says, Once we were separate,
and now we must move in unison.

A poem written for the Fifth National Climate Assessment.
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Margaret Plumley

About This Report

The Global Change Research Act of 1990[1] mandates that the US Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) deliver a report to Congress and the President not less frequently than every four years that "integrates, evaluates, and interprets the findings of the Program and discusses the scientific uncertainties associated with such findings; analyzes the effects of global change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity; and analyzes current trends in global change, both human-induced and natural, and projects major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years."

The Fifth National Climate Assessment (NCA5) fulfills that mandate by delivery of this Assessment and provides the scientific foundation to support informed decision-making across the United States. By design, much of the development of NCA5 built upon the approaches and processes used to create the Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4),[2] with a goal of continuously advancing an inclusive, diverse, and sustained process for assessing and communicating scientific knowledge on the impacts, risks, and vulnerabilities associated with a changing global climate (App. 1).

The findings in this report are based on a comprehensive review and assessment of information sources determined to meet the standards and documentation required under the Information Quality Act and the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (App. 2), including peer-reviewed literature, other literature, Indigenous Knowledge, other expert and local knowledge, and climate data processed and prepared for authors by NOAA's Technical Support Unit (TSU; see Guide to the Report section below and App. 3).

NCA5 was thoroughly reviewed by Federal Government experts, external experts, and the public multiple times throughout the report development process. An expert external review was performed by an ad hoc committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.[3] Additional information on the development of this Assessment can be found in Appendix 1: Assessment Development Process.

Guide to the Report

Intended Audience

The products of the US Global Change Research Program are designed to assist the Nation and the world in understanding, assessing, predicting, and responding to human-induced and natural processes of global change. National Climate Assessments synthesize scientific information and evaluate the state of the science on climate change to inform a broad audience of decision-makers across the country. These decision-makers include national, state, local, and Tribal governments, city planners, public health officials, adaptation specialists, nurses, farmers, business owners, community organizers, researchers, water utilities, ecosystem managers, educators, students, the media, and concerned individuals who need to make timely decisions about the climate impacts they are facing. National Climate Assessments make policy-neutral and policy-relevant information accessible and actionable by relying on the expert judgment of the report authors to determine what topics are included in each chapter, to describe what we know and where uncertainties remain, and to clearly communicate the risks, responses, and opportunities associated with climate change.

Categories of Chapters and Their Scope

Overview

The Overview chapter presents the major findings of the report alongside highlights drawn from across NCA5. This chapter provides a synthesis of material from the underlying report chapters.

Physical Science Chapters

The Climate Trends and Earth Systems Processes chapters (Chs. 2, 3) assess how climate change affects physical Earth systems, with a focus on the United States, including observations and projections of climate change and discussion of how methods to understand changes in Earth systems have advanced since NCA4, which was released in November 2018.

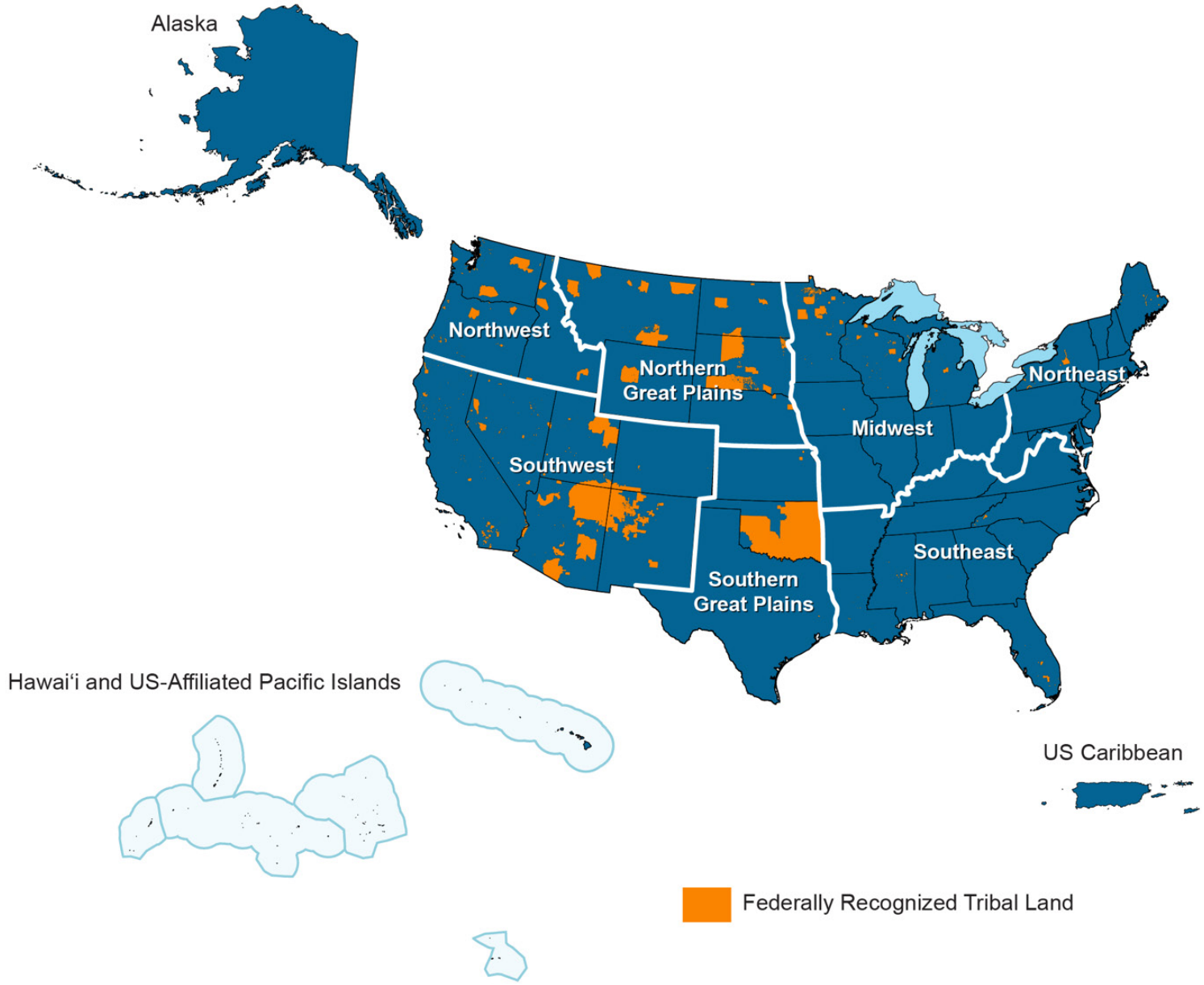
National Topic Chapters

The national topic chapters (Chs. 4–20) summarize current and future risks related to climate change and what can be done to reduce those risks for a variety of societal and economic sectors of the United States. This Assessment builds on the range of topics covered in NCA4 by adding two new chapters: Economics (Ch. 19) and Social Systems and Justice (Ch. 20).

Regional Chapters

The regional chapters (Chs. 21–30) assess current and future risks posed by climate change to each of the 10 NCA5 regions (Figure 1). These chapters provide detailed discussions of region-specific challenges, opportunities, and success stories for managing risks and impacts.

Fifth National Climate Assessment Regions



The Fifth National Climate Assessment explores subnational climate change risks, impacts, and responses in each of the 10 regions shown.

Figure 1. The map shows the 10 US regions that correspond to the 10 regional chapters of the report (Chs. 21–30). The same regional boundaries are used in text and figures throughout the Assessment to provide regional-scale information where appropriate. Adapted from USGCRP 2018.[2]

Response Chapters

The response chapters (Ch. 31: Adaptation and Ch. 32: Mitigation) assess the science of adapting to a changing climate, emissions reductions, and other efforts that together describe the US's existing and potential response to climate change, including benefits, trade-offs, targets, limitations, and best practices. The National Climate Assessment does not evaluate or recommend specific adaptation or mitigation policies.

Focus on... Features

To better address critical and timely topics with themes that span the Assessment chapters, NCA5 pioneered a new feature: a set of five "Focus on..." boxes on important cross-cutting issues. High-priority topics were nominated by authors during early development of the report; final topics were approved for inclusion by the Federal Steering Committee. Authors from multiple NCA5 chapters assessed literature, coordinated cross-report discussions, and contributed text and figures to these features.

Appendices

The first three appendices outline the development process, legal standards of scientific quality for assessing scientific information, and the climate scenarios and datasets used to support author assessment. Appendix 4 explores indicators of observed climate-related changes that support findings across NCA5. Appendix 5 is a glossary defining select terms in the context of how they are typically used across the Assessment.

Glossary of Terms

Throughout the online version of the report, definitions of terms in the glossary (App. 5) are accessible via an interactive hover-over feature where text appears with a dotted underline. Any usage of a term that differs from the glossary definition is explicitly defined within chapter text.

Artwork and Gallery

The NCA5 Art × Climate gallery showcases the work of visual artists across the country. These artworks and their accompanying descriptions speak to the causes and impacts of climate change, as well as the ways that people are responding. Submissions of visual art were collected through a public call, and finalists were selected by a jury panel of experts (App. 1). Artworks that appear throughout the PDF version of the report are denoted by a teal border. The artworks and associated artists' statements are not Assessment products and do not necessarily represent the views of the authors or USGCRP.

Structure and Format of Chapter Content

Key Messages

Chapters are centered around Key Messages, which are conclusions based on authors' expert judgment and synthesis of the assessed information sources. Many Key Messages present findings in the context of risks to natural and/or human systems. The text supporting each Key Message provides evidence, discusses implications, identifies intersections between systems or hazards, and presents examples of paths to greater resilience.

Confidence and Likelihood

Evaluating confidence and likelihood is a key part of the assessment process. As in previous Assessments, NCA5 uses specific terms to convey information about scientific confidence and certainty associated with important findings, observations, and projections. Chapter authors use a range of calibrated terms adopted from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report[4] to describe the levels of **confidence** and, where appropriate, the assessment of **likelihood** associated with the statements in their Key Messages (Tables 1, 2).

- **Confidence** in a finding is based on the type, amount, quality, strength, and consistency of evidence; the skill, range, and consistency of methods to detect, evaluate, attribute, and interpret climate trends; and the degree of agreement across scientific information sources.
- **Likelihood** of a finding is based on measures of certainty expressed probabilistically; in other words, based on statistical analysis of observed or projected results or on the authors' expert judgment based on their assessment across scientific information sources.

These calibrated terms are presented in parentheses and set in *italics* after relevant phrases or sentences in the Key Messages. Statements in Key Messages that do not include either likelihood or confidence terms are intended as statements of fact. In some cases, calibrated likelihood assessments are also included in italics in the narrative text supporting Key Messages.

Table 1. Calibrated Language for Confidence Assessment

The NCA5 calibrated uncertainty language listed here and in Table 2 follows standards developed for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report. The confidence levels listed below are used to reflect the quantity, quality, and degree of agreement across the evidence base underpinning an assessment finding. Source: Mastrandrea et al. 2011[4]

Confidence Level	Definition
Very high	• Strong evidence (established theory, multiple sources, well-documented and accepted methods, etc.) • High consensus
High	• Moderate evidence (several sources, some consistency, methods vary and/or documentation limited, etc.) • Medium consensus
Medium	• Suggestive evidence (a few sources, limited consistency, methods emerging, etc.) • Competing schools of thought
Low	• Inconclusive evidence (limited sources, extrapolations, inconsistent findings, poor documentation and/or methods not tested, etc.) • Disagreement or lack of opinions among experts

Table 2. Calibrated Language for Likelihood Assessment

The calibrated uncertainty terms below are used to express a probabilistic assessment across the evidence base of the likelihood of observed or projected results. Source: Mastrandrea et al. 2011.[4]

Likelihood Assessment	Numeric Probability of Outcome
Virtually certain	99%–100%
Very likely	90%–100%
Likely	66%–100%
As likely as not	33%–66%
Unlikely	0%–33%
Very unlikely	0%–10%
Exceptionally unlikely	0%–1%

Traceable Accounts

Each chapter concludes with a section entitled Traceable Accounts, which provides information on the overall process used to develop the chapter as well as a separate Traceable Account section for each Key Message. These Traceable Accounts describe the supporting evidence behind each Key Message, the process and rationale authors used in reaching their conclusions, and the author team's expert assessment of the confidence in and, where applicable, likelihood of these conclusions. As such, Traceable Accounts provide information about the state of the science, document sources of uncertainty, identify research gaps, and allow traceability to data and resources.

Additional information on Key Messages and Traceable Accounts can be found in the Front Matter for NCA4.[2]

Figures and Tables

Each figure in the report includes a figure number and title, a figure intent, and a caption. The figure title (embedded at the top of the figure) briefly describes what is shown in the figure, the figure intent (shown below the figure) provides a key takeaway message of the figure, and the caption (shown below the figure intent) provides additional information on how to interpret the elements of the figure. Where original figures have been developed for the Assessment, the figure credit listed at the end of the caption notes the affiliation of the NCA5 authors or contributors responsible for the development of the figure.

Each figure and some tables are accompanied by a metadata survey, which can be accessed in the online version of the report by clicking on the eyeball icon above the figure or table (see the table below for explanations of additional icons used throughout the report). The metadata survey describes data sources, figure or table development methods, copyright information, and other important documentation. All figures that appear in the online version of the report are also accompanied by alternative text for screen readers.

Icon	Description
	Share a chapter, chapter section, figure, table, box, or other content element
	Access metadata for a table or figure
	Download a figure
	Access additional information about a figure, table, or box in the Climate Resilience Toolkit
	Access additional information about a figure, table, or box in the NCA5 Atlas

Metrics and Definitions Used Across the Report

Economic Estimates

Unless otherwise noted, economic estimates in this report have been converted to 2022 US dollars using the US Bureau of Economic Analysis's Implicit Price Deflators for Gross Domestic Product, Table 1.1.9.[12] Where documented in the underlying literature, discount rates in specific estimates in this Assessment are noted next to those projections.

Use of Scenarios

Climate modeling experts develop global climate projections for a range of realistic futures. These projections capture variables such as the relationship between human behavior, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the Earth system processes and responses to changes in concentration of GHGs in our atmosphere and oceans, and resulting impacts, including temperature change and sea level rise. Because there are

uncertainties inherent in all of these factors—especially human behavior and the choices that determine emissions levels—the resulting range of projections are not predictions but instead reflect multiple potential pathways for our collective future (Ch. 2). The scenarios do not have relative likelihoods assigned and are all plausible futures.

NCA5 authors were advised to assess the full range of scenarios available. While use of specific scenarios was not mandated across the report, authors were encouraged to report impacts under more than one scenario in order to describe a range of possible outcomes. Few climate projections extend past 2100, limiting the information available for authors to evaluate trends 100 years into the future (Box A3.1).

To help communicate author findings effectively, the naming convention with simplified summary descriptions shown in Table 3 is used across the report to describe the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs) and Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) used in Phases 5 and 6 of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP5 and CMIP6), respectively. Scenarios other than those described in Table 3 are referred to by name.

Table 3. Descriptive Terms for Common Climate Scenarios Used in NCA5

This table summarizes the terms used to describe scenarios from Phases 5 and 6 of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP5 and CMIP6). This standardized terminology is used throughout the report when discussing scenarios to facilitate easier comparison by readers. Sources: Arias et al. 2021; Gidden et al. 2019; Meinshausen et al. 2020; O'Neil et al. 2017; Riahi et al. 2017; van Vuuren et al. 2011 [5,6,7,8,9,10]

Climate Scenario Descriptor	CMIP5	CMIP6	Summary
Very High Scenario	RCP8.5	SSP5-8.5	Among the scenarios described here, these reflect the highest range of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions and no mitigation. Total annual global CO_2 emissions in 2100 are quadruple emissions in 2000 (RCP8.5 and SSP5-8.5). Population growth in 2100 doubles from 2000 in RCP8.5, but the SSP5-8.5 population remains relatively stable, with approximately 13% growth in 2100 from 2005. Both scenarios include fossil fuel development, but SSP5-8.5 has higher economic growth than RCP8.5.
High Scenario	RCP6.0	SSP3-7.0	These scenarios reflect high CO_2 emissions with limited (RCP6.0) or no (SSP3-7.0) mitigation. Total annual CO_2 emissions in 2100 are more than 75% higher than in 2000 in RCP6.0, and triple that of 2000 emissions in SSP3-7.0. Compared to 2000, both scenarios include expanded fossil fuel development and population growth but slow economic growth.
Intermediate Scenario	RCP4.5	SSP2-4.5	These scenarios reflect reductions in CO_2 emissions from current levels. Total annual CO_2 emissions in 2100 are 46% (RCP4.5) and 67% (SSP2-4.5) less than the year 2000. Mitigation efforts include low-carbon technology (SSP2-4.5) and expanded renewable energy compared to 2000 (RCP 4.5).
Low Scenario	RCP2.6	SSP1-2.6	These scenarios reflect rapidly declining and net-negative CO_2 emissions (with CO_2 removal from the atmosphere exceeding human-caused emissions) by 2100. Mitigation efforts include increased renewable energy. Adaptive capacity reflects effective governance institutions, reduced inequality, and international cooperation (SSP1-2.6).
Very Low Scenario	n/a	SSP1-1.9	Among the scenarios described here, SSP1-1.9 reflects the greatest reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions and substantial CO_2 removal from the atmosphere. Total annual CO_2 emissions have a steeper decline than SSP1-2.6, dropping by more than 145% by 2100 compared to 2000. Mitigation efforts include a shift to nuclear and renewable energy and sustainable land use. Adaptive capacity benefits from international cooperation and sharing of technology.

Box 1. Global Warming Levels Measure How Much the Planet Has Warmed

In this report, the term "global warming level" is used to describe the level of global temperature increase relative to preindustrial temperatures conditions (the 1850–1900 average). A given global warming level is reached when global annual warming, defined by the average temperature over multiple decades, exceeds a specified level. Although this Assessment primarily reports temperatures in Fahrenheit, global warming levels are usually reported and more widely known in degrees Celsius. For example, the Paris Agreement set a goal of holding the increase in global average temperature to "well below" 2°C (3.6°F) and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C (2.7°F) above preindustrial levels. Thus, global warming levels are typically defined in this report with their Celsius value first and their Fahrenheit value in parentheses.

Internal variability in the climate system means that even as the world rapidly warms, some years will be hotter and some years will be cooler than the multidecadal average. This annual variability means that even if a single year occurs in which Earth is 1.5°C (2.7°F) hotter than the preindustrial average, the 1.5°C global warming level has not necessarily been reached. Conversely, such variability also means that climate impacts projected to occur at a given global warming level may occur earlier than expected, before that level is reached in terms of multidecadal average temperatures. In addition, temperatures in some parts of the world are warmer or cooler than the global average. For example, a global warming level of 2°C (3.6°F) would result in regional temperatures in parts of the United States that are more than 2°C above preindustrial levels (Figure 1.14).

Global warming levels are not thresholds; they do not represent "safe" levels of warming, nor does exceeding a particular global warming level mean that it is too late to slow or halt many of the impacts of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Continued action to reduce emissions can avoid the worst impacts of climate change and provide valuable benefits to society and ecosystems no matter what global warming level is reached or exceeded. At regional or local scales, climate impacts, such as increased risks of extreme weather, depend on changes to underlying drivers like local temperatures and rainfall. These changes in turn depend on the level of global warming. The level of global warming depends on future emissions, which depend on human actions. This means that future projections are conditional: when or if Earth reaches a particular level of warming is largely dependent on human choices.

To support decision-making related to future sea level risks, a set of five specific trajectories were selected to cover a range of plausible future global mean sea level conditions. Table 4 displays the naming convention used by NCA5 authors to describe the range of possible rise in global and US sea levels. Although the sea level rise scenarios in Table 4 were developed using global warming levels derived from the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways and there are similarities in the naming conventions (e.g., low, intermediate, high), they have distinct definitions and are used in different ways from the climate scenarios shown in Table 3 (App. 3).[11]

Additional information on scenarios can be found in the Overview and in Appendix 3.

Table 4. Descriptive Terms for Common Sea Level Rise Scenarios Used in NCA5

Future global mean sea level rise and sea level rise along United States coastline are shown for five scenarios in feet (and meters), relative to a 2000 baseline. The US values shown in the right half of the table are averaged across the US coastal regions, including the contiguous US, Alaska, Hawai'i and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands, and the US Caribbean. The national values shown in the table differ substantially from regional values. For example, sea level rise is higher in the Gulf Coast and lower or even negative in some parts of Alaska. In the next 30 years (2020–2050), sea level along the contiguous US coasts is expected to rise 0.92 feet (0.28 m), the same amount of sea level rise observed over the last 100 years (1920–2020). See Chapter 9 for regional sea level information. Adapted from Sweet et al. 2022.[11]

Sea Level Rise Scenario Descriptor	Global Mean Sea Level			United States		
Year	2050	2100	2150	2050	2100	2150
Low	0.49 (0.15)	0.98 (0.3)	1.31 (0.4)	0.59 (0.18)	0.98 (0.3)	1.64 (0.5)
Intermediate-Low	0.66 (0.20)	1.64 (0.5)	2.62 (0.8)	0.75 (0.23)	1.64 (0.5)	2.95 (0.9)
Intermediate	0.92 (0.28)	3.28 (1.0)	6.23 (1.9)	0.89 (0.27)	3.28 (1.0)	6.89 (2.1)
Intermediate-High	1.21 (0.37)	4.92 (1.5)	8.86 (2.7)	1.12 (0.34)	4.92 (1.5)	8.86 (2.7)
High	1.41 (0.43)	6.56 (2.0)	12.14 (3.7)	1.38 (0.42)	6.56 (2.0)	12.46 (3.8)

Key Advances Since the Fourth National Climate Assessment

Advances since the publication of the Fourth National Climate Assessment (2017–2018) have led to new understanding of the changing climate system, the resulting impacts on society, and approaches to reduce risks. See Appendix 1 for advances in the development process of NCA5.

Physical Climate Science

Reduced uncertainty: New observations combined with improved modeling provide multiple lines of evidence supporting advances in understanding and projections of climate change. Improved understanding has significantly narrowed the estimated range of global warming expected from a doubling of CO_2 in the atmosphere to 4.5°–7.2°F (2.5°–4.0°C). (KMs 3.2, 3.3)

Improved attribution: Advances have increased confidence in the linkages between many weather disasters and climate change, and scientists can now estimate the role of climate change in some types of extreme events in real time. For example, climate change was estimated to have increased the rainfall of Hurricane Harvey in 2017 by about 15% to 20%. (Ch. 2; Introduction; KMs 2.2, 3.3)

Incorporating socioeconomics: New model projections are based on policy-relevant scenarios that span plausible future social and economic development pathways (Table 3). These scenarios allow for a deeper exploration of the interactions between development and emissions pathways, as well as technology pathways to reach net-zero emissions goals. (KMs 2.3, 3.2, 6.3, 32.2; App. 3)

New models: The latest generation of Earth system models incorporates more detailed simulations of the physical climate system and provides improved understanding of how regional-scale processes will change with warming. (KM 3.3)

Risks and Impacts

Connecting justice: More information is available on disproportionate climate change impacts on overburdened communities, including a better understanding of how climate impacts exacerbate, and are exacerbated by, social inequities. (KMs 4.2, 9.2, 11.2, 12.2, 14.3, 15.2, 16.1, 19.1, 21.3, 26.4, 27.1, 31.2; Introductions in Chs. 16, 17, 20)

Untangling interconnections: Observations and enhanced modeling highlight the compounding and cascading effects of climate change on interconnected food, energy, and water systems. Understanding of how climate change affects national security, sustainable and equitable development, and disaster risk reduction and recovery has improved. (Chs. 17, 18; KMs 4.2, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 12.2, 19.3)

Damages by degrees: Improved understanding of the risks human and environmental systems face under each additional increment of global warming has helped scientists quantify potential damages to health, ecosystems, livelihoods, and the economy (see Box 1). (Ch. 8, Introduction; KM 19.1)

Responses

Sophisticated support: Improved tools, data, and climate projections needed to support adaptation, mitigation, and resilience measures are becoming more widely available, including advancements in quantifying the economic, health, and environmental benefits from climate actions and better documentation of how the benefits and burdens of investments are distributed. (Ch. 4, Introduction; KMs 5.3, 7.3, 11.3, 12.2, 13.2, 31.5, 32.4; Box 17.1)

Understanding people: The social sciences are providing new insights into how people experience climate change and how climate actions are understood, communicated, and implemented. Increased documentation of institutional changes, partnerships, knowledge sharing, and sustainable financing options are supporting climate action at multiple levels of government. (KMs 12.3, 31.4, 31.6; Ch. 20)

Indigenous Knowledge: Growing efforts to integrate Indigenous Knowledge in community adaptation actions build on accumulated knowledge that has enabled Indigenous Peoples to adapt to environmental change for millennia. (KMs 16.3, 25.5, 27.6, 28.2, 29.5, 30.5; Box 27.2)

Real-world examples: More examples of adaptation in practice, such as green infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and changes in governance and financing, are now available. Cities and states that have implemented adaptation actions are sharing best practices and aiding cooperation, and many communities are learning from climate change responses led by Tribal and Indigenous Peoples. (KMs 12.3, 16.3; Ch. 31)

Reporting Suspected Errata

In case of a suspected error in this report, please send an email containing the following information to nca-errata-group@usgcrp.gov:

Your full name
Your organization (if applicable)
Chapter and section (e.g., chapter title, Key Message number, or figure number)
An explanation of your concern

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Chapter 1. Overview: Understanding Risks, Impacts, and Responses

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Tammy West

The Fifth National Climate Assessment documents observed and projected vulnerabilities, risks, and impacts associated with climate change across the United States and provides examples of response actions underway in many communities. This Overview presents highlights from the Assessment, providing summary findings and a synthesis of material from the underlying chapters. Curly brackets indicate cross-references to full chapters (e.g., {Ch. 2}), Key Messages (e.g., {2.1}), figures (e.g., {Figure 32.8}), and other text elements.

How the United States Is Addressing Climate Change

The effects of human-caused climate change are already far-reaching and worsening across every region of the United States. Rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions can limit future warming and associated increases in many risks. Across the country, efforts to adapt to climate change and reduce emissions have expanded since 2018, and US emissions have fallen since peaking in 2007. However, without deeper cuts in global net greenhouse gas emissions and accelerated adaptation efforts, severe climate risks to the United States will continue to grow.

Future climate change impacts depend on choices made today

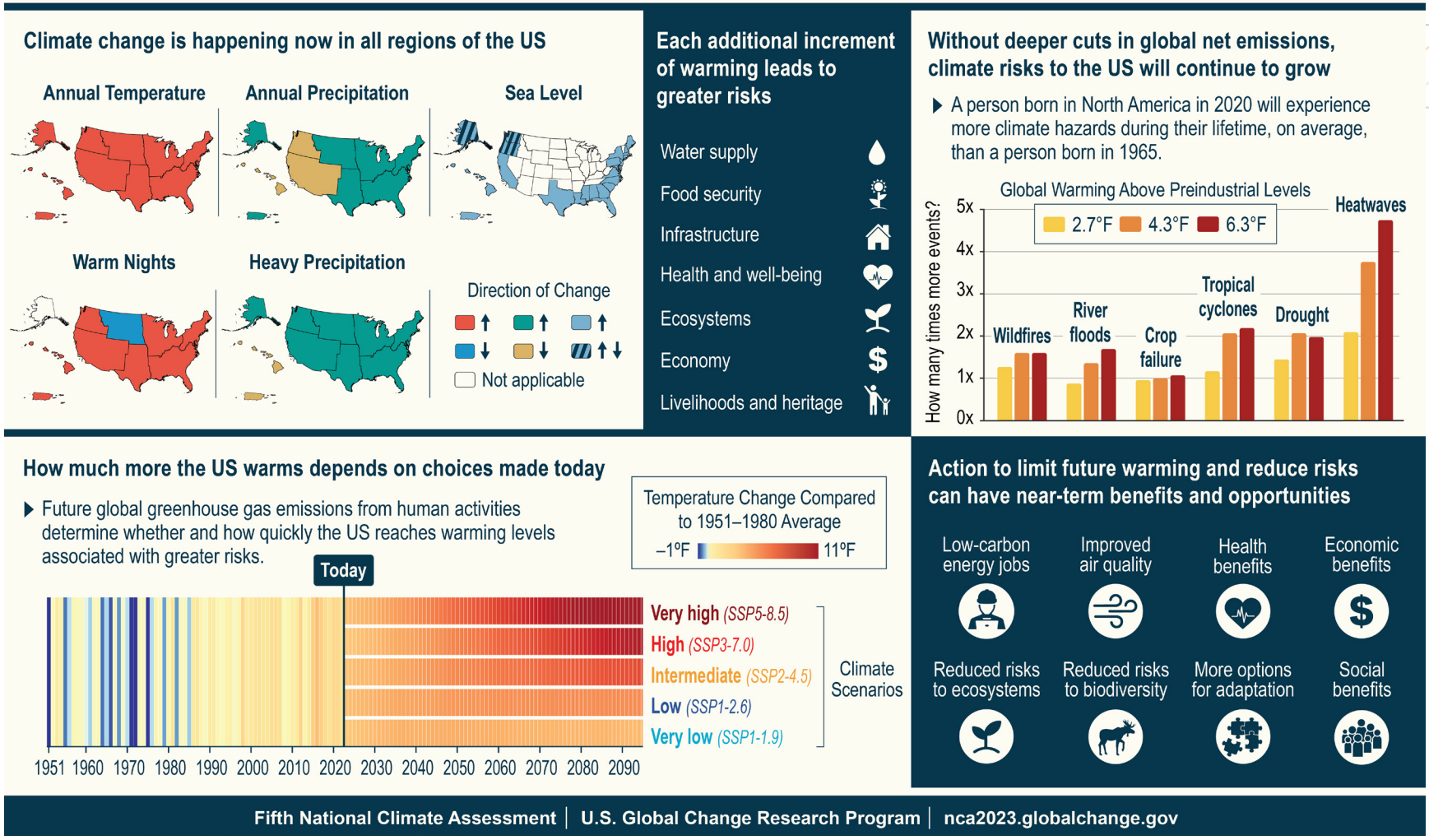
The more the planet warms, the greater the impacts. Without rapid and deep reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, the risks of accelerating sea level rise, intensifying extreme weather, and other harmful climate impacts will continue to grow. Each additional increment of warming is expected to lead to more damage and greater economic losses compared to previous increments of warming, while the risk of catastrophic or unforeseen consequences also increases. {2.3, 19.1}

However, this also means that each increment of warming that the world avoids—through actions that cut emissions or remove carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere—reduces the risks and harmful impacts of climate change. While there are still uncertainties about how the planet will react to rapid warming, the degree to which climate change will continue to worsen is largely in human hands. {2.3, 3.4}

In addition to reducing risks to future generations, rapid emissions cuts are expected to have immediate health and economic benefits (Figure 1.1). At the national scale, the benefits of deep emissions cuts for current and future generations are expected to far outweigh the costs. {2.1, 2.3, 13.3, 14.5, 15.3, 32.4; Ch. 2, Introduction}

Taelyn B.

Climate Change Risks and Opportunities in the US



Climate change presents risks while action to limit warming and reduce risks presents opportunities for the US.

Figure 1.1. (**top left**) Changes in multiple aspects of climate are apparent in every US region. The five maps present observed changes for five temperature, precipitation, and sea level rise metrics: 1) warming is apparent in every region (based on changes in annual average temperature in 2002–2021 compared to the 1901–1960 average for the contiguous United States, Hawai'i, and Puerto Rico and to 1925–1960 for Alaska); 2) the number of warm nights per year (days with minimum temperatures at or above 70°F in 2002–2021 compared to 1901–1960) is increasing everywhere except the Northern Great Plains, where they have decreased, and in Alaska, where nights above 70°F are not common; 3) average annual precipitation is increasing in most regions, except in the Northwest, Southwest, and Hawai'i, where precipitation has decreased (same time periods as annual average temperature); 4) heavy precipitation events are increasing everywhere except Hawai'i and the US Caribbean, where there has been a decrease (trends over the period 1958–2021); and 5) relative sea levels are increasing along much of the US coast except in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, where there is a mix of both increases and decreases (trends over 1990–2020). {2.2, 9.1; Figures 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 2.8}

(**top center**) Every fraction of a degree of additional warming will lead to increasing risks across multiple sectors in the US (see Table 1.2 and "Current and Future Climate Risks to the United States" below). Without rapid, substantial reductions in the greenhouse gases that cause global warming, these climate risks in the US are expected to increase.

(**top right**) People born in North America in 2020, on average, will be exposed to more climate-related hazards compared to people born in 1965. How many more extreme climate events current generations experience compared to previous generations will depend on the level of future warming. {Figure 15.4}

(**bottom left**) This climate stripes chart shows the observed changes in US annual average surface temperature for 1951–2022 and projected changes in temperature for 2023–2095 for five climate scenarios, ranging from a very high scenario, where greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase through most of the century, to a very low scenario, where emissions decline rapidly, reaching net zero by around midcentury (see Figure 1.4 and Table 3 in the Guide to the Report). Each vertical stripe represents the observed or projected change in temperature for a given year compared to the 1951–1980 average; changes are averaged over all 50 states and Puerto Rico but do not include data for the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands and the US Virgin Islands (see also Figure 1.13).

(**bottom right**) Although climate benefits from even the most aggressive emissions cuts may not be detectable before the middle of the century, there are many other potential near-term benefits and opportunities from actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. {2.3, 8.3, 10.3, 13.3, 14.5, 15.3, 19.1, 31.3, 32.4}

Figure credits: (top left, top center, top right, bottom right) USGCRP, USGCRP/ICF, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC; (bottom left) adapted from panel (c) of Figure SPM.1 in IPCC 2023.

Box 1.1. Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience

Throughout this report, three important terms are used to describe the primary options for reducing the risks of climate change:

- **Mitigation**: Measures to reduce the amount and rate of future climate change by reducing emissions of heat-trapping gases (primarily carbon dioxide) or removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.
- **Adaptation**: The process of adjusting to an actual or expected environmental change and its effects in a way that seeks to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.
- **Resilience**: The ability to prepare for threats and hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover rapidly from adverse conditions and disruptions.

James Keul

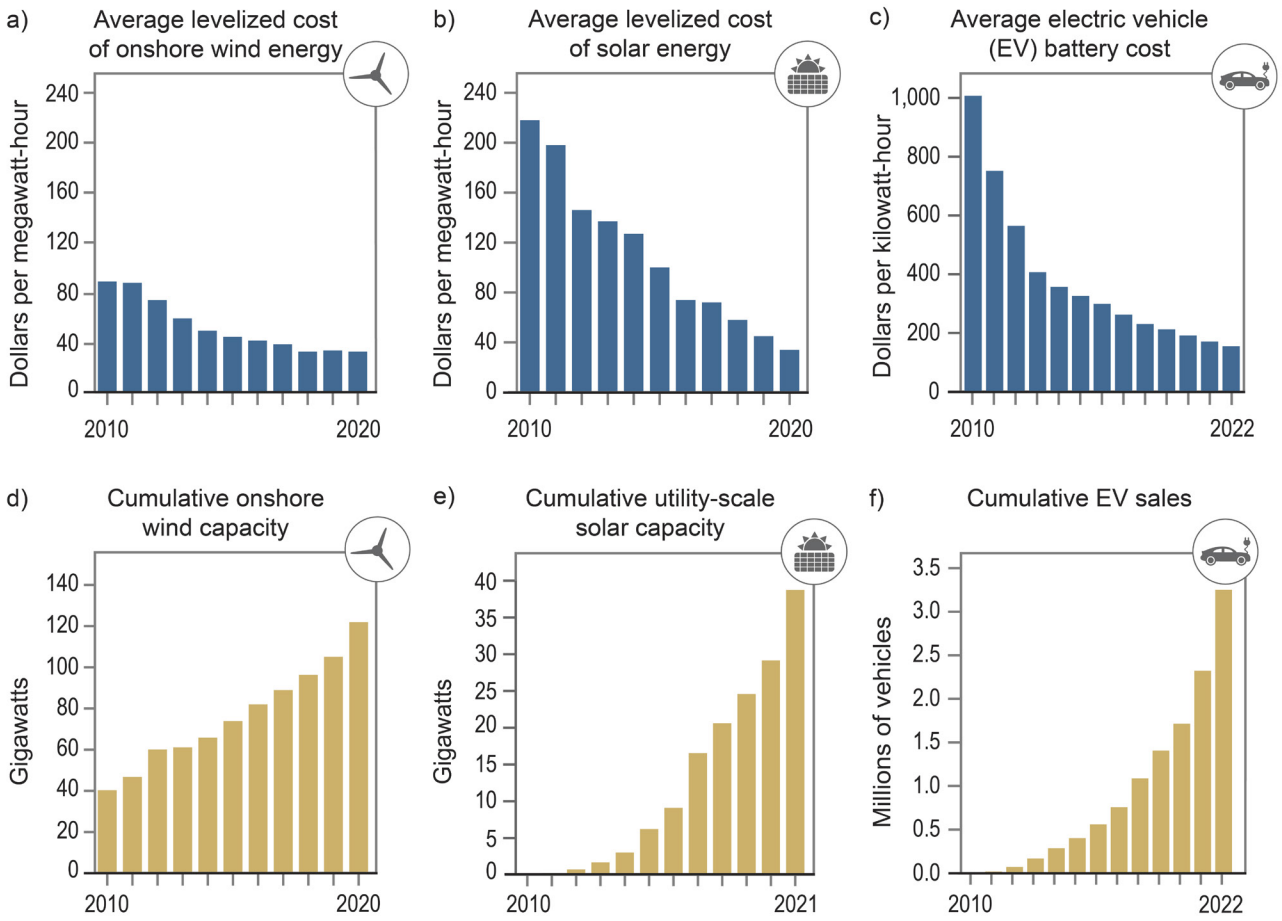
US emissions have decreased, while the economy and population have grown

Annual US greenhouse gas emissions fell 12% between 2005 and 2019. This trend was largely driven by changes in electricity generation: coal use has declined, while the use of natural gas and renewable technologies has increased, leading to a 40% drop in emissions from the electricity sector. Since 2017, the transportation sector has overtaken electricity generation as the largest emitter. {11.1, 13.1, 32.1; Figures 32.1, 32.3}

As US emissions have declined from their peak in 2007, the country has also seen sustained reductions in the amount of energy required for a given quantity of economic activity and the emissions produced per unit of energy consumed. Meanwhile, both population and per capita GDP have continued to grow. {32.1; Figures 32.1, 32.2}

Recent growth in the capacities of wind, solar, and battery storage technologies is supported by rapidly falling costs of zero- and low-carbon energy technologies, which can support even deeper emissions reductions. For example, wind and solar energy costs dropped 70% and 90%, respectively, over the last decade, while 80% of new generation capacity in 2020 came from renewable sources (Figures 1.2, 1.3). {5.3, 12.3, 32.1, 32.2; Figure A4.17}

Across all sectors, innovation is expanding options for reducing energy demand and increasing energy efficiency, moving to zero- and low-carbon electricity and fuels, electrifying energy use in buildings and transportation, and adopting practices that protect and improve natural carbon sinks that remove and store CO_2 from the atmosphere, such as sustainable agricultural and land-management practices. {11.1, 32.2, 32.3; Boxes 32.1, 32.2; Focus on Blue Carbon}



Historical Trends in Unit Costs and Deployment of Low-Carbon Energy Technologies in the United States

Increasing capacities and decreasing costs of low-carbon energy technologies are supporting efforts to further reduce emissions.

Figure 1.2. Costs of onshore wind (**a**), solar photovoltaics (**b**), and electric vehicle (EV) batteries (**c**) have decreased sharply since 2000 (data shown here start in 2010), as the cumulative capacities of wind and solar generation (**d** and **e**) and the cumulative number of EVs sold (**f**) have increased. {Figure 32.8} Figure credit: Electric Power Research Institute, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

Accelerating advances in adaptation can help reduce rising climate risks

As more people face more severe climate impacts, individuals, organizations, companies, communities, and governments are taking advantage of adaptation opportunities that reduce risks. State climate assessments and online climate services portals are providing communities with location- and sector-specific information on climate hazards to support adaptation planning and implementation across the country. New tools, more data, advancements in social and behavioral sciences, and better consideration of practical experiences are facilitating a range of actions (Figure 1.3). {7.3, 12.3, 21.4, 25.4, 31.1, 31.5, 32.5; Table 31.1}

Actions include:

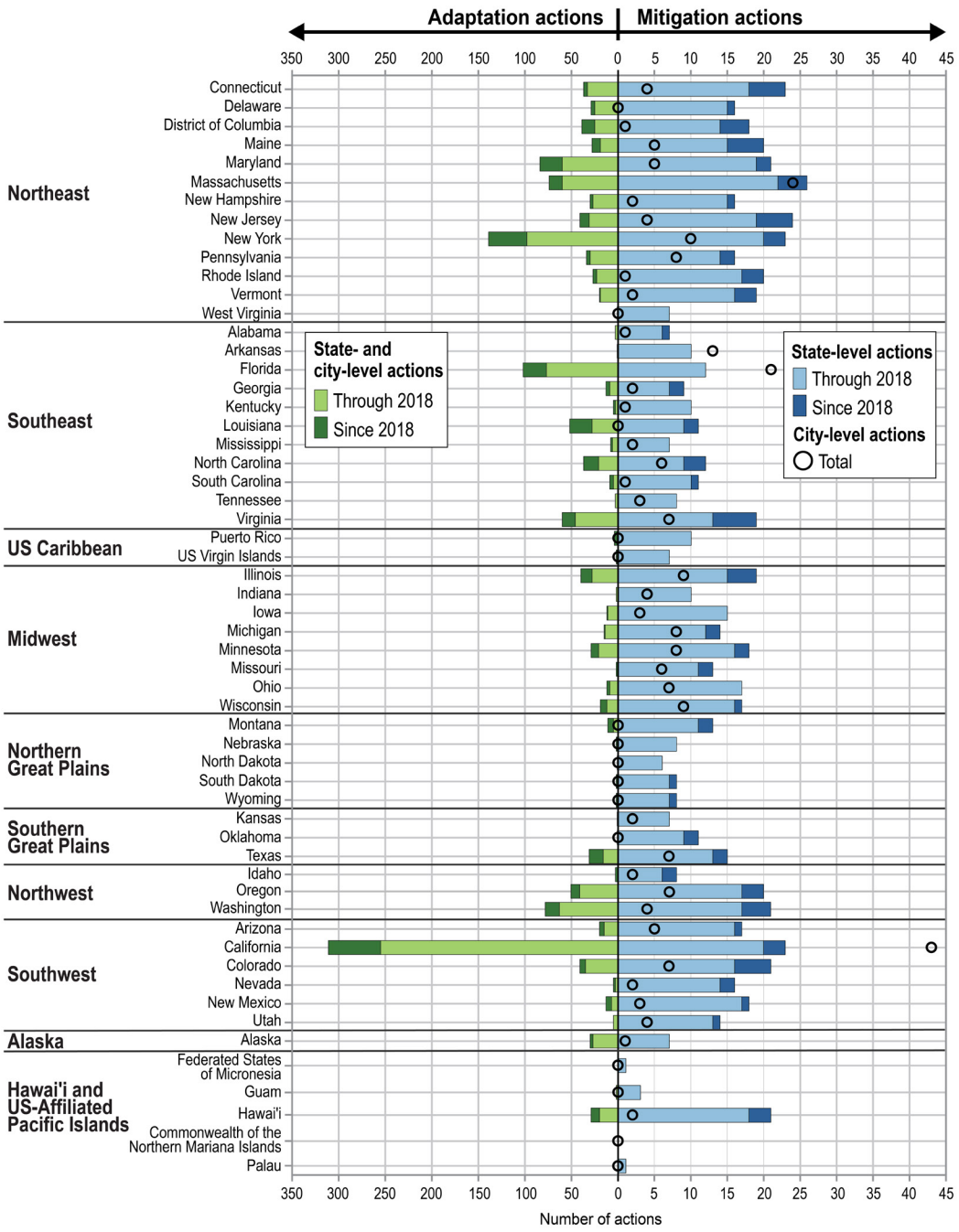
- Implementing nature-based solutions—such as restoring coastal wetlands or oyster reefs—to reduce shoreline erosion {8.3, 9.3, 21.2, 23.5}
- Upgrading stormwater infrastructure to account for heavier rainfall {4.2}
- Applying innovative agricultural practices to manage increasing drought risk {11.1, 22.4, 25.5}
- Assessing climate risks to roads and public transit {13.1}
- Managing vegetation to reduce wildfire risk {5.3}
- Developing urban heat plans to reduce health risks from extreme heat {12.3, 21.1, 28.4}
- Planning relocation from high-risk coastal areas {9.3}

Despite an increase in adaptation actions across the country, current adaptation efforts and investments are insufficient to reduce today's climate-related risks and keep pace with future changes in the climate. Accelerating current efforts and implementing new ones that involve more fundamental shifts in systems and practices can help address current risks and prepare for future impacts (see "Mitigation and adaptation actions can result in systemic, cascading benefits" below). {31.1, 31.3}

Pam DeChellis

Climate action has increased in every region of the US

Efforts to adapt to climate change and reduce net greenhouse gas emissions are underway in every US region and have expanded since 2018 (Figure 1.3; Table 1.1). Many actions can achieve both adaptation and mitigation goals. For example, improved forest- or land-management strategies can both increase carbon storage and protect ecosystems, and expanding renewable energy options can reduce emissions while also improving resilience. {31.1, 32.5}



US Adaptation and Mitigation Actions

Cities and states are acting on climate change, with a substantial increase in new activities underway since 2018.

Figure 1.3. Since 2018, city- and state-level adaptation plans and actions (**green bars**, left) increased by 32%, complemented by a 14% increase in the total number of new state-level mitigation activities (**blue bars**, right; 69% have updated their policies). In 2021 there were 271 city-level mitigation actions in place (**open circles**, right), according to the Global Climate Action Tracker. Renewable energy and energy efficiency projects on Tribal lands have also expanded (not shown). {31.1, 32.5; Figure 16.4; Table 1.1} Figure credit: US Army Corps of Engineers, EPA, Pennsylvania State University, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS-NC.

Climate adaptation and mitigation efforts involve trade-offs, as climate actions that benefit some or even most people can result in burdens to others. To date, some communities have prioritized equitable and inclusive planning processes that consider the social impacts of these trade-offs and help ensure that affected communities can participate in decision-making. As additional measures are implemented, more widespread consideration of their social impact can help inform decisions around how to distribute the outcomes of investments. {12.4, 13.4, 20.2, 21.3, 21.4, 26.4, 27.1, 31.2, 32.4, 32.5; Box 20.1}

Table 1.1. Climate Actions Are Taking Place Across All US Regions

Examples of recent local adaptation, resilience, and mitigation actions around the country follow.

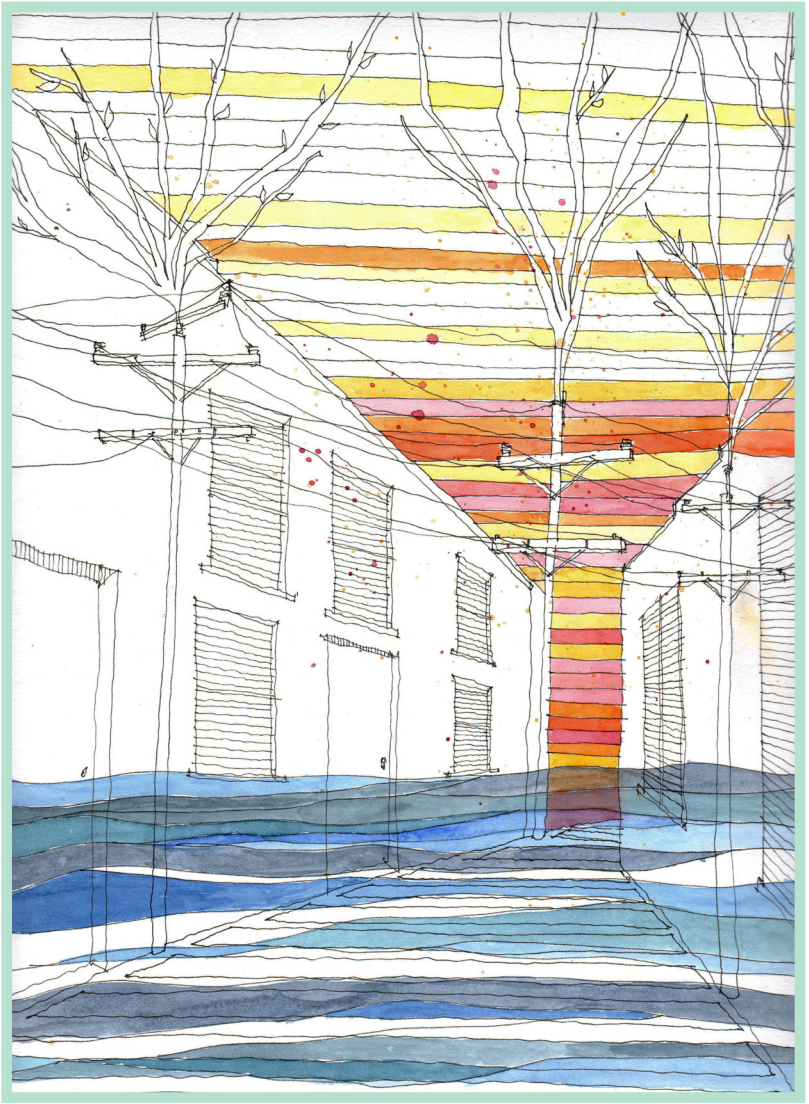
Region	Action
Northeast	The 2022 stormwater code in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, requires new developments to plan for projected increases in heavy rainfall under climate change rather than building to historical rainfall amounts. In 2021, the city also committed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. {Box 21.1}
Southeast	Following repeated flooding from multiple hurricanes, measures to reduce flood risk in Princeville, North Carolina, include buyouts, elevating homes, and building housing that meets local flood standards. In Orlando, Florida, the city and businesses are adopting commercial building energy-efficiency requirements and electric vehicle readiness policies and have used wastewater and food scraps from parks and resorts to generate renewable biogas. {Boxes 22.1, 32.3}
US Caribbean	Many community-based organizations in Puerto Rico have undertaken actions to advance adaptation, social transformation, and sustainable development. These organizations work to expand renewable energy and equitable access to energy resources, prepare for disasters, restore ecosystems, strengthen agriculture and food security, and protect public health. {23.5}
Midwest	A wetland creation project in Ashtabula, Ohio, restored habitat displaced by shoreline development, improving coastal protection for the port on Lake Erie. In Michigan, some state forestlands are being managed to bolster carbon storage and to support recreation and wildlife habitat. {24.2, 24.4; Figure 24.9}
Northern Great Plains	The Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service supported farmers in testing soil health and evaluating soil management practices that promote climate adaptation. Across the region, wind electricity generation tripled between 2011 and 2021, with a growing number of Tribes leading the Nation's renewable energy transition by installing wind, solar, and hydropower. {25.3, 25.5; Box 25.3}
Southern Great Plains	Texas- and Kansas-based groups are supporting soil and land management practices that increase carbon storage while protecting important ecosystems. Wind and solar energy generation and battery storage capacities have also grown, with the region accounting for 42% of national wind-generated electricity in 2022. {26.2}
Northwest	The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation are prioritizing carbon capture in their forest and timber management efforts, leading to improved air and water quality and wildlife habitat as well as preservation of cultural areas and practices. {27.3}
Southwest	In response to severe drought, seven Colorado River basin states, the US and Mexican governments, and Indigenous Peoples are collaborating to improve water conservation and develop adaptation solutions. Dozens of cities are committed to emissions reductions; for instance, Phoenix is on track to meet a 2030 goal of 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 2018 levels. {Ch. 28, Introduction; Box 28.1}
Alaska	To address climate threats to traditional foods, the Chugach Regional Resources Commission is integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Western scientific methods in its adaptation efforts, including weekly water sampling for harmful algal blooms and restoring clam populations. Kelp farming is also being developed to reduce the effects of ocean acidification, serve as a carbon sink, and generate income. {29.7; Box 29.7}
Hawai'i and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands	The Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative achieved a 69.5% renewable portfolio standard in 2021, and the island is occasionally 100% renewably powered during midday hours; it is projected to achieve a 90% renewable portfolio by 2026. Guam, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau plan to use blue carbon ecosystems to offset emissions while also protecting coastal infrastructure. {30.3; Box 30.3}

Meeting US mitigation targets means reaching net-zero emissions

The global warming observed over the industrial era is unequivocally caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities—primarily burning fossil fuels. Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO_2)—the primary greenhouse gas produced by human activities—and other greenhouse gases continue to rise due to ongoing global emissions. Stopping global warming would require both reducing emissions of CO_2 to net zero and rapid and deep reductions in other greenhouse gases. Net-zero CO_2 emissions means that CO_2 emissions decline to zero or that any residual emissions are balanced by removal from the atmosphere. {2.3, 3.1; Ch. 32}

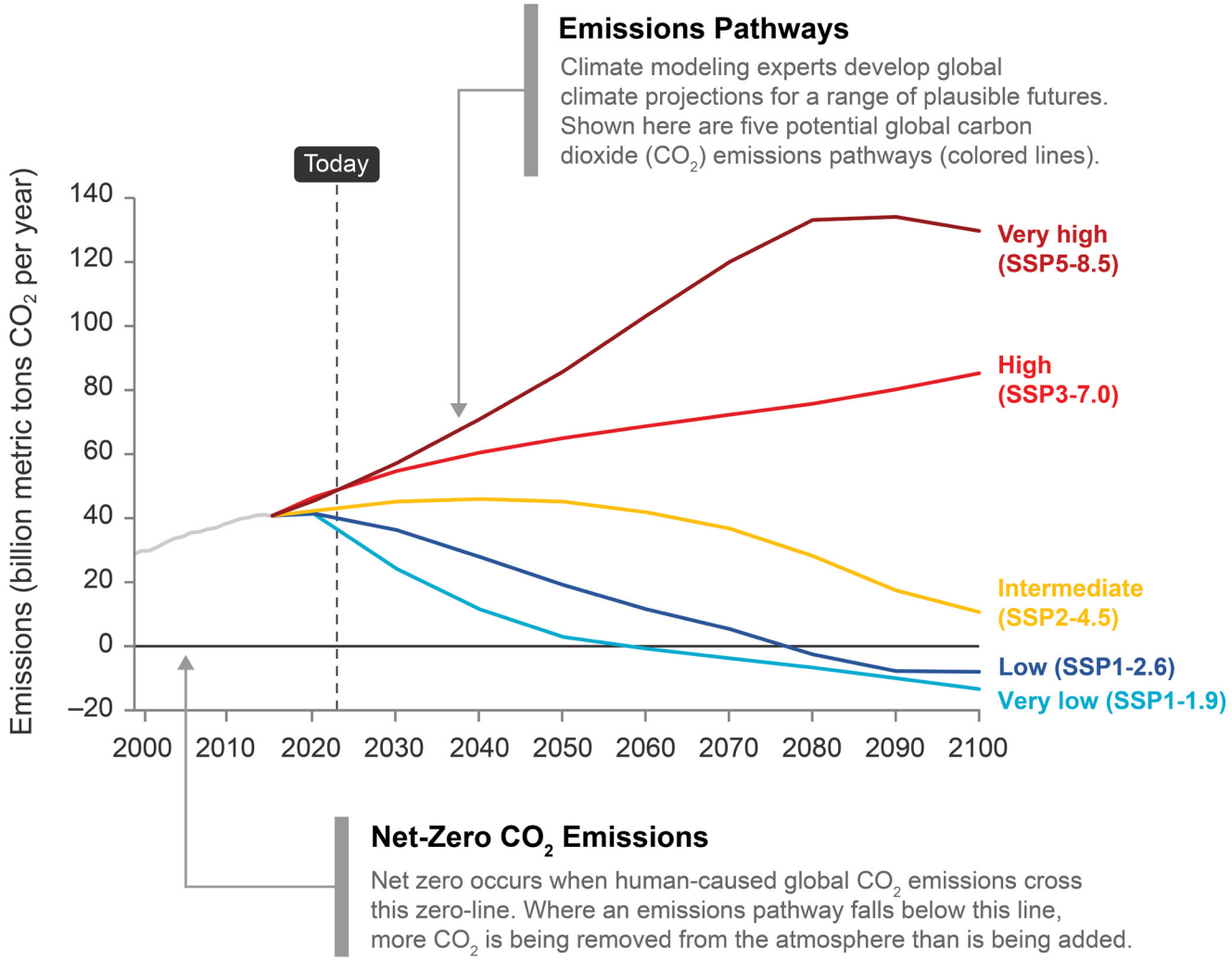
Once CO_2 emissions reach net zero, the global warming driven by CO_2 is expected to stop: additional warming over the next few centuries is not necessarily "locked in" after net CO_2 emissions fall to zero. However, global average temperatures are not expected to fall for centuries unless CO_2 emissions become net negative, which is when CO_2 removal from the atmosphere exceeds CO_2 emissions from human activities. Regardless of when or if further warming is avoided, some long-term responses to the temperature changes that have already occurred will continue. These responses include sea level rise, ice sheet losses, and associated disruptions to human health, social systems, and ecosystems. In addition, the ocean will continue to acidify after the world reaches net-zero CO_2 emissions, as it continues to gradually absorb CO_2 in the atmosphere from past emissions. {2.1, 2.3, 3.1; Ch. 2, Introduction}

National and international commitments seek to limit global warming to well below 2°C (3.6°F), and preferably to 1.5°C (2.7°F), compared to preindustrial temperature conditions (defined as the 1850–1900 average). To achieve this, global CO_2 emissions would have to reach net zero by around 2050 (Figure 1.4); global emissions of all greenhouse gases would then have to reach net zero within the following few decades. {2.3, 32.1}



Andrea Ruedy Trimble

Future Global Carbon Dioxide Emissions Pathways



Different scenarios of future carbon dioxide emissions are used to explore the range of possible climate futures.

Figure 1.4. The five scenarios shown (colored lines) demonstrate potential global carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions pathways modeled from 2015 through 2100, with the solid light gray line showing observed global CO_2 emissions from 2000 to 2015. See Table 3 in the Guide to the Report for scenario definitions. Many projected impacts described in this report are based on a potential climate future defined by one or more of these scenarios for future CO_2 emissions from human activities, the largest long-term driver of climate change. The vertical dashed line, labeled "Today," marks the year 2023; the solid horizontal black line marks net-zero CO_2 emissions. Adapted with permission from Figure TS.4 in Arias et al. 2021.

While US greenhouse gas emissions are falling, the current rate of decline is not sufficient to meet national and international climate commitments and goals. US net greenhouse gas emissions remain substantial and would have to decline by more than 6% per year on average, reaching net-zero emissions around midcentury, to meet current national mitigation targets and international temperature goals; by comparison, US greenhouse gas emissions decreased by less than 1% per year on average between 2005 and 2019. {32.1}

Many cost-effective options that are feasible now have the potential to substantially reduce emissions over the next decade. Faster and more widespread deployment of renewable energy and other zero- and low-carbon energy options can accelerate the transition to a decarbonized economy and increase the chances of meeting a 2050 national net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target for the US. However, to reach the US net-zero emissions target, additional mitigation options need to be explored and advanced (see "Available mitigation strategies can deliver substantial emissions reductions, but additional options are needed to reach net zero" below). {5.3, 6.3, 32.2, 32.3}

David Zeiset

How the United States Is Experiencing Climate Change

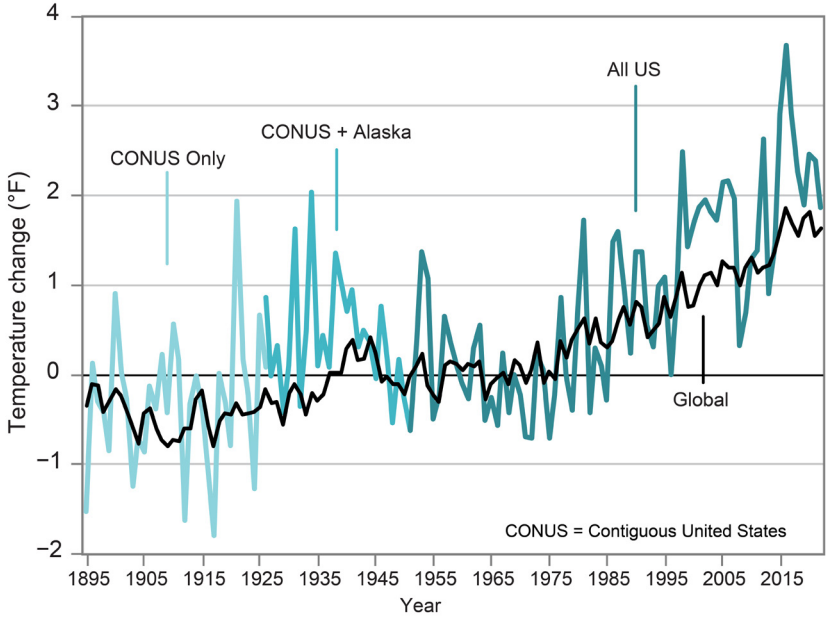
As extreme events and other climate hazards intensify, harmful impacts on people across the United States are increasing. Climate impacts—combined with other stressors—are leading to ripple effects across sectors and regions that multiply harms, with disproportionate effects on underserved and overburdened communities.

Current climate changes are unprecedented over thousands of years

Global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities continue to increase, resulting in rapid warming (Figure 1.5) and other large-scale changes, including rising sea levels, melting ice, ocean warming and acidification, changing rainfall patterns, and shifts in timing of seasonal events. Many of the climate conditions and impacts people are experiencing today are unprecedented for thousands of years (Figure 1.6). {2.1, 3.1; Figures A4.6, A4.7, A4.10, A4.13}

As the world's climate has shifted toward warmer conditions, the frequency and intensity of extreme cold events have declined over much of the US, while the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme heat have increased. Across all regions of the US, people are experiencing warming temperatures and longer-lasting heatwaves. Over much of the country, nighttime temperatures and winter temperatures have warmed more rapidly than daytime and summer temperatures. Many other extremes, including heavy precipitation, drought, flooding, wildfire, and hurricanes, are becoming more frequent and/or severe, with a cascade of effects in every part of the country. {2.1, 2.2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 7.1, 9.1; Ch. 2, Introduction; App. 4; Focus on Compound Events}

US and Global Changes in Average Surface Temperature



The US has warmed rapidly since the 1970s.

Figure 1.5. The graph shows the change in US annual average surface temperature during 1895–2022 compared to the 1951–1980 average. The temperature trend changes color as data become available for more regions of the US, with Alaska data added to the average temperature for the contiguous US (CONUS) beginning in 1926 (medium blue line) and Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands data added beginning in 1951 (dark blue line). Global average surface temperature is shown by the black line. Figure credit: NOAA NCEI and CISESS NC.

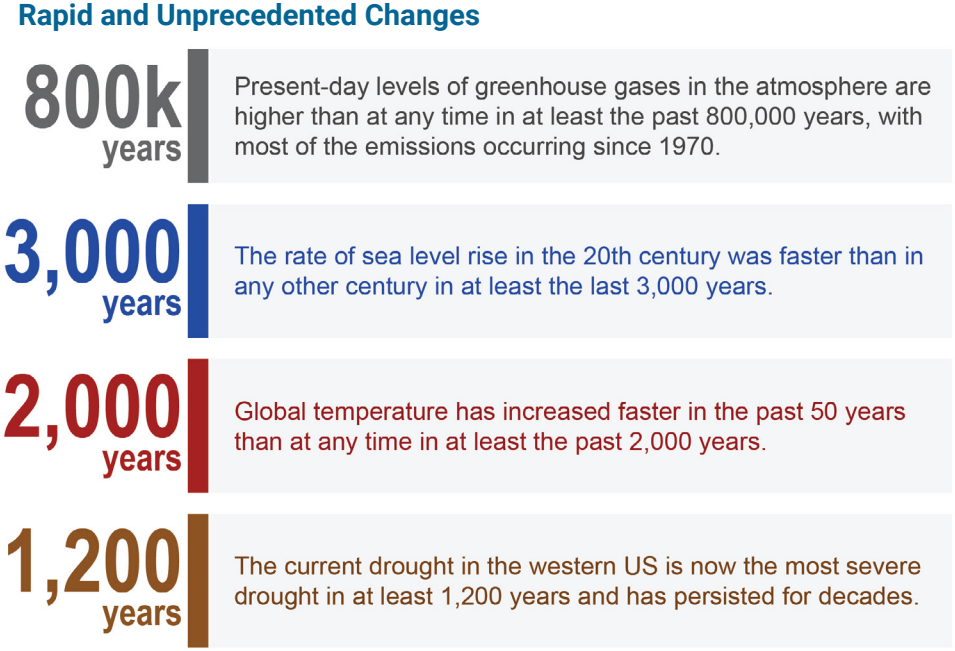


Figure 1.6. Human activities since industrialization have led to increases in atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations that are unprecedented in records spanning hundreds of thousands of years. These are examples of some of the large and rapid changes in the climate system that are occurring as the planet warms. (Greenhouse gas concentrations {2.1}; sea level rise {3.4}; global temperature {2.1}; drought {2.2, 3.5}) Figure credit: USGCRP and ICF.

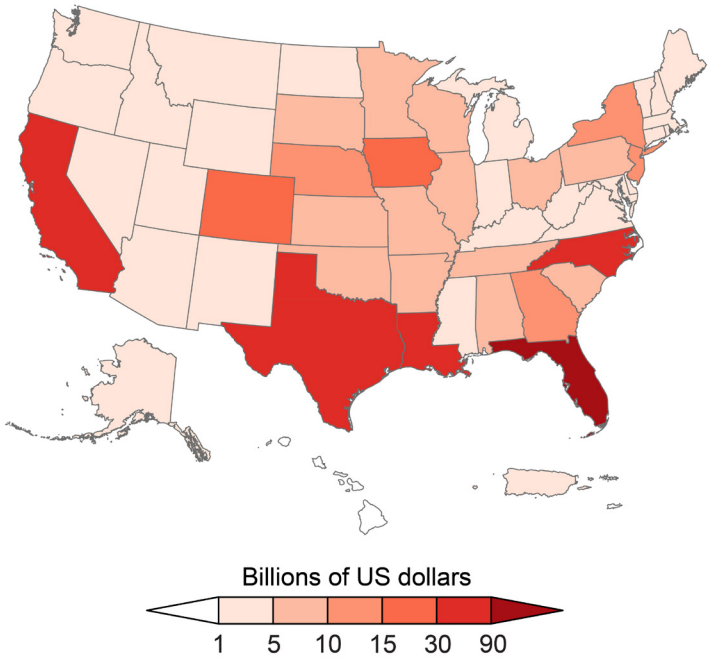
Risks from extreme events are increasing

One of the most direct ways that people experience climate change is through changes in extreme events. Harmful impacts from more frequent and severe extremes are increasing across the country—including increases in heat-related illnesses and death, costlier storm damages, longer droughts that reduce agricultural productivity and strain water systems, and larger, more severe wildfires that threaten homes and degrade air quality. {2.2, 4.2, 12.2, 14.2, 15.1, 19.2; Focus on Western Wildfires}

Extreme weather events cause direct economic losses through infrastructure damage, disruptions in labor and public services, and losses in property values. The number and cost of weather-related disasters have increased dramatically over the past four decades, in part due to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme events and in part due to increases in assets at risk (through population growth, rising property values, and continued development in hazard-prone areas). Low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribes and Indigenous Peoples experience high exposure and vulnerability to extreme events due to both their proximity to hazard-prone areas and lack of adequate infrastructure or disaster management resources. {2.2, 4.2, 17.3, 19.1; Focus on Compound Events}

In the 1980s, the country experienced, on average, one (inflation-adjusted) billion-dollar disaster every four months. Now, there is one every three weeks, on average. Between 2018 and 2022, the US experienced 89 billion-dollar events (Figure 1.7). Extreme events cost the US close to $150 billion each year—a conservative estimate that does not account for loss of life, healthcare-related costs, or damages to ecosystem services. {2.2, 19.1; Ch. 2, Introduction; Figures 4.1, A4.5}

Damages by State from Billion-Dollar Disasters (2018–2022)



The US now experiences, on average, a billion-dollar weather or climate disaster every three weeks.

Figure 1.7. Billion-dollar weather and climate disasters are events where damages/costs reach or exceed $1 billion, including adjustments for inflation. Between 2018 and 2022, 89 such events affected the US, including 4 droughts, 6 floods, 52 severe storms, 18 tropical cyclones, 5 wildfires, and 4 winter storm events (see Figure A4.5 for the number of billion-dollar disasters per year). During this period, Florida had the highest total damages ($140 billion) and experienced the highest damages from a single event—Hurricane Ian ($113 billion). Over the 1980–2022 period, Texas had the highest total damages ($375 billion). While similar data are not available for the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands, Super Typhoon Yutu caused $500 million in property damage alone in Saipan and the northern Marianas in 2018 (NCEI 2019). Increasing costs over time are driven by changes in the assets at risk and the increase in frequency or intensity of extreme events caused by climate change. Adapted from NCEI 2023.

Cascading and compounding impacts increase risks

The impacts and risks of climate change unfold across interacting sectors and regions. For example, wildfire in one region can affect air quality and human health in other regions, depending on where winds transport smoke. Further, climate change impacts interact with other stressors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental degradation, or socioeconomic stressors like poverty and lack of adequate housing that disproportionately impact overburdened communities. These interactions and interdependencies can lead to cascading impacts and sudden failures. For example, climate-related shocks to the food supply chain have led to local to global impacts on food security and human migration patterns that affect US economic and national security interests. {11.3, 17.1, 17.2, 17.3, 18.1, 22.3, 23.4, 31.3; Introductions in Chs. 2, 17, 18; Focus on Compound Events; Focus on Risks to Supply Chains; Focus on COVID-19 and Climate Change}

The risk of two or more extreme events occurring simultaneously or in quick succession in the same region—known as compound events—is increasing. Climate change is also increasing the risk of multiple extremes occurring simultaneously in different locations that are connected by complex human and natural systems. For instance, simultaneous megafires across multiple western states and record back-to-back Atlantic hurricanes in 2020 caused unprecedented demand on federal emergency response resources. {2.2, 3.2, 15.1, 22.2, 26.4; Focus on Compound Events; Ch. 4, Introduction}

Compound events often have cascading impacts that cause greater harm than individual events. For example, in 2020, record-breaking heat and widespread drought contributed to concurrent destructive wildfires across California, Oregon, and Washington, exposing millions to health hazards and straining firefighting resources. Ongoing drought amplified the record-breaking Pacific Northwest heatwave of June 2021, which

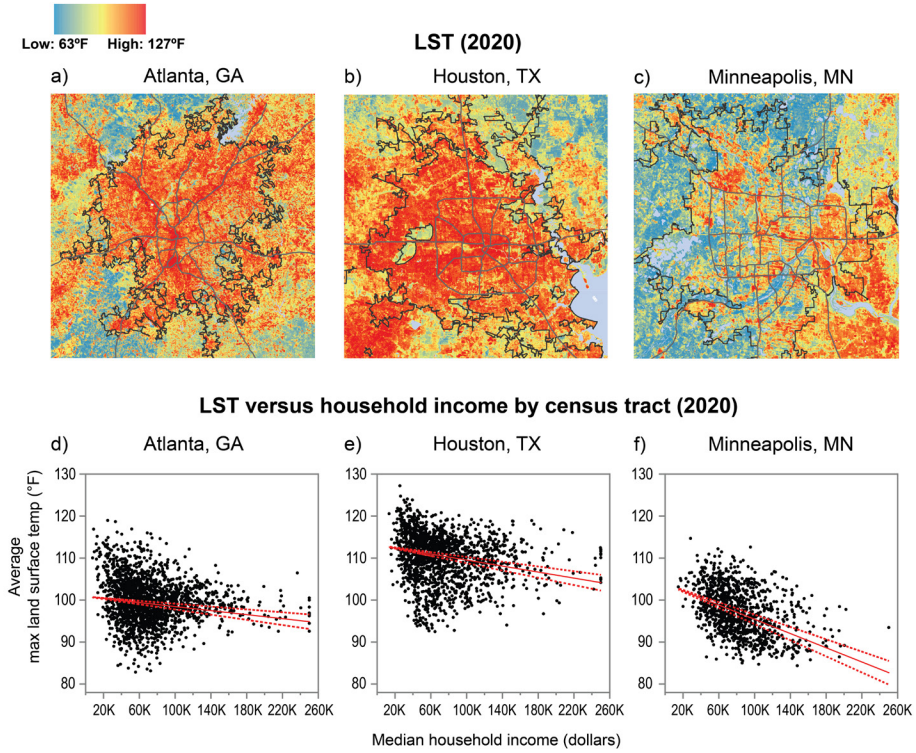
was made 2° to 4°F hotter by climate change. The heatwave led to more than 1,400 heat-related deaths, another severe wildfire season, mass die-offs of fishery species important to the region's economy and Indigenous communities, and total damages exceeding $38.5 billion (in 2022 dollars). {27.3; Ch. 2, Introduction; Focus on Compound Events, Focus on Western Wildfires}

Climate change exacerbates inequities

Some communities are at higher risk of negative impacts from climate change due to social and economic inequities caused by ongoing systemic discrimination, exclusion, and under- or disinvestment. Many such communities are also already overburdened by the cumulative effects of adverse environmental, health, economic, or social conditions. Climate change worsens these long-standing inequities, contributing to persistent disparities in the resources needed to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate impacts. {4.2, 9.2, 12.2, 14.3, 15.2, 16.1, 16.2, 18.2, 19.1, 20.1, 20.3, 21.3, 22.1, 23.1, 26.4, 27.1, 31.2}

For example, low-income communities and communities of color often lack access to adequate flood infrastructure, green spaces, safe housing, and other resources that help protect people from climate impacts. In some areas, patterns of urban growth have led to the displacement of under-resourced communities to suburban and rural areas with less access to climate-ready housing and infrastructure. Extreme heat can lead to higher rates of illness and death in low-income neighborhoods, which are hotter on average (Figure 1.8). Neighborhoods that are home to racial minorities and low-income people have the highest inland (riverine) flood exposures in the South, and Black communities nationwide are expected to bear a disproportionate share of future flood damages—both coastal and inland (Figure 1.9). {4.2, 11.3, 12.2, 15.1, 22.1, 22.2, 26.4, 27.1; Ch. 2, Introduction}

Land Surface Temperature and Its Relationship to Median Household Income for Three Cities

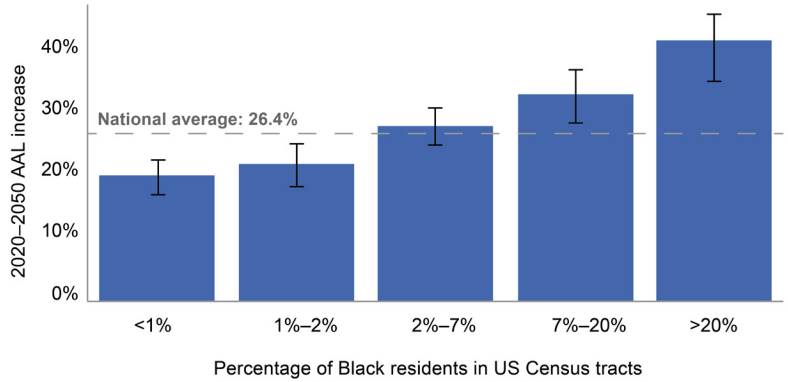


Lower-income urban neighborhoods experience higher surface temperatures.

Figure 1.8. The figure shows the spatial distribution of maximum land surface temperature (LST) in 2020 for Atlanta (**a**), Houston (**b**), and Minneapolis (**c**). Graphs (**d**), (**e**), and (**f**) depict the relationship between maximum LST and median household income across census tracts in each city (see also Figure A4.4). A statistical trend analysis (the Theil-Sen estimator) returns negative values for all three cities, indicating that LST decreases as income increases (solid red line). Dashed red lines indicate the 95% confidence interval, meaning that the true slope of the trend is expected to fall within this range. Note that LST is measured at ground level and may differ from surface air temperature, which is measured at a height of 2 meters. {Figure 12.6} Portions of this figure include intellectual property of Esri and its licensors and are used under license. Copyright © 2020 Esri and its licensors. All rights reserved. Figure credit: University of California, Davis; University of Texas at El Paso; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; City of Phoenix, Arizona; and USGS.

These disproportionate impacts are partly due to exclusionary housing practices—both past and ongoing—that leave underserved communities with less access to heat and flood risk-reduction strategies and other economic, health, and social resources. For example, areas that were historically redlined—a practice in which lenders avoided providing services to communities, often based on their racial or ethnic makeup—continue to be deprived of equitable access to environmental amenities like urban green spaces that reduce exposure to climate impacts. These neighborhoods can be as much as 12°F hotter during a heatwave than nearby wealthier neighborhoods. {8.3, 9.2, 12.2, 15.2, 20.3, 21.3, 22.1, 26.4, 27.1, 32.4; Ch. 2, Introduction}

Projected Increases in Average Annual Losses (AALs) from Floods by 2050



Losses due to floods are projected to increase disproportionately in US Census tracts with higher percentages of Black residents.

Figure 1.9. The bars show that the average annual losses—or the economic damage in a typical year—due to floods in census tracts with a Black population of at least 20% are projected to increase at roughly twice the rate of that in tracts where Black populations make up less than 1% of population. {Figure 4.14} Adapted from Wing et al. 2022 [CC BY 4.0].

Harmful impacts will increase in the near term

Even if greenhouse gas emissions fall substantially, the impacts of climate change will continue to intensify over the next decade (see "Meeting US mitigation targets means reaching net-zero emissions" above; Box 1.4), and all US regions are already experiencing increasingly harmful impacts. Although a few US regions or sectors may experience limited or short-term benefits from climate change, adverse impacts already far outweigh any positive effects and will increasingly eclipse benefits with additional warming. {2.3, 19.1; Ch. 2, Introduction; Chs. 21–30}

Table 1.2 shows examples of critical impacts expected to affect people in each region between now and 2030, with disproportionate effects on overburdened communities. While these examples affect particular regions in the near term, impacts often cascade through social and ecological systems and across borders and may lead to longer-term losses. {15.2, 18.2, 20.1; Figure 15.5; Ch. 20, Introduction}

Table 1.2. Climate Change Is Already Affecting All US Regions and Will Continue to Have Impacts in the Near Term

The table shows three climate impacts of significant concern to each US region between now and 2030. Icons indicate general categories of impacts: infrastructure, water supply, health and well-being, food security, economy, livelihoods and heritage, and ecosystems. More information can be found in the regional chapters (Chs. 21–30).

Northeast

- Extreme weather events damage critical infrastructure. {21.1}
- Warming temperatures shift distributions of coastal and marine species and habitats. {21.2}
- Extreme heat and flooding disproportionately impact overburdened communities. {21.3}

Southeast

- Sea level rise and coastal flooding harm rapidly growing communities. {22.1}
- Extreme heat threatens human health, especially stressing urban communities. {22.2}
- Heavy rain and longer dry spells reduce water supply and access. {22.4}

US Caribbean

- Agricultural losses, especially from tropical cyclones, threaten food security. {23.1}
- Severe drought leads to large agricultural and economic losses. {23.3}
- Rising temperatures increase mortality and power demand; hurricanes and storms stress power grids. {23.2, 23.4}

Midwest

- Rising temperatures and extreme events threaten livelihoods and trades. {24.2}
- Extreme weather events harm public health. {24.3}
- Rising temperatures and extreme rainfall damage buildings, homes, and businesses. {24.4}

Northern Great Plains

- Rising temperatures and decreasing snowpack reduce water supply. {25.1}
- Increases in extreme heat, wildfire, and flooding harm physical and mental health. {25.1, 25.2}
- Livelihoods are at greater risk, especially in agriculture, recreation, and energy sectors. {25.3}

Southern Great Plains

- Drier conditions threaten agriculture, ecosystems, and water supplies. {26.1, 26.2, 26.5}
- Extreme heat and high humidity harm human health and exacerbate inequities. {26.4}
- Multiple stressors and extreme events disrupt business, outdoor recreation, and leisure activities. {26.1, 26.2, 26.3}

Northwest

Less water is available for hydropower, rural communities, and aquatic ecosystems. {27.1, 27.2, 27.4}

Extreme heat and wildfire smoke endanger at-risk urban, rural, and Tribal communities. {27.1, 27.3, 27.5}

Wildfire, extreme heat, and floods threaten livelihoods and heritage tied to natural resources. {27.1, 27.3, 27.6}

Alaska

Landscape degradation increases damage to private and municipal infrastructure. {29.2, 29.4}

Reduced fish stocks harm local economies, Tribal sovereignty, and overall well-being. {29.6, 29.7}

Diminished access to mammals, seabirds, fish, and vegetation decreases local food security. {29.5}

Southwest

Intensifying drought and decreases in groundwater recharge reduce water supply. {28.1}

Economic losses to farmers and ranchers increase. {28.3}

Extreme heat, drought, wildfire smoke, and coastal flooding harm physical and mental health. {28.3, 28.4}

Hawai‘i and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands

Sea level rise and saltwater intrusion reduce irrigation and drinking water supply. {30.1}

Damages to the coastal built environment, including traditional structures, increase. {30.3, 30.5}

Risks to unique and biodiverse flora and fauna continue to grow. {30.4}

Current and Future Climate Risks to the United States

Climate changes are making it harder to maintain safe homes and healthy families; reliable public services; a sustainable economy; thriving ecosystems, cultures, and traditions; and strong communities. Many of the extreme events and harmful impacts that people are already experiencing will worsen as warming increases and new risks emerge.

Safe, reliable water supplies are threatened by flooding, drought, and sea level rise

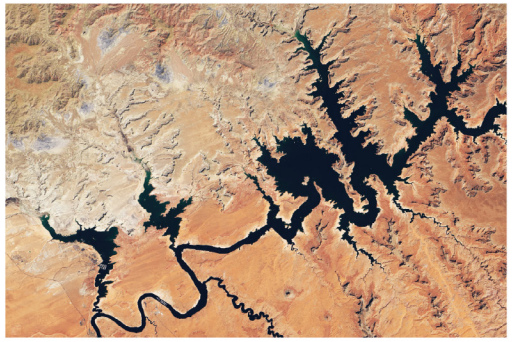
More frequent and intense heavy precipitation events are already evident, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. Urban and agricultural environments are especially vulnerable to runoff and flooding. Between 1981 and 2016, US corn yield losses from flooding were comparable to those from extreme drought. Runoff and flooding also transport debris and contaminants that cause harmful algal blooms and pollute drinking water supplies. Communities of color and low-income communities face disproportionate flood risks. {2.2, 4.2, 6.1, 9.2, 21.3, 24.1, 24.5, 26.4; Figure A4.8}

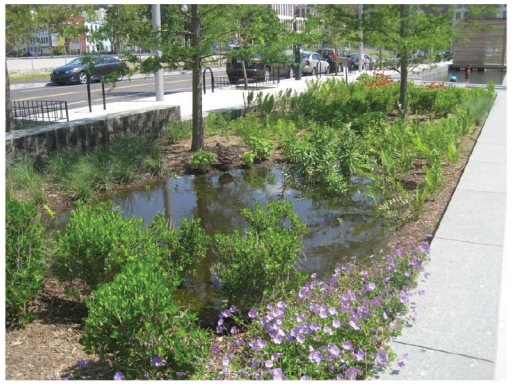
Between 1980 and 2022, drought and related heatwaves caused approximately $328 billion in damages (in 2022 dollars). Recent droughts have strained surface water and groundwater supplies, reduced agricultural productivity, and lowered water levels in major reservoirs, threatening hydropower generation. As higher temperatures increase irrigation demand, increased pumping could endanger groundwater supplies, which are already declining in many major aquifers. {4.1, 4.2; Figure A4.9}

Droughts are projected to increase in intensity, duration, and frequency, especially in the Southwest, with implications for surface water and groundwater supplies. Human and natural systems are threatened by rapid shifts between wet and dry periods that make water resources difficult to predict and manage. {2.2, 2.3, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 28.1}

In coastal environments, dry conditions, sea level rise, and saltwater intrusion endanger groundwater aquifers and stress aquatic ecosystems. Inland, decreasing snowpack alters the volume and timing of streamflow and increases wildfire risk. Small rural water providers that often depend on a single water source or have limited capacity are especially vulnerable. {4.2, 7.2, 9.2, 21.2, 22.1, 23.1, 23.3, 25.1, 27.4, 28.1, 28.2, 28.5, 30.1; Figure A4.7}

Many options are available to protect water supplies, including reservoir optimization, nature-based solutions, and municipal management systems to conserve and reuse water. Collaboration on flood hazard management at regional scales is particularly important in areas where flood risk is increasing, as cooperation can provide solutions unavailable at local scales. {4.3, 9.3, 26.5; Focus on Blue Carbon}





(**left**; Toledo, Ohio) Rising temperatures are intensifying harmful algal blooms, negatively affecting human and animal health. (**top right**; Utah, Arizona) Water levels on Lake Powell have fallen to historic lows in recent years, affecting millions of people across the Southwest. (**bottom right**) Rain gardens, a form of green infrastructure, absorb excess stormwater. Photo credits: (left) Aerial Associates Photography Inc. by Zachary Haslick; (top right) NASA Earth Observatory images by Lauren Dauphin, using Landsat data from the USGS; (bottom right) Alisha Goldstein, EPA.

Disruptions to food systems are expected to increase

As the climate changes, increased instabilities in US and global food production and distribution systems are projected to make food less available and more expensive. These price increases and disruptions are expected to disproportionately affect the nutrition and health of women, children, older adults, and low-wealth communities. {11.2, 15.2}

Climate change also disproportionately harms the livelihoods and health of communities that depend on agriculture, fishing, and subsistence lifestyles, including Indigenous Peoples reliant on traditional food sources. Heat-related stress and death are significantly greater for farmworkers than for all US civilian workers. {11.2, 11.3, 15.1, 15.2, 16.1; Focus on Risks to Supply Chains}

While farmers, ranchers, and fishers have always faced unpredictable weather, climate change heightens risks in many ways:

- Increasing temperatures, along with changes in precipitation, reduce productivity, yield, and nutritional content of many crops. These changes can introduce disease, disrupt pollination, and result in crop failure, outweighing potential benefits of longer growing seasons and increased CO_2 fertilization. {11.1, 19.1, 21.1, 22.4, 23.3, 24.1, 26.2}
- Heavy rain and more frequent storms damage crops and property and contaminate water supplies. Longer-lasting droughts and larger wildfires reduce forage production and nutritional quality, diminish water supplies, and increase heat stress on livestock. {23.2, 25.3, 28.3}
- Increasing water temperatures, invasive aquatic species, harmful algal blooms, and ocean acidification and deoxygenation put fisheries at risk. Fishery collapses can result in large economic losses, as well as loss of cultural identity and ways of life. {11.3, 29.3}

In response, some farmers and ranchers are adopting innovations—such as agroecological practices, data-driven precision agriculture, and carbon monitoring—to improve resilience, enhance soil carbon storage, and reduce emissions. Across the Nation, Indigenous food security efforts are helping improve community resilience to climate change while also improving cultural resilience. Some types of aquaculture have the potential to increase climate-smart protein production, human nutrition, and food security, although some communities have raised concerns over issues such as conflict with traditional livelihoods and the introduction of disease or pollution. {10.2, 11.1, 29.6, 25.5; Boxes 22.3, 27.2}

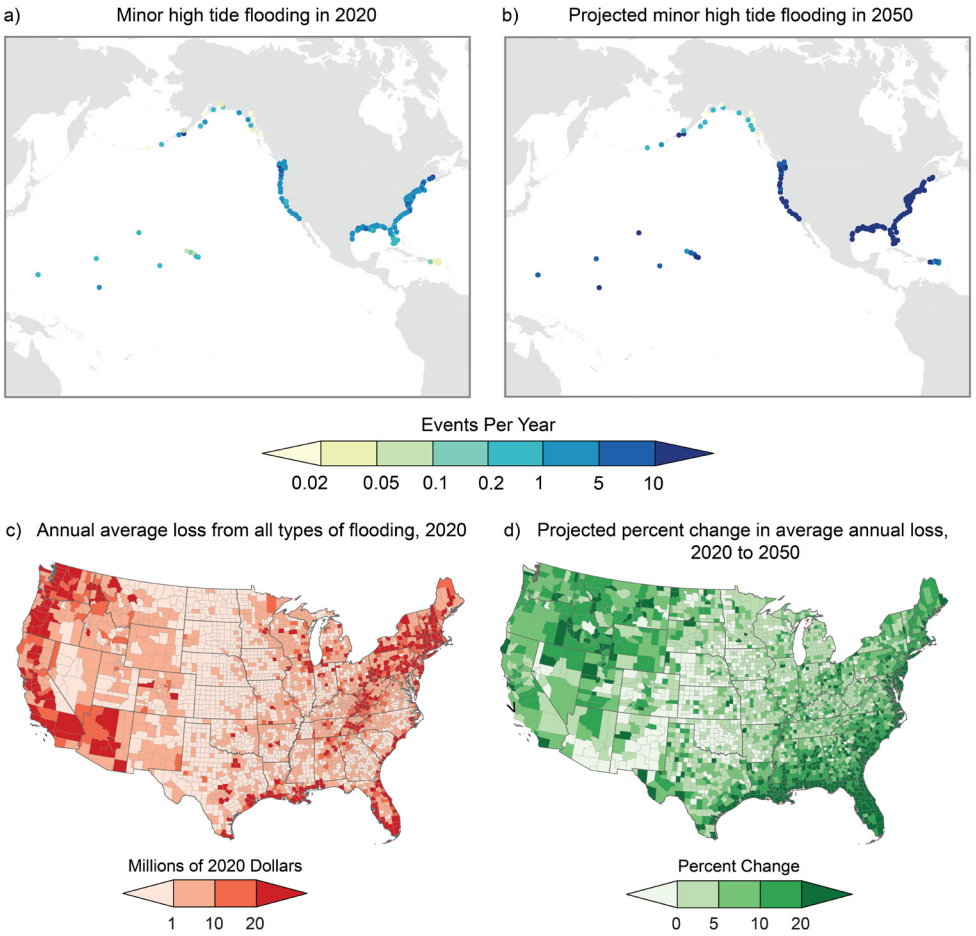
(**left**; Baltimore, Maryland) Urban farms offer the potential to reduce carbon emissions while helping to improve community food security. (**top right**; California) A Northern California vineyard is affected by wildfire. (**bottom right**; Kenai River, Alaska) Recent climate extremes have contributed to declines in many salmon populations. Photo credits: (left) Preston Keres, USDA/FPAC; (top right) Ordinary Mario/iStock via Getty Images; (bottom right) Eric Vance, EPA.

Homes and property are at risk from sea level rise and more intense extreme events

Homes, property, and critical infrastructure are increasingly exposed to more frequent and intense extreme events, increasing the cost of maintaining a safe and healthy place to live. Development in fire-prone areas and increases in area burned by wildfires have heightened risks of loss of life and property damage in many areas across the US. Coastal communities across the country—home to 123 million people (40% of the total US population)—are exposed to sea level rise (Figure 1.10), with millions of people at risk of being displaced from their homes by the end of the century. {2.3, 9.1, 12.2, 22.1, 27.4, 30.3; Figures A4.10, A4.14; Focus on Western Wildfires}

People who regularly struggle to afford energy bills—such as rural, low-income, and older fixed-income households and communities of color—are especially vulnerable to more intense extreme heat events and associated health risks, particularly if they live in homes with poor insulation and inefficient cooling systems. For example, Black Americans are more likely to live in older, less energy efficient homes and face disproportionate heat-related health risks. {5.2, 15.2, 15.3, 22.2, 26.4, 32.4; Figure A4.4}

Accessible public cooling centers can help protect people who lack adequate air-conditioning on hot days. Strategic land-use planning in cities, urban greenery, climate-smart building codes, and early warning communication can also help neighborhoods adapt. However, other options at the household scale, such as hardening homes against weather extremes or relocation, may be out of reach for renters and low-income households without assistance. {12.3, 15.3, 19.3, 22.2}



US Flooding Risks in 2020 and 2050

Increasing flooding puts more people and assets at risk.

Figure 1.10. (**top row**) Maps show (**a**) the average number of minor high tide flooding events per year in 2020 (with historical sea level rise) and (**b**) the expected number of events per year in 2050 (when driven by extrapolated sea level rise). (**bottom row**) Maps show (**c**) average annual loss (AAL) from all types of flooding in millions of dollars in 2020 and (**d**) the projected changes in AAL in 2050 relative to 2020. AAL estimates were made only for the contiguous US. Over the next three decades, the number of flooding days along all coastlines of the US is expected to increase. These increases in the occurrence of flooding will drive greater AALs, especially in coastal areas of the US. (a, b) Adapted from Sweet et al. 2022; (c, d) adapted from Wing et al. 2022 [CC BY 4.0].

Box 1.2. Migration and Displacement

Extreme events, such as extended drought, wildfire, and major hurricanes, have contributed to human migration and displacement. For example, numerous extreme events over the last two decades drove migration of vulnerable communities in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands to the mainland. {9.2, 15.1, 17.2, 19.2, 23.1, 23.5; Box 18.2}

In the future, the combination of climate change and other factors, such as housing affordability, is expected to increasingly affect migration patterns. More severe wildfires in California, increasing sea level rise in Florida, and more frequent flooding in Texas are expected to displace millions of people. Climate-driven economic changes abroad, including reductions in crop yields, are expected to increase the rate of emigration to the United States. {9.2, 17.2, 19.2, 30.3}

From Alaska to low-lying Pacific atolls, forced migrations and displacements driven by climate change disrupt social networks, decrease housing security, and exacerbate grief, anxiety, and negative mental health outcomes. Indigenous Peoples, who have long faced land dispossession due to settler colonialism, are again being confronted with displacement and loss of traditional resources and practices. {4.2, 15.1, 16.1, 19.1, 20.1, 20.3, 22.1, 22.2, 29.1, 30.3; Box 18.2}

(**left**; Cedar Rapids, Iowa) More frequent and intense heavy precipitation events are already evident, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. (**right**; Arizona) The 2021 Telegraph Fire destroyed homes and property. Photo credits: (left) Don Becker, USGS; (right) Andrew Avitt, USDA Forest Service.

Infrastructure and services are increasingly damaged and disrupted by extreme weather and sea level rise

Climate change threatens vital infrastructure that moves people and goods, powers homes and businesses, and delivers public services. Many infrastructure systems across the country are at the end of their intended useful life and are not designed to cope with additional stress from climate change. For example, extreme heat causes railways to buckle, severe storms overload drainage systems, and wildfires result in roadway obstruction and debris flows. Risks to energy, water, healthcare, transportation, telecommunications, and waste management systems will continue to rise with further climate change, with many infrastructure systems at risk of failing. {12.2, 13.1, 15.2, 23.4, 26.5; Focus on Risks to Supply Chains}

In coastal areas, sea level rise threatens permanent inundation of infrastructure, including roadways, railways, ports, tunnels, and bridges; water treatment facilities and power plants; and hospitals, schools, and military bases. More intense storms also disrupt critical services like access to medical care, as seen after Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. {9.2, 23.1, 28.2, 30.3}

At the same time, climate change is expected to place multiple demands on infrastructure and public services. For example, higher temperatures and other effects of climate change, such as greater exposure to stormwater or wastewater, will increase demand for healthcare. Continued increases in average temperatures and more intense heatwaves will heighten electricity and water demand, while wetter storms and intensified

hurricanes will strain wastewater and stormwater management systems. In the Midwest and other regions, aging energy grids are expected to be strained by disruptions and transmission efficiency losses from climate change. {23.4, 24.4, 30.2}

Forward-looking designs of infrastructure and services can help build resilience to climate change, offset costs from future damage to transportation and electrical systems, and provide other benefits, including meeting evolving standards to protect public health, safety, and welfare. Mitigation and adaptation activities are advancing from planning stages to deployment in many areas, including improved grid design and workforce training for electrification, building upgrades, and land-use choices. Grid managers are gaining experience planning and operating electricity systems with growing shares of renewable generation and working toward understanding the best approaches for dealing with the natural variability of wind and solar sources alongside increases in electrification. {5.3, 12.3, 13.1, 13.2, 22.3, 24.4, 32.3; Figure 22.17}

Climate change exacerbates existing health challenges and creates new ones

Climate change is already harming human health across the US, and impacts are expected to worsen with continued warming. Climate change harms individuals and communities by exposing them to a range of compounding health hazards, including the following:

- More severe and frequent extreme events {2.2, 2.3, 15.1}
- Wider distribution of infectious and vector-borne pathogens {15.1, 26.1; Figure A4.16}
- Air quality worsened by smog, wildfire smoke, dust, and increased pollen {14.1, 14.2, 14.4, 23.1, 26.1}
- Threats to food and water security {11.2, 15.1}
- Mental and spiritual health stressors {15.1}

(**left**; Oregon) The Hooskanaden Landslide, triggered by heavy rainfall, caused substantial road damage. (**right**; Maunabo, Puerto Rico) Punta Tuna Wetlands Nature Reserve, which helps buffer the coastline from extreme events, was severely damaged during Hurricane Maria in 2017. Photo credits: (left) Oregon Department of Transportation [CC BY 2.0]; (right) Kenneth Wilsey, FEMA.

While climate change can harm everyone's health, its impacts exacerbate long-standing disparities that result in inequitable health outcomes for historically marginalized people, including people of color, Indigenous Peoples, low-income communities, and sexual and gender minorities, as well as older adults, people with disabilities or chronic diseases, outdoor workers, and children. {14.3, 15.2}

The disproportionate health impacts of climate change compound with similar disparities in other health contexts. For example, climate-related disasters during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as drought along the Colorado River basin, western wildfires, and Hurricane Laura, disproportionately magnified COVID-19 exposure, transmission, and disease severity and contributed to worsened health conditions for essential workers, older adults, farmworkers, low-wealth communities, and communities of color. {15.2; Focus on COVID-19 and Climate Change}

Large reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are expected to result in widespread health benefits and avoided death or illness that far outweigh the costs of mitigation actions. Improving early warning, surveillance, and communication of health threats; strengthening the resilience of healthcare systems; and supporting community-driven adaptation strategies can reduce inequities in the resources and capabilities needed to adapt as health threats from climate change continue to grow. {14.5, 15.3, 26.1, 30.2, 32.4}

(**left**; New York, New York) The Empire State Building is shrouded in a haze caused by smoke from the 2023 Canadian wildfires. (top right; Charleston, South Carolina) An ambulance drives through floodwaters. (bottom right; Atlanta, Georgia) Heatwaves in the Southeast are happening more frequently. Park amenities, such as trees and splash pads, help cool people on hot days. Photo credits: (left) Anthony Quintano [CC BY 2.0]; (top right) US Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Jorge Intriago; (bottom right) ucumari photography [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0]

Box 1.3. Indigenous Ways of Life and Spiritual Health

Indigenous communities, whose ways of life, cultures, intergenerational continuity, and spiritual health are tied to nature and the environment, are experiencing disproportionate health impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures and intensifying extreme events are reducing biodiversity and shifting the ranges of culturally important species like Pacific salmon, wild rice, and moose, making it more difficult for Indigenous Peoples to fish, hunt, and gather traditional and subsistence resources within Tribal jurisdictions. Heatwaves can prevent Tribal members from participating in traditional ceremonies, while flooding, erosion, landslides, and wildfires increasingly disrupt or damage burial grounds and ceremonial sites. {16.1, 15.2, 27.6}

Indigenous Peoples are leading numerous actions in response to climate change, including planning and policy initiatives, youth movements, cross-community collaborative efforts, and the expansion of renewable energy (Figure 1.11). Many of these efforts involve planning processes that start with place-based Indigenous Knowledge of local climate and ecosystems. {16.3}

Exemplifying Indigenous Resilience

Figure 1.11. For over 2,000 years, the Hopi People have farmed on land with only 6–10 inches of annual precipitation. Today, Hopi children learn both the practices and process of Hopi dryland farming and the values, customs, and identities that underpin them. Photo credit: ©Michael K. Johnson. {Panel from Figure 16.6}

Ecosystems are undergoing transformational changes

Together with other stressors, climate change is harming the health and resilience of ecosystems, leading to reductions in biodiversity and ecosystem services. Increasing temperatures continue to shift habitat ranges as species expand into new regions or disappear from unfavorable areas, altering where people can hunt, catch, or gather economically important and traditional food sources. Degradation and extinction of local flora and fauna in vulnerable ecosystems like coral reefs and montane rainforests are expected in the near term, especially where climate changes favor invasive species or increase susceptibility to pests and pathogens. Without significant emissions reductions, rapid shifts in environmental conditions are expected to lead to irreversible ecological transformations by mid- to late century. {2.3, 6.2, 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.2, 10.1, 10.2, 21.1, 24.2, 27.2, 28.5, 29.3, 29.5, 30.4; Figure A4.12}

Changes in ocean conditions and extreme events are already transforming coastal, aquatic, and marine ecosystems. Coral reefs are being lost due to warming and ocean acidification, harming important fisheries; coastal forests are converting to ghost forests, shrublands, and marsh due to sea level rise, reducing coastal protection; lake and stream habitats are being degraded by warming, heavy rainfall, and invasive species, leading to declines in economically important species. {8.1. 10.1, 21.2, 23.2, 24.2, 27.2; Figures 8.7, A4.11}

Increased risks to ecosystems are expected with further climate change and other environmental changes, such as habitat fragmentation, pollution, and overfishing. For example, mass fish die-offs from extreme summertime heat are projected to double by midcentury in northern temperate lakes under a very high scenario (RCP8.5). Continued climate changes are projected to exacerbate runoff and erosion, promote harmful algal blooms, and expand the range of invasive species. {4.2, 7.1, 8.2, 10.1, 21.2, 23.2, 24.2, 27.2, 28.2, 30.4}

While adaptation options to protect fragile ecosystems may be limited, particularly under higher levels of warming, management and restoration measures can reduce stress on ecological systems and build resilience. These measures include migration assistance for vulnerable species and protection of essential habitats, such as establishing wildlife corridors or places where species can avoid heat. Opportunities for nature-based solutions that assist in mitigation exist across the US, particularly those focused on protecting existing carbon sinks and increasing carbon storage by natural ecosystems. {8.3, 10.3, 23.2, 27.2; Focus on Blue Carbon}

(**top left**; Nags Head Woods, North Carolina) Coastal ghost forests result when trees are killed by sea level rise and saltwater intrusion. (**top right**; Molokai Island, Hawai'i) High island ecosystems are at risk due to invasive species, habitat destruction, intensifying fire, and drought. (**bottom**; Florida) A diver works on coral reef restoration around Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Photo credits: (top left) NC Wetlands [CC BY 2.0]; (top right) Lucas Fortini, USGS; (bottom) Mitchell Tartt, NOAA.

Climate change slows economic growth, while climate action presents opportunities

With every additional increment of global warming, costly damages are expected to accelerate. For example, 2°F of warming is projected to cause more than twice the economic harm induced by 1°F of warming. Damages from additional warming pose significant risks to the US economy at multiple scales and can compound to dampen economic growth. {19.1}

- International impacts can disrupt trade, amplify costs along global supply chains, and affect domestic markets. {17.3, 19.2; Focus on Risks to Supply Chains}
- While some economic impacts of climate change are already being felt across the country, the impacts of future changes are projected to be more significant and apparent across the US economy. {19.1}
- States, cities, and municipalities confront climate-driven pressures on public budgets and borrowing costs amid spending increases on healthcare and disaster relief. {19.2}
- Household consumers face higher costs for goods and services, like groceries and health insurance premiums, as prices change to reflect both current and projected climate-related damages. {19.2}

Mitigation and adaptation actions present economic opportunities. Public and private measures—such as climate financial risk disclosures, carbon offset credit markets, and investments in green bonds—can avoid economic losses and improve property values, resilience, and equity. However, climate responses are not without risk. As innovation and trade open further investment opportunities in renewable energy and the country continues to transition away from fossil fuels, loss and disposal costs of stranded capital assets such as coal mines, oil and gas wells, and outdated power plants are expected. Climate solutions designed without input from affected communities can also result in increased vulnerability and cost burden. {17.3, 19.2, 19.3, 20.2, 20.3, 27.1, 31.6}

Many regional economies and livelihoods are threatened by damages to natural resources and intensifying extremes

Climate change is projected to reduce US economic output and labor productivity across many sectors, with effects differing based on local climate and the industries unique to each region. Climate-driven damages to local economies especially disrupt heritage industries (e.g., fishing traditions, trades passed down over generations, and cultural heritage–based tourism) and communities whose livelihoods depend on natural resources. {11.3, 19.1, 19.3}

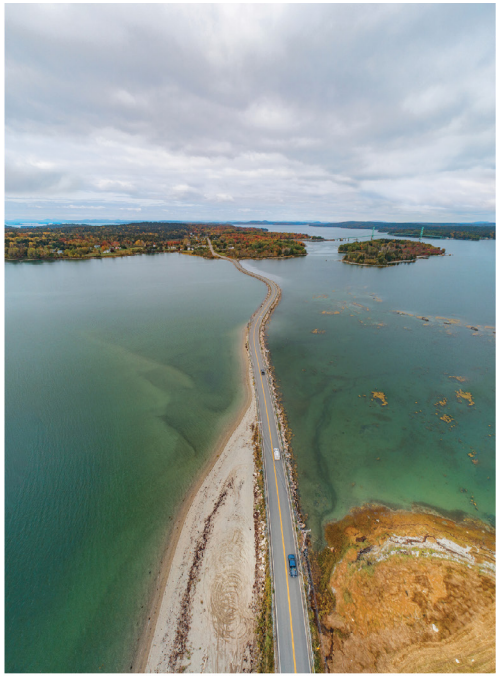
- As fish stocks in the Northeast move northward and to deeper waters in response to rapidly rising ocean temperatures, important fisheries like scallops, shrimp, and cod are at risk. In Alaska, climate change has already played a role in 18 major fishery disasters that were especially damaging for coastal Indigenous Peoples, subsistence fishers, and rural communities. {10.2, 21.2, 29.3}
- While the Southeast and US Caribbean face high costs from projected labor losses and heat health risks to outdoor workers, small businesses are already confronting higher costs of goods and services and potential closures as they struggle to recover from the effects of compounding extreme weather events. {22.3, 23.1}
- Agricultural losses in the Midwest, including lower corn yields and damages to specialty crops like apples, are linked to rapid shifts between wet and dry conditions and stresses from climate-induced increases in pests and pathogens. Extreme heat and more intense wildfire and drought in the Southwest are already threatening agricultural worker health, reducing cattle production, and damaging wineries. {24.1, 28.5}
- In the Northern Great Plains, agriculture and recreation are expected to see primarily negative effects related to changing temperature and rainfall patterns. By 2070, the

Southern Great Plains is expected to lose cropland acreage as lands transition to pasture or grassland. {25.3, 26.2}

- Outdoor-dependent industries, such as tourism in Hawai‘i and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands and skiing in the Northwest, face significant economic loss from projected rises in park closures and reductions in workforce as continued warming leads to deterioration of coastal ecosystems and shorter winter seasons with less snowfall. {7.2, 8.3, 10.1, 10.3, 19.1, 27.3, 30.4}

Mitigation and adaptation actions taken by businesses and industries promote resilience and offer long-term benefits to employers, employees, and surrounding communities. For example, as commercial fisheries adapt, diversifying harvest and livelihoods can help stabilize income or buffer risk. In addition, regulators and investors are increasingly requiring businesses to disclose climate risks and management strategies. {10.2, 19.3, 26.2}

Scarlett W.



(**top left**; Fort Myers Beach, Florida) Shops and restaurants were severely damaged or completed destroyed by Hurricane Ian in 2022. (**bottom left**; Whatcom County, Washington) Snow-based recreational industries, such as skiing in the Pacific Northwest, are projected to lose revenue due to declining snowpack. (**right**; Maine) A causeway connecting Little Deer Isle to Deer Isle (the largest lobster port in the state) is threatened by sea level rise. Photo credits: (top left) Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Gabriel Wisdom; (bottom left) US Forest Service–Pacific Northwest Region; (right) ©Jack Sullivan, Island Institute.

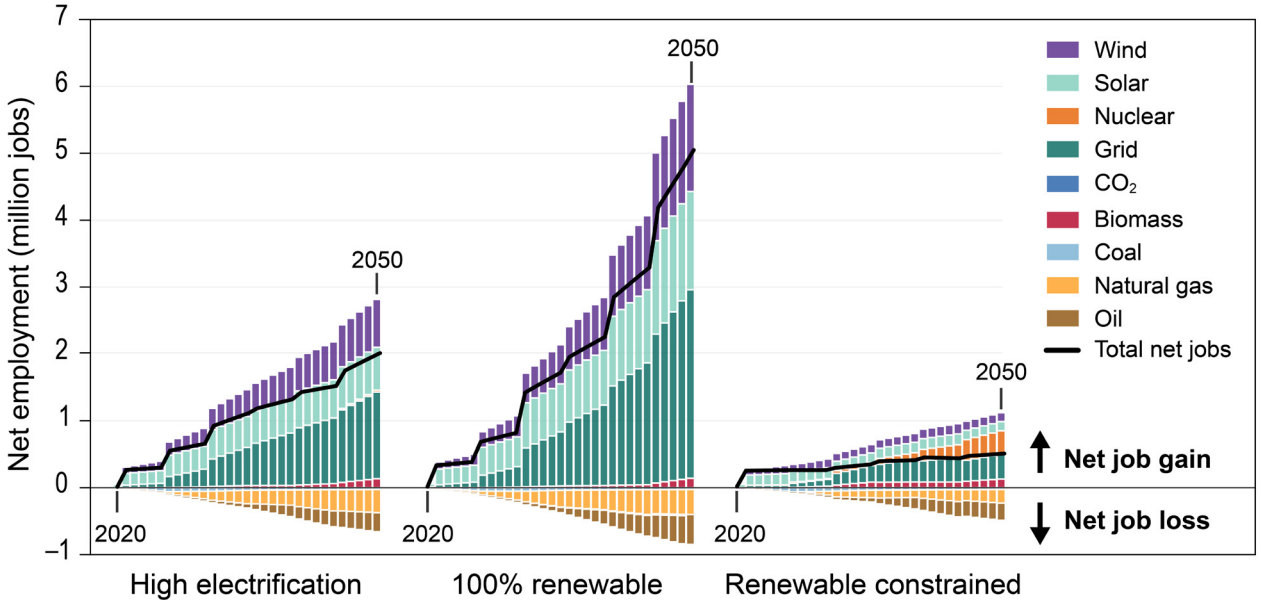
Job opportunities are shifting due to climate change and climate action

Many US households are already feeling the economic impacts of climate change. Climate change is projected to impose a variety of new or higher costs on most households as healthcare, food, insurance, building, and repair costs become more expensive. Compounding climate stressors can increase segregation, income inequality, and reliance on social safety net programs. Quality of life is also threatened by climate change

in ways that can be more difficult to quantify, such as increased crime and domestic violence, harm to mental health, reduced happiness, and fewer opportunities for outdoor recreation and play. {11.3, 19.1, 19.3}

Climate change, and how the country responds, is expected to alter demand for workers and shift where jobs are available. For example, energy-related livelihoods in the Northern and Southern Great Plains are expected to shift as the energy sector transforms toward more renewables, low-carbon technologies, and electrification of more sectors of the economy. Losses in fossil fuel–related jobs are projected to be completely offset by greater increases in mitigation-related jobs, as increased demand for renewable energy and low-carbon technologies is expected to lead to long-term expansion in most states' energy and decarbonization workforce (Figure 1.12). Grid expansion and energy efficiency efforts are already creating new jobs in places like Nevada, Vermont, and Alaska, and advancements in biofuels and agrivoltaics (combined renewable energy and agriculture) provide economic opportunities in rural communities. {10.2, 11.3, 19.3, 25.3, 26.2, 29.3, 32.4}

Additional opportunities include jobs in ecosystem restoration and construction of energy-efficient and climate-resilient housing and infrastructure. Workforce training and equitable access to clean energy jobs, which have tended to exclude women and people of color, are essential elements of a just transition to a decarbonized economy. {5.3, 19.3, 20.3, 22.3, 25.3, 26.2, 27.3, 32.4}



Energy Employment (2020–2050) for Alternative Net-Zero Pathways

Employment gains in electrification and renewable energy industries are projected to far outpace job losses in fossil fuel industries.

Figure 1.12. Despite decreases in the number of fossil fuel–related jobs, the overall number of energy jobs (specifically those involved in the supply of energy) relative to 2019 is generally projected to increase in net-zero-emissions energy scenarios between 2020 and 2050, although by much more in some scenarios than in others. {Figure 32.17} Adapted with permission from Jenkins et al. 2021.

(**top**; Golden, Colorado) Solar panels are pictured on the campus of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. (**bottom left**; San Antonio, Texas) Participants in the 2022 Collegiate Wind Competition focus on offshore wind projects. (**bottom right**; Lexington, Virginia) Workers install fiber-optic cables. Rural broadband deployment is associated with higher incomes and lower unemployment rates. Photo credits: (top and bottom left) Werner Slocum/NREL [CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0]; (bottom right) Preston Keres, USDA

Climate change is disrupting cultures, heritages, and traditions

As climate change transforms US landscapes and ecosystems, many deeply rooted community ties, pastimes, Traditional Knowledges, and cultural or spiritual connections to place are at risk. Cultural heritage—including buildings, monuments, livelihoods, and practices—is threatened by impacts on natural ecosystems and the built environment. Damages to archaeological, cultural, and historical sites further reduce opportunities to transfer important knowledge and identity to future generations. {6.1, 7.2, 8.3, 9.2, 10.1, 12.2, 16.1, 22.1, 23.1, 26.1, 27.6, 28.2; Introductions in Chs. 10, 30}

Many outdoor activities and traditions are already being affected by climate change, with overall impacts projected to further hinder recreation, cultural practices, and the ability of communities to maintain local heritage and a sense of place. {19.1}

For example:

- The prevalence of invasive species and harmful algal blooms is increasing as waters warm, threatening activities like swimming along Southeast beaches, boating and fishing for walleye in the Great Lakes, and viewing whooping cranes along the Gulf Coast. In the Northwest, water-based recreation demand is expected to increase in spring and summer months, but reduced water quality and harmful algal blooms are expected to restrict these opportunities. {24.2, 24.5, 26.3, 27.6}

- Ranges of culturally important species are shifting as temperatures warm, making them harder to find in areas where Indigenous Peoples have access (see Box 1.3). {11.2, 24.2, 26.1}
- Hikers, campers, athletes, and spectators face increasing threats from more severe heatwaves, wildfires, and floods and greater exposure to infectious disease. {15.1, 22.2, 26.3, 27.6}

Nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration can preserve cultural heritage while also providing valuable local benefits, such as flood protection and new recreational opportunities. Cultural heritage can also play a key role in climate solutions, as incorporating local values, Indigenous Knowledge, and equity into design and planning can help reaffirm a community's connection to place, strengthen social networks, and build new traditions. {7.3, 26.1, 26.3, 30.5}

(**top left**; Glacier National Park, Montana) Wildfire smoke jeopardizes participation in outdoor sports and recreation. (**top right**; Boston Harbor, Massachusetts) Sea level rise threatens historical and archaeological sites on the Boston Harbor Islands. (**bottom**; Goose Island, Texas) Whooping cranes, which draw birdwatchers to the Gulf of Mexico, are at risk due to flooding, drought, and upstream water use. Photo credit: (top left) Andrew Parlette [CC BY 2.0]; (top right) cmh2315fl [CC BY-NC 2.0]; (bottom) Alan Schmierer [CC0 1.0].

The Choices That Will Determine the Future

With each additional increment of warming, the consequences of climate change increase. The faster and further the world cuts greenhouse gas emissions, the more future warming will be avoided, increasing the chances of limiting or avoiding harmful impacts to current and future generations.

Societal choices drive greenhouse gas emissions

The choices people make on a day-to-day basis—how to power homes and businesses, get around, and produce and use food and other goods—collectively determine the amount of greenhouse gases emitted. Human use of fossil fuels for transportation and energy generation, along with activities like manufacturing and agriculture, has increased atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases. Since 1850, CO_2 concentrations have increased by almost 50%, methane by more than 156%, and nitrous oxide by 23%, resulting in long-term global warming. {2.1, 3.1; Ch. 2, Introduction}

The CO_2 not removed from the atmosphere by natural sinks lingers for thousands of years. This means that CO_2 emitted long ago continues to contribute to climate change today. Because of historical trends, cumulative CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels and industry in the US are higher than from any other country. To understand the total contributions of past actions to observed climate change, additional warming from CO_2 emissions from land use, land-use change, and forestry, as well as emissions of nitrous oxide and the shorter-lived greenhouse gas methane, should also be taken into account. Accounting for all of these factors and emissions from 1850–2021, emissions from the US are estimated to comprise approximately 17% of current global warming. {2.1}

Tami Phelps

Carbon dioxide, along with other greenhouse gases like methane and nitrous oxide, is well-mixed in the atmosphere. This means these gases warm the planet regardless of where they were emitted. For the first half of the 20th century, the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions came from the US and Europe. But as US and European emissions have been falling (US emissions in 2021 were 17% lower than 2005 levels), emissions from the rest of the world, particularly Asia, have been rising rapidly. The choices the US and other countries make now will determine the trajectory of climate change and associated impacts for many generations to come (Figure 1.13). {2.1, 2.3; Ch. 32}

George Lorio

Box 1.4. Global Warming Levels

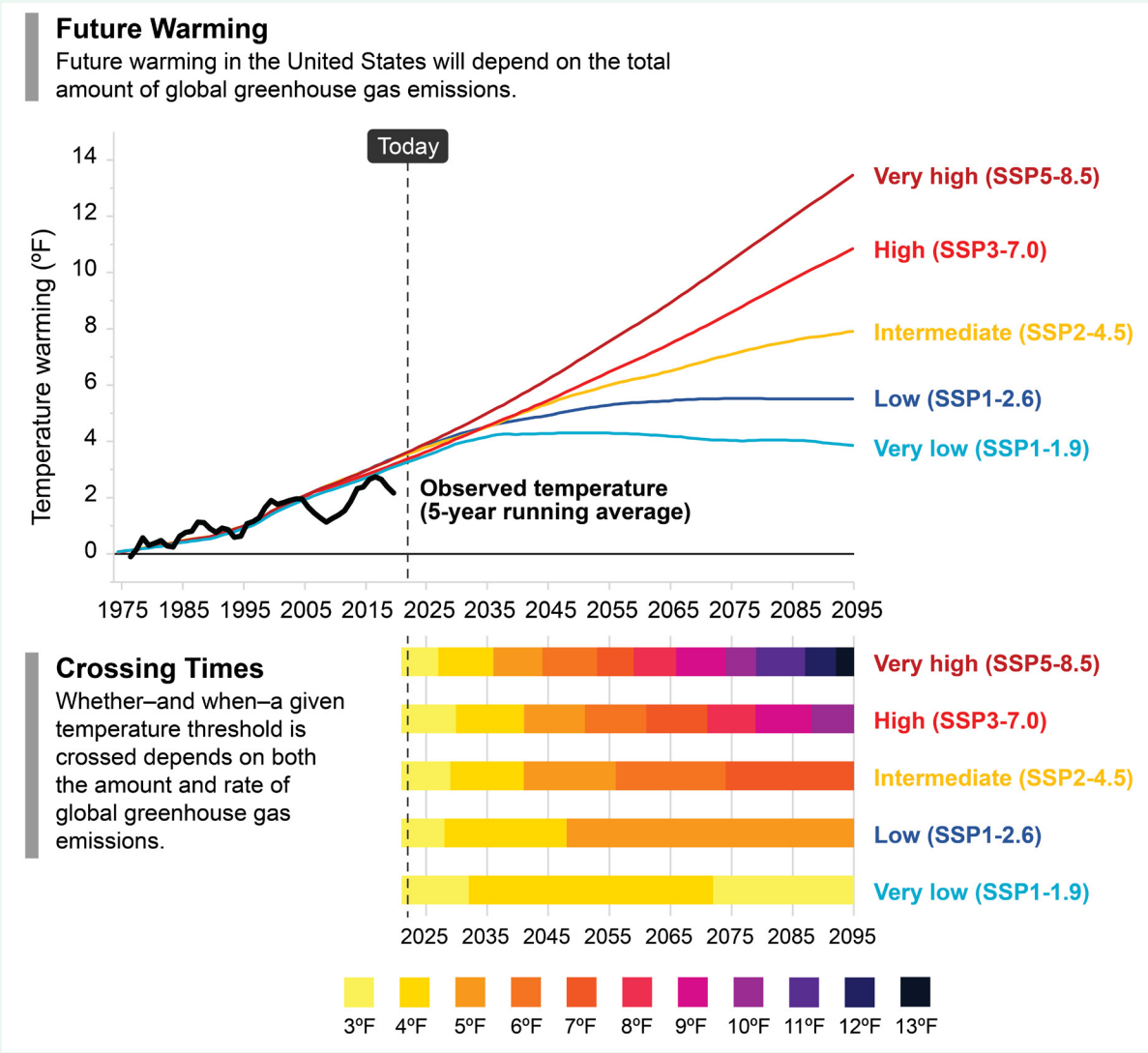
Because long-term societal actions are uncertain, climate modeling experts use different scenarios of plausible futures to represent a range of possible trajectories. These scenarios capture variables such as the relationship between human behavior, greenhouse gas emissions, Earth's responses to changes in the concentration of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere and ocean, and the resulting impacts, including temperature change and sea level rise. {3.3; Guide to the Report; App. 3}

Since there are uncertainties inherent in all of these factors—especially human behavior and the choices that determine emissions levels—the resulting range of projections are not predictions but instead reflect multiple potential future pathways. Future climate change under a given scenario is often expressed in one of two ways: as a range of potential outcomes in a future year (Figure 1.13a) or the time at which a specific outcome is expected (Figure 1.13b). {2.3, 3.3; App. 3}

Over the next decade, projected global warming is very similar across all scenarios. Updating energy infrastructure or making systemic economic and political changes takes time, thus temperature trajectories under different scenarios take time to diverge. {2.3}

By midcentury (2040–2070), differences between projected temperatures under higher and lower scenarios become apparent. By the end of the century, the global warming level—that is, how much the global average surface temperature increases above preindustrial levels—is expected to exceed 5.4°F (3°C) under high and very high scenarios (SSP3-7.0 and SSP5-8.5, respectively), and the world could see more than 7.2°F (4°C) of warming under a very high scenario (SSP5-8.5). Long-term global warming is expected to stay below 3.6°F (2°C) under a low scenario (SSP1-2.6) and can be limited to 2.7°F (1.5°C) only under a very low scenario (SSP1-1.9). {2.3}

The risk of exceeding a particular global warming level depends on future emissions. This means that projections are conditional: when or if the world reaches a particular level of warming is largely dependent on human choices. {2.3}



Potential Warming Pathways in the United States

When or if the US reaches a particular level of warming depends on global greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.

Figure 1.13. How much warming the US will experience—and when a given temperature threshold is crossed—depends on future global emissions. The **top graph** shows observed change in US surface temperature during 1975–2022 (black line, 5-year averaged) and modeled historical (1975–2014) and projected (2015–2095) change in surface temperature compared to 1951–1980, annually averaged over all 50 states and Puerto Rico under different climate scenarios (multicolored lines; see Table 3 in the Guide to the Report). The **bottom graph** shows the same projections in a different way, highlighting the year in which the US crosses temperature thresholds under each scenario. The vertical dashed line represents the year 2023. Data for the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands and the US Virgin Islands are not available. See Figure 1.5 for observed US and global temperature changes since 1895. Adapted with permission from Figure TS.1 in Arias et al. 2021.

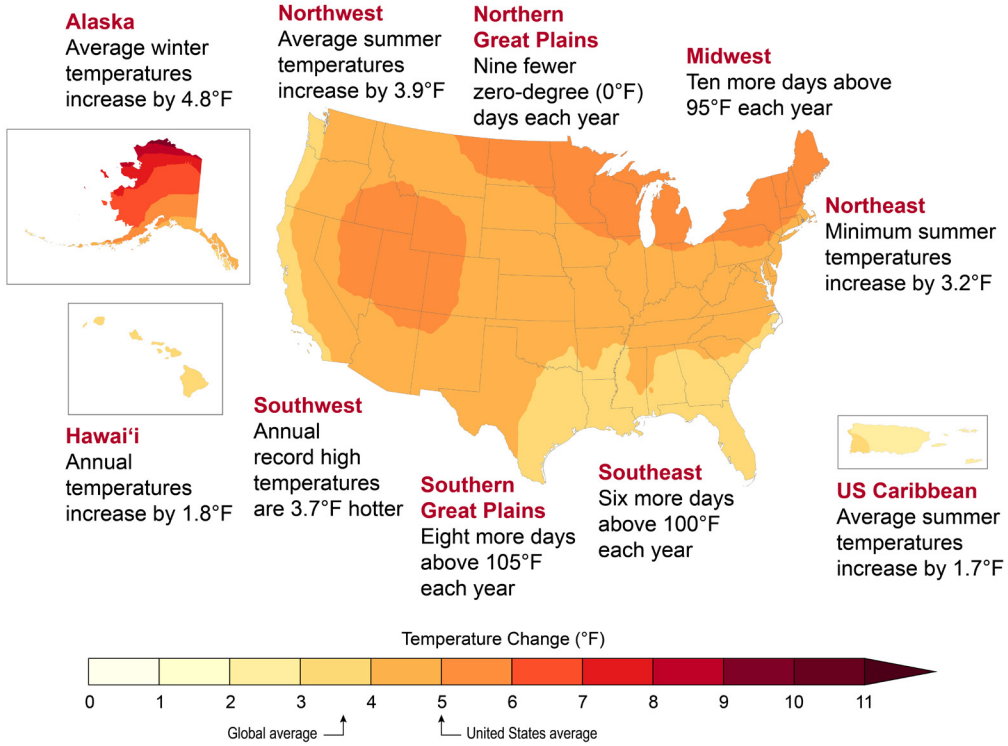
Rising global emissions are driving global warming, with faster warming in the US

The observed global warming of about 2°F (1.1°C) over the industrial era is unequivocally caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, with only very small effects from natural sources. About three-quarters of total emissions and warming (1.7°F [0.95°C]) have occurred since 1970. Warming would have been even greater without the land and ocean carbon sinks, which have absorbed more than half of the CO_2 emitted by humans. {2.1, 3.1, 7.2; Ch. 2, Introduction; Figures 3.1, 3.8}

The US is warming faster than the global average, reflecting a broader global pattern: land areas are warming faster than the ocean, and higher latitudes are warming faster than lower latitudes. Additional global warming is expected to lead to even greater warming in some US regions, particularly Alaska (Figure 1.14). {2.1, 3.4; Ch. 2, Introduction; App. 4}

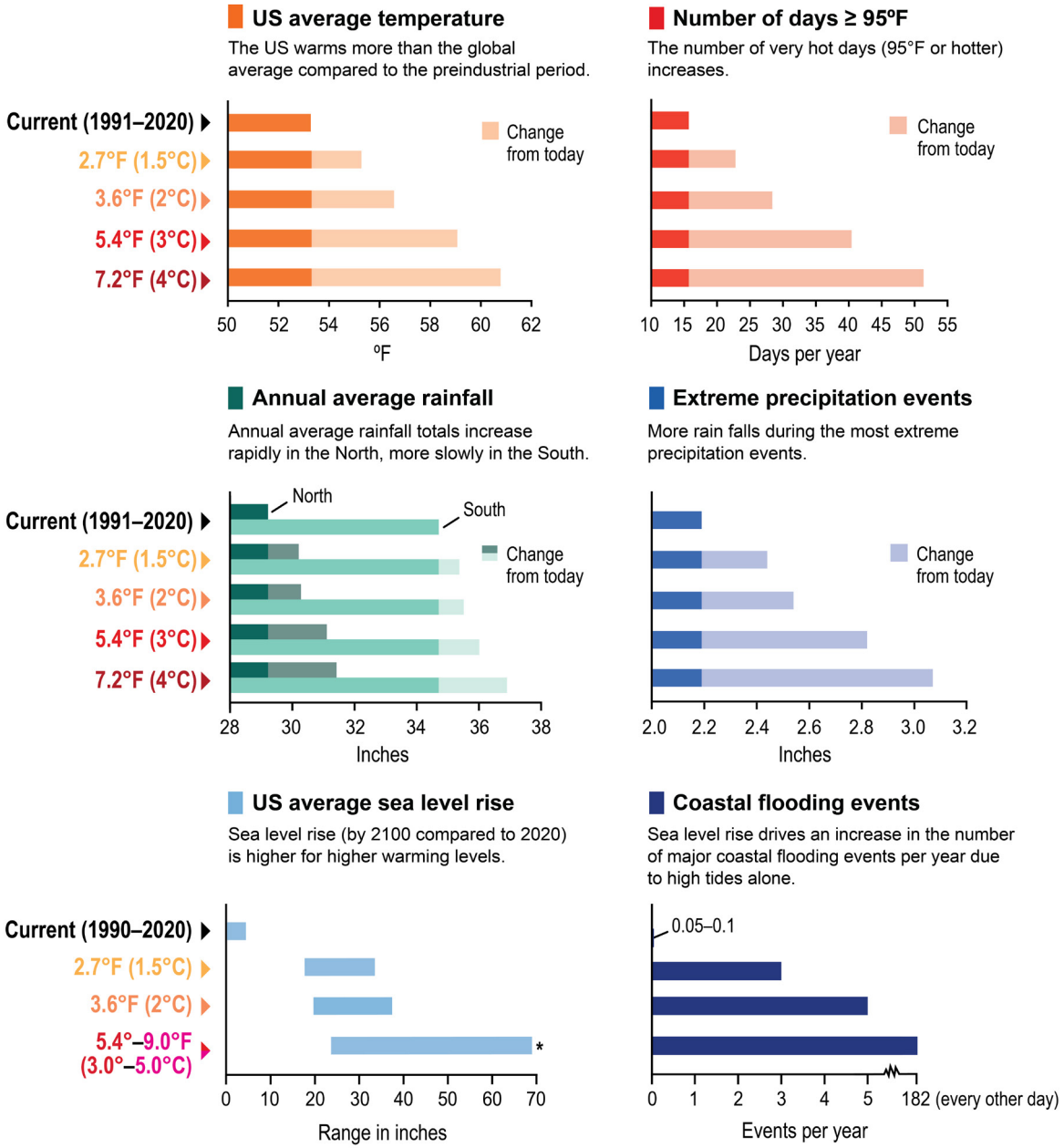
Warming increases risks to the US

Rising temperatures lead to many large-scale changes in Earth's climate system, and the consequences increase with warming (Figure 1.15). Some of these changes can be further amplified through feedback processes at higher levels of warming, increasing the risk of potentially catastrophic outcomes. For example, uncertainty in the stability of ice sheets at high warming levels means that increases in sea level along the continental US of 3–7 feet by 2100 and 5–12 feet by 2150 are distinct possibilities that cannot be ruled out. The chance of reaching the upper end of these ranges increases as more warming occurs. In addition to warming more, the Earth warms faster in high and very high scenarios (SSP3-7.0 and SSP5-8.5, respectively), making adaptation more challenging. {2.3, 3.1, 3.4, 9.1}



What would 3.6°F (2°C) of global warming feel like in the United States?

Figure 1.14. As the world warms, the United States warms more on average. The map shows projected changes in annual surface temperature compared to the present day (1991–2020) under a global warming level of 3.6°F (2°C) above preindustrial levels (see Figure 2.9). Regional examples show how different temperature impacts would be experienced across the country at this level of warming. Figure credit: USGCRP, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.



*Rise at the upper end of this range cannot be ruled out due to the possibility of rapid ice sheet loss. The amount of warming required to trigger such loss is not currently known but is assessed to be above 3.6°F (2°C).

Consequences Are Greater at Higher Global Warming Levels

At higher global warming levels, the US will experience more severe climate impacts.

Figure 1.15. With each additional increment of global warming, climate impacts in the US are projected to be more severe: US average temperature warms more than the global average (**top left**), and the number of days per year at or above 95°F in the US increases (**top right**). Annual average US rainfall increases rapidly in the North and more slowly in the South (**center left**), and more rain falls during the most extreme precipitation events (**center right**). Sea level rise (range of projected increases by 2100 compared to 2020) is higher (**bottom left**), driving an increase in the number of major coastal flooding events per year due to high tides alone (**bottom right**). Temperature (averages and extremely hot days; top row) and extreme rainfall projections (center right) are averages for all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Average rainfall projections (center left) are shown for both the northern and southern US (above and below 37° latitude, respectively). Sea level rise (bottom left) and coastal flooding (bottom right) projections are averages for the contiguous United States. For sea level change estimates outside of the contiguous US, see Chapter 23 (for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands), Chapter 30 (for Hawai'i and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands), and Sweet et al. 2022 (for Alaska). Global warming levels refer to warming since preindustrial temperature conditions, defined as the 1851–1900 average. Figure credit: USGCRP, NOAA NOS, NASA, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

How Climate Action Can Create a More Resilient and Just Nation

Large near-term cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are achievable through many currently available and cost-effective mitigation options. However, reaching net-zero emissions by midcentury cannot be achieved without exploring additional mitigation options. Even if the world decarbonizes rapidly, the Nation will continue to face climate impacts and risks. Adequately and equitably addressing these risks involves longer-term inclusive planning, investments in transformative adaptation, and mitigation approaches that consider equity and justice.

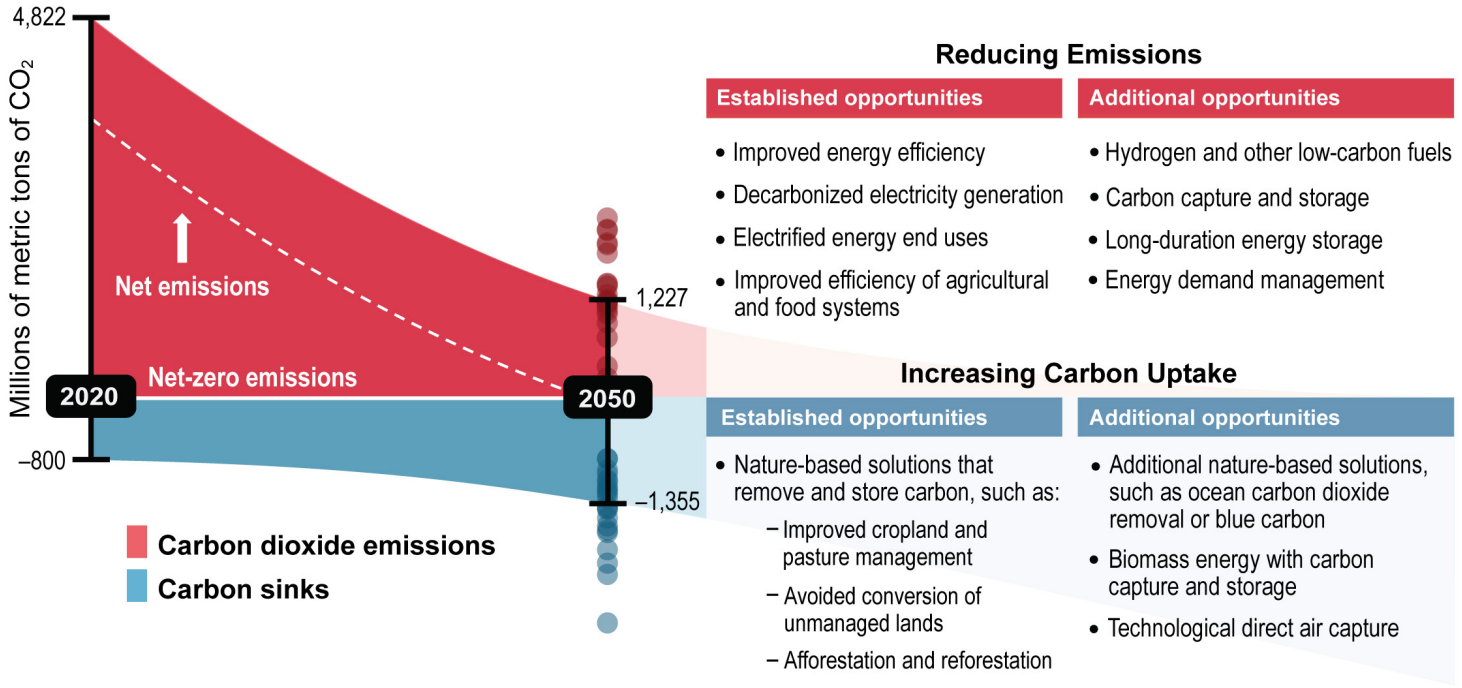
Available mitigation strategies can deliver substantial emissions reductions, but additional options are needed to reach net zero

Limiting global temperature change to well below 2°C (3.6°F) requires reaching net-zero CO_2 emissions globally by 2050 and net-zero emissions of all greenhouse gases from human activities within the following few decades (see "Meeting US mitigation targets means reaching net-zero emissions" above). Net-zero emissions pathways involve widespread implementation of currently available and cost-effective options for reducing emissions alongside rapid expansion of technologies and methods to remove carbon from the atmosphere to balance remaining emissions. However, to reach net-zero emissions, additional mitigation options need to be explored (Figure 1.16). Pathways to net zero involve large-scale technological, infrastructure, land-use, and behavioral changes and shifts in governance structures. {5.3, 6.3, 9.2, 9.3, 10.4, 13.2, 16.2, 18.4, 20.1, 24.1, 25.5, 30.5, 32.2, 32.3; Focus on Blue Carbon}

Scenarios that reach net-zero emissions include some of the following key options:

- Decarbonizing the electricity sector, primarily through expansion of wind and solar energy, supported by energy storage {32.2}
- Transitioning to transportation and heating systems that use zero-carbon electricity or low-carbon fuels, such as hydrogen {5.3, 13.1, 32.2, 32.3}
- Improving energy efficiency in buildings, appliances, and light- and heavy-duty vehicles and other transportation modes {5.3, 13.3, 32.2}
- Implementing urban planning and building design that reduces energy demands through more public transportation and active transportation and lower cooling demands for buildings {12.3, 13.1, 32.2}
- Increasing the efficiency and sustainability of food production, distribution, and consumption {11.1, 32.2}
- Improving land management to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon removal and storage, with options ranging from afforestation, reforestation, and restoring coastal ecosystems to industrial processes that directly capture and store carbon from the air {5.3, 6.3, 8.3, 32.2, 32.3; Focus on Blue Carbon}

Portfolio of Mitigation Options for Achieving Net Zero by 2050



Reaching net zero by 2050 in the US will involve a mix of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and increases in carbon dioxide removal.

Figure 1.16. Reaching net-zero emissions (horizontal white line) by midcentury in the US would mean deep reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other greenhouse gases (**top side of figure**; red), with residual emissions balanced by additional removal of CO_2 from the atmosphere (**bottom side of figure**; blue). The dashed white line shows net emissions to the atmosphere (the sum of carbon sources and carbon sinks). The dots at 2050 show ranges of emissions and uptake for energy model scenarios explored in detail in Chapter 32. Model scenarios that achieve these targets project a mix of established opportunities for reducing emissions and increasing carbon sinks. Among these, energy efficiency, decarbonized electricity (mainly renewables), and end-use electrification are critical for the energy sector. While not exhaustive, the list also includes additional opportunities, many of which are emerging technologies that will be integral to reaching net zero. These include options like use of hydrogen and low-carbon fuels to further reduce emissions in difficult-to-decarbonize sectors and greatly increasing CO_2 removal. Figure credit: EPA; University of California, Irvine; NOAA NCEI; and CISESS NC.

Due to large declines in technology and deployment costs over the last decade (Figure 1.2), decarbonizing the electricity sector is expected to be largely driven by rapid growth in renewable energy. Recent legislation is also expected to increase deployment rates of low- and zero-carbon technology. To reach net-zero targets, the US will need to add new electricity-generating capacity, mostly wind and solar, faster than ever before. This infrastructure expansion may drastically increase demand for products (batteries, solar photovoltaics) and resources, such as metals and critical minerals. Near-term shortages in minerals and metals due to increased demand can be addressed by increased recycling, for example, which can also reduce dependence on imported materials. {5.2, 5.3, 17.2, 25.3, 32.2, 32.4; Focus on Risks to Supply Chains}

Most US net-zero scenarios require CO_2 removal from the atmosphere to balance residual emissions, particularly from sectors where decarbonization is difficult. In these scenarios, nuclear and hydropower capacity are maintained but not greatly expanded; natural gas–fired generation declines, but more slowly if coupled with carbon capture and storage. {32.2}

Nature-based solutions that restore degraded ecosystems and preserve or enhance carbon storage in natural systems like forests, oceans, and wetlands, as well as agricultural lands, are cost-effective mitigation strategies. For example, with conservation and restoration, marine and coastal ecosystems could capture and store enough atmospheric carbon each year to offset about 3% of global emissions (based on 2019 and 2020 emissions). Many nature-based solutions can provide additional benefits, like improved ecosystem resilience, food production, improved water quality, and recreational opportunities. {8.3; Boxes 7.2, 32.2; Focus on Blue Carbon}

Adequately addressing climate risks involves transformative adaptation

While adaptation planning and implementation has advanced in the US, most adaptation actions to date have been incremental and small in scale (see Table 1.3). In many cases, more transformative adaptation will be necessary to adequately address the risks of current and future climate change. {31.1, 31.3}.

Table 1.3. Incremental Versus Transformative Adaptation Approaches

	Examples of incremental adaptation	Examples of transformative adaptation
	Using air-conditioning during heatwaves	Redesigning cities and buildings to address heat
	Reducing water consumption during droughts	Shifting water-intensive industry to match projected rainfall patterns
	Elevating homes above flood waters	Directing new housing development to less flood-prone areas

Transformative adaptation involves fundamental shifts in systems, values, and practices, including assessing potential trade-offs, intentionally integrating equity into adaptation processes, and making systemic changes to institutions and norms. While barriers to adaptation remain, many of these can be overcome with financial, cultural, technological, legislative, or institutional changes. {31.1, 31.2, 31.3}.

Adaptation planning can more effectively reduce climate risk when it identifies not only disparities in how people are affected by climate change but also the underlying causes of climate vulnerability. Transformative adaptation would involve consideration of both the physical and social drivers of vulnerability and how they interact to shape local experiences of vulnerability and disparities in risk. Examples include understanding how differing levels of access to disaster assistance constrain recovery outcomes or how disaster damage exacerbates long-term wealth inequality. Effective adaptation, both incremental and transformative, involves developing and investing in new monitoring and evaluation methods to understand the different values of, and impacts on, diverse individuals and communities. {9.3, 19.3, 31.2, 31.3, 31.5}

Transformative adaptation would require new and better-coordinated governance mechanisms and cooperation across all levels of government, the private sector, and society. A coordinated, systems-based approach can support consideration of risks that cut across multiple sectors and scales, as well as the development of context-specific adaptations. For example, California, Florida, and other states have used informal regional collaborations to develop adaptation strategies tailored to their area. Adaptation measures that are designed and implemented using inclusive, participatory planning approaches and leverage coordinated governance and financing have the greatest potential for long-term benefits, such as improved quality of life and increased economic productivity. {10.3, 18.4, 20.2, 31.4}

Ritika S.

Joan Hart

Mitigation and adaptation actions can result in systemic, cascading benefits

Actions taken now to accelerate net emissions reductions and adapt to ongoing changes can reduce risks to current and future generations. Mitigation and adaptation actions, from international to individual scales, can also result in a range of benefits beyond limiting harmful climate impacts, including some immediate benefits (Figure 1.1). The benefits of mitigation and proactive adaptation investments are expected to outweigh the costs. {2.3, 13.3, 14.5, 15.3, 17.4, 22.1, 31.6, 32.4; Introductions in Chs. 17, 31}

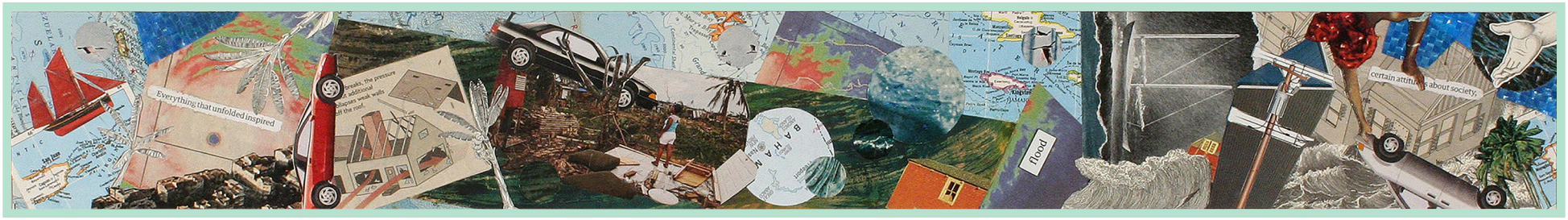
- Accelerating the deployment of low-carbon technologies, expanding renewable energy, and improving building efficiency can have significant near-term social and economic benefits like reducing energy costs and creating jobs. {32.4}
- Transitioning to a carbon-free, sustainable, and resilient transportation system can lead to improvements in air quality, fewer traffic fatalities, lower costs to travelers, improved mental and physical health, and healthier ecosystems. {13.3}
- Reducing emissions of short-lived climate pollutants like methane, black carbon, and ozone provides immediate air quality benefits that save lives and decrease the burden on healthcare systems while also slowing near-term warming. {11.1, 14.5, 15.3}
- Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions that accelerate pathways to net-zero emissions through restoration and protection of ecological resources can improve water quality, strengthen biodiversity, provide protection from climate hazards like heat extremes or flooding, preserve cultural heritage and traditions, and support more equitable access to environmental amenities. {8.3, 15.3, 20.3, 24.4, 30.4; Focus on Blue Carbon}
- Strategic planning and investment in resilience can reduce the economic impacts of climate change, including costs to households and businesses, risks to markets and supply chains, and potential negative impacts on employment and income, while also providing opportunities for economic gain. {9.2, 19.3, 26.2, 31.6; Focus on Risks to Supply Chains}
- Improving cropland management and climate-smart agricultural practices can strengthen the resilience and profitability of farms while also increasing soil carbon uptake and storage, reducing emissions of nitrous oxide and methane, and enhancing agricultural efficiency and yields. {11.1, 24.1, 32.2}

Climate actions that incorporate inclusive and sustained engagement with overburdened and underserved communities in the design, planning, and implementation of evidence-based strategies can also reduce existing disparities and address social injustices. {24.3, 31.2, 32.4}

Transformative climate actions can strengthen resilience and advance equity

Fossil fuel–based energy systems have resulted in disproportionate public health burdens on communities of color and/or low-income communities. These same communities are also disproportionately harmed by climate change impacts. {13.4, 15.2, 32.4}

A "just transition" is the process of responding to climate change with transformative actions that address the root causes of climate vulnerability while ensuring equitable access to jobs; affordable, low-carbon energy; environmental benefits such as reduced air pollution; and quality of life for all. This involves reducing impacts to overburdened communities, increasing resources to underserved communities, and integrating diverse worldviews, cultures, experiences, and capacities into mitigation and adaptation actions. As the country shifts to low-carbon energy industries, a just transition would include job creation



Melanie Mills

and training for displaced fossil fuel workers and addressing existing racial and gender disparities in energy workforces. For example, Colorado agencies are creating plans to guide the state's transition away from coal, with a focus on economic diversification, job creation, and workforce training for former coal workers. The state's plan also acknowledges a commitment to communities disproportionately impacted by coal power pollution. {5.3, 13.4, 14.3, 15.2, 16.2, 20.3, 31.2, 32.4; Figure 20.1}

A just transition would take into account key aspects of environmental justice:

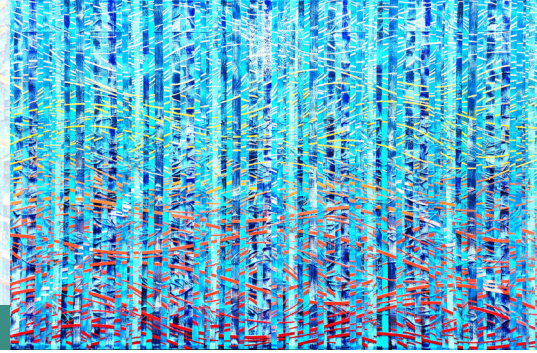
- Recognizing that certain people have borne disparate burdens related to current and historical social injustices and, thus, may have different needs
- Ensuring that people interested in and affected by outcomes of decision-making processes are included in those procedures through fair and meaningful engagement
- Distributing resources and opportunities over time, including access to data and information, so that no single group or set of individuals receives disproportionate benefits or burdens

{20.3; Figure 20.1}

An equitable and sustainable US response to climate change has the potential to reduce climate impacts while improving well-being, strengthening resilience, benefiting the economy, and, in part, redressing legacies of racism and injustice. Transformative adaptation and the transition to a net-zero energy system come with challenges and trade-offs that would need to be considered to avoid exacerbating or creating new social injustices. For example, transforming car-centric transportation systems to emphasize public transit and walkability could increase accessibility for underserved communities and people with limited mobility—if user input and equity are intentionally considered. {13.4, 20.3, 31.3, 32.4; Ch. 31, Introduction}

Equitable responses that assess trade-offs strengthen community resilience and self-determination, often fostering innovative solutions. Engaging communities in identifying challenges and bringing together diverse voices to participate in decision-making allows for more inclusive, effective, and transparent planning processes that account for the structural factors contributing to inequitable climate vulnerability. {9.3, 12.4, 13.4, 20.2, 31.4}

Climate Trends



Artist: Dodd Holsapple

Key Message 2.1

Climate Is Changing, and Scientists Understand Why

It is unequivocal that human activities have increased atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. It is also unequivocal that global average temperature has risen in response. Observed warming over the continental United States and Alaska is higher than the global average (*virtually certain, very high confidence*). Long-term changes have been observed in many other aspects of the climate system (*very high confidence*). The Earth system is complex and interconnected, which means changes in faraway regions are *virtually certain* to affect the United States (*very high confidence*).

Key Message 2.2

Extreme Events Are Becoming More Frequent and Severe

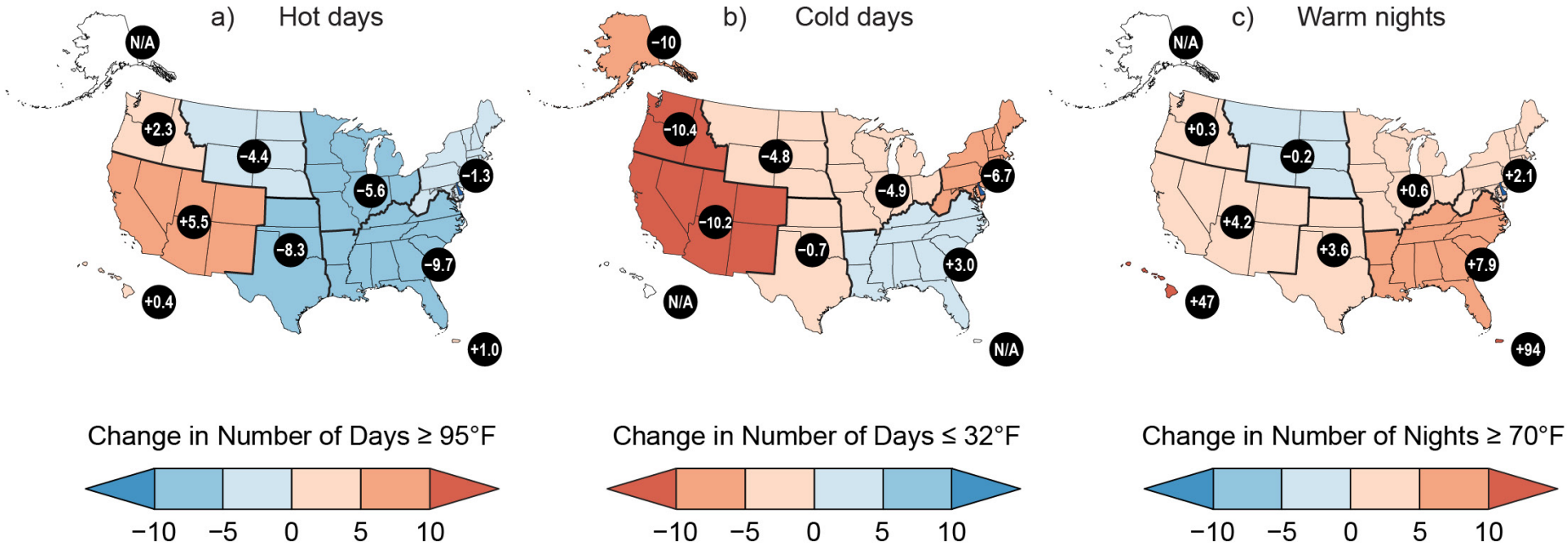
Observations show an increase in the severity, extent, and/or frequency of multiple types of extreme events. Heatwaves have become more common and severe in the West since the 1980s (*high confidence*). Drought risk has been increasing in the Southwest over the past century (*very high confidence*), while at the same time rainfall has become more extreme in recent decades, especially east of the Rockies (*very high confidence*). Hurricanes have been intensifying more rapidly since the 1980s (*high confidence*) and causing heavier rainfall and higher storm surges (*high confidence*). More frequent and larger wildfires have been burning in the West in the past few decades due to a combination of climate factors, societal changes, and policies (*very high confidence*).

Key Message 2.3

How Much the Climate Changes Depends on the Choices Made Now

The more the planet warms, the greater the impacts—and the greater the risk of unforeseen consequences (*very high confidence*). The impacts of climate change increase with warming, and warming is virtually certain to continue if emissions of carbon dioxide do not reach net zero (*very high confidence*). Rapidly reducing emissions would very likely limit future warming (*very high confidence*) and the associated increases in many risks (*high confidence*). While there are still uncertainties about how the planet will react to rapid warming and catastrophic future scenarios that cannot be ruled out, the future is largely in human hands.

Observed Changes in Hot and Cold Extremes



Hot days have increased in the West, hot nights have increased nearly everywhere, and cold days have decreased.

Figure 2.7. Over much of the country, the risk of warm nights has increased while the risk of cold days has decreased. The risk of hot days has also increased across the western US. This figure shows the observed change in the number of (**a**) hot days (days at or above 95°F), (**b**) cold days (days at or below 32°F), and (**c**) warm nights (nights at or above 70°F) over the period 2002–2021 relative to 1901–1960 (1951–1980 for Alaska and Hawai'I and 1956–1980 for Puerto Rico). Data were not available for the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands and the US Virgin Islands. Figure credit: Project Drawdown, Washington State University Vancouver, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

Recommended Citation

Marvel, K., W. Su, R. Delgado, S. Aarons, A. Chatterjee, M.E. Garcia, Z. Hausfather, K. Hayhoe, D.A. Hence, E.B. Jewett, A. Robel, D. Singh, A. Tripati, and R.S. Vose, 2023: Ch. 2. Climate trends. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH2

Earth Systems Processes

Artist: Ian van Coller

Key Message 3.1

Human Activities Have Caused the Observed Global Warming

Human activities—primarily emissions of greenhouse gases from fossil fuel use—have unequivocally caused the global warming observed over the industrial era. Changes in natural climate drivers had globally small and regionally variable long-term effects over that period.

Key Message 3.2

The Estimated Range of Climate Sensitivity Has Narrowed by 50%

Recent improvements in the understanding of how climate feedbacks vary across timescales have narrowed the estimated likely range of warming expected from a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide by 50% to between 4.5°F and 7.2°F (*high confidence*).

Key Message 3.3

New Data and Analysis Methods Have Advanced Climate Science

A number of scientific developments have enabled deeper understanding of climate processes and their responses to human influence. Observational records have lengthened, and new observing systems have come online. New scenarios of socioeconomic development, and their associated emissions and land-use changes, drive updated climate projections from Earth system models. Large ensemble simulations from multiple models have enabled scientists to better distinguish anthropogenic climate change from natural climate variability. More targeted model evaluation techniques are using observations to narrow the estimated range of future climatic changes. Finally, advances in methods for extreme event attribution enabled scientists to estimate the contributions of human influence to some types of individual extreme events in near-real-time.

Key Message 3.4

Humans Are Changing Earth System Processes

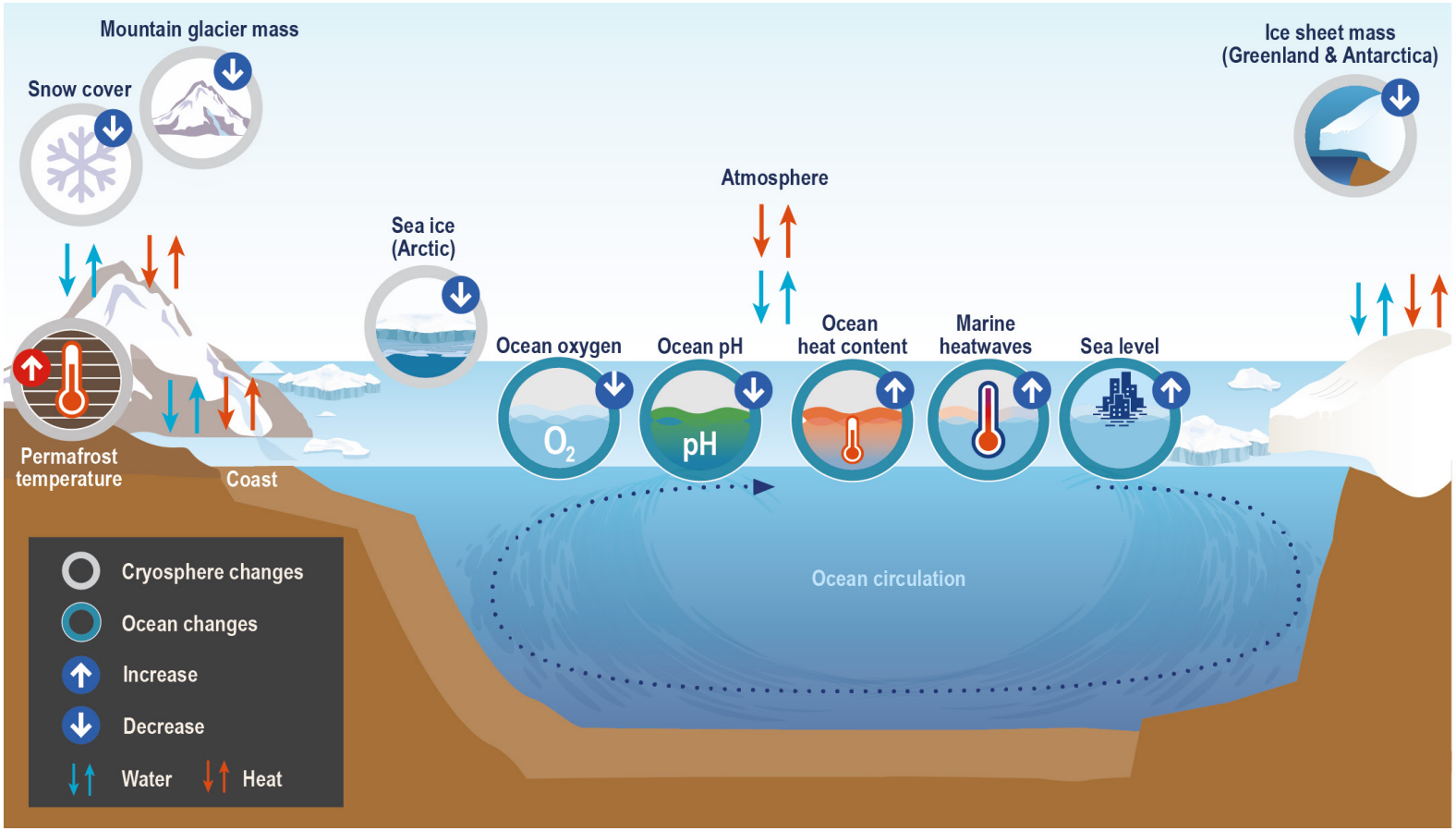
Human activities cause changes throughout the Earth system, including the land surface, cryosphere, ocean and atmosphere, and carbon and water cycles. The magnitude, and for some processes the direction, of these changes can vary across regions, including within the US. These changes also occur against a background of substantial natural climate variability.

Key Message 3.5

Humans Are Changing Weather and Climate Extremes

Human activities are affecting climate system processes in ways that alter the intensity, frequency, and/or duration of many weather and climate extremes, including extreme heat, extreme precipitation and flooding, agricultural and hydrological drought, and wildfire (*medium to high confidence*).

Changes in Ocean, Cryosphere, and Coastal Processes



Climate change has multiple effects on the ocean, atmosphere, and cryosphere and their complex interactions.

Figure 3.9. The figure shows important physical processes that play a role in the ocean and cryosphere, along with their linkages. Associated climate change–related effects, including sea level rise, increasing ocean heat content, ocean acidification, marine heatwaves, and ice mass loss, are also shown. The arrows indicate an exchange taking place between ice, ocean, and atmosphere. Adapted with permission from Figure TS.2 in IPCC 2019 (See full chapter for detailed citation).

Recommended Citation

Leung, L.R., A. Terando, R. Joseph, G. Tselioudis, L.M. Bruhwiler, B. Cook, C. Deser, A. Hall, B.D. Hamlington, A. Hoell, F.M. Hoffman, S. Klein, V. Naik, A.G. Pendergrass, C. Tebaldi, P.A. Ullrich, and M.F. Wehner, 2023: Ch. 3. Earth systems processes. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment.* Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH3

Water

Artist: Jon Bradham

Key Message 4.1

Climate Change Will Continue to Cause Profound Changes in the Water Cycle

Changes to the water cycle pose risks to people and nature. Alaska and northern and eastern regions of the US are seeing and expect to see more precipitation on average, while the Caribbean, Hawai'i, and southwestern regions of the US are seeing and expect to see less precipitation (*medium confidence*). Heavier rainfall events are expected to increase across the Nation (*very likely, very high confidence*), and warming will increase evaporation and plant water use where moisture is not a limiting factor (*medium confidence*). Groundwater supplies are also threatened by warming temperatures that are expected to increase demand (*very likely, high confidence*). Snow cover will decrease and melt earlier (*very likely, high confidence*). Increasing aridity, declining groundwater levels, declining snow cover, and drought threaten freshwater supplies (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 4.2

Water Cycle Changes Will Affect All Communities, with Disproportionate Impacts for Some

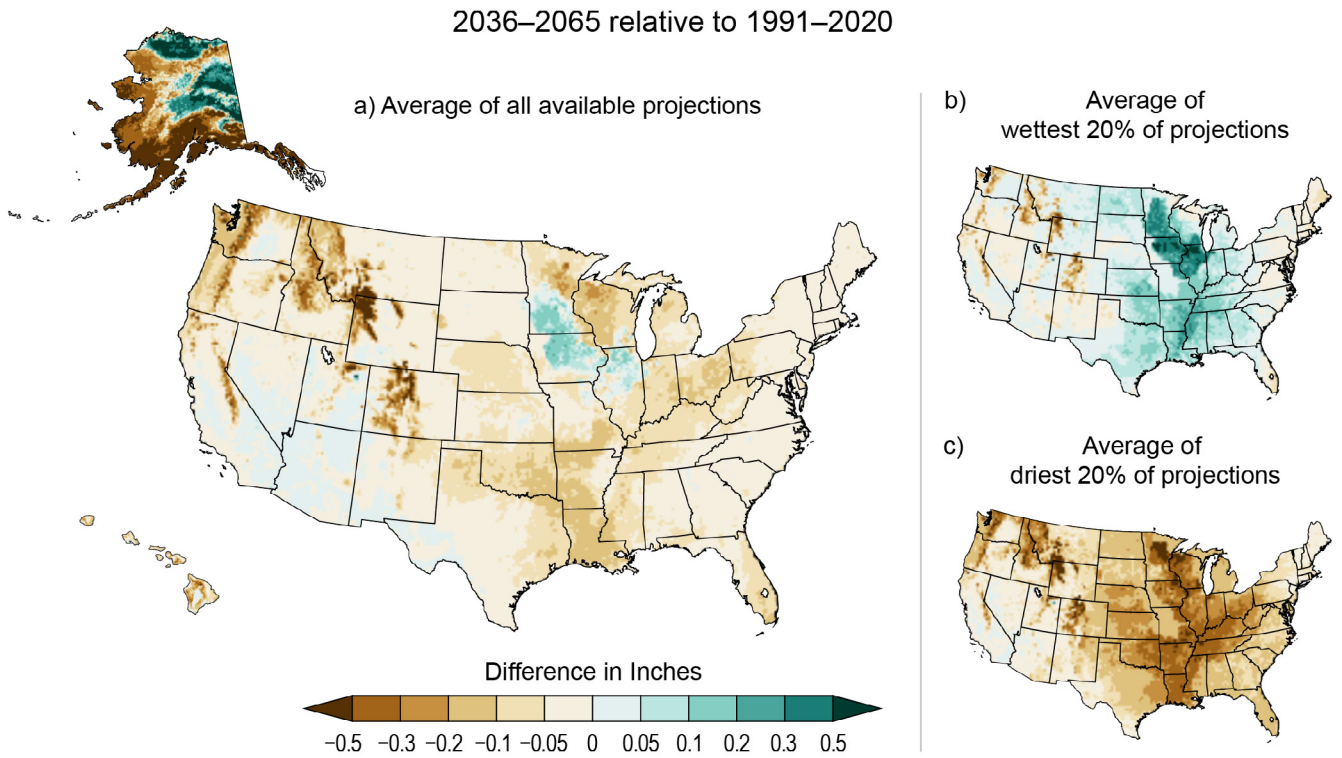
Natural and human systems have evolved under the water cycle's historical patterns, making rapid adaptation challenging. Heavier rainfall, combined with changes in land use and other factors such as soil moisture and snow, is leading to increasing flood damage (*likely, high confidence*). Drought impacts are also increasing (*medium confidence*), as are flood- and drought-related water quality impacts (*medium confidence*). All communities will be affected, but in particular those on the frontline of climate change—including many Black, Hispanic, Tribal, Indigenous, and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities—face growing risks from changes to water quantity and quality due to the proximity of their homes and workplaces to hazards and limited access to resources and infrastructure (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 4.3

Progress Toward Adaptation Has Been Uneven

The ability of water managers to adapt to changes has improved with better data, advances in decision-making, and steps toward cooperation. However, infrastructure standards and water allocation institutions have been slow to adapt to a changing climate (*high confidence*), and efforts are confounded by wet and dry cycles driven by natural climate variability (*very likely, high confidence*). Frontline, Tribal, and Indigenous communities are heavily impacted but lack resources to adapt effectively, and they are not fully represented in decision-making (*high confidence*).

Projected Changes in Average Summer (June–August) Soil Moisture by Midcentury



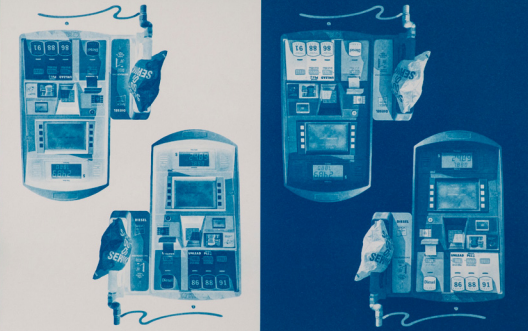
Projected decreases in summer soil moisture will have important implications for agriculture and ecosystems.

Figure 4.6. Summer soil moisture supports dryland agriculture and ecosystem functions and reduces irrigation demand and wildfire risk. Under an intermediate scenario (RCP 4.5), soil moisture is projected to decrease during the summer months (June, July, and August) for most of the country (**a**), with the West seeing decreases even under the wettest projections. Exceptions include portions of the Upper Midwest and Alaska. The range between the wettest (**b**) and driest (**c**) projections illustrate the uncertainty in summer soil projections. Projections are not available for the US Caribbean or US-Affiliated Pacific Islands. Figure credit: University of Colorado Boulder, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

Recommended Citation

Payton, E.A., A.O. Pinson, T. Asefa, L.E. Condon, L.-A.L. Dupigny-Giroux, B.L. Harding, J. Kiang, D.H. Lee, S.A. McAfee, J.M. Pflug, I. Rangwala, H.J. Tanana, and D.B. Wright, 2023: Ch. 4. Water. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH4

Energy Supply, Delivery, and Demand



Artist: Maria Trunk

Key Message 5.1

Climate Change Threatens Energy Systems

Energy supply and delivery are at risk from climate-driven changes, which are also shifting demand (*virtually certain, very high confidence*). Climate change threats, including increases in extreme precipitation, extreme temperatures, sea level rise, and more intense storms, droughts, and wildfires, are damaging infrastructure and operations and affecting human lives and livelihoods (*virtually certain, very high confidence*). Impacts will vary over time and location (*virtually certain, very high confidence*). Without mitigation and adaptation, projected increases in the frequency, intensity, duration, and variability of extreme events will amplify effects on energy systems (*virtually certain, very high confidence*).

Key Message 5.2

Compounding Factors Affect Energy-System and Community Vulnerabilities

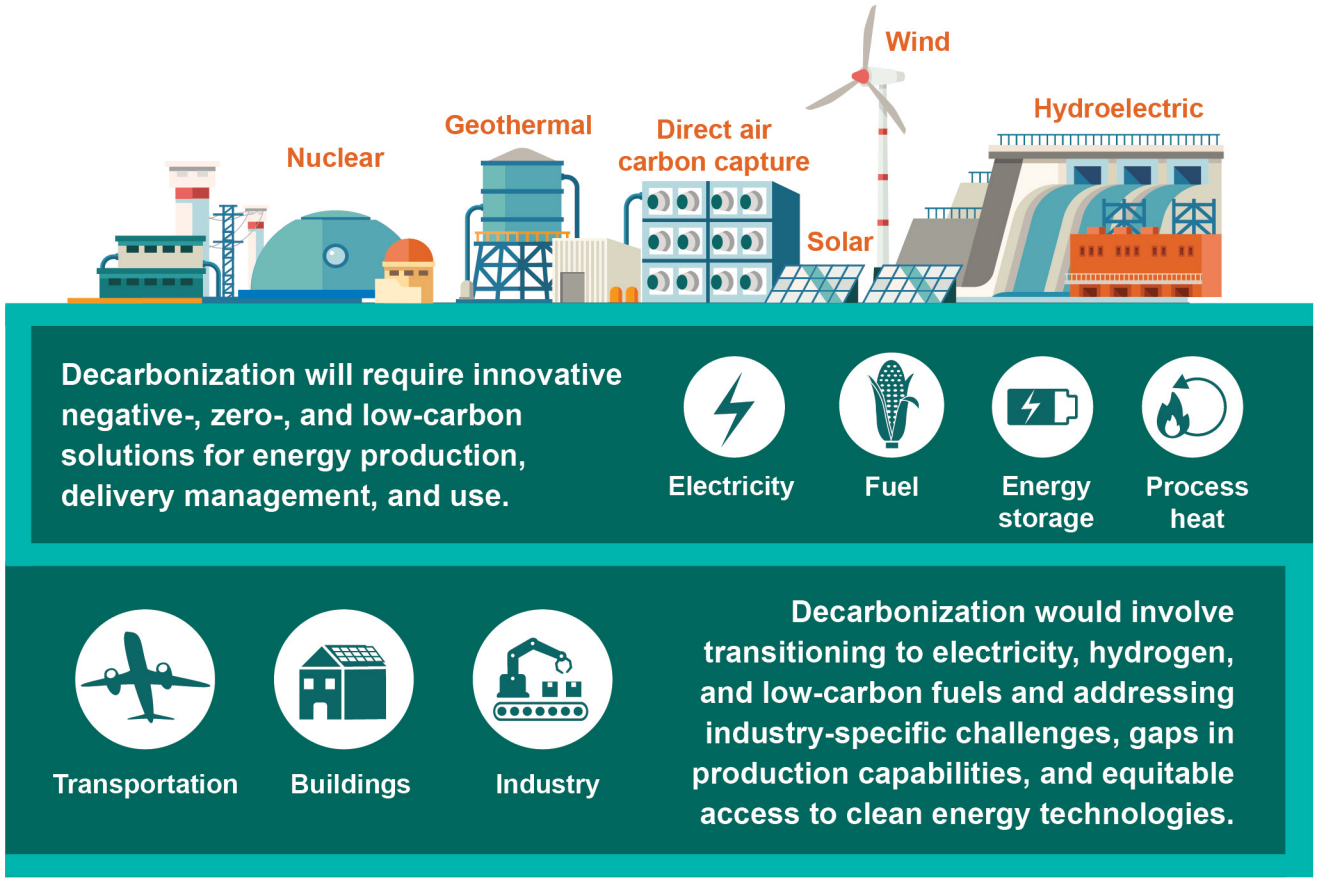
Concurrent changes in technologies, policies, and markets, in addition to their interconnections, can reduce GHG emissions while also increasing vulnerabilities of energy systems and communities to climate change and extreme weather (*very likely, very high confidence*). Compound and cascading hazards related to energy systems and additional stressors, such as cyber and physical threats and pandemics, create risks for all but disproportionately affect overburdened communities (*very likely, very high confidence*).

Key Message 5.3

Efforts to Enhance Energy System Resilience Are Underway

Federal, state, local, Tribal, and private-sector investments are being made to increase the resilience of the energy system to climate-related stressors, and opportunities exist to build upon this progress (*very high confidence*). Ongoing investments will need to include improvements in energy-efficient buildings; technology to decarbonize the energy system; advanced automation and communication and artificial intelligence technologies to optimize operations; climate modeling and planning methodologies under uncertainties; and efforts to increase equitable access to clean energy (*very high confidence*). An energy system transition emphasizing decarbonization and electrification would require efforts in new generation, transmission, distribution, and fuel delivery (*very high confidence*).

Energy System Decarbonization



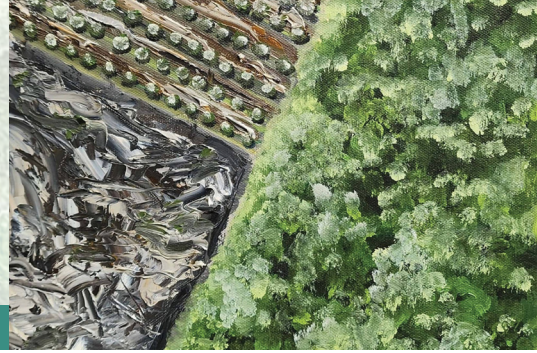
Decarbonization will require innovative solutions across multiple sectors.

Figure 5.6. Energy system decarbonization will rely on increased innovation, deployment of clean energy technologies including carbon capture, small modular nuclear reactors, hydrogen, and further integration and electrification of residential and commercial buildings, industry, and transportation. Figure credit: DOE, Idaho National Laboratory, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

Recommended Citation

Zamuda, C.D., D.E. Bilello, J. Carmack, X.J. Davis, R.A. Efroymson, K.M. Goff, T. Hong, A. Karimjee, D.H. Loughlin, S. Upchurch, and N. Voisin, 2023: Ch. 5. Energy supply, delivery, and demand. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH5

Land Cover and Land-Use Change



Artist: Kelly Curl

Key Message 6.1

The Goods and Services Provided by Land Systems Are Threatened by Climate Change

Climate change has increased regional intensity and frequency of extreme rain, droughts, temperature highs, fires, and urban floods (*high confidence*), posing increased risks for roads and other infrastructure, agricultural production, forests, biodiversity, carbon sinks, and human health (*high confidence*). Climate-driven increases in wildfire extent and intensity are threatening the ability of some western forests to provide valued goods and services (*high confidence*). Climate change has disrupted the ways that people interact with the landscape for spiritual practices, recreation, and subsistence (*high confidence*).

Key Message 6.2

Changes in Climate and Land Use Affect Land-System Resilience

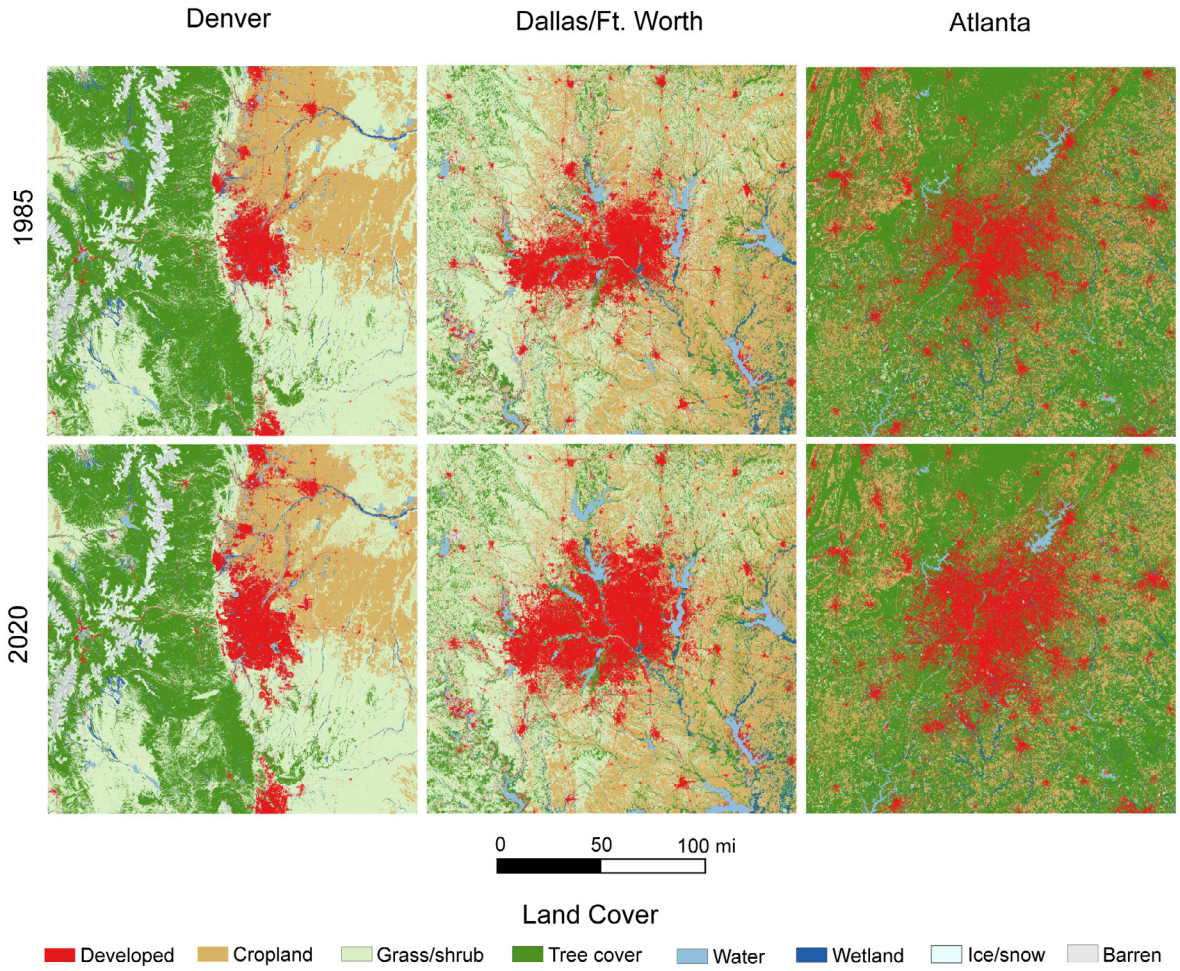
Changes in climate and land use affect the resilience of land ecosystems and thus the fate of the services they provide (*high confidence*); for example, increasing drought reduces the ability of forests to store carbon. Climate and land-use change interact, and these interactions present challenges as well as opportunities for maintaining ecosystem resilience (*high confidence*).

Key Message 6.3

Mitigation and Adaptation Priorities Will Increasingly Constrain Future Land-Use Options

The future of land use in the United States will depend on how energy and agricultural technology evolves, how the climate changes, and the degree to which we prioritize climate mitigation and adaptation in land-use decisions (*high confidence*). US cropland area had been declining but has rebounded somewhat over the last 1–2 decades (*high confidence*). Future cropland needs will depend on uncertain factors such as agricultural technology improvements, dietary shifts, and climate change impacts (*medium confidence*). Decarbonization will require a continued expansion of solar and wind energy generation and transmission infrastructure (*very likely, high confidence*) and may involve large land-use changes toward land-based mitigation measures, including reforestation, other natural climate solutions, and bioenergy crops (*low confidence*).

Expansion of Developed Land Cover



Increased development decreases natural and managed land cover.

Figure 6.3. Continuing expansion of development into vegetated land changes the array of climate-related risks to land system goods and services (KM 6.1), land system resilience (KM 6.2), and future land-use options (KM 6.3). Land-cover changes from 1985 to 2020 are shown for three urban areas: Denver, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Atlanta. Figure credit: Oak Ridge National Laboratory and USGS.

Recommended Citation

Thornton, P.E., B.C. Reed, G.Z. Xian, L. Chini, A.E. East, J.L. Field, C.M. Hoover, B. Poulter, S.C. Reed, G. Wang, and Z. Zhu, 2023: Ch. 6. Land cover and land-use change. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH6

Forests

Artist: Jenny Helbraun Abramson

Key Message 7.1

Forests Are Increasingly Affected by Climate Change and Disturbances

Climate change is increasing the frequency, scale, and severity of some disturbances that drive forest change and affect ecosystem services (*high confidence*). Continued warming and regional changes in precipitation are expected to amplify interactions among disturbance agents (*likely, high confidence*) and further alter forest ecosystem structure and function (*likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 7.2

Climate Change Affects Ecosystem Services Provided by Forests

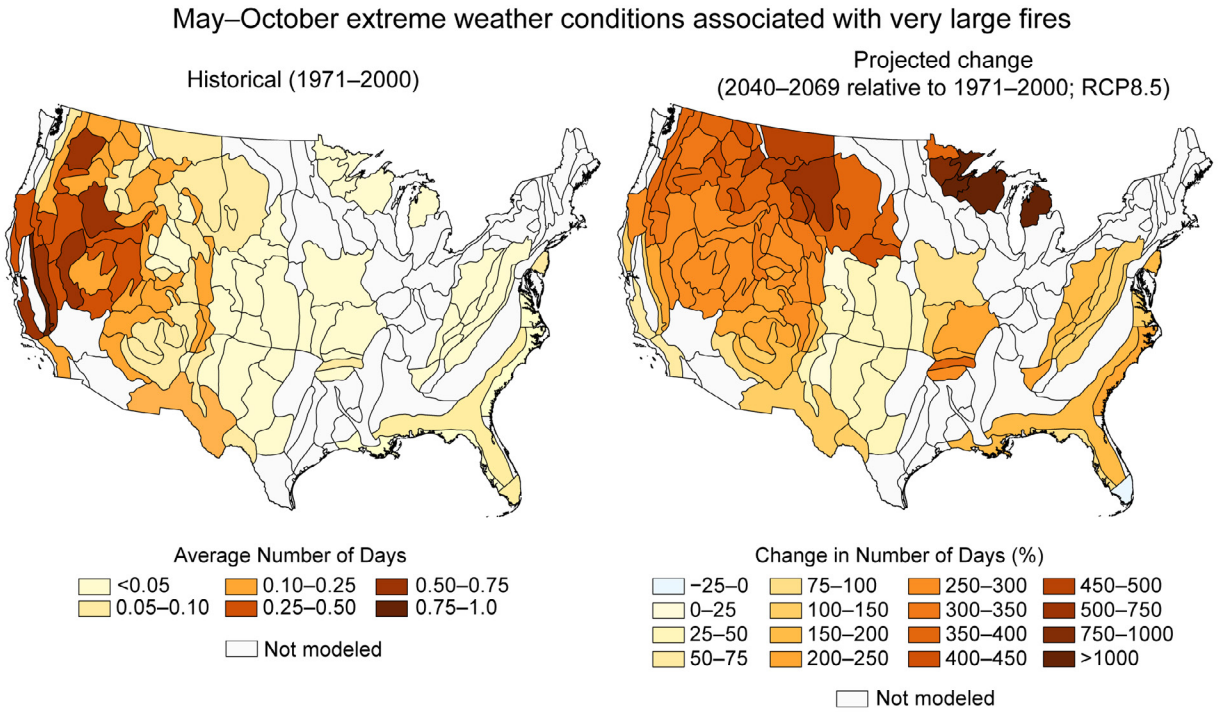
Climate change threatens the ecosystem services forests provide that enrich human lives and sustain life more broadly. Increasing temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and altered disturbances are affecting the capacity of forest ecosystems to sequester and store carbon (*high confidence*), provide clean water and clean air (*high confidence*), produce timber and non-timber products (*high confidence*), and provide recreation (*medium confidence*), among other benefits. Future climate effects will interact with societal changes to determine the capacity of forests to provide ecosystem services (*likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 7.3

Adaptation Actions Are Necessary for Maintaining Resilient Forest Ecosystems

Climate change creates challenges for natural resource managers charged with preserving the function, health, and productivity of forest ecosystems (*high confidence*). Forest landowners, managers, and policymakers working at local, state, Tribal, and federal levels are preparing for climate change through the development and implementation of vulnerability assessments and adaptation plans (*medium confidence*). Proactive adaptation of management strategies that create, maintain, and restore resilient forest ecosystems are critical to maintaining equitable provisioning of ecosystem services (*medium confidence*).

Very Large Fires



Conditions conducive to very large fires are projected to increase.

Figure 7.4. The left panel shows historical (1971–2000) values for the annual number of days in May through October with extreme weather conditions conducive to very large fires (VLFs; more than 12,000 acres). The right panel shows the percent change in the number of days for a projected future (2040–2069) climate under a very high scenario (RCP8.5). Changes are summarized by Bailey ecosections, which are areas of similar vegetation and climate defined by Bailey (2016).25 The number of days with conditions associated with VLFs more than doubles in many ecosections, with more than a fourfold increase for parts of the Northwest, fivefold for the northern Rockies, and over sevenfold for the Upper Midwest. Projected conditions are an average of a 17-GCM (global climate model) ensemble selected for data availability. Areas with no color indicate lack of data (sufficient data are unavailable or where wildfires were historically rare). Data were unavailable for Alaska, Hawai‘i and the Affiliated US Pacific Islands, and the US Caribbean. Figure credit: USGS. See full chapter for detailed citation.

Recommended Citation

Domke, G.M., C.J. Fettig, A.S. Marsh, M. Baumflek, W.A. Gould, J.E. Halofsky, L.A. Joyce, S.D. LeDuc, D.H. Levinson, J.S. Littell, C.F. Miniat, M.H. Mockrin, D.L. Peterson, J. Prestemon, B.M. Sleeter, and C. Swanston, 2023: Ch. 7. Forests. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH7

Ecosystems, Ecosystem Services, and Biodiversity

Artist: Taelyn B.

Key Message 8.1

Climate Change Is Driving Rapid Ecosystem Transformations

Climate change, together with other stressors, is driving transformational changes in ecosystems, including loss and conversion to other states, and changes in productivity (*very likely, high confidence*). These changes have serious implications for human well-being (*very likely, high confidence*). Many types of extreme events are increasing in frequency and/or severity and can trigger abrupt ecosystem changes (*medium confidence*). Adaptive governance frameworks, including adaptive management, combined with monitoring can help to prepare for, respond to, and alleviate climate change impacts, as well as build resilience for the future (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 8.2

Species Changes and Biodiversity Loss Are Accelerating

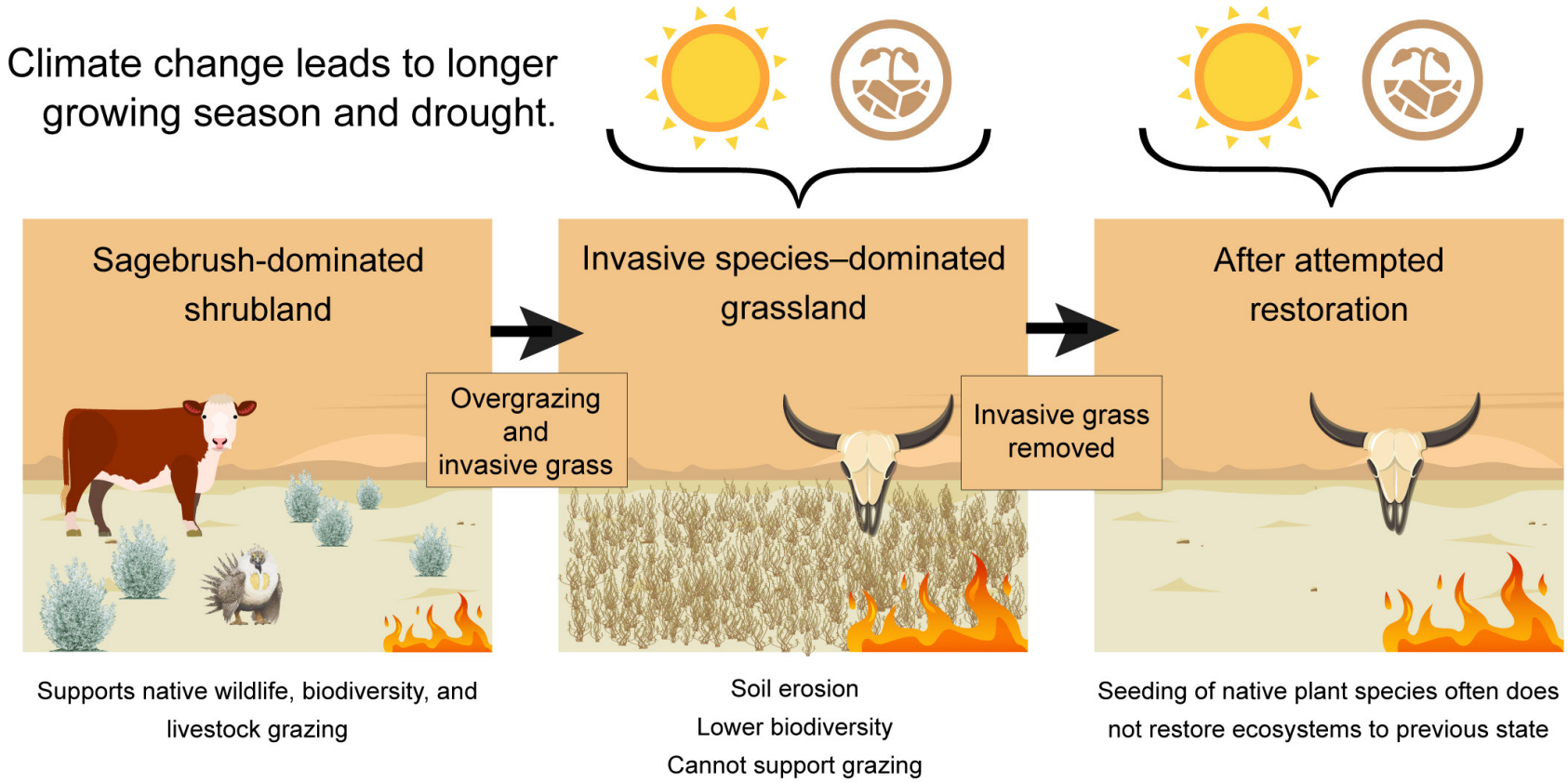
The interaction of climate change with other stressors is causing biodiversity loss, changes in species distributions and life cycles, and increasing impacts from invasive species and diseases, all of which have economic and social consequences (*very likely, high confidence*). Future responses of species and populations will depend on the magnitude and timing of changes, coupled with the differential sensitivity of organisms; species that cannot easily relocate or are highly temperature sensitive may face heightened extinction risks (*very likely, high confidence*). Identification of risks (e.g., extreme events) will help prioritize species and locations for protection and improve options for management (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 8.3

Impacts to Ecosystem Services Create Risks and Opportunities

Climate change is having variable and increasing impacts on ecosystem services and benefits, from food production to clean water to carbon sequestration, with consequences for human well-being (*very likely, high confidence*). Changes in availability and quality of ecosystem services, combined with existing social inequities, have disproportionate impacts on certain communities (*very likely, high confidence*). Equity-driven nature-based solutions, designed to protect, manage, and restore ecosystems for human well-being, can provide climate adaptation and mitigation benefits *(likely, medium confidence*).

Abrupt Changes in Ecosystem State



Climate change interacts with other stressors to cause synergistic effects, and resulting ecosystem changes can be abrupt and difficult to reverse.

Figure 8.6. In the western US, drought and longer, hotter growing seasons combined with invasive grasses and overgrazing have transformed sagebrush shrublands past a tipping point into annual grasslands that experience more frequent wildfires and no longer support native biodiversity and livestock grazing. Removing invasive grasses and seeding with native plants often does not restore the original shrubland ecosystem (Svejcar et al. 2023). Adapted from Foley et al. 2015 [CC BY 4.0]. See full chapter for detailed citations.

Recommended Citation

McElwee, P.D., S.L. Carter, K.J.W. Hyde, J.M. West, K. Akamani, A.L. Babson, G. Bowser, J.B. Bradford, J.K. Costanza, T.M. Crimmins, S.C. Goslee, S.K. Hamilton, B. Helmuth, S. Hoagland, F.-A.E. Hoover, M.E. Hunsicker, R. Kashuba, S.A. Moore, R.C. Muñoz, G. Shrestha, M. Uriarte, and J.L. Wilkening, 2023: Ch. 8. Ecosystems, ecosystem services, and biodiversity. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH8

Coastal Effects

Artist: Joan Hart

Key Message 9.1

Coastal Hazards Are Increasing Due to Accelerating Sea Level Rise and Changing Storm Patterns

The severity and risks of coastal hazards across the Nation are increasing (*very likely, high confidence*), driven by accelerating sea level rise and changing storm patterns, resulting in increased flooding, erosion, and rising groundwater tables. Over the next 30 years (2020–2050), coastal sea levels along the contiguous US coasts are expected to rise about 11 inches (28 cm), or as much as the observed rise over the last 100 years (*likely, high confidence*). In response, coastal flooding will occur 5–10 times more often by 2050 than 2020 in most locations, with damaging flooding occurring as often as disruptive "high tide flooding" does now if action is not taken (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 9.2

Coastal Impacts on People and Ecosystems Are Increasing Due to Climate Change

Climate change–driven sea level rise, among other factors, is affecting the resilience of coastal ecosystems and communities (*very likely, high confidence*). The impacts of climate change and human modifications to coastal landscapes, such as seawalls, levees, and urban development, are both limiting the capacity of coastal ecosystems to adapt naturally and are compounding the loss of coastal ecosystem services (*very likely, high confidence*). Proactive strategies are necessary to avoid degraded quality of life in the coastal zone, as the combination of reduced ecosystem services and damage to the built environment from exacerbated coastal hazards increasingly burdens communities, industries, and cultures (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 9.3

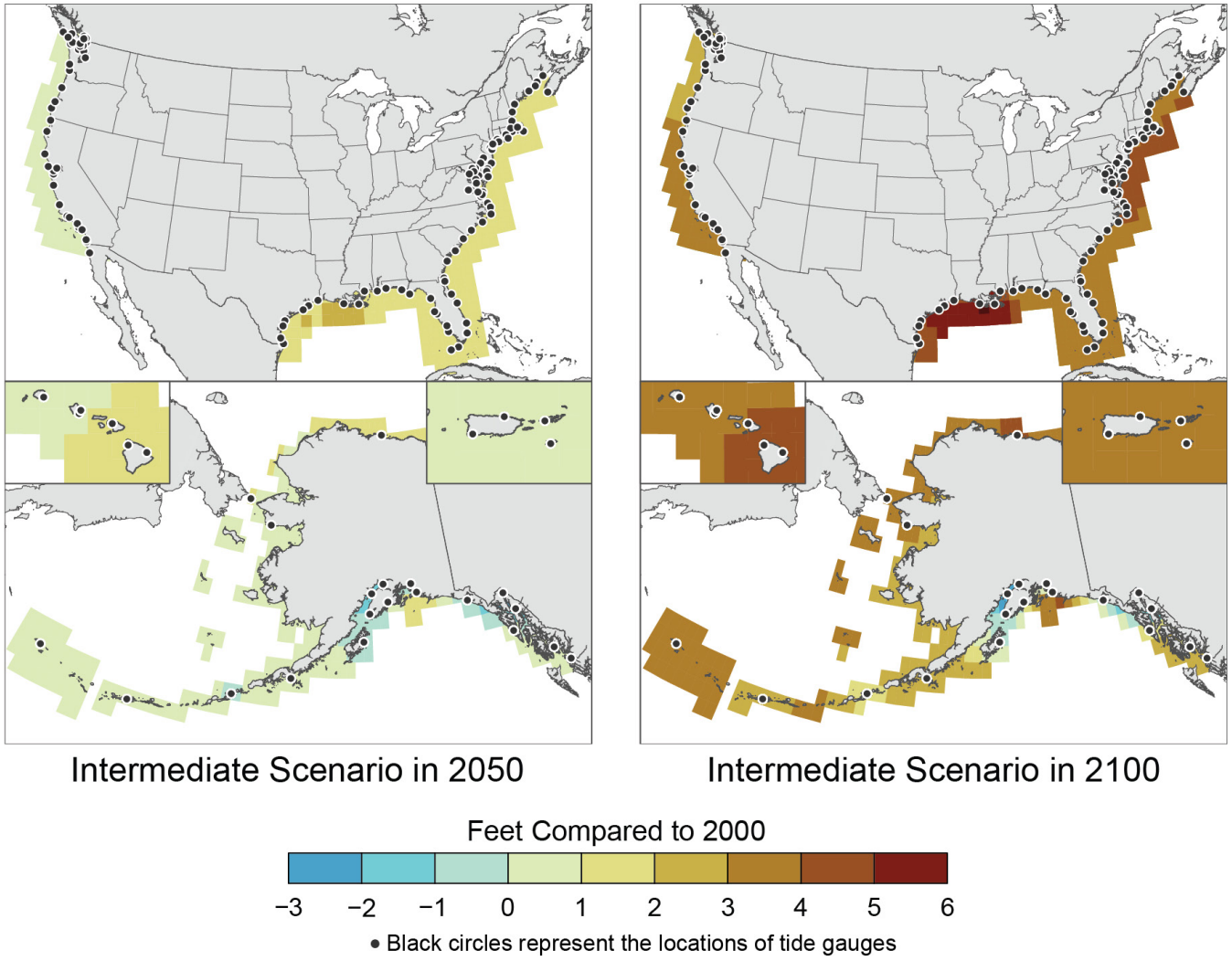
Adaptation Reduces Risk and Provides Additional Benefits for Coastal Communities

Accelerating sea level rise and climate change will transform the coastal landscape, requiring a new paradigm for how we live with, or adapt to, these changes (*high confidence*). Although incremental in nature, nature-based solutions and planned relocation strategies may help communities adapt to increasing coastal hazards if they are community-led and equity-centered (*medium confidence*). Maintaining cultural and economic connections within coastal communities will require equitable transformative adaptation that addresses systemic interconnections between ecosystems, communities, and governance *(medium confidence*).

Projected Sea Level Rise

By 2050 and 2100 under the Intermediate sea level scenario, sea level rise is projected to be higher along the Atlantic versus the Pacific Coast and greatest along the western Gulf Coast.

Figure 9.2. The figure shows relative sea level rise along the US coastlines under the Intermediate sea level scenario of the US Interagency Sea Level Rise Task Force (Sweet et al. 2022) for 2050 (**left**) and 2100 (**right**). Relative sea level rise for the contiguous US is shown on the top, and for Alaska, Hawai'i (left insets), and Puerto Rico (right insets) on the bottom. The black dots along the coastline indicate tide-gauge locations used to characterize past SLR. Characterizing past (and future) SLR for Alaska and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands is complicated due to tectonic effects that cause both uplift and subsidence. Figure credit: NOAA National Ocean Service. See full chapter for detailed citation.



Recommended Citation

May, C.L., M.S. Osler, H.F. Stockdon, P.L. Barnard, J.A. Callahan, R.C. Collini, C.M. Ferreira, J. Finzi Hart, E.E. Lentz, T.B. Mahoney, W. Sweet, D. Walker, and C.P. Weaver, 2023: Ch. 9. Coastal effects. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH9

Ocean Ecosystems and Marine Resources

Artist: Olivia D.

Key Message 10.1

Unprecedented Climate Impacts Threaten Ecosystems and Human Well-Being

Climate change is significantly altering US marine ecosystems at a pace, magnitude, and extent that is unprecedented over millennia (*very high confidence*). Changes in species locations, productivity, and seasonal timing are cascading through ecosystems, threatening critical connections between people and the ocean (*high confidence*), especially for Indigenous Peoples (*very high confidence*). Risks to marine ecosystems and the people connected to them will be greater under higher scenarios (*likely, very high confidence*) and will depend on the ability of ecological and social systems to adapt to the pace of climate change (*very high confidence*). Continued climate change, particularly under higher scenarios, is projected to push many systems toward novel conditions and critical tipping points (*very high confidence*), beyond which the risk of significant impacts to marine ecosystems, including collapse, is high, adaptation may be insufficient, and human well-being is threatened (*high confidence*).

Key Message 10.2

Climate Change Is Altering Marine-Related Economic Activities

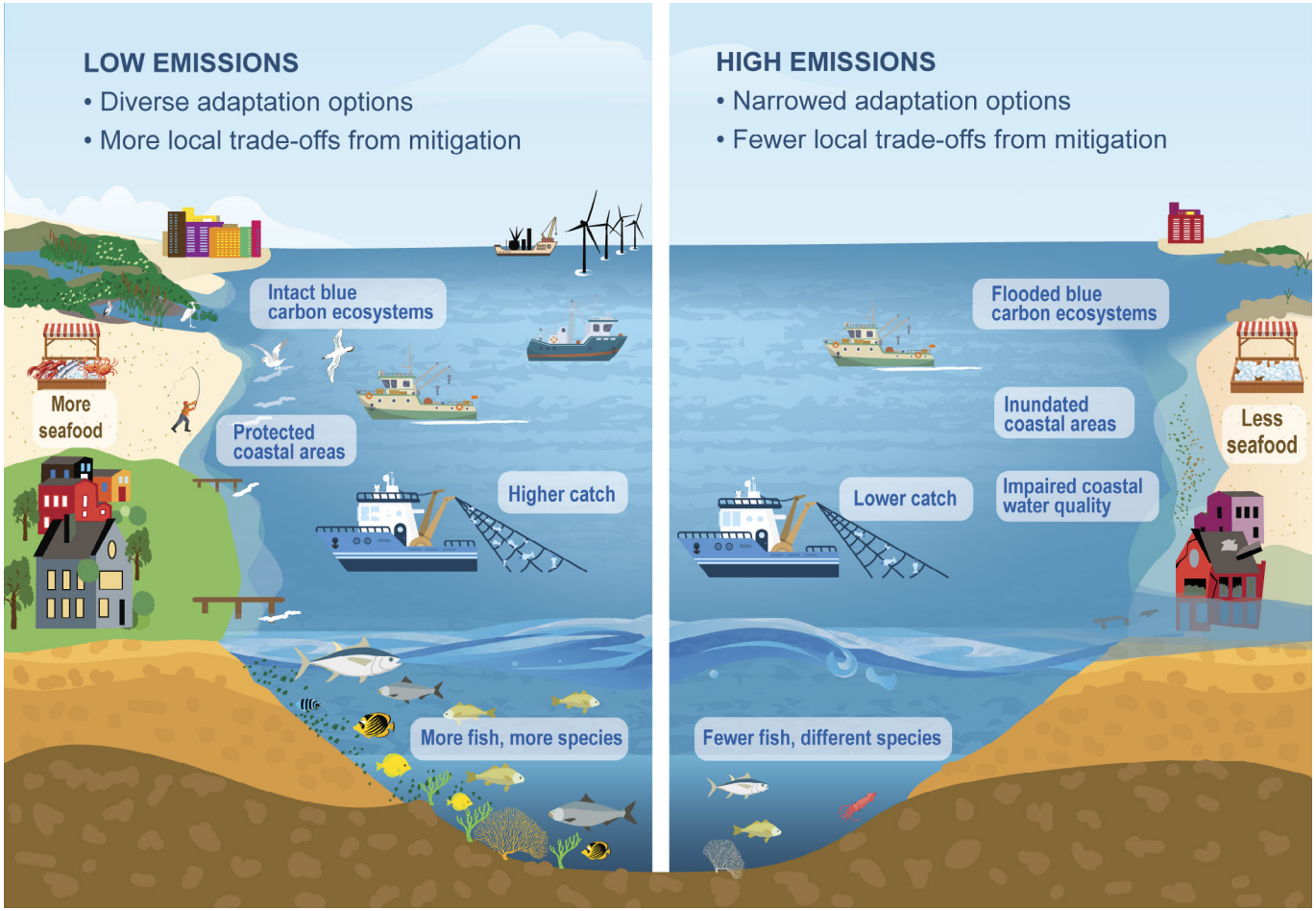
Climate change poses a substantial risk to ocean-related industries and economic activities such as fisheries, tourism, recreation, transportation, and energy (*high confidence*). As climate change continues, economic and cultural impacts are expected to become larger and more widespread, especially under higher scenarios and in communities that are highly dependent on ocean resources (*very high confidence*). A range of approaches can facilitate adaptation to some degree of climate change (*medium confidence*), but higher levels of climate change will limit the success of adaptation measures and markedly increase climate risk to marine-related economic activities (*high confidence*).

Key Message 10.3

Our Future Ocean Depends on Decisions Today

Future risks to marine ecosystems, ocean resources, and people will be substantially reduced by implementing adaptation and mitigation actions now (*very high confidence*). Responding swiftly to climate change will improve outcomes, reduce costs, promote resilience and equity, and allow the widest possible suite of adaptation solutions (*very high confidence*). Impacts will continue to be uneven across communities, with more harmful outcomes in communities that are highly ocean-reliant and historically marginalized, unless equitable adaptation and mitigation efforts are implemented (*high confidence*).

Ocean Conditions and Activities Under Two Climate Scenarios



Future ocean conditions and activities will depend on emissions levels and mitigation strategies.

Figure 10.5. Future marine ecosystems and human activities will differ under low versus high greenhouse gas emissions scenarios. This figure is a simplified depiction of major predicted changes as a result of climate change. Under low scenarios (**left**), more adaptation options remain available, and ocean services such as food provision and coastal protection are maintained, but trade-offs between ocean-based activities will escalate. Under high scenarios (**right**), ecosystems will be altered, fewer adaptation options will be available, and losses of services are expected across diverse sectors. Figure credit: Center for American Progress and Gulf of Maine Research Institute.

Recommended Citation

Mills, K.E., E.B. Osborne, R.J. Bell, C.S. Colgan, S.R. Cooley, M.C. Goldstein, R.B. Griffis, K. Holsman, M. Jacox, and F. Micheli, 2023: Ch. 10. Ocean ecosystems and marine resources. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH10

Agriculture, Food Systems, and Rural Communities

Artist: Julia Y.

Key Message 11.1

Agricultural Adaptation Increases Resilience in an Evolving Landscape

Climate change has increased agricultural production risks by disrupting growing zones and growing days, which depend on precipitation, air temperature, and soil moisture (*very likely, very high confidence*). Growing evidence for positive environmental and economic outcomes of conservation management has led some farmers and ranchers to adopt agroecological practices (*very high confidence*), which increases the potential for agricultural producers to limit greenhouse gas emissions (*likely, medium confidence*) and improve agricultural resilience to climate change (*high confidence*).

Key Message 11.2

Climate Change Disrupts Our Food Systems in Uneven Ways

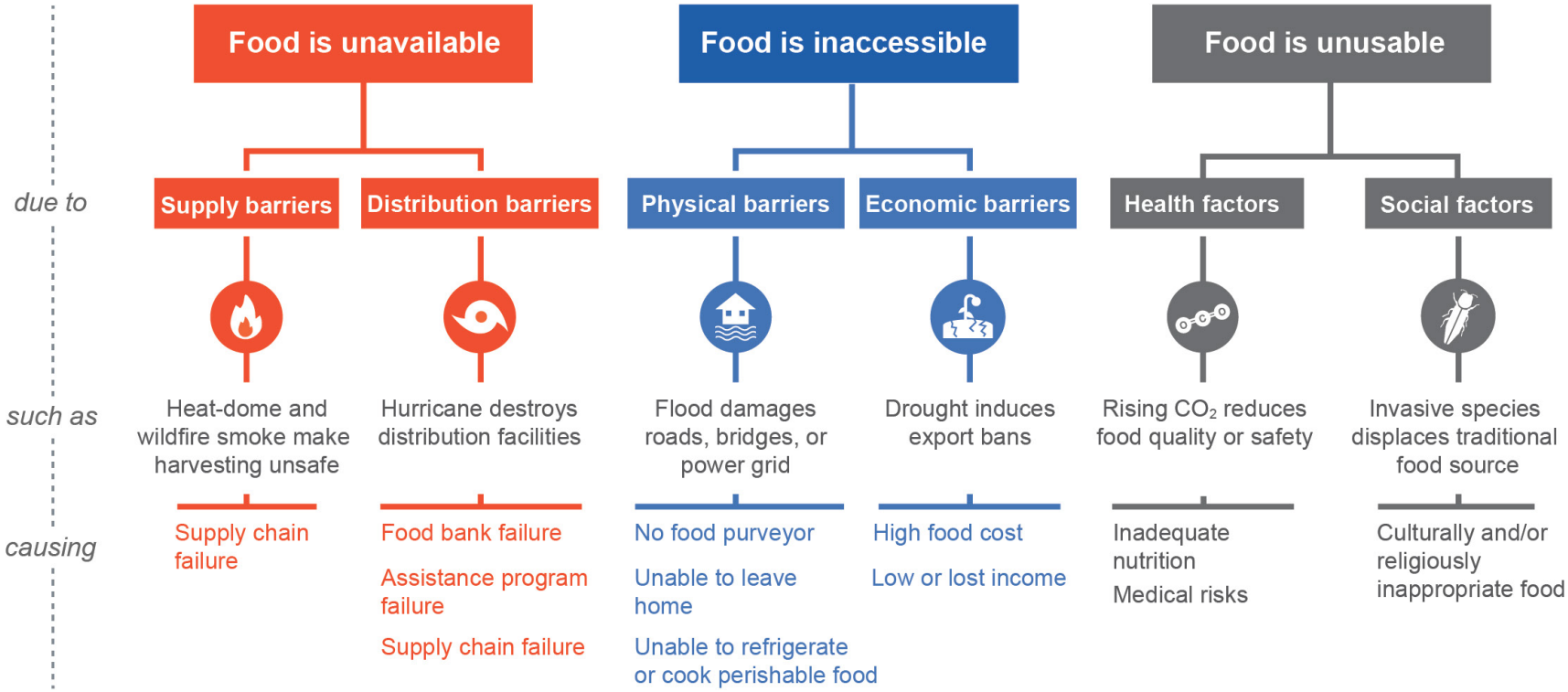
Climate change is projected to disrupt food systems in ways that reduce the availability and affordability of nutritious food, with uneven economic impacts across society (*likely, medium confidence*). Impacts of climate change on other measures of human well-being are also distributed unevenly, such as worsening heat stress among farmworkers (*high confidence*) and disruptions to the ability of subsistence-based peoples to access food through hunting, fishing, and foraging (*high confidence*).

Key Message 11.3

Rural Communities Face Unique Challenges and Opportunities

Rural communities steward much of the Nation's land and natural resources, which provide food, bioproducts, and ecosystem services *(high confidence*). These crucial roles are at risk as climate change compounds existing stressors such as poverty, unemployment, and depopulation (*likely, medium confidence*). Opportunities exist for rural communities to increase their resilience to climate change and protect rural livelihoods (*high confidence*).

Examples of Food System Failure Due to Climate Change



Climate change is expected to increase risks to food security in multiple ways.

Figure 11.11. This fault-tree shows some of the many ways that food system failures can occur due to climate change, ultimately making food less accessible, available, or usable. In some cases, food may still be available yet inaccessible or unusable. For example, power outages during extreme heat events or after a hurricane may prevent some consumers from safely refrigerating or cooking perishable foods they have already purchased. Adapted from Chodur et al. 2018 [CC BY 4.0] (see full chapter for detailed citation).

Recommended Citation

Bolster, C.H., R. Mitchell, A. Kitts, A. Campbell, M. Cosh, T.L. Farrigan, A.J. Franzluebbers, D.L. Hoover, V.L. Jin, D.E. Peck, M.R. Schmer, and M.D. Smith, 2023: Ch. 11. Agriculture, food systems, and rural communities. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH11

Built Environment, Urban Systems, and Cities

Artist: Diane Bronstein

Key Message 12.1

Urban Areas Are Major Drivers of Climate Change

Consumption of food, energy, water, and materials is a major driver of global climate change, and these consumption activities are disproportionately concentrated in urban and suburban areas (*virtually certain, very high confidence*).

Key Message 12.2

Attributes of the Built Environment Exacerbate Climate Impacts, Risks, and Vulnerabilities

Urban development patterns can exacerbate climate change impacts such as increases in heat and flooding (*virtually certain, very high confidence*). Climate change is amplifying existing loads and stressors on the built environment, and this is expected to continue (*virtually certain, very high confidence*). Urban areas face elevated risk as both people and the built environment are exposed to climate hazards, and these risks are distributed unevenly across the population (*virtually certain, very high confidence*).

Key Message 12.3

Urban Environments Create Opportunities for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

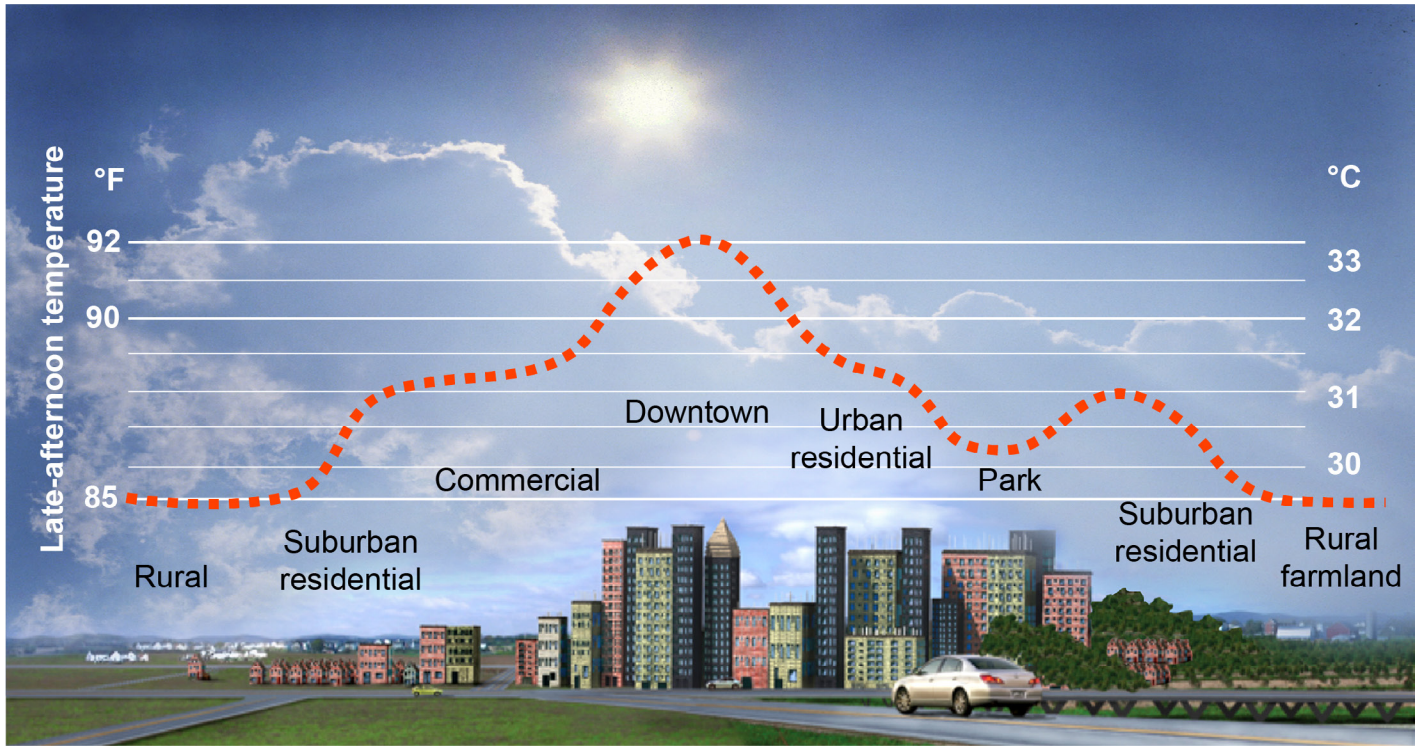
Cities across the country are working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to adverse climate impacts (*likely, high confidence*). Some states and cities are integrating climate considerations into relevant codes, standards, and policies. However, the pace, scale, and scope of action are not yet sufficient to avoid the worst impacts, given the magnitude of observed and projected climate changes (*virtually certain, very high confidence*).

Key Message 12.4

Community-Led Actions Signal a Shift Toward Equitable Climate Governance

There is varying progress in considering who benefits from, or bears the burden of, local climate actions (*very likely, high confidence*). The emergence of local and community-led approaches—coupled with increasing collaboration among city, Tribal, state, and federal governments—indicates a movement toward more inclusive planning and implementation of climate actions (*likely, high confidence*).

The Urban Heat Island Effect



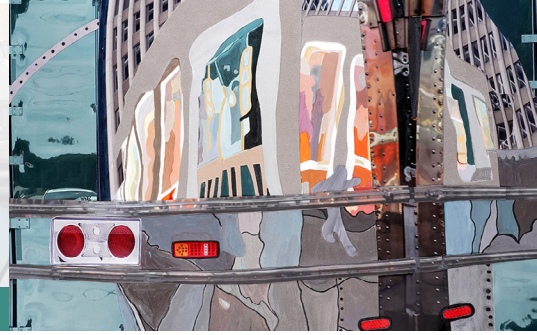
Urban heat islands are most prominent in dense downtown areas with little access to open space.

Figure 12.5. The figure illustrates temperature fluctuations across natural and built environments in a typical late afternoon in the summertime. Downtown areas with dense high-rise buildings experience the heat island effect because concrete and asphalt absorb and retain heat. Waste heat from cars, air-conditioning, and other human activities also contribute to the heat island effect. Cooler temperatures are found around urban parks, green spaces, open land, and in suburbs and rural areas. The temperature lines are shown for illustrative purposes and do not represent the climate in a particular city. Figure credit: ©Heat Island Group, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Adapted with permission.

Recommended Citation

Chu, E.K., M.M. Fry, J. Chakraborty, S.-M. Cheong, C. Clavin, M. Coffman, D.M. Hondula, D. Hsu, V.L. Jennings, J.M. Keenan, A. Kosmal, T.A. Muñoz-Erickson, and N.T.O. Jelks, 2023: Ch. 12. Built environment, urban systems, and cities. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment.* Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH12

Transportation



Artist: Oxana Kovalchuk

Key Message 13.1

Limiting Transportation Sector Emissions and Integrating Climate Projections Can Reduce Risks

The transportation sector is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, although transportation emissions sources are changing (*very high confidence*). The sector also faces increasing risk from climate-related extreme weather (*very high confidence*). Incorporating climate projections and adaptation and resilience best practices into transportation planning, design, operations, and maintenance can reduce such risks to the sector (*very high confidence*).

Key Message 13.2

Climate Change Combined with Other Disruptors Requires New Frameworks and Competencies

Climate action creates an opportunity to address concurrent disruptors, including cyber-technology integration, challenges with the condition of existing assets, and a changing workforce (*medium confidence*). Climate change has accelerated a transition to the use of more advanced approaches, including updated technologies, tools, and best practices (*high confidence*). Further recruitment and training of the sector's workforce is needed to effectively address these fundamental challenges (*high confidence*).

Key Message 13.3

Sustainable Transportation Would Produce Societal Benefits

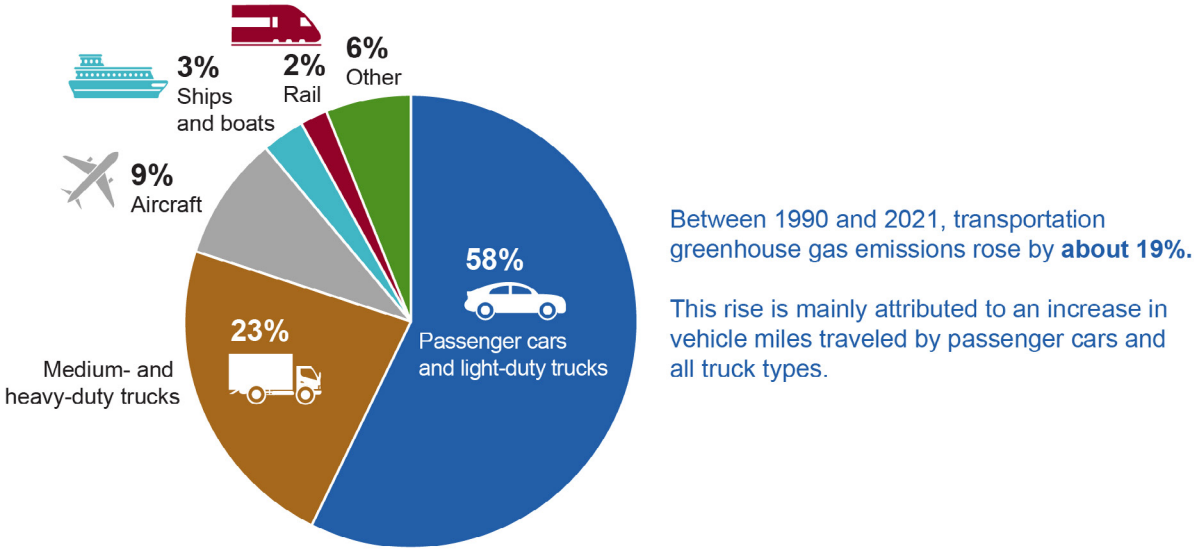
A carbon-free, sustainable, and resilient transportation system would have co-benefits for human health, environmental justice, the natural environment, and economic development (*very high confidence*). When these co-benefits are considered, the benefits of greenhouse gas mitigation actions in the transportation sector far outweigh the costs (*high confidence*).

Key Message 13.4

Equitable Distribution of Transportation Trade-Offs and Benefits Requires Community Involvement

Although implementing adaptation and mitigation measures in the transportation sector will produce essential benefits and co-benefits, including addressing existing inequities, additional consideration is needed to avoid or reduce potential adverse consequences associated with these measures (*high confidence*). Moving toward climate resilience and environmental justice requires that these considerations, as well as current and historic inequities, be assessed through transparent and inclusive processes in order to provide equitable protection from environmental and health hazards and equitable access to transportation benefits (*high confidence*).

2021 Greenhouse Gas Emissions from US Domestic Transportation by Mode



Transportation remains the largest source of emissions in the US, with cars and light-duty trucks as the largest contributors.

Figure 13.1. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the US domestic transportation sector rose by about 19% between 1990 and 2021 and remain the largest source of total national GHG emissions, with passenger cars and all types of trucks being the most significant contributors to the rise in transportation emissions. "Other" refers to buses, motorcycles, pipelines, and lubricants. Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding. Figure credit: Arizona State University and Texas Tech University. See figure metadata for additional contributors.

Recommended Citation

Liban, C.B., R. Kafalenos, L. Alessa, S. Anenberg, M. Chester, J. DeFlorio, F.J. Dóñez, A. Flannery, M.R. Sanio, B.A. Scott, and A.M.K. Stoner, 2023: Ch. 13. Transportation. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH13

Air Quality

Artist: Margaret Plumley

Key Message 14.1

Climate Change Will Hamper Efforts to Improve US Air Quality

Climate change is projected to worsen air quality in many US regions (*medium confidence*), thereby harming human health and increasing premature death (*very likely, high confidence*). Extreme heat events, which can lead to high concentrations of air pollution, are projected to increase in severity and frequency (*very likely, very high confidence*), and the risk of exposure to airborne dust and wildfire smoke will increase with warmer and drier conditions in some regions (*very likely, high confidence*). Reducing air pollution concentrations will unequivocally help protect human health in a changing climate.

Key Message 14.2

Increasing Wildfire Smoke Is Harming Human Health and Catalyzing New Protection Strategies

Wildfires emit gases and fine particles that are harmful to human health, contributing to premature mortality, asthma, and other health problems (*very high confidence*). Climate change is contributing to increases in the frequency and severity of wildfires, thereby worsening air quality in many regions of the contiguous US and Alaska (*likely, high confidence*). Although large challenges remain, new communication and mitigation measures are reducing a portion of the dangers of wildfire smoke (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 14.3

Air Pollution Is Often Worse in Communities of Color and Low-Income Communities

Communities of color, people with low socioeconomic status, and other marginalized populations are disproportionately harmed by poor air quality (*very high confidence*). In the coming decades, these same communities will, on average, face worsened cumulative air pollution burdens from climate change–driven hazards (*very likely, high confidence*). Decision-making focused on the fair distribution of air quality improvements, rather than on overall emissions reductions alone, is critical for reducing air pollution inequities (*high confidence*).

Key Message 14.4

Climate Change Is Worsening Pollen Exposures and Adversely Impacting Health

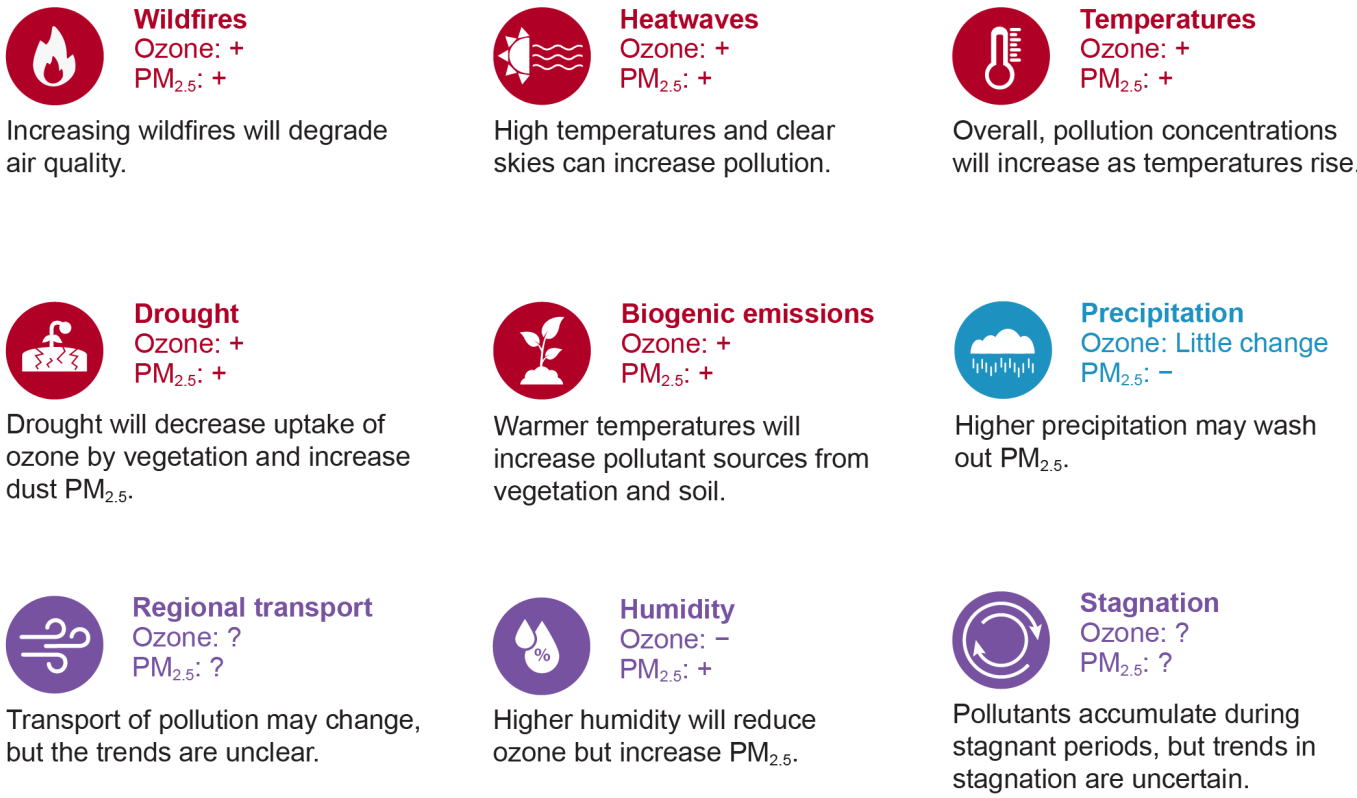
Increased allergen exposure damages the health of people who suffer from allergies, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (*very high confidence*). Human-caused climate change has already caused some regions to experience longer pollen seasons and higher pollen concentrations (*very likely, high confidence*), and these trends are expected to continue as climate changes (*very likely, high confidence*). Increasing access to allergists, improved diagnosis and disease management, and allergy early warning systems may counteract the health impacts of increasing pollen exposure (*high confidence*).

Key Message 14.5

Policies Can Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Improve Air Quality Simultaneously

Substantial reductions in economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions would result in improved air quality and significant public health benefits (*very likely, high confidence*). For many actions, these benefits exceed the cost of greenhouse gas emission controls (*likely, high confidence*). Through coordinated actions emphasizing reduced fossil fuel use, improved energy efficiency, and reductions in short-lived climate pollutants, the US has an opportunity to greatly improve air quality while substantially reducing its climate impact, approaching net-zero CO_2 emissions (*high confidence*).

Climate Change Impacts on Ozone and Fine Particulate Matter ($PM_{2.5}$) over the United States



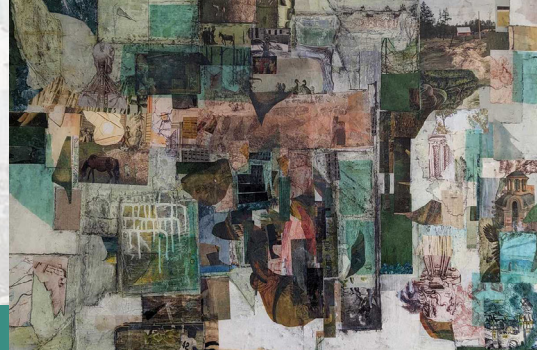
Climate change will have varying effects on ozone and fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) concentrations, including through impacts on weather-sensitive emissions.

Figure 14.1. Climate change is projected to alter concentrations of two key US air pollutants, ozone and $PM_{2.5}$, through several processes. Red icons signify increased ozone and $PM_{2.5}$, and the blue icon denotes decreased $PM_{2.5}$. Plus and minus signs indicate the expected pollutant response to climate-driven changes in meteorology. Question marks and purple icons denote uncertainty in either the response or in how the meteorological process will change with climate change. Given uncertainties and regional differences in pollution responses, the magnitude of these responses is not presented. Key Messages 14.1 and 14.2 provide more detailed descriptions of the mechanisms involved. Adapted from The Royal Society 2021 [CC BY 4.0] (see full chapter for detailed citation).

Recommended Citation

West, J.J., C.G. Nolte, M.L. Bell, A.M. Fiore, P.G. Georgopoulos, J.J. Hess, L.J. Mickley, S.M. O'Neill, J.R. Pierce, R.W. Pinder, S. Pusede, D.T. Shindell, and S.M. Wilson, 2023: Ch. 14. Air quality. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH14

Human Health



Artist: Audrey Martin

Key Message 15.1

Climate Change Is Harming Human Health

It is an established fact that climate change is harming physical, mental, spiritual, and community health and well-being through the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme events, increasing cases of infectious and vector-borne diseases, and declines in food and water quality and security. Climate-related hazards will continue to grow, increasing morbidity and mortality across all regions of the US (*very likely, very high confidence*).

Key Message 15.2

Systemic Racism and Discrimination Exacerbate Climate Impacts on Human Health

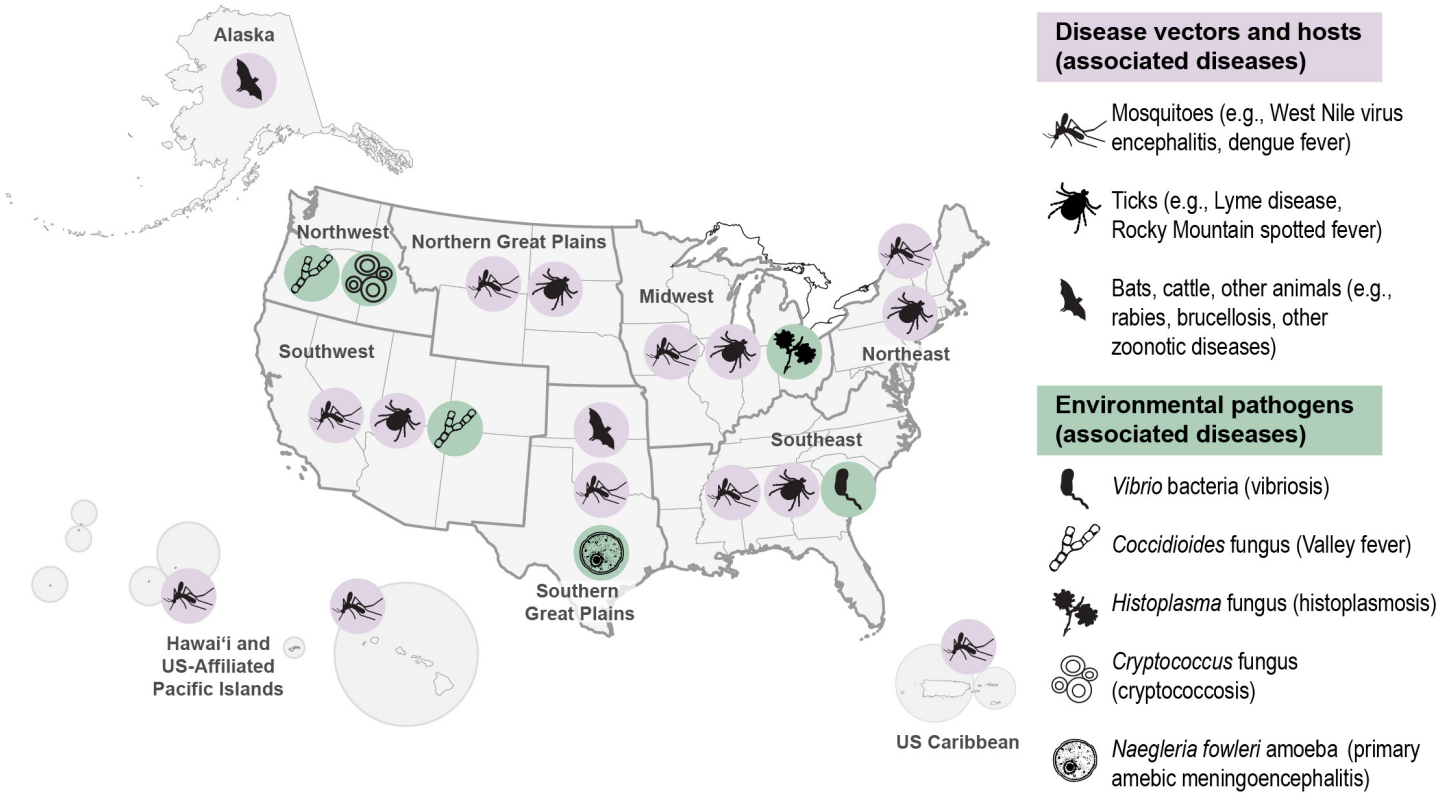
Climate change unequivocally worsens physical, mental, spiritual, and community health and well-being, as well as social inequities. It is an established fact that climate-related impacts disproportionately harm communities and people who have been marginalized. These include BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), individuals and communities with low wealth, women, people with disabilities or chronic diseases, sexual and gender minorities, and children.

Key Message 15.3

Timely, Effective, and Culturally Appropriate Adaptation and Mitigation Actions Protect Human Health

In every sector of society, implementing timely, effective, and culturally appropriate adaptation measures (*high confidence*), creating climate-resilient health systems (*high confidence*), and preventing the release of greenhouse gases can protect human health and improve health equity (*high confidence*).

Regional Examples of Climate-Sensitive Infectious Diseases



Some climate-sensitive infectious diseases are expected to see expanded geographic range and extended seasonality.

Figure 15.2. The map shows select examples of regional climate-sensitive infectious diseases, based on recent changes in geographic range or incidence. Some regions will experience increases in tick- and mosquito-borne diseases, zoonotic diseases, and pathogens, both in geographic area and extended seasonality. Figure credit: Los Alamos National Laboratory, CDC, Columbia University, University of Arizona, and University of Colorado.

Recommended Citation

Hayden, M.H., P.J. Schramm, C.B. Beard, J.E. Bell, A.S. Bernstein, A. Bieniek-Tobasco, N. Cooley, M. Diuk-Wasser, Michael K. Dorsey, K.L. Ebi, K.C. Ernst, M.E. Gorris, P.D. Howe, A.S. Khan, C. Lefthand-Begay, J. Maldonado, S. Saha, F. Shafiei, A. Vaidyanathan, and O.V. Wilhelmi, 2023: Ch. 15. Human health. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH15

Tribes and Indigenous Peoples

Artists: L.A. Jacobs, C. Avery, K. Champagne, R. Grayson

Key Message 16.1

Indigenous Peoples Face Risks to Well-Being and Livelihoods from Climate Change and Barriers to Energy Sovereignty

Climate change continues to cause negative effects on critical aspects of Indigenous Peoples' well-being, including their livelihoods, health, nutrition, and cultural practices, as well as the ecological resilience of their territories (*very high confidence*). Indigenous Peoples are responding in diverse ways, including through energy sovereignty (*very high confidence*).

Key Message 16.2

Self-Determination Is Key to Indigenous Peoples' Resilience to Climate Change

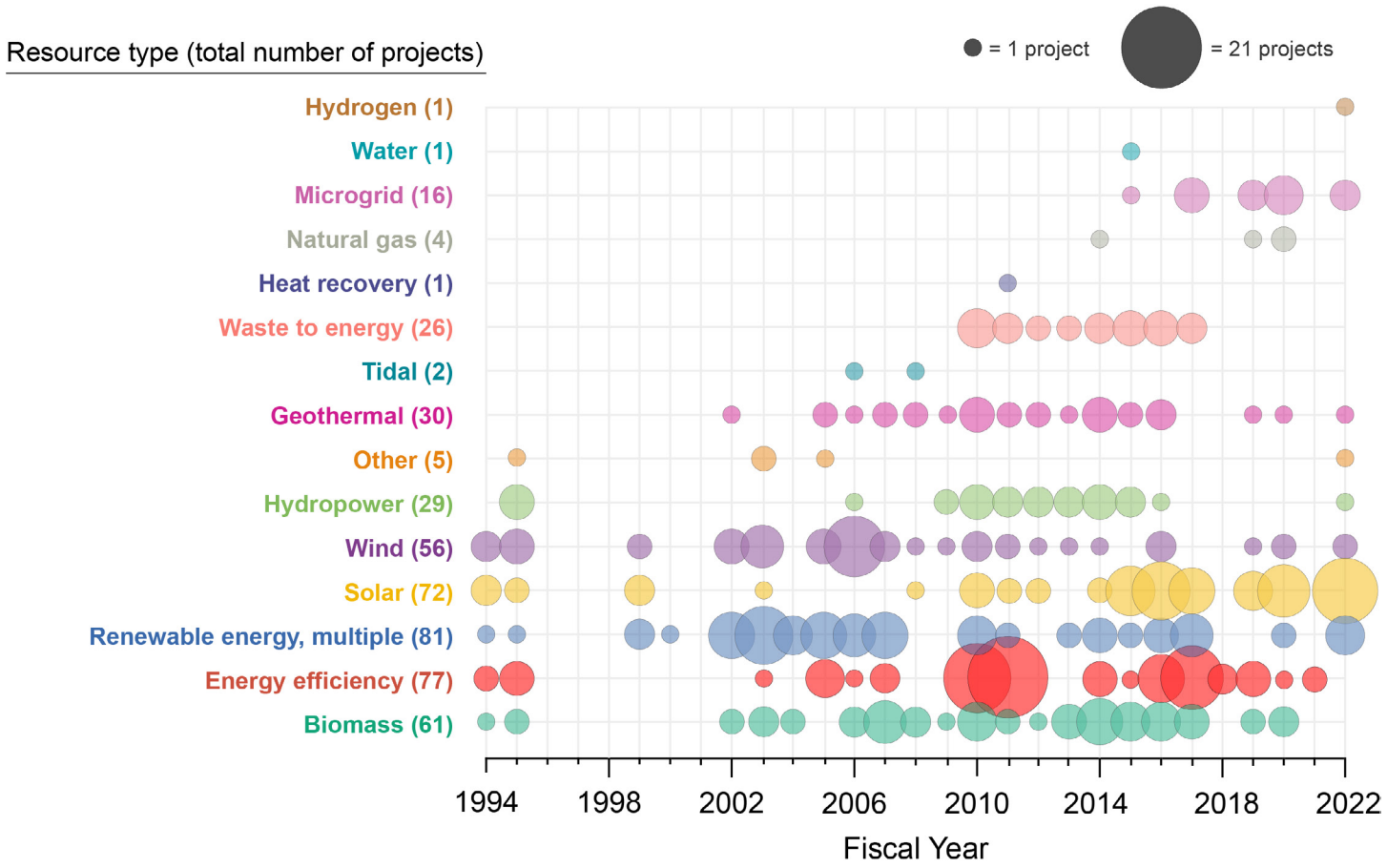
By exercising their right to self-determination, Indigenous Peoples can respond to climate change in ways that meet the needs and aspirations of their communities (*very high confidence*). However, their ability to exercise this right is often undermined by institutions and policies shaped by the impacts of settler colonialism (*very high confidence*). Expanded support from federal and state governments has the potential to uphold Indigenous rights to self-determination for guiding climate resilience (*high confidence*).

Key Message 16.3

Indigenous Leadership Guides Climate Change Response

Indigenous Peoples lead numerous actions that respond to climate change (*high confidence*). Indigenous-led organizations, initiatives, and movements have demonstrated diverse strategies for climate adaptation and mitigation that are guided by Indigenous Knowledges and values and by the pursuit of Indigenous rights (*high confidence*).

Tribal Renewable Energy Projects



The breadth of project type and funding amounts have increased for federally funded renewable energy projects.

Figure 16.4. The figure shows federally funded Tribal renewable energy and energy-efficiency projects between 1994 and 2022. The size of the circles indicates the number of projects: the larger the circle, the more projects of that energy type were funded that year. Historically, projects like retrofitting to improve energy efficiency, as well as renewable energy projects including solar, wind, and biomass, often received funding. The more recent trend toward microgrid and solar projects mirrors efforts to build Tribal energy sovereignty. Figure credit: DOI, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

Recommended Citation

Whyte, K., R. Novak, M.B. Laramie, N.G. Bruscato, D.M. David-Chavez, M.J. Dockry, M.K. Johnson, C.E. Jones Jr., and K. Leonard, 2023: Ch. 16. Tribes and Indigenous Peoples. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH16

Climate Effects on US International Interests

Artist: Taina Litwak

Key Message 17.1

Interdependent, Systemic Climate-Related Risks Increasingly Affect US Interests

In a globally connected world, climate change impacts on US interests are multifaceted, interconnected, and frequently exacerbated by social unrest and environmental degradation (*likely, high confidence*). The scale and speed of climate-related impacts to US interests are expected to increase, due in part to underlying interdependencies and to the projected intensification of climate change (*likely, high confidence*). Emerging systems- and scenarios-based approaches to integrative planning are being applied to account for interdependencies and competing priorities (*likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 17.2

Climate Change Exacerbates Risks to National Security

Climate change can contribute to political and social instability and, in some instances, to conflict (*likely, high confidence*). It impacts the operations and missions of defense, diplomacy, and development agencies critical to US national security (*very likely, high confidence*). The US Government, bilaterally and in collaboration with international partners, is increasingly addressing these implications through a range of diplomatic, development, and defense responses (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 17.3

Climate Change Presents Risks and Opportunities for US Economics, Trade, and Investments

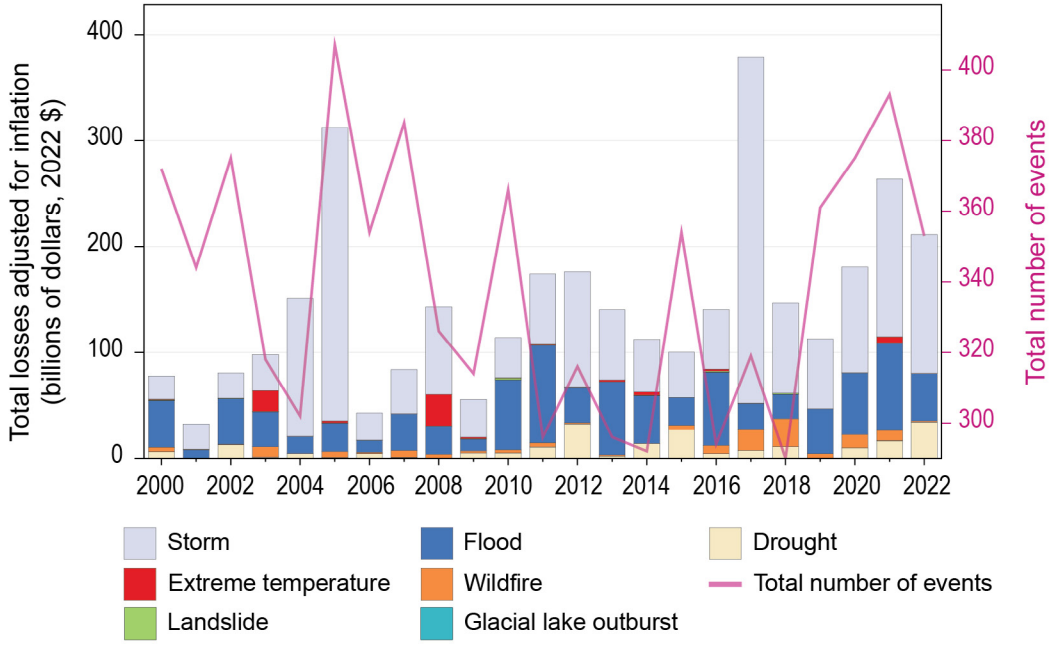
The physical impacts of climate change are increasingly affecting global and regional economic growth (*very likely, high confidence*). These impacts have important implications for US economic, trade, and investment interests *(likely, medium confidence*). Global mitigation and adaptation responses by governments and businesses will likewise impact US economic interests, presenting both risks and potential opportunities for the US economy (*likely, medium confidence*). Public- and private-sector institutional, regulatory, financial, and market-based frameworks for climate mitigation and adaptation will influence these risks and opportunities (*likely, medium confidence*).

Key Message 17.4

Climate Change Undermines Sustainable Development

Climate change undermines the world's ability to develop sustainably, reverses development gains, and exacerbates inequities (*very likely, high confidence*). Climate finance is increasing, but global flows continue to fall short of needs (*likely, high confidence*). Accelerated deployment of adaptation and mitigation action at scale can yield substantial benefits for sustainable development (*likely, medium confidence*). Climate action is most effective when co-developed and grounded in equity, local ownership, and inclusive governance (*likely, medium confidence*).

Climate-Related Disasters and Economic Losses



This figure shows global trends in the number, growing costs, and increasing diversity of types of climate-related natural disasters since 2000.

Figure 17.3. The total global losses associated with climate-related disasters have risen over the last two decades, with growing diversity in the types of climate-related events that lead to disasters (e.g., drought, wildfires, floods) and some annual spikes in storm-related losses. There is little correlation between losses and total number of disasters (suggesting increased losses may derive from increasing severity of disasters, increased value of assets, reporting discrepancies, or a combination of these). Figure credit: DOI, Winrock International, NOAA NCEI, and CISESS NC.

Recommended Citation

Hellmuth, M.E., F.H. Akhtar, A.H. Cameron, C.A. Corner-Dolloff, G.D. Dabelko, T. Dinku, J.L. Koh, D. Mason, R.S. Pulwarty, L.I. Sperling, and M.F. Zermoglio, 2023: Ch. 17. Climate effects on US international interests. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH17

Sector Interactions, Multiple Stressors, and Complex Systems

Artist: Carolina Aragon

Key Message 18.1

Human–Nature Interconnections Create Unexpected Climate Risks and Opportunities

Human–natural systems are dynamic and complex. Interconnected networks of people, infrastructure, commodities, goods, and services influence changing climate risks and are increasingly vulnerable to their impacts (*high confidence*). The vulnerabilities in these networks, and their effects on human–natural systems, strongly depend on human responses and other compounding stressors (*high confidence*). Decision-makers seeking to reduce climate change risks have to navigate diverse and sometimes competing objectives and perspectives across many actors, institutions, and geographic scales while reconciling deep uncertainties and limits to predictability (*high confidence*).

Key Message 18.2

Complex Climate Impacts and Responses Further Burden Frontline Communities

Compounding and cascading interactions among sectors, hazards, and geographies magnify the impact of climate change and societal responses for already-overburdened groups (*high confidence*). However, social vulnerability assessments tend to evaluate risks and impacts by sector, hazard, or jurisdiction, and most complex-systems models do not yet account for social and political dynamics (*high confidence*). Data about how complex systems affect frontline communities under climate change are severely lacking, especially for hard-to-reach populations, and this can lead to disproportionate risks and impacts for these groups (*high confidence*).

Key Message 18.3

Collaborations Among Diverse Knowledge Holders Improve Responses to Complex Climate Challenges

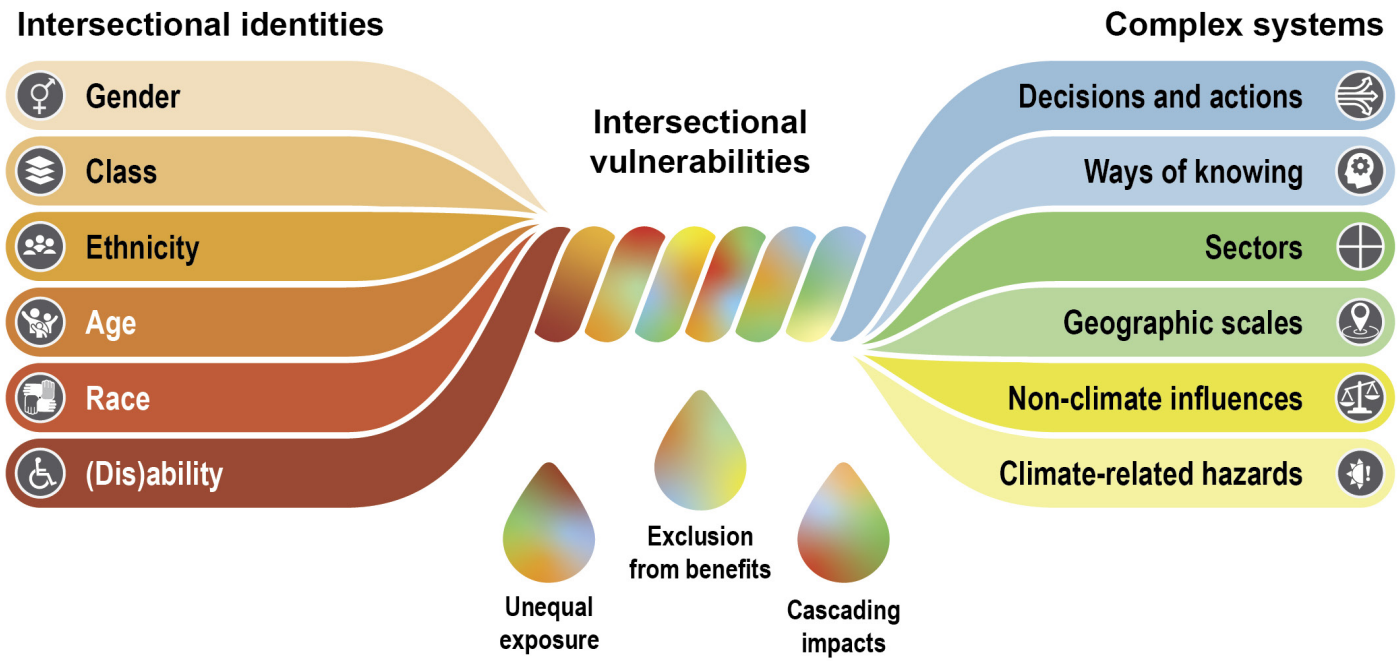
Responding effectively to complex climate challenges benefits from integrated frameworks and modeling approaches that incorporate diverse types of knowledges suited to specific contexts and needs (*high confidence*). Participatory and collaborative approaches and tools bring together diverse knowledge holders and improve the generation and use of actionable knowledge for complex-systems decision-making (*medium confidence*). These collaborative approaches help navigate complex challenges, such as competing perspectives and knowledge uncertainties, thereby improving climate responses (*low confidence*).

Key Messages 18.4

New Governance Approaches Are Emerging, but Gaps in Practice and Evidence Persist

Climate change presents challenges for managing risks and responses across different levels of government, the private sector, and civil society. Current governance entities and their existing jurisdictional authorities are often unable to resolve conflicts posed by the wide-ranging and unprecedented interactions and complexities of climate risks and more localized compounding stressors (*high confidence*). Local and regional governments have experimented with alternative institutional arrangements, funding mechanisms, and decision coordination (*medium confidence*). Thus far, however, there is only preliminary evidence of their effectiveness (*low confidence*). These pilots and other innovations developed for climate mitigation and adaptation may well present opportunities for replication and broader successes in other locations and different local contexts (*medium confidence*).

Intersectional Vulnerabilities



Intersecting social and environmental factors privilege some people's ability to respond to climate change.

Figure 18.2. Climate impacts and societal responses exacerbate intersectional vulnerabilities. People's gender, class, ethnicity, age, race, and ability form their intersectional identity (left). Intersectional vulnerabilities emerge when intersectional identities interact with inequities in complex systems, as outlined in Figure 18.1 (right). In the face of climate risks and responses, these intersectional vulnerabilities can result in unequal exposure, exclusion from benefits, and cascading impacts that further impact already-overburdened groups. Societal responses to climate change—including uneven existing resources across municipalities, decisions about where to allocate investments, and noninclusive ways of knowing—can exacerbate existing harms and generate new ones. Adapted with permission from Box TS.4, Figure 1 of Field et al. 2014 (see full chapter for detailed citation).

Recommended Citation

Mach, K.J., R. Vallario, J.R. Arnold, C. Brelsford, K.V. Calvin, A.N. Flores, J. Gao, K. Jagannathan, D. Judi, C.E. Martín, F.C. Moore, R. Moss, E. Nance, B. Rashleigh, P.M. Reed, L. Shi, and L.L. Turek-Hankins, 2023: Ch. 18. Sector interactions, multiple stressors, and complex systems. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH18

Economics

Artist: George Lorio

Key Message 19.1

Climate Change Affects the Economy Directly

Climate change directly impacts the economy through increases in temperature, rising sea levels, and more frequent and intense weather-related extreme events (e.g., wildfires, floods, hurricanes, droughts), which are estimated to generate substantial and increasing economic costs in many sectors (*likely, high confidence*). These impacts are projected to be distributed unequally, affecting certain regions, industries, and socioeconomic groups more than others (*very likely, high confidence*). Adaptation can attenuate some impacts by reducing vulnerability to climate change, but adaptation strategies vary in their effectiveness and costs (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 19.2

Markets and Budgets Respond to Climate Change

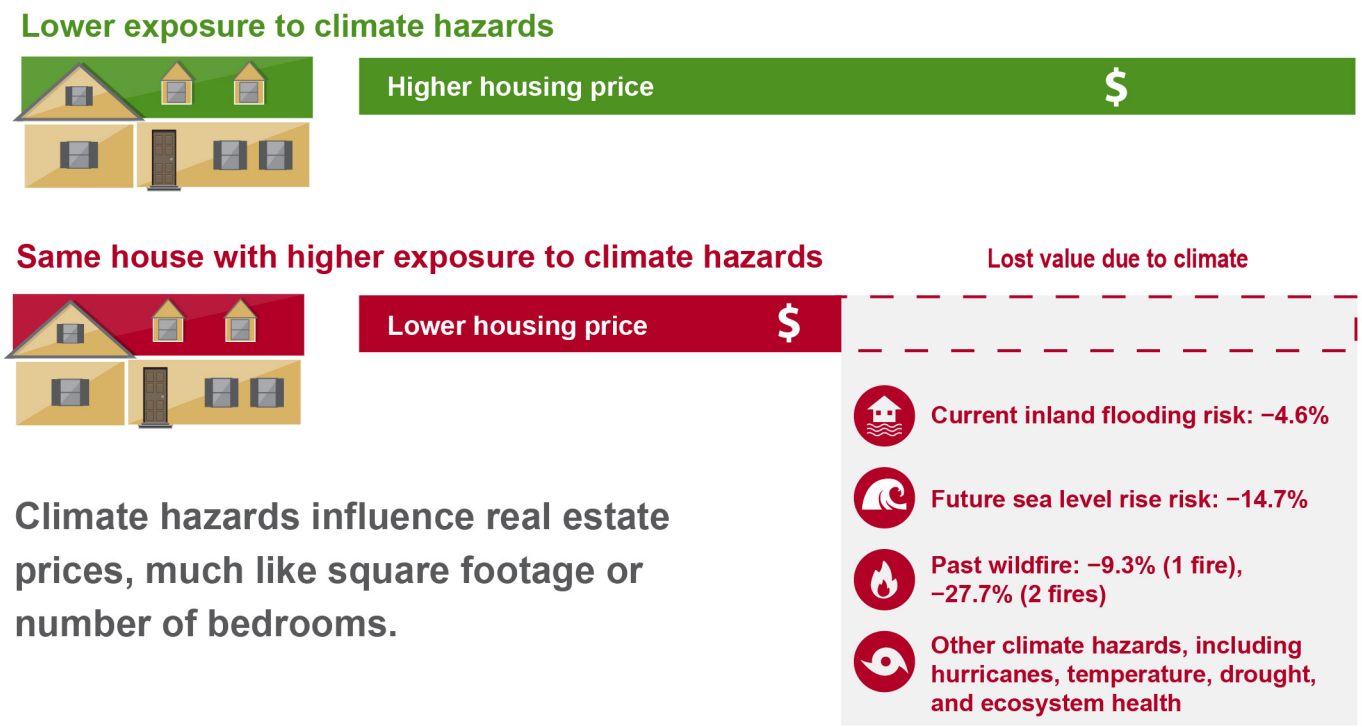
Markets are responding to current and anticipated climate changes, and stronger market responses are expected as climate change progresses (*medium confidence*). Climate risks are projected to change asset values as markets and prices adjust to reflect economic conditions that result from climate change (*very likely, high confidence*). New costs and challenges will emerge in insurance systems and public budgets that were not originally designed to respond to climate change (*high confidence*). Trade and economic growth are projected to be impacted by climate change directly and through policy responses to climate change (*likely, medium confidence*).

Key Message 19.3

Economic Opportunities for Households, Businesses, and Institutions Will Change

Climate change is projected to impose a variety of new or higher costs on most households and to impact their employment, income, and quality of life (*very likely, high confidence*). Climate change will alter the economic landscape that businesses face, generating new risks but also creating new opportunities (*likely, medium confidence*). Institutions and governments are expected to see existing programs used more intensively or in new ways as populations cope with climate change, generating new system-wide risks (*medium confidence*). Design, evaluation, and deployment of adaptation technologies and policies will strengthen our national preparedness for climate change (*high confidence*).

How Climate Hazards Impact Real Estate Prices



Exposure to climate hazards has a negative effect on real estate values.

Figure 19.3. Exposure to past climate events and to present and future climate risks affects the values of otherwise identical properties. The market price for real estate is reduced when the property is exposed to adverse climate extremes or risks. Percentages shown are example estimates from studies. Homes located in the present-day 100-year floodplain cost 4.6% less than comparable homes outside the floodplain (Beltrán et al. 2018); homes projected to be inundated by 1 foot of sea level rise cost 14.7% less (Bernstein et al. 2019); and homes located near one recent wildfire cost 9.3% less, while those located near two recent wildfires cost 27.7% less (Mueller et al. 2009). Note that these are examples from specific studies, some of which are not nationally representative. Other climate hazards including hurricanes (Hallstrom and Smith 2005), droughts (Hornbeck 2012), temperature (Albouy et al. 2016), and ecosystem health (Druckenmiller 2020), among others, also affect real estate prices. Figure credit: See figure metadata for contributors. See full chapter for detailed citations.

Recommended Citation

Hsiang, S., S. Greenhill, J. Martinich, M. Grasso, R.M. Schuster, L. Barrage, D.B. Diaz, H. Hong, C. Kousky, T. Phan, M.C. Sarofim, W. Schlenker, B. Simon, and S.E. Sneeringer, 2023: Ch. 19. Economics. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH19

Social Systems and Justice

Artist: Spencer Owen

Key Message 20.1

Social Systems Are Changing the Climate and Distributing Its Impacts Inequitably

Social systems are changing the climate *(very high confidence*). Societal characteristics and processes shape greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, primarily through the burning of fossil fuels (*very high confidence*). Social systems also inequitably distribute the benefits of energy consumption and the impacts of GHG emissions and climate change (*high confidence*). Governance is a critical process that distributes these impacts (*very high confidence*) and provides access to adaptation (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 20.2

Social Systems Structure How People Know and Communicate About Climate Change

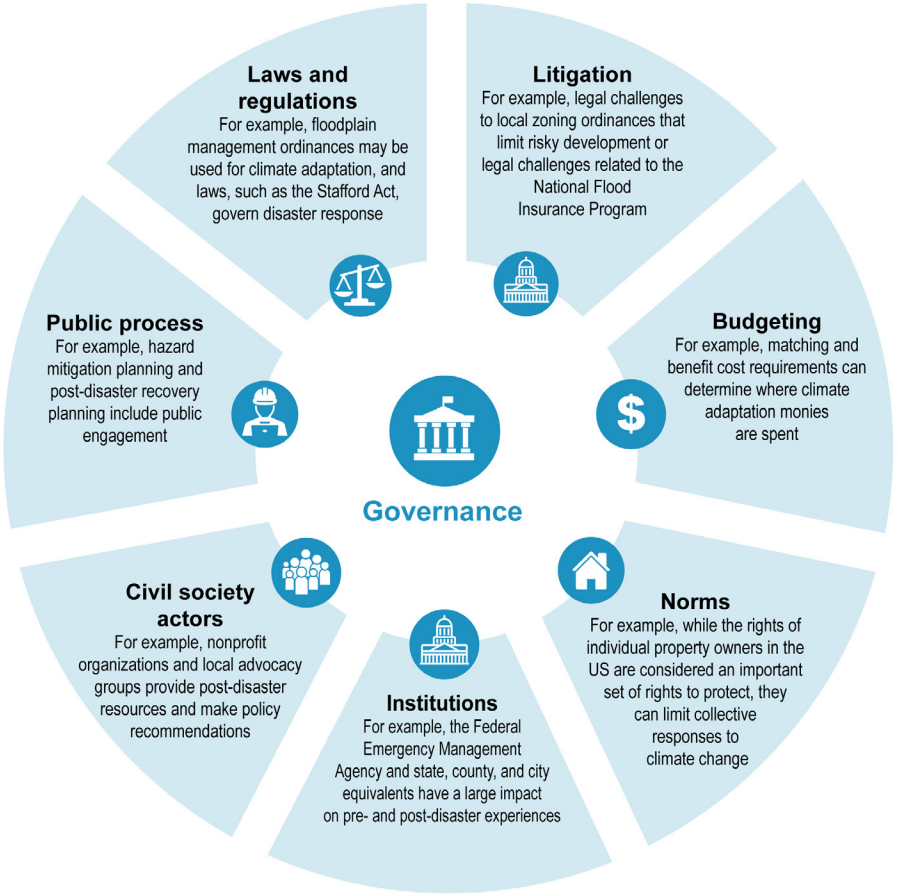
People's histories, educations, cultures, and ethics determine how they understand and experience climate change (*high confidence*). These knowledges take multiple forms (*high confidence*) and generate diverse approaches to climate adaptation and mitigation (*medium confidence*). Engagement across communities that builds clear objectives and benchmarks has been shown to produce more desired outcomes (*medium confidence*). Effective engagement is challenging due in part to the complexity and uncertainty associated with climate science and politics (*high confidence*). Including community perspectives and multiple forms of knowledge in climate discussions and decision-making helps promote justice (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 20.3

Climate Justice Is Possible If Processes like Migration and Energy Transitions Are Equitable

Climate justice—the recognition of diverse values and past harms, equitable distribution of benefits and risks, and the procedural inclusion of affected communities in decision-making processes—is possible (*medium confidence*). Complex social processes such as human migration affect climate inequities (*medium confidence*). Climate justice is also closely related to just transitions (*high confidence*), which involve equitably adapting societies, economies, and energy systems to climate change mitigation strategies and climate impacts (*high confidence*).

Climate Change Governance



Climate change governance is complex and multifaceted.

Figure 20.2. This figure recognizes the complex interaction of multiple social systems that give rise to governance. Climate change impacts, and the impacts of adaptation and mitigation strategies, will all be mediated by governance decisions and actions. Understanding this complex interplay allows the social scientists who study climate change to make predictions regarding climate impacts and to assess where governance systems are expected to produce climate justice or injustice. Figure credit: Jacksonville State University.

Recommended Citation

Marino, E.K., K. Maxwell, E. Eisenhauer, A. Zycherman, C. Callison, E. Fussell, M.D. Hendricks, F.H. Jacobs, A. Jerolleman, A.K. Jorgenson, E.M. Markowitz, S.T. Marquart-Pyatt, M. Schutten, R.L. Shwom, and K. Whyte, 2023: Ch. 20. Social systems and justice. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH20

Northeast

Artist: Jillian Pelto

Key Message 21.1

Chronic Impacts of Extreme Weather Are Shaping Adaptation and Mitigation Efforts

The Northeast continues to be confronted with extreme weather, most notably extreme precipitation—which has caused problematic flooding across the region—and heatwaves (*very likely, high confidence*). In response, climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, including nature-based solutions, have increased across the region (*high confidence*), with a focus on emissions reductions, carbon sequestration, and resilience building (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 21.2

Ocean and Coastal Impacts Are Driving Adaptation to Climate Change

The ocean and coastal habitats in the Northeast are experiencing changes that are unprecedented in recorded history, including ocean warming, marine heatwaves, sea level rise, and ocean acidification (*high confidence*). Changing ocean conditions are causing significant shifts in the distribution, productivity, and seasonal timing of life-cycle events of living marine resources in the Northeast (*high confidence*). These impacts have spurred adaptation efforts such as coastal wetland restoration and changes in fishing behavior (*high confidence*).

Key Message 21.3

Disproportionate Impacts Highlight the Importance of Equitable Policy Choices

Extreme heat, storms, flooding, and other climate-related hazards are causing disproportionate impacts among certain communities in the Northeast, notably including racial and ethnic minorities, people of lower socioeconomic status, and older adults (*very likely, very high confidence*). These communities tend to have less access to healthcare, social services, and financial resources and to face higher burdens related to environmental pollution and preexisting health conditions (*very likely, high confidence*). Social equity objectives are prominent in many local-level adaptation initiatives, but the amount of progress toward equitable outcomes remains uneven (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 21.4

Climate Action Plans Are Now Being Implemented

In recent years, there have been substantial advances in the magnitude and scope of climate action across all jurisdictional scales (*high confidence*). Almost every state in the region has conducted or updated a climate impact assessment, developed a comprehensive climate action plan, and enacted climate-related laws since 2018 (*high confidence*). Innovative approaches to transparent, inclusive, and equitable processes around climate action are being embraced by Tribes, municipalities, and states (*high confidence*). Although ambitious emissions reduction targets have been put forward, meeting these goals is expected to be challenging (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 21.5

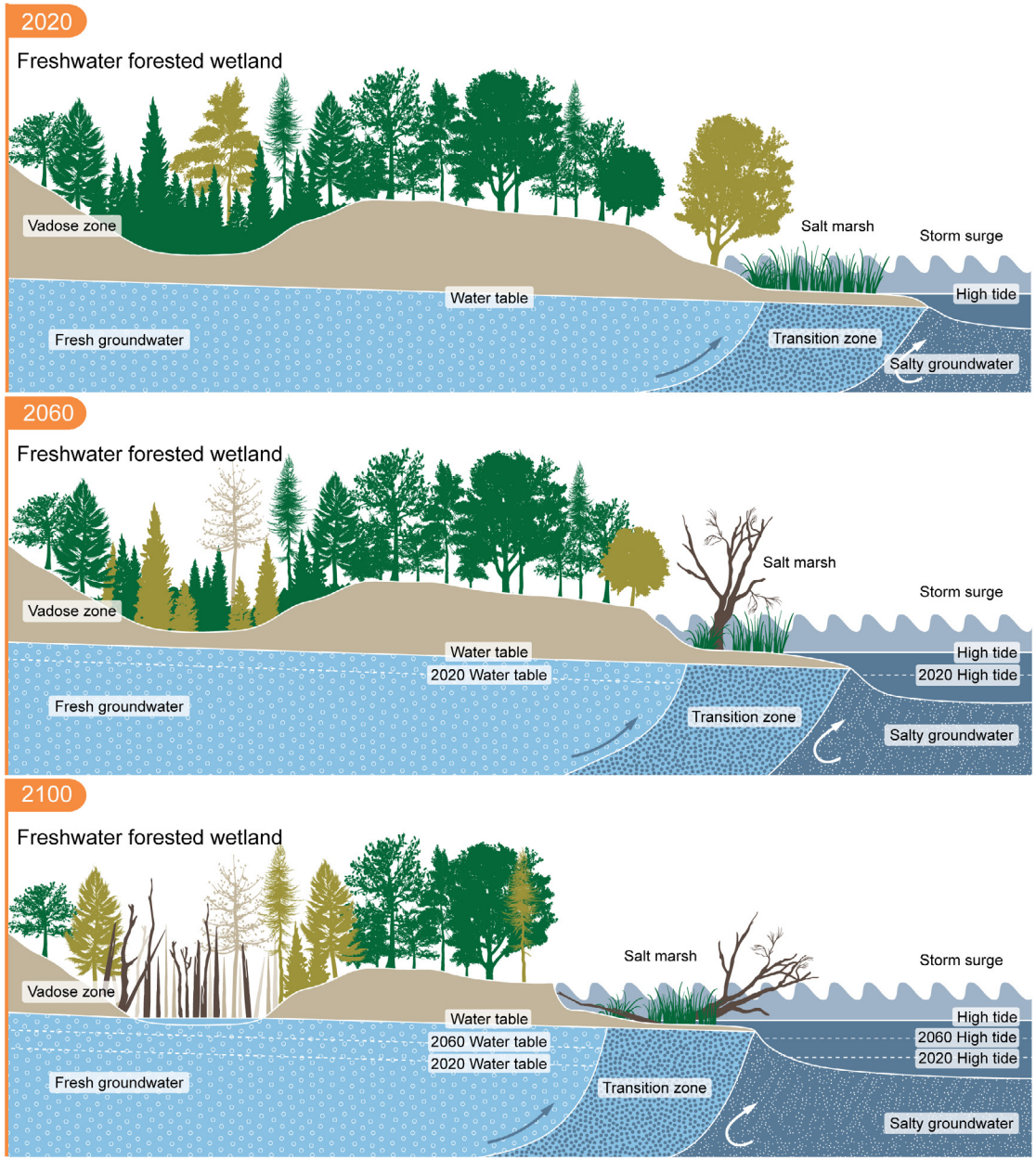
Implementation of Climate Plans Depends on Adequate Financing

Options for financing mitigation and adaptation efforts have expanded in recent years, providing households, communities, and businesses with more options for responding to climate change (*high confidence*). Flood insurance allows individuals and communities to recover following extreme flooding events, but many at-risk homeowners lack adequate coverage (*high confidence*). Although the public sector remains the primary source of funding for adaptation, private capital has started to invest in a variety of mitigation and adaptation projects, including services for monitoring climate risks and community-based catastrophe insurance (*high confidence*).

Projected Changes in Coastal Forests

Rising sea levels kill trees and transform coastal forests into marshes, damaging vital ecosystems and the services they provide to the community.

Figure 21.7. As sea level rises, the water table also rises; the vadose zone (which is between the ground surface and the groundwater table) becomes thinner, bringing the water table closer to the surface; and tidal flooding and storm surges reach farther inland, resulting in forest dieback and conversion of forested wetlands to standing-water wetlands. Over time, these changes result in permanent habitat shifts. Adapted from Sacatelli et al. 2020 (see full chapter for detailed citation).



Recommended Citation

Whitehead, J.C., E.L. Mecray, E.D. Lane, L. Kerr, M.L. Finucane, D.R. Reidmiller, M.C. Bove, F.A. Montalto, S. O'Rourke, D.A. Zarrilli, P. Chigbu, C.C. Thornbrugh, E.N. Curchitser, J.G. Hunter, and K. Law, 2023: Ch. 21. Northeast. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH21

Southeast

Artist: Laura Tanner

Key Message 22.1

Regional Growth Increases Climate Risks

The Southeast's population has grown and is expected to continue growing, mostly in metropolitan areas and along its coastline (*very likely, very high confidence*), putting more communities and their assets into harm's way from increasing risks related to climate and land-use changes (*very likely*, *very high confidence*). Conversely, many rural places are facing declining populations with a growing percentage of older residents (*very high confidence*), making these areas particularly vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate (*likely, high confidence*). At the same time, decision-makers frequently use outdated and/or limited information on climate-related risks to inform adaptation plans, which as a result fail to account for worsening future conditions (*likely, high confidence*). These climate adaptation efforts also tend to be concentrated in wealthier communities, leaving under-resourced and more rural populations, communities of color, and Tribal Nations at growing and disproportionate risk (*likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 22.2

Climate Change Worsens Human Health and Widens Health Inequities

Human health and climate stressors are intimately linked in the Southeast (*very high confidence*). Community characteristics such as racial and ethnic population, chronic disease prevalence, age, and socioeconomic status can influence how climate change exacerbates, ameliorates, or introduces new health issues (*very high confidence*). Climate change is already impacting health in the region (*very likely, very high confidence*). There are effective strategies to address the health impacts of climate change in the Southeast that have multiple benefits across social and environmental contexts (*high confidence*).

Key Message 22.3

Climate Change Disproportionately Damages Southeastern Jobs, Households, and Economic Security

Over the last few decades, economic growth in the Southeast has been concentrated in and around urban centers (*high confidence*) that depend on climate-sensitive infrastructure and regional connections to thrive (*medium confidence*). Simultaneously, rural and place-based economies that rely on the region's ecosystems are particularly at risk from current and future climate changes (*very likely, high confidence*). Global warming is expected to worsen climate-related impacts on economic systems, labor, and regional supply chains in the Southeast, with disproportionate effects on frontline communities (*very likely, high confidence*). A coordinated approach that recognizes present-day inequities and the interdependencies between rural and urban communities will be necessary to secure the region's economic vitality (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 22.4

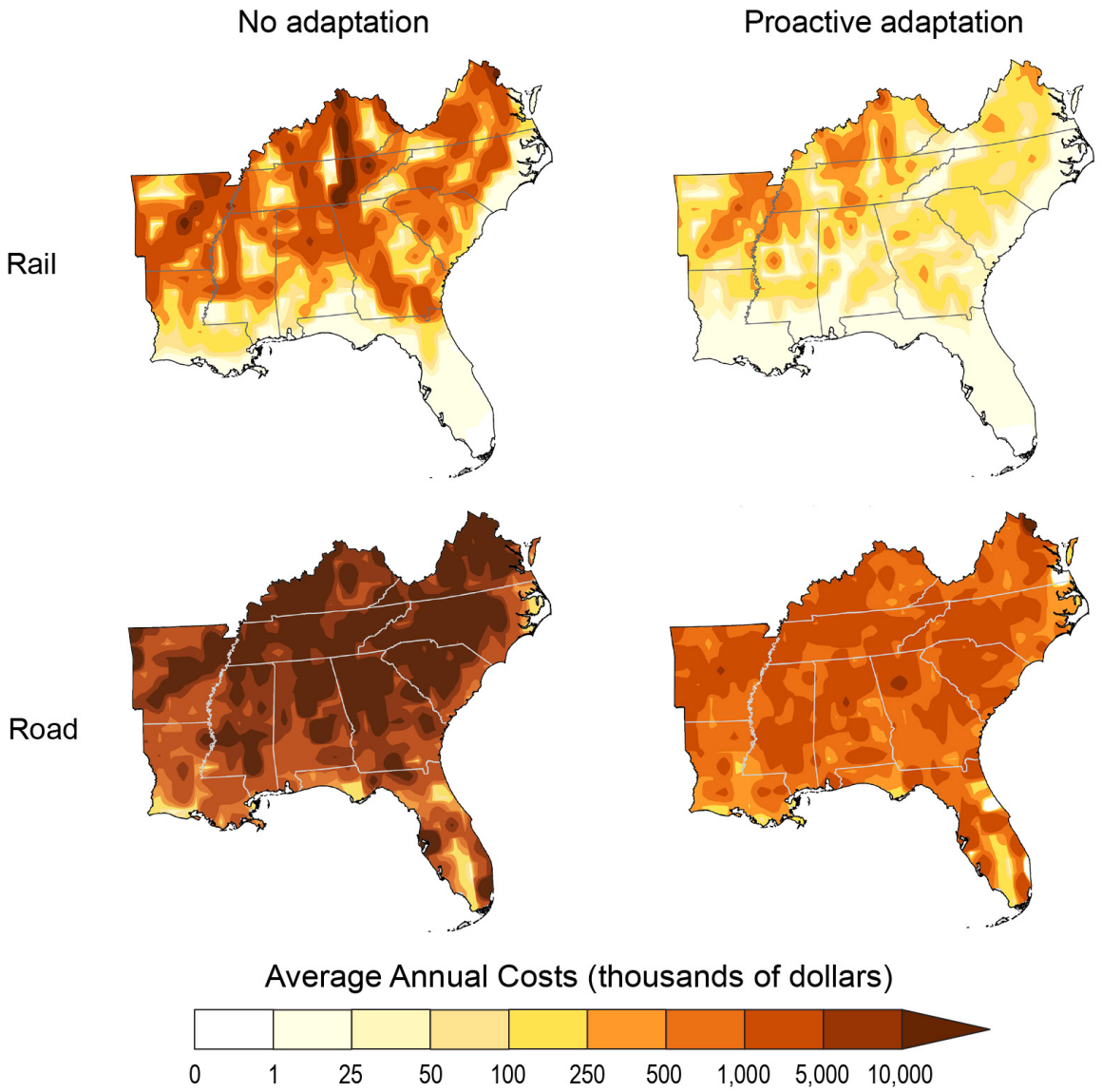
Agriculture Faces Growing Threats, but Innovations Offer Help

Changes in temperature, drought, extreme rainfall, and sea levels are already threatening the Southeast's agriculture and other food-related systems (*likely, very high confidence*). Moreover, these climate-related hazards are expected to worsen with every increment of global warming, disproportionately harm farmers and small-scale operations, and increase the competition between urban and rural communities for valuable resources such as water and land (*high confidence, very likely*). However, innovative agricultural techniques such as precision farming show promise for adapting to future climate changes in the region (*likely, high confidence*).

Proactive Adaptation Offsets Future Transportation Infrastructure Costs

Proactive adaptation to climate change could save millions of dollars in future transportation infrastructure costs.

Figure 22.15. Future climate change impacts (under RCP4.5) may cost US transportation infrastructure billions in damages by 2050, with especially high costs in the Southeast. The **left panels** show the additional annual average system costs (as compared to 1986–2005 in 2018 dollars) to rail infrastructure (**top**) and road networks (**bottom**) in 2050, assuming no adaptation. Proactive adaptation—anticipating climate risks and investing up front in strengthening these systems before damage occurs—could reduce significantly, but not eliminate, these costs (**right panels**). Proactive adaptation strategies include temperature sensors for railroad tracks and working to reduce disruption times for roads undergoing repairs. Adapted from Neumann et al. 2021 [CC BY 4.0] (see full chapter for detailed citation).



Recommended Citation

Hoffman, J.S., S.G. McNulty, C. Brown, K.D. Dello, P.N. Knox, A. Lascurain, C. Mickalonis, G.T. Mitchum, L. Rivers III, M. Schaefer, G.P. Smith, J.S. Camp, and K.M. Wood, 2023: Ch. 22. Southeast. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH22

US Caribbean

Artist: Melanie Mills

Key Message 23.1

Climate-Driven Extreme Events Exacerbate Inequities and Impact Human Health and Well-Being

Traditionally underserved and disadvantaged communities suffer disproportionate impacts from climate change because they have been systematically excluded from social services, secure livelihoods, quality education, and other social benefits that help sustain health and well-being (*high confidence*). Hurricanes and other climate-related extreme events have been associated with higher rates of disease, mental illness, and overall mortality, as well as loss of cultural heritage that is central to community identity (*high confidence*). As extreme weather events become more intense and more frequent, residents will continue experiencing increasing levels of noncommunicable diseases, excess mortality, behavioral health challenges, and loss of quality of life (*high confidence*). The frequency of heat episodes and the severity of hurricanes are both expected to increase in the region due to human-induced climate change, which will affect public health unless adaptation measures are taken (*high confidence*).

Key Message 23.2

Ecology and Biodiversity Are Unique and Vulnerable

Coastal and terrestrial ecosystems provide a large number of goods and services that are vital to the islands' economies and to the health and well-being of their residents (*high confidence*). These essential systems are degraded by human actions and climate change, thereby reducing the benefits they provide to people, as well as their functionality as habitats for protecting biological diversity (*high confidence*). Climate change is expected to exacerbate the degradation of ecosystems (*very likely, high confidence*). The success of climate adaptation strategies will depend on reducing all sources of stress on ecological systems (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 23.3

Climate Change Threatens Water and Food Security

US Caribbean food and water systems are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the escalation of climate change, including stronger hurricanes, more severe drought, warmer air temperatures, and other extreme weather (*likely, high confidence*). Because the territories are heavily reliant on imported foods, they are affected by climate changes occurring both within and outside of the region (*high confidence*). Reductions in average annual rainfall, increasing air temperatures, and rising sea levels will adversely affect freshwater availability in the future (*medium confidence*). Improved adaptation efforts would benefit from a better understanding of the ways food and water systems interrelate and of the cascading impacts generated by climate change (*medium confidence*).

Key Messages 23.4

Infrastructure and Energy Are Vulnerable, but Decentralization Could Improve Resilience

Climate change has created profound risks for the US Caribbean's critical infrastructure, already weakened from years of disinvestment and deferred maintenance (*high confidence*). Increasingly powerful storms, along with rising sea levels, are severely impairing infrastructure systems, with increasing damage projected in future years (*likely, high confidence*). Dependence on fossil fuel imports increases energy insecurity (*high confidence*). Infrastructure improvements, coupled with a new paradigm focused on decentralization, adoption of distributed solar, and shared governance, could help limit residents' vulnerability to health and other risks associated with loss of essential services (*likely, medium confidence*).

Key Message 23.5

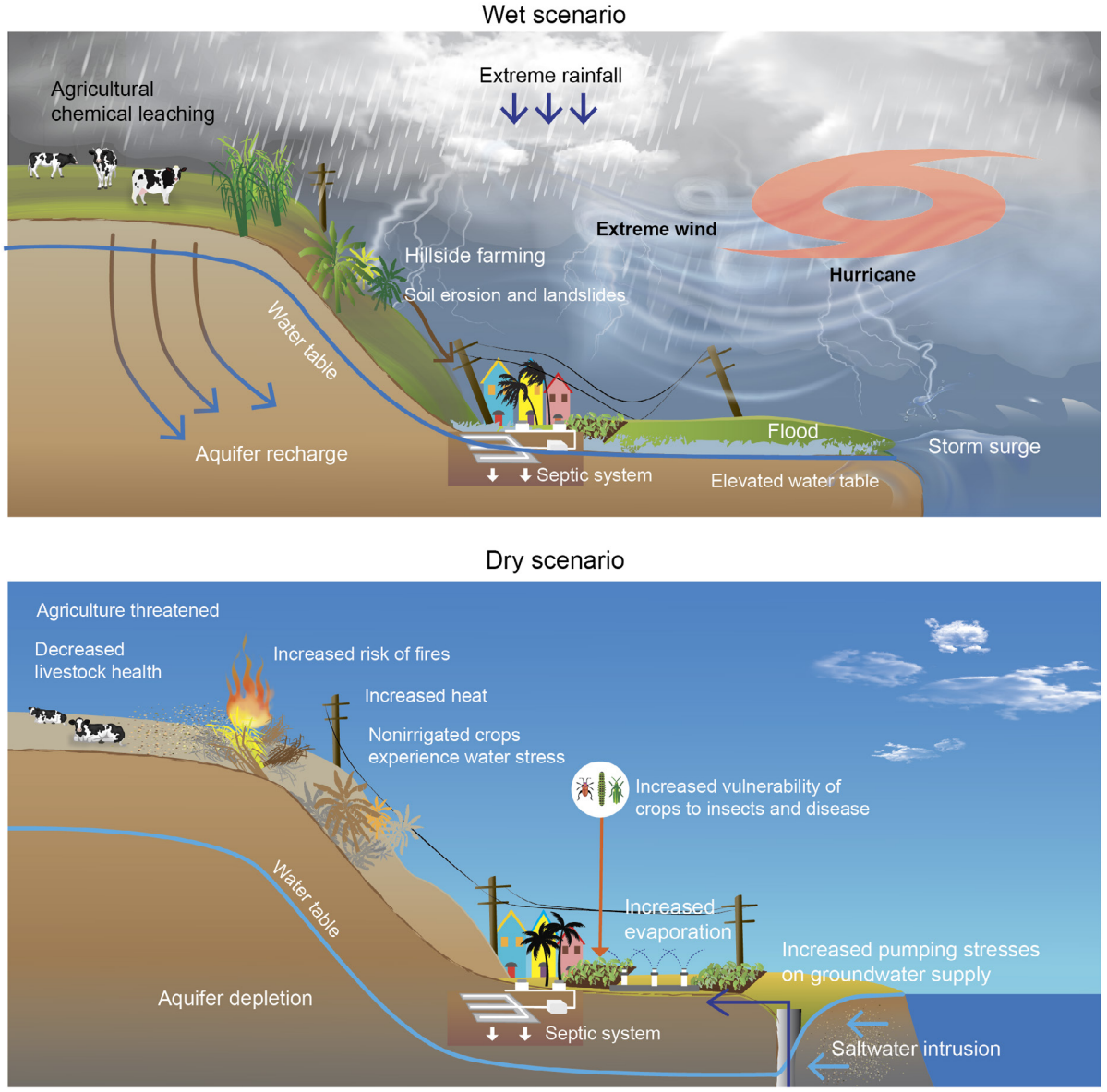
Adaptation Effectiveness Increases When Coupled with Strategic Governance and Planning

Climate adaptation in the US Caribbean is challenging because of multiple interacting factors, including high risk exposure, limited or misaligned funding, insufficient institutional and organizational capacity, and siloed approaches to risk reduction and resilience (*high confidence*). Effective adaptation to support resilience in the US Caribbean could be enhanced through co-development and integration of robust global, regional, and local climate science and risk-based knowledge into planning and implementation, as well as improved governance arrangements (*high confidence*). US Caribbean capabilities in planning and adaptation could be enhanced by strengthening partnerships across the wider Caribbean region and the US mainland (*medium confidence*).

Climate Impacts on Food and Water Systems from Ridge to Reef

Risks to food and water systems differ under wet and dry scenarios.

Figure 23.8. (**top**) In periods of wet conditions, saturated soils coupled with heavy rainfall from hurricanes and storms can lead to flooding and, in turn, soil erosion and vegetation and crop destruction. Strong winds and floods can also damage infrastructure needed for food and water distribution. Excessive rain combined with higher sea levels affects water quality through the leaching of agricultural chemicals and wastewater from septic systems. (**bottom**) Dry conditions, on the other hand, increase groundwater pumping for irrigation. When combined with sea level rise, these conditions can also lead to saltwater intrusion into coastal aquifers. Figure credit: University of Puerto Rico, North Carolina State University, USDA Forest Service, University of Arizona, and University of the Virgin Islands.



Recommended Citation

Méndez-Lazaro, P.A., P. Chardón-Maldonado, L. Carrubba, N. Álvarez-Berríos, M. Barreto, J.H. Bowden, W.I. Crespo-Acevedo, E.L. Diaz, L.S. Gardner, G. Gonzalez, G. Guannel, Z. Guido, E.W. Harmsen, A.J. Leinberger, K. McGinley, P.A. Méndez-Lazaro, A.P. Ortiz, R.S. Pulwarty, L.E. Ragster, I.C. Rivera-Collazo, R. Santiago, C. Santos-Burgoa, and I.M. Vila-Biaggi, 2023: Ch. 23. US Caribbean. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH23

Midwest

Artist: Nikki Way

Key Message 24.1

Climate-Smart Practices May Offset Complex Climate Interactions in Agriculture

Crop production is projected to change in complex ways (*likely, medium confidence*) due to increasing extreme precipitation events and transitions between wet and dry conditions (*likely, medium confidence*), as well as intensification of crop water loss (*likely*, *low confidence*). Changes in precipitation extremes, timing of snowmelt, and early-spring rainfall are expected to pose greater challenges for crop and animal agriculture, including increased pest and disease transmission, muddier pastures, and further degradation of water quality (*likely, high confidence*). Climate-smart agriculture and other adaptation techniques provide a potential path toward environmental and economic sustainability (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 24.2

Adaptation May Ease Disruptions to Ecosystems and Their Services

Ecosystems are already being affected by changes in extreme weather and other climate-related changes, with negative impacts on a wide range of species (*likely, high confidence*). Increasing incidence of flooding and drought is expected to further alter aquatic ecosystems (*likely, medium confidence*), while terrestrial ecosystems are being reshaped by rising temperatures and decreasing snow and ice cover (*very likely, high confidence*). Loss of ecosystem services is undermining human well-being, causing the loss of economic, cultural, and health benefits (*medium confidence*). In response, communities are adapting their cultural practices and the ways they manage the landscape, preserving and protecting ecosystems and the services they provide (*low confidence*).

Key Message 24.3

Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies Improve Individual and Community Health

Climate change has wide-ranging effects on lives and livelihoods (*very likely, very high confidence*), healthcare systems (*high confidence*), and community cohesion (*high confidence*). These diverse impacts will require integrated, innovative response from collaborations between public health and other sectors, such as emergency management, agriculture, and urban planning. Because of historical and systemic biases, communities of color are especially vulnerable to these negative impacts (*very likely*, *very high confidence*). Mitigation and adaptation strategies, such as expanded use of green infrastructure, heat-health early warning systems, and improved stormwater management systems, when developed in collaboration with affected communities, have the potential to improve individual and community health (*high confidence*).

Key Message 24.4

Green Infrastructure and Investment Solutions Can Address Costly Climate Change Impacts

Increases in temperatures and extreme precipitation events are already challenging aging infrastructure and are expected to impair surface transportation, water navigation, and the electrical grid (*likely, medium confidence*). Shifts in the timing and intensity of rainfall are expected to disrupt transportation along major rivers and increase chronic flooding (*likely, high confidence*). Green infrastructure and public and private investments may mitigate losses, provide relief from heat, and offer other ways to adapt the built environment to a changing climate (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 24.5

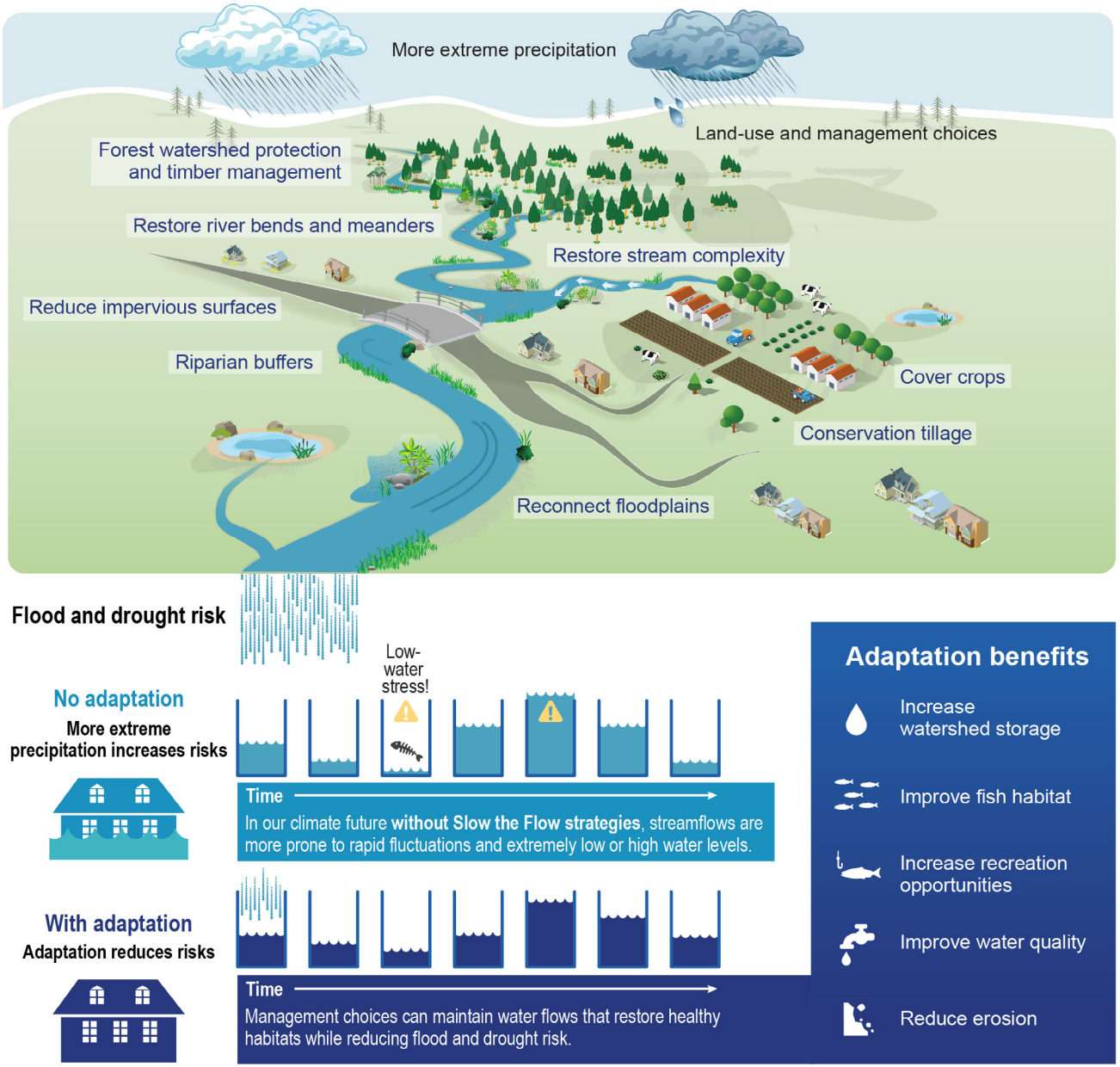
Managing Extremes Is Necessary to Minimize Impacts on Water Quality and Quantity

Climate-related changes to water quantity and quality are increasing the risks to ecosystem health, adequate food production, surface water and groundwater uses, and recreation (*high confidence*). Projected increases in droughts, floods, and runoff events across the Mississippi River basin and the Great Lakes will adversely impact ecosystems through increased erosion, harmful algal blooms, and expansion of invasive species (*likely, high confidence*). Federal and state agencies and nongovernmental organizations are cooperating on adaptation efforts related to streamflow, water quality, and other water issues (*high confidence*).

Extreme Precipitation Impacts

Extreme precipitation events have adverse impacts on aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, human health, infrastructure, and economies. Conservation and management strategies can help moderate these impacts.

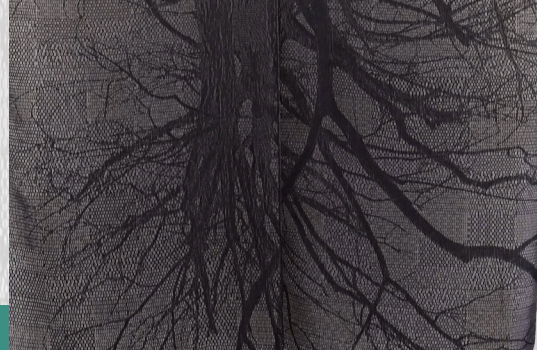
Figure 24.5. Extreme precipitation events can degrade aquatic ecosystems, threaten human health and safety, damage infrastructure and communities, and yield billions of dollars in economic damage. The conservation and management of natural lands can reduce these negative effects—reducing erosion and flood risk, improving water quality, increasing carbon sequestration, and reducing the economic cost of flooding. This conceptual drawing, showing a Midwestern landscape with an extreme storm on the horizon and water flowing into streams and rivers, illustrates how land management choices affect downstream flooding, infrastructure, and ecosystem services. Landscape features and land management practices that slow the flow of water across the surface can improve habitat and water quality, reduce flood and drought risks, and have a variety of other benefits. Adapted with permission from Palmer et al. 2020 (see full chapter for detailed citation).



Recommended Citation

Wilson, A.B., J.M. Baker, E.A. Ainsworth, J. Andresen, J.A. Austin, J.S. Dukes, E. Gibbons, B.O. Hoppe, O.E. LeDee, J. Noel, H.A. Roop, S.A. Smith, D.P. Todey, R. Wolf, and J.D. Wood, 2023: Ch. 24. Midwest. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH24

Northern Great Plains



Artist: Tali Weinberg

Key Message 25.1

Climate Change Is Compounding the Impacts of Extreme Events

The Northern Great Plains region is experiencing unprecedented extremes related to changes in climate, including severe droughts (*likely, high confidence*), increases in hail frequency and size (*medium confidence*), floods (*very likely, high confidence*), and wildfire (*likely, high confidence*). Rising temperatures across the region are expected to lead to increased evapotranspiration (*very likely, very high confidence*), as well as greater variability in precipitation (*very likely, high confidence*).

Key Message 25.2

Human and Ecological Health Face Rising Threats from Climate-Related Hazards

Climate-related hazards, such as drought, wildfire, and flooding, are already harming the physical, mental, and spiritual health of Northern Great Plains region residents (*virtually certain, high confidence*), as well as the ecology of the region (*very likely, medium confidence*). As the climate continues to change, it is expected to have increasing and cascading negative effects on human health and on the lands, waters, and species on which people depend (*very likely, medium confidence*).

Key Message 25.3

Resource- and Land-Based Livelihoods Are at Risk

The Northern Great Plains region is heavily reliant on agriculture and resource-based economies, placing livelihoods at risk from the impacts of climate change and related policy. Agriculture and recreation will see some positive effects but primarily negative effects related to changing temperature and precipitation regimes (*likely, medium confidence*). Energy-sector livelihoods will be affected as emissions-reductions policies drive shifts away from fossil fuel sources (*likely, high confidence*). Climate change is expected to test the adaptive resilience of the region's residents, in particular rural, Indigenous, and low-income immigrant populations (*likely, medium confidence*).

Key Message 25.4

Climate Response Involves Navigating Complex Trade-Offs and Tensions

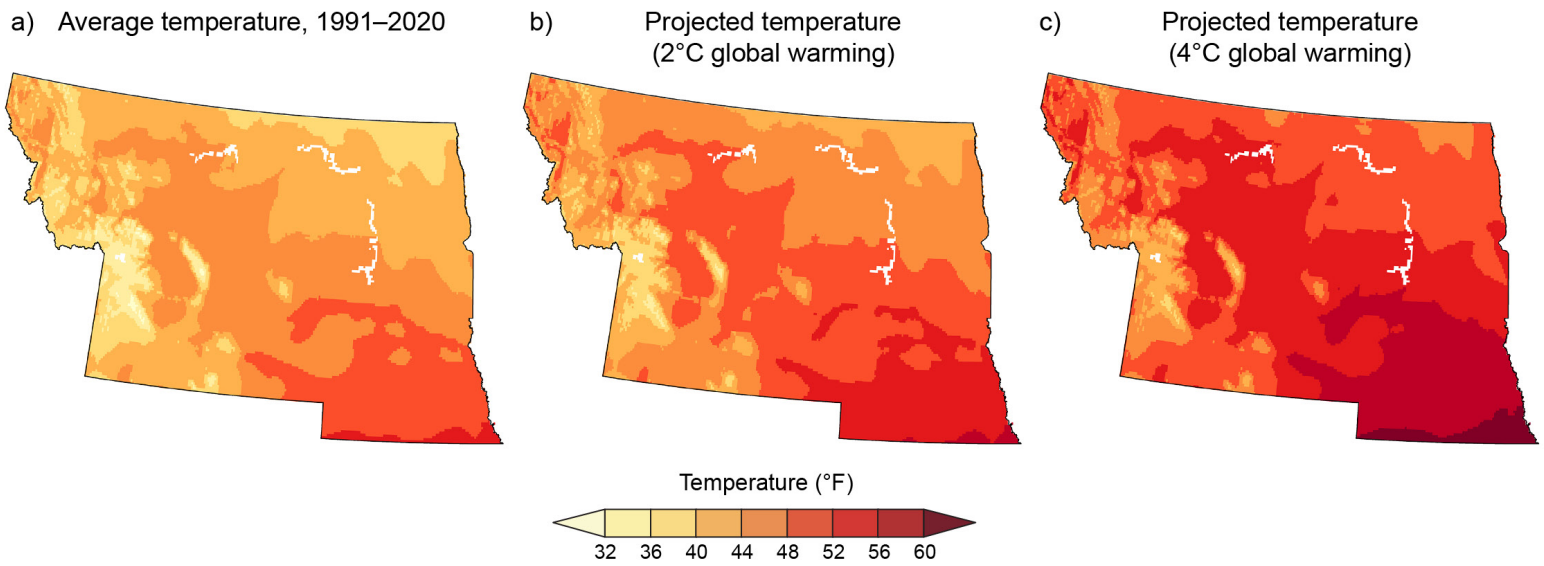
Climate change is creating new, and exacerbating existing, tensions and trade-offs between land use, water availability, ecosystem services, and other considerations in the region, leading to decisions that are expected to benefit some and set back others (*very high confidence*). Decision-makers are navigating a complicated landscape of shifting demographics, policy and regulatory tensions, and barriers to action (*high confidence*). Changes in temperature and precipitation averages, extremes, and seasonality will alter the productivity of working lands, resulting in land-use shifts to alternative crops or conversion to grasslands (*likely, medium confidence*). Shifts in energy demand, production, and policy will change land-use needs for energy infrastructure (*likely, medium confidence*).

Key Message 25.5

Communities Are Building the Capacity to Adapt and Transform

Adaptation is underway in the Northern Great Plains to address the effects of climate change. Agricultural communities are shifting toward climate adaptation measures such as innovative soil practices, new drought-management tools, and water-use partnerships *(medium confidence*). Several Tribal Nations are leading efforts to incorporate Traditional Knowledge and governance into their adaptation plans (*high confidence*). Resource managers are increasingly relying on tools such as scenario planning to improve the adaptive capacity of natural ecosystems (*medium confidence*).

Temperature for the Northern Great Plains



Distinctive gradients of temperature will hold with projected warming.

Figure 25.3. The maps show temperature averages for 1991–2020 (**a**) and projected temperature for global warming of 2°C (3.6°F; **b**) and 4°C (7.2°F; **c**) above preindustrial levels for the Northern Great Plains region. Current and projected values demonstrate distinctive gradients of temperature from southeast to northwest, with implications for climate impacts and effective adaptation. White areas are large water bodies. Figure credit: USGS, NOAA NCEI, CISESS NC, and University of Wyoming. See figure metadata for additional contributors.

Recommended Citation

Knapp, C.N., D.R. Kluck, G. Guntenspergen, M.A. Ahlering, N.M. Aimone, A. Bamzai-Dodson, A. Basche, R.G. Byron, O. Conroy-Ben, M.N. Haggerty, T.R. Haigh, C. Johnson, B. Mayes Boustead, N.D. Mueller, J.P. Ott, G.B. Paige, K.R. Ryberg, G.W. Schuurman, and S.G. Tangen, 2023: Ch. 25. Northern Great Plains. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH25

Southern Great Plains

Artist: Cody Norton

Key Message 26.1

How We Live: Climate Change Is Degrading Lands, Waters, Culture, and Health

Climate change is beginning to alter how we live in the Southern Great Plains, putting us at risk from climate hazards that degrade our lands and waters, quality of life, health and well-being, and cultural interconnectedness (*high confidence*). Many climate hazards are expected to become more frequent, intense, or prolonged; to broaden in spatial extent; and to result in more people experiencing costly, deadly, or stressful climate-related conditions *(very likely, high confidence*). To address the growing risk, effective climate-resilient actions include implementing nature-based solutions; valuing Indigenous, traditional, and local knowledges; and infusing climate change solutions into community planning (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 26.2

How We Work: Climate Changes Are Creating Economic Challenges and Opportunities

As climate conditions change, businesses and industries across the Southern Great Plains are experiencing disruptions and losses in productivity and profits—but also new economic opportunities (*high confidence*). In coming decades, warmer temperatures, more erratic precipitation, and sea level rise are expected to force widespread and costly changes in how we work (*very likely, high confidence*). Businesses and industries have opportunities to harness their diverse knowledge, resources, and workers to develop products and services in climate mitigation technologies, adaptation strategies, and resilient design that will enhance the region's economy (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 26.3

How We Play: Climate Extremes Are Endangering Sports, Recreation, and Leisure

Extreme climate-related events are negatively influencing how we play and participate in outdoor sport, recreation, and physical activities in the Southern Great Plains (*very high confidence*). Climate change is expected to increase heat-related illness and death, reduce outdoor physical activity, and decrease athletic performance (*very likely, high confidence*). Individuals, communities, and sports organizations can adapt to these hazards through strategies such as modifying the timing, location, intensity, or monitoring of activities (*high confidence*).

Key Message 26.4

How We Heal: Climate Change Is Exacerbating Existing Social and Environmental Disparities

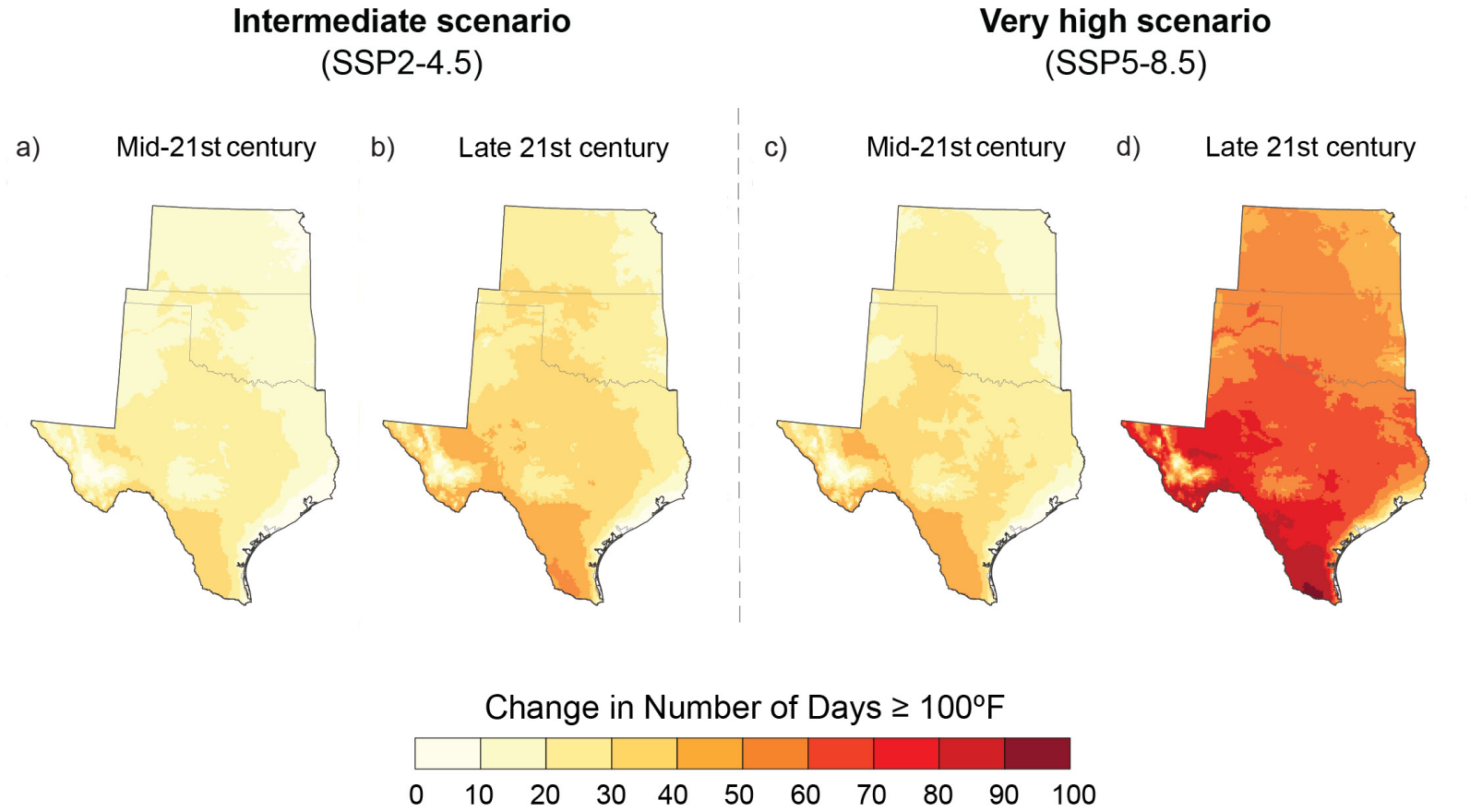
Some neighborhoods and communities in the Southern Great Plains are suffering disproportionately from climate-related hazards because of long-standing marginalization, discrimination, and governmental policies (*very high confidence*). As a result, climate change will compound existing social and environmental burdens on the people, neighborhoods, and communities with the fewest resources to prepare and adapt (*very high confidence*). Our institutions and governments can play a role in improving outcomes for these people and places by adopting climate adaptation and hazard-mitigation practices and policies that prioritize social equity and justice, aim to reduce community risks, build resilience, and repair past injustices (*medium confidence)*.

Key Message 26.5

How We Serve: Climate Change Is Straining Public Infrastructure and Services

The institutions that serve our communities have been challenged to respond and adapt to more frequent and intense weather events (*medium confidence*). Without significant adaptation, climate change is expected to strain water supplies, transportation infrastructure, and emergency services across the Southern Great Plains (*high confidence*). Actions that can enhance our community resilience include substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions, installing or retrofitting climate-resilient infrastructure, educating students and the public on climate change, and cultivating the capacity of faith- and volunteer-based aid organizations to assist hazard planning, response, and recovery (*medium confidence*).

Projected Change in Annual Number of Days of 100°F or Higher



The number of extreme-heat days is projected to increase.

Figure 26.13. Outdoor physical activity becomes more dangerous in extremely hot temperatures. By midcentury, the number of days per year with temperatures at or above 100°F across the Southern Great Plains is projected to increase (**a**) by 10–40 days under an intermediate scenario (SSP2-4.5) and (**c**) by 10–60 days under a very high scenario (SSP5-8.5) above the 1991–2020 average. By late century, projections indicate that the number of these extreme-heat days would increase (**b**) by 10–60 days (SSP2-4.5) or (**d**) by 30–90 days (SSP5-8.5), depending on scenario. The historical average ranges from fewer than 10 days per year in Kansas to fewer than 20 days across most of Oklahoma and Texas, with 40–60 days along the Mexican border. Figure credit: See figure metadata for contributors.

Recommended Citation

McPherson, R.A., P.A. Fay, S.G. Alvarez, D. Bertrand, T.L. Broadbent, T. Bruno, A. Fares, B. McCullough, G.W. Moore, B. Moorhead, L. Patiño, A. Petersen, N.G. Smith, J.L. Steiner, A. Taylor, and T. Warziniack, 2023: Ch. 26. Southern Great Plains. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH26

Northwest

Artist: Claire Seaman

Key Message 27.1

Frontline Communities Are Overburdened, and Prioritizing Social Equity Advances Regional Resilience

Ongoing systemic oppression disproportionately exposes frontline communities in the Northwest—including low-income urban communities of color; rural and natural resource–dependent communities; and Tribes and Indigenous communities—to the consequences of extreme heat, flooding, and wildfire smoke and other climate hazards (*very high confidence*). Frontline communities often have fewer resources to cope with and adapt to climate change but have been leaders in developing climate solutions within and outside their communities (*high confidence*). Actions to limit and adapt to climate change that prioritize climate justice and redirect investments to frontline communities can advance regional resilience (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 27.2

Ecosystems Are Transitioning in Response to Extreme Events and Human Activity

Ecosystems are expected to change as the climate continues to change and as the magnitude and frequency of extreme events increases (*very high confidence*). Some historical and ongoing human activities reduce ecosystem resilience and the adaptive capacity of species (*very high confidence*). These human activities are expected to exacerbate many effects of climate change (*very high confidence*). Human efforts to enable ecological adaptation founded in ecological theory are expected to improve ecosystem functions and services and reduce exposure to climate-related hazards (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 27.3

Impacts to Regional Economies Have Cascading Effects on Livelihoods and Well-Being

Climate change impacts to the Northwest's natural resource- and outdoor-dependent economies will be variable, given the diversity of industries, land cover, and climatic zones (*very high confidence*). Impacts to these industries will have cascading effects on community livelihoods and well-being (*high confidence*). While some industries and resource-dependent communities are resilient to climate-related stresses, economic responses to climate change can benefit affected industries, workers, and livelihoods (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 27.4

Infrastructure Systems Are Stressed by Climate Change but Can Enable Mitigation and Adaptation

Recent extreme events have stressed water systems and housing, transportation, and energy infrastructure across the Northwest (*very high confidence*). Extreme precipitation, droughts, and heatwaves will intensify due to climate change and continue to threaten these interrelated systems (*very high confidence*). Given the complexity of and interdependencies among infrastructure systems, an impact or a response within one sector can cascade to other sectors (*very high confidence*). Cross-sectoral planning, which can include redesigning aging infrastructure and incorporating climate considerations into land-use decisions, can increase resilience to future climate variability and extremes (*high confidence*).

Key Message 27.5

Climate Change Amplifies Health Inequities

The Northwest's climate has historically been temperate and relatively mild, but shifting weather patterns associated with climate change are adversely affecting physical, mental, and community health (*very high confidence*). The incidence of illnesses and death during extreme heat events and wildfire smoke days is increasing, and climate change is stressing health systems (*high confidence*). Climate-related health risks disproportionately affect certain individuals and groups (*very high confidence*). Climate resilience efforts can be leveraged to improve health, especially among the most vulnerable populations (*high confidence*).

Key Message 27.6

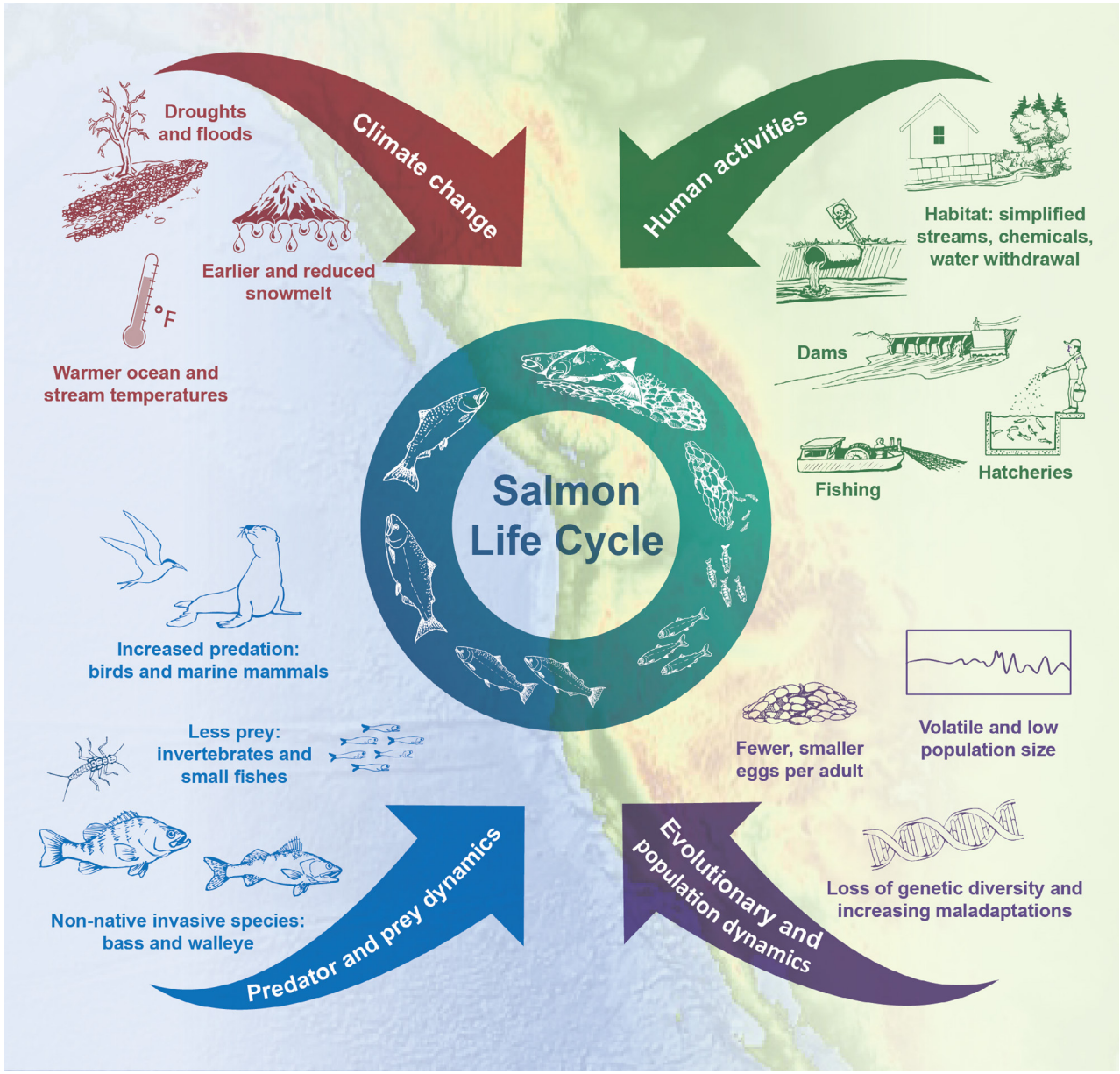
Climate Change Affects Heritage and Sense of Place

Climate change has disrupted sense of place in the Northwest, affecting noneconomic values such as proximity and access to nature and residents' feelings of security and stability (*high confidence*). Place-based communities, including Tribes, face additional challenges from climate change because of cultural and economic relationships with their locale (*very high confidence*). Leveraging local or Indigenous Knowledge and value systems can spur climate action to ensure that local heritage and sense of place persist for future generations (*medium confidence*).

Interacting Stressors Affecting Salmon Resilience

Stressors stemming from interactions between human activities and natural systems affect freshwater and marine ecosystems and reduce salmon resilience to climate change.

Figure 27.4. Human activities and climate change alter the physical environment in concert, often amplifying their impacts through cumulative effects over the salmon life cycle. They also directly and indirectly alter freshwater and marine systems. Natural systems respond to changes in their environment through both evolutionary and ecological processes. The sum of these many different processes has led to declines in many populations of salmon over decades and reduced their ability to cope with future climate change. Figure credit: NOAA Fisheries.



Recommended Citation

Chang, M., L. Erikson, K. Araújo, E.N. Asinas, S. Chisholm Hatfield, L.G. Crozier, E. Fleishman, C.S. Greene, E.E. Grossman, C. Luce, J. Paudel, K. Rajagopalan, E. Rasmussen, C. Raymond, J.J. Reyes, and V. Shandas, 2023: Ch. 27. Northwest. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH27

Southwest

Artist: Diya P.

Key Message 28.1

Drought and Increasing Aridity Threaten Water Resources

Climate change has reduced surface water and groundwater availability for people and nature in the Southwest (*very high confidence*), and there are inequities in how these impacts are experienced (*high confidence*). Higher temperatures have intensified drought and will lead to a more arid future (*very likely, high confidence*); without adaptation, these changes will exacerbate existing water supply–demand imbalances (*likely, high confidence*). At the same time, the region is experiencing more intense precipitation events, including atmospheric rivers, which contribute to increased flooding (*high confidence*). Flexible and adaptive approaches to water management have the potential to mitigate the impacts of these changes on people, the environment, and the economy (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 28.2

Adaptation Efforts Increase to Address Accelerating Impacts to the Region's Coast and Ocean

Large-scale marine heatwaves and harmful algal blooms have caused profound and cascading impacts on marine coastal ecosystems and economies (*high confidence*). Without implementation of adaptation or emissions-reductions measures, human-caused warming will drive more frequent and longer marine heatwaves (*very likely, very high confidence*), amplifying negative coastal effects (*medium confidence*). Sea level rise, along with associated impacts such as flooding and saltwater intrusion, will have severe and disproportionate effects on infrastructure, communities, and natural resources (*likely, very high confidence*). The California State Government has applied climate science to planning and decision-making for sea level rise, and multiple regions are moving toward climate-informed and adaptive strategies for fisheries (*high confidence*). However, climate planning and adaptation solutions for aquaculture are less clear (*high confidence*).

Key Message 28.3

Increasing Challenges Confront Food and Fiber Production in the Southwest

Continuing drought and water scarcity will make it more difficult to raise food and fiber in the Southwest without major shifts to new strategies and technologies (*high confidence*). Extreme heat events will increase animal stress and reduce crop quality and yield, thereby resulting in widespread economic impacts (*likely, high confidence*). Because people in the Southwest have adapted to drought impacts for millennia, incorporating Indigenous Knowledge with technological innovation can offer solutions to protect food security and sovereignty (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 28.4

Climate Change Compromises Human Health and Reshapes Demographics

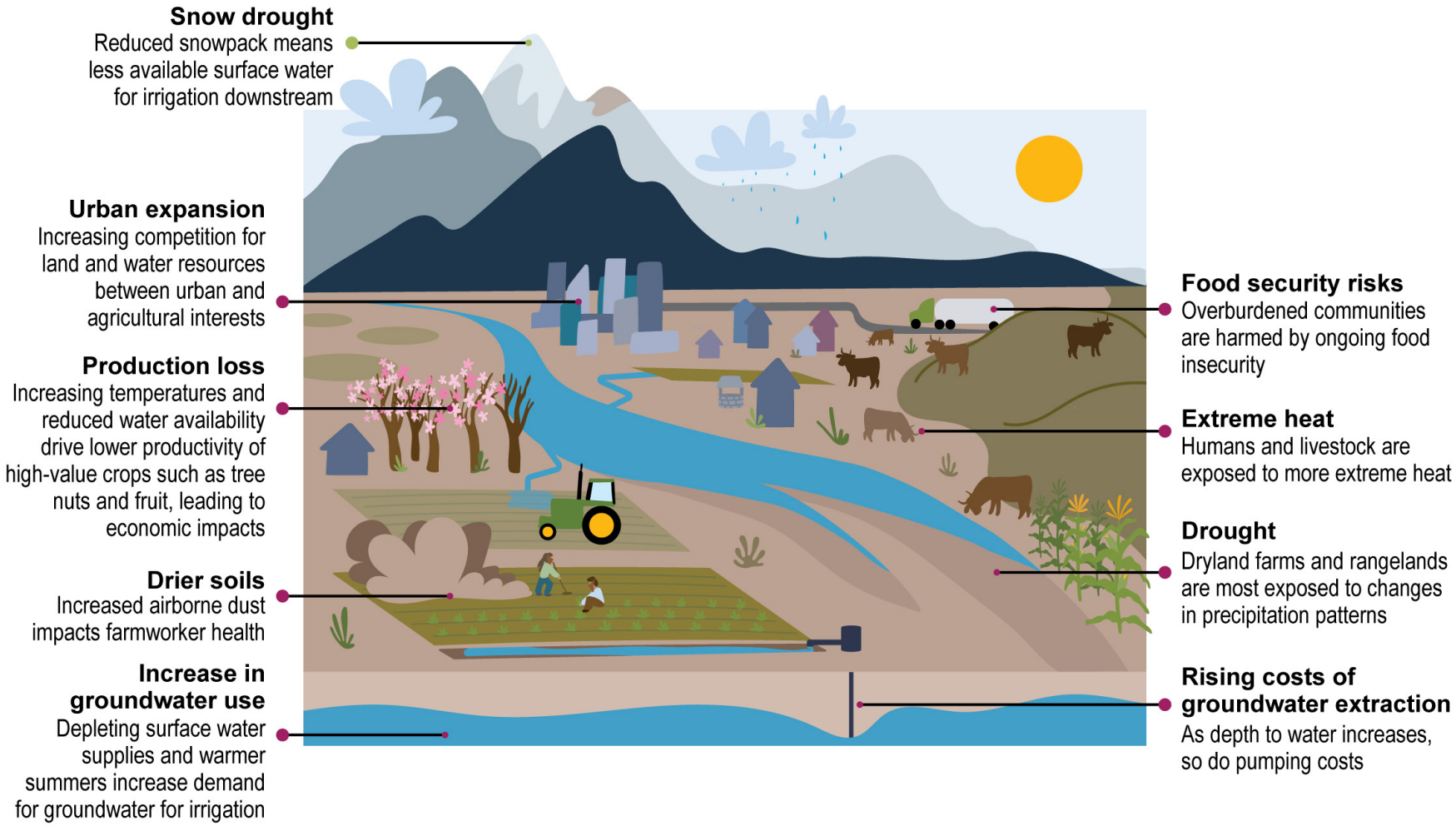
Increases in extreme heat, drought, flooding, and wildfire activity are negatively impacting the physical health of Southwest residents (*high confidence*). Climate change is also shaping the demographics of the region by spurring the migration of people from Central America to the Southwest (*medium confidence*). Individuals particularly vulnerable to increasing climate change impacts include older adults, outdoor workers, and people with low income (*high confidence*). Local, state, and federal adaptation initiatives are working to respond to these impacts (*high confidence*).

Key Message 28.5

Changes in Wildfire Patterns Pose Challenges for Southwest Residents and Ecosystems

In recent years, the Southwest has experienced unprecedented wildfire events, driven in part by climate change (*high confidence*). Fires in the region have become larger and more severe (*high confidence*). High-severity wildfires are expected to continue in coming years, placing the people, economies, ecosystems, and water resources of the region at considerable risk (*very likely, high confidence*). Opportunities for adaptation include pre- and postfire actions that reduce wildfire risk and facilitate ecosystem restoration and include traditional land stewardship practices (*high confidence*) and the application of Indigenous cultural fire (*medium confidence*).

Agriculture and Climate Change in the Southwest US



Monitoring indicators of climate impacts on agriculture can improve understanding and help with adaptation efforts.

Figure 28.6. Climate change impacts to the Southwest's agriculture include longer growing seasons, a northward shift in plant hardiness zones, expanded areas of heat stress, and higher rates of evapotranspiration, increasing demand for fresh water for irrigation. Monitoring the indicators helps us understand how impacts are experienced and how to adapt to risks. Figure credit: New Mexico State University and Utah State University. See figure metadata for additional contributors.

Recommended Citation

White, D.D., E.H. Elias, K.A. Thomas, C.E. Bradatan, M.W. Brunson, A.M. Chischilly, C.A.F. Enquist, L.R. Fisher, H.E. Froehlich, E.A. Koebele, M. Méndez, S.M. Ostoja, C. Steele, and J.K. Vanos, 2023: Ch. 28. Southwest. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH28

Alaska

Artist: Tami Phelps

Key Message 29.1

Our Health and Healthcare Are at Risk

Health disparities in Alaska, including access to healthcare and health outcomes, are exacerbated by climate change (*high confidence*). The well-being of Alaska residents will be further challenged by climate-driven threats and by emerging diseases (*medium confidence*). Improving health surveillance and healthcare access statewide can increase resilience to events that threaten public health (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 29.2

Our Communities Are Navigating Compounding Stressors

Climate change amplifies the social and economic challenges facing Alaska communities (*high confidence*). Resource shifts, coastal and riverbank erosion, and disproportionate access to services will continue to threaten the physical and social integrity of these communities *(high confidence*). Increased adaptation capacity and equitable support have the potential to help rural and urban communities address Alaska's regionally varied climate-driven threats (*high confidence*).

Key Message 29.3

Our Livelihoods Are Vulnerable Without Diversification

Livelihoods, especially those dependent on natural resources, are at risk around Alaska. While advancing climate change has contributed to the collapse of major fisheries and is undermining many existing jobs and ways of life (*high confidence*), it may also create some opportunities related to adaptation and response (*medium confidence*). Economic diversification, especially expansion of value-added industries, can help increase overall livelihood options (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 29.4

Our Built Environment Will Become More Costly

Much of Alaska's infrastructure was built for a stable climate, and changes in permafrost, ocean conditions, sea ice, air temperature, and precipitation patterns place that infrastructure at risk (*high confidence*). Further warming is expected to lead to greater needs and costs for maintenance or replacement of buildings, roads, airports, and other facilities *(high confidence*). Planning for further change and greater attention to climate trends and changes in extremes can help improve infrastructure resilience around Alaska (*high confidence*).

Key Message 29.5

Our Natural Environment Is Transforming Rapidly

Alaska's ecosystems are changing rapidly due to climate change (*high confidence*). Many of the ecosystem goods and services that Alaskans rely on are expected to be diminished by further change (*medium confidence*). Careful management of Alaska's natural resources to avoid additional stresses on fish, wildlife, and habitats can help avoid compounding effects on our ecosystems (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 29.6

Our Security Faces Greater Threats

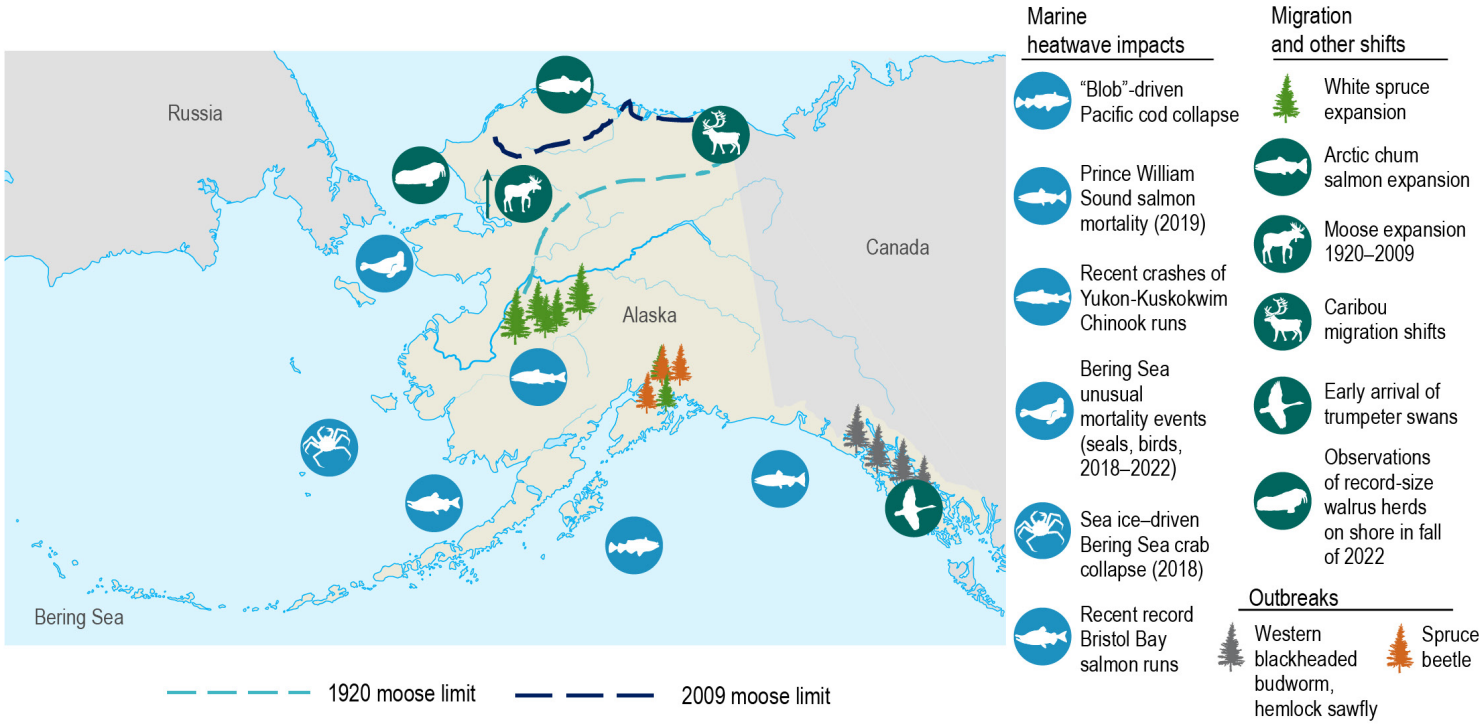
Rapid climate-driven change in Alaska undermines many of the assumptions of predictability on which community, state, and national security are based (*high confidence*). Further change, especially in the marine environment with loss of sea ice, will create new vulnerabilities and requirements for security from multiple perspectives and at multiple scales (*high confidence*). Greater capacity for identifying and responding to threats has the potential to help reduce security risks in the Alaska region (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 29.7

Our Just and Prosperous Future Starts with Adaptation

Local and regional efforts are underway around Alaska to prepare for and adapt to a changing climate (*high confidence*). The breadth of adaptation needed around the state will require substantial investment of financial resources and close coordination among agencies, including Tribal governments (*high confidence*). The effectiveness of adaptation planning and activities can be strengthened by addressing intersecting non-climate stressors, prioritizing the needs of the communities and populations experiencing the greatest impacts, building local capacity, and connecting adaptation efforts to economic and workforce development (*medium confidence*).

Major Recent Ecological Changes



Climate change has caused or contributed to extensive ecological effects throughout Alaska in recent years.

Figure 29.11. Warming ocean waters, extreme heat events, and other changes, including the events shown in Figure 29.1, are affecting ecosystems across Alaska. Some species' ranges are expanding, including chum salmon in Arctic rivers (Dunmall et al. 2022), moose (Tape et al. 2016) and beaver (Tape et al. 2018) in the Arctic (not shown), and white spruce in western Alaska (KM 8.2; Juday et al. 2015). Migration timings or patterns are changing, for example trumpeter swans in Southeast Alaska (Cohen 2019) and caribou in the eastern Arctic. Marine heatwaves and reduced sea ice cover are affecting seabird, fish, and seal populations: the North Pacific "Blob" (Figure 29.1) contributed to Pacific cod collapse, the 2019 Southcentral heatwave affected Prince William Sound king salmon survival (von Biela et al. 2020), and low sea ice caused or contributed to the collapse of crab fisheries and unusual mortality events for seabirds and ice seals in the Bering Sea region (2018–2022; KM 10.2; Figure 10.1). In 2022, Pacific walrus hauled out in record numbers in the Bering Strait area (Fischbach and Douglas 2022), suggesting that the minimum population estimate may be higher than previously thought, even if the range may be shrinking. Insect distributions and outbreaks have also changed (Ahtuangaruak 2019; White 2019). In Southeast Alaska, outbreaks of western blackheaded budworm and hemlock sawfly have damaged forests in the wake of the 2017–2019 drought (USFS 2020). The 2019 heatwave in Southcentral Alaska contributed to spruce beetle expansion in that region and extreme fire activity on the Kenai peninsula (KM 7.1; Box 7.1). Salmon runs responded variably: Yukon–Kuskokwim River king salmon runs have been decimated (von Biela et al. 2020), while Bristol Bay has had record sockeye salmon returns. Figure credit: USGS, NOAA Fisheries, and Ocean Conservancy. See full chapter for detailed citations.

Recommended Citation

Huntington, H.P., C. Strawhacker, J. Falke, E.M. Ward, L. Behnken, T.N. Curry, A.C. Herrmann, C.U. Itchuaqiyaq, J.S. Littell, E.A. Logerwell, D. Meeker, J.R. Overbeck, D.L. Peter, R. Pincus, A.A. Quintyne, S.F. Trainor, and S.A. Yoder, 2023: Ch. 29. Alaska. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH29

Hawai‘i and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands

Artist: James Keul

Key Message 30.1

Climate Change Impairs Access to Healthy Food and Water

Access to clean, fresh water and healthy food is expected to be increasingly impaired by climate change (*very high confidence*). On low-lying atolls, sea level rise has caused saltwater contamination of fresh water (*high confidence*). Regionally, food and water availability will be further negatively impacted by increasing temperatures, altered rainfall patterns, increased flooding and pollution, and degradation of nearshore fisheries (*very high confidence*). Adaptation actions such as traditional farming, fishing, and land-management practices can help build more resilient water and food systems (*very high confidence*).

Key Message 30.2

Climate Change Undermines Human Health, but Community Strength Boosts Resilience

Climate change undermines the place-based foundations of human health and well-being in the Pacific Islands (*high confidence*). Climate shocks and stressors compromise healthcare services (*medium confidence*) and worsen long-standing social and economic inequities in both mental and physical health (*high confidence*), and these negative impacts are expected to increase in the future (*very high confidence*). Adaptation efforts that build upon existing community strengths and center local and Indigenous Knowledge systems have great potential to boost resilience (*high confidence*).

Key Message 30.3

Rising Sea Levels Threaten Infrastructure and Local Economies and Exacerbate Existing Inequities

Climate change, particularly sea level rise (SLR), will continue to negatively impact the built environment (*very likely, high confidence*) and will harm numerous sectors of the islands' economies (*very likely, high confidence*). SLR intensifies loss of territory and exclusive economic zones, particularly in low islands (*high confidence*). Climate-driven changes will exacerbate existing social challenges by disrupting livelihoods (*likely, medium confidence*). Adaptation to climate change and recovery from disasters is logistically challenging and disproportionately more expensive in the islands (*high confidence*). Government and community groups have developed innovative ways to reduce emissions and improve resilience by moving toward renewable energy and green infrastructure, nature-based urban planning, forward-looking building codes, and sustainable and equitable economic growth, guided by Western science and Traditional Knowledge.

Key Message 30.4

Responses to Rising Threats May Help Safeguard Tropical Ecosystems and Biodiversity

The structure and composition of Pacific Island coastal and marine ecological communities are directly threatened by rising ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, and sea level rise (*very likely, high confidence*). Increasingly severe droughts and warming are increasing fire risk (*high confidence*) and will have broad negative impacts on native plants and wildlife, including an increased risk of forest bird extinctions (*very likely, high confidence*). Adaptation strategies improve the resilience of ecosystems, including ecosystem protection, ecological restoration, invasive species prevention and control, and investments in fire prevention (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 30.5

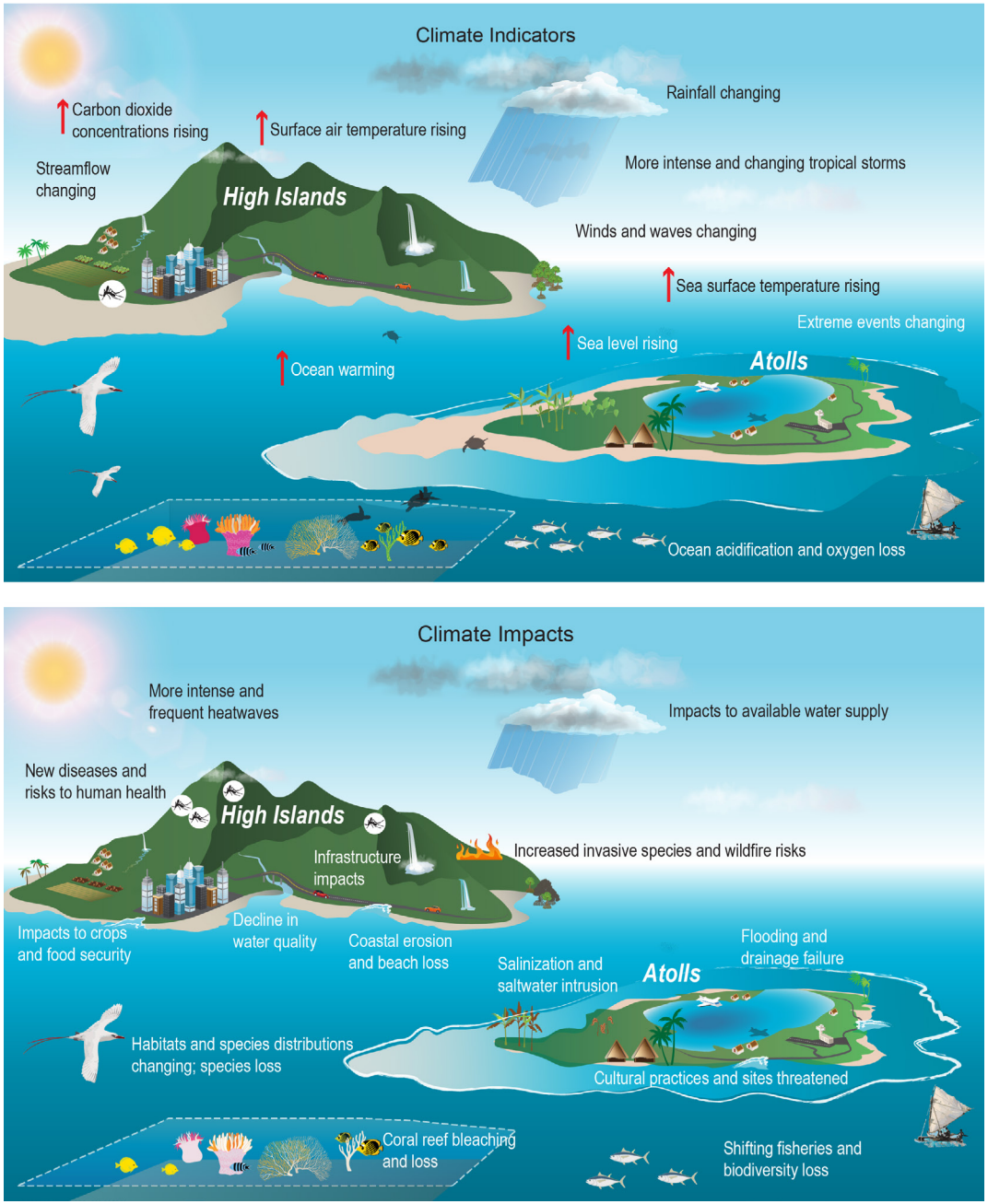
Indigenous Knowledge Systems Strengthen Island Resilience

Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge systems are central to the resilience of island communities amidst the changing climate (*high confidence*). Reciprocal and spiritual relationships among the lands, territories, waters, resources, and peoples are being strengthened and sustained as communities adapt and manage their resources collectively (*high confidence*). Indigenous Peoples are identifying and quantifying the potential loss and migration of critical resources and expanding the cultivation of traditional food crops on high islands (*high confidence*).

Climate Change Indicators and Impacts in the Pacific Islands

Monitoring key indicators of climate change is essential for understanding impacts and informing adaptation efforts.

Figure 30.5. Changes in climate, as measured through key indicators (**top panel**), including sea surface temperature, sea level, and tropical cyclone intensity, result in impacts and risks (**lower panel**) for Pacific Island environments and communities, both on high volcanic islands and atolls. Improved monitoring of indicators is essential for tracking the pace and extent of climate change. Understanding of the connections between indicators and impacts is expanding, which supports adaptation efforts. Adapted from Keener et al. 2018, which was adapted from Keener et al. 2012 (see full chapter for detailed citations).



Recommended Citation

Frazier, A.G., M.-V.V. Johnson, L. Berio Fortini, C.P. Giardina, Z.N. Grecni, H.H. Kane, V.W. Keener, R. King, R.A. MacKenzie, M. Nobrega-Olivera, K.L.L. Oleson, C.K. Shuler, A.K. Singeo, C.D. Storlazzi, R.J. Wallsgrove, and P.A. Woodworth-Jefcoats, 2023: Ch. 30. Hawai'i and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH30

Adaptation

Artist: Linda Gass

Key Message 31.1

Adaptation Is Occurring but Is Insufficient in Relation to the Pace of Climate Change

Diverse adaptation activities are occurring across the US (*very high confidence*). Adaptation activities are increasingly moving from awareness and assessment toward planning and implementation (*medium confidence*), with limited advancement toward monitoring and evaluation (*high confidence*). Numerous social, economic, physical, and psychological barriers are preventing more widespread adoption and implementation of adaptation (*high confidence*). Current adaptation efforts and investments are insufficient to reduce today's climate-related risks (*high confidence*) and are unlikely to keep pace with future changes in the climate (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 31.2

Effective Adaptation Requires Centering Equity

People and communities are affected by climate change in different ways (*very high confidence*). How people and institutions adapt depends on social factors, including individual and community preferences, capacity, and access to resources (*very high confidence*). Adaptation processes, decisions (about whether, where, and how adaptation occurs), and actions that do not explicitly address the uneven distribution of climate harms, and the social processes and injustices underlying these disparities, can exacerbate social inequities and increase exposure to climate harms (*high confidence*).

Key Message 31.3

Transformative Adaptation Will Be Needed to Adequately Address Climate-Related Risks

Climate adaptation actions undertaken in the United States to date have generally been small in scale and incremental in approach, involving minor changes to business as usual (*very high confidence*). Transformative adaptation, which involves more fundamental shifts in systems, values, and practices, will be necessary in many cases to adequately address the risks of current and future climate change (*high confidence*). New monitoring and evaluation methods will also be needed to assess the effectiveness and sufficiency of adaptation and to address equity (*high confidence*).

Key Message 31.4

Effective Adaptation Governance Empowers Multiple Voices to Navigate Competing Goals

Adaptation involves actors from government, private-sector, nongovernmental (e.g., nonprofit and for-profit institutions), and civil society organizations, which often have different priorities and approaches (*high confidence*). Adaptation decision-makers must balance competing goals while also addressing uncertainties regarding future climate change and the ways that political, social, and technological systems will be transformed (*high confidence*). To minimize the potential for adaptation actions to benefit some at the expense of others, adaptation processes must emphasize collaboration, center equity and justice, and incorporate a wide range of values and knowledge sources (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 31.5

Adaptation Requires More Than Scientific Information and Understanding

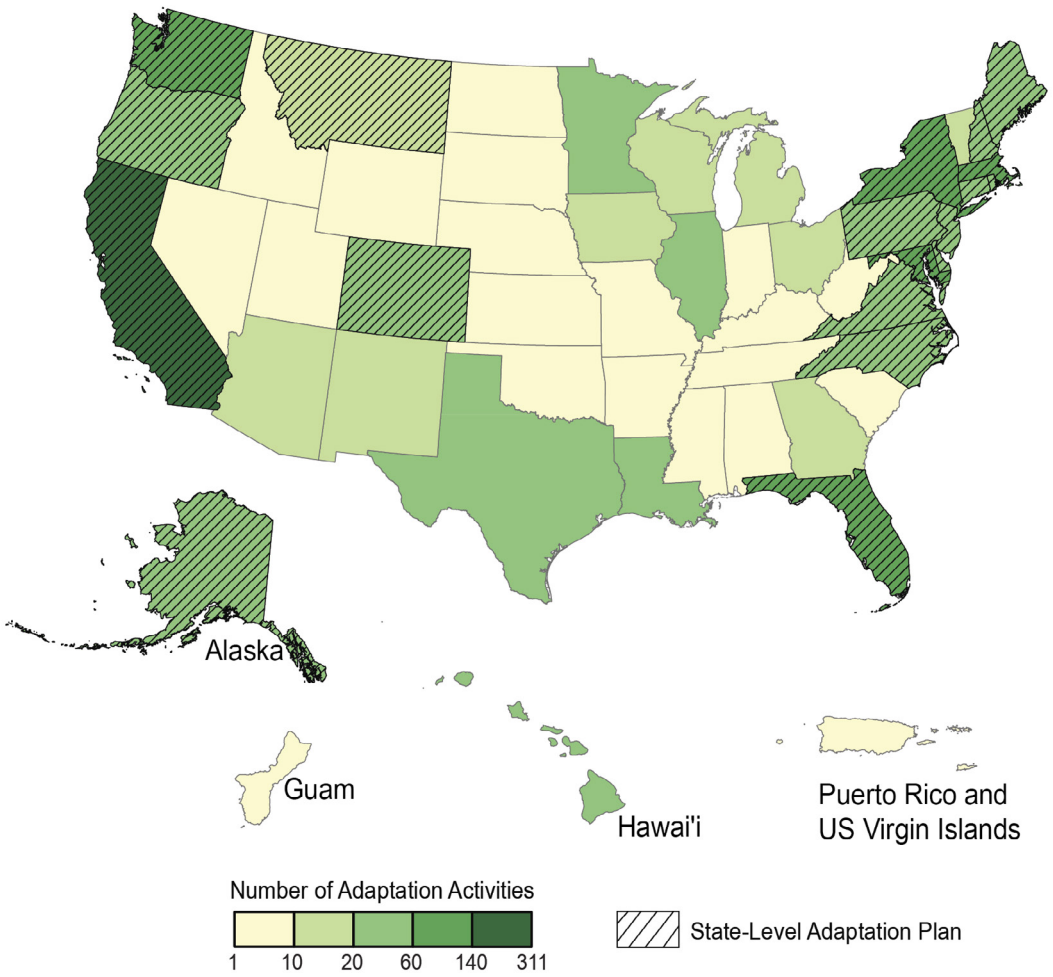
Effective adaptation to a changing climate requires both decision-relevant climate information and evidence-based decision-making approaches (*high confidence*). Adaptation requires that researchers intentionally collaborate with communities to identify goals, assess vulnerability, improve capacity, and address contextual factors, such as values, culture, risk perception, and historic injustices (*medium confidence*). Climate services can be improved by ensuring access for historically disinvested communities and by attention to procedural and recognitional equity when scientists work with communities and decision-makers (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 31.6

Adaptation Investments and Financing Are Difficult to Track and May Be Inadequate

Investments in adaptation are being made at the federal, state, territorial, Tribal, and local levels, as well as within the private sector, but they are not always evenly distributed, coordinated, tracked, or reported (*high confidence*) and may be inadequate (*medium confidence*). Future adaptation investment needs are expected to be significant, although projected amounts vary due to uncertainty in future emissions trajectories, associated impacts, and the timing of implementation (*high confidence*). Proactive adaptation can reduce some of the most severe costs of future climate change, particularly under very high emissions scenarios in the late 21st century (*medium confidence*), although adaptation is still needed in the present for communities and infrastructure that may not be well adapted to face current climate conditions (*high confidence*).

Number of Publicly Documented Adaptation Activities (2018–2022)



The level of documented public- and private-sector adaptation activity varies widely across US states and territories.

Figure 31.1. This figure illustrates the number of public- and private-sector adaptation activities—see examples offered in Table 31.1—publicly documented and/or updated since 2018. There are several states that have publicly documented numerous adaptation activities, while others have very few or have not documented the activities. Figure credit: WSP, University of Delaware, and University of California, Irvine. See figure metadata for additional contributors.

Recommended Citation

Wasley, E., T.A. Dahl, C.F. Simpson, L.W. Fischer, J.F. Helgeson, M.A. Kenney, A. Parris, A.R. Siders, E. Tate, and N. Ulibarri, 2023: Ch. 31. Adaptation. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH31

Mitigation

Artist: Katharine Cartwright

Key Message 32.1

Successful Mitigation Means Reaching Net-Zero Emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions in the United States decreased by 12% between 2005 and 2019, mostly due to replacing coal-fired electricity generation with natural gas–fired and renewable generation (*very high confidence*). However, US net greenhouse gas emissions remain substantial and would have to decline by more than 6% per year on average, reaching net zero around midcentury, to meet current national climate targets and international temperature goals *(very high confidence*).

Key Message 32.2

We Know How to Drastically Reduce Emissions

A US energy system with net-zero emissions would rely on widespread improvements in energy efficiency, substantial electricity generation from solar and wind energy, and widespread electrification of transportation and heating (*high confidence*). Low-carbon fuels would still be needed for some transport and industry applications that are difficult to electrify (*high confidence*). Land-related emissions in the US could be reduced by increasing the efficiency of food systems and improving agricultural practices and by protecting and restoring natural lands (*high confidence*). Across all sectors, many of these options are economically feasible now (*high confidence*).

Key Message 32.3

To Reach Net-Zero Emissions, Additional Mitigation Options Need to Be Explored

Although many mitigation options are currently available and cost-effective, the level and types of energy technologies and carbon management in net-zero-emissions energy systems depend on still-uncertain technological progress, public acceptance, consumer choice, and future developments in institutions, markets, and policies (*high confidence*). Attractive targets for further research, development, and demonstration include carbon capture, utilization, and storage; long-duration energy storage; low-carbon fuels and feedstocks; demand management; next-generation electricity transmission; carbon dioxide removal; modern foods; and interventions to reduce industry and agricultural emissions (*medium confidence*).

Key Message 32.4

Mitigation Can Be Sustainable, Healthy, and Fair

Large reductions in US greenhouse gas emissions could have substantial benefits for human health and well-being (*high confidence*). Mitigation is expected to affect pollution, the use of land and water resources, the labor force, and the affordability, reliability, and security of energy and food (*high confidence*). An equitable and sustainable transition to net-zero-emissions energy and food systems in the United States could help redress legacies of inequity, racism, and injustice while maximizing overall benefits to our economy and environment (*high confidence*).

Key Message 32.5

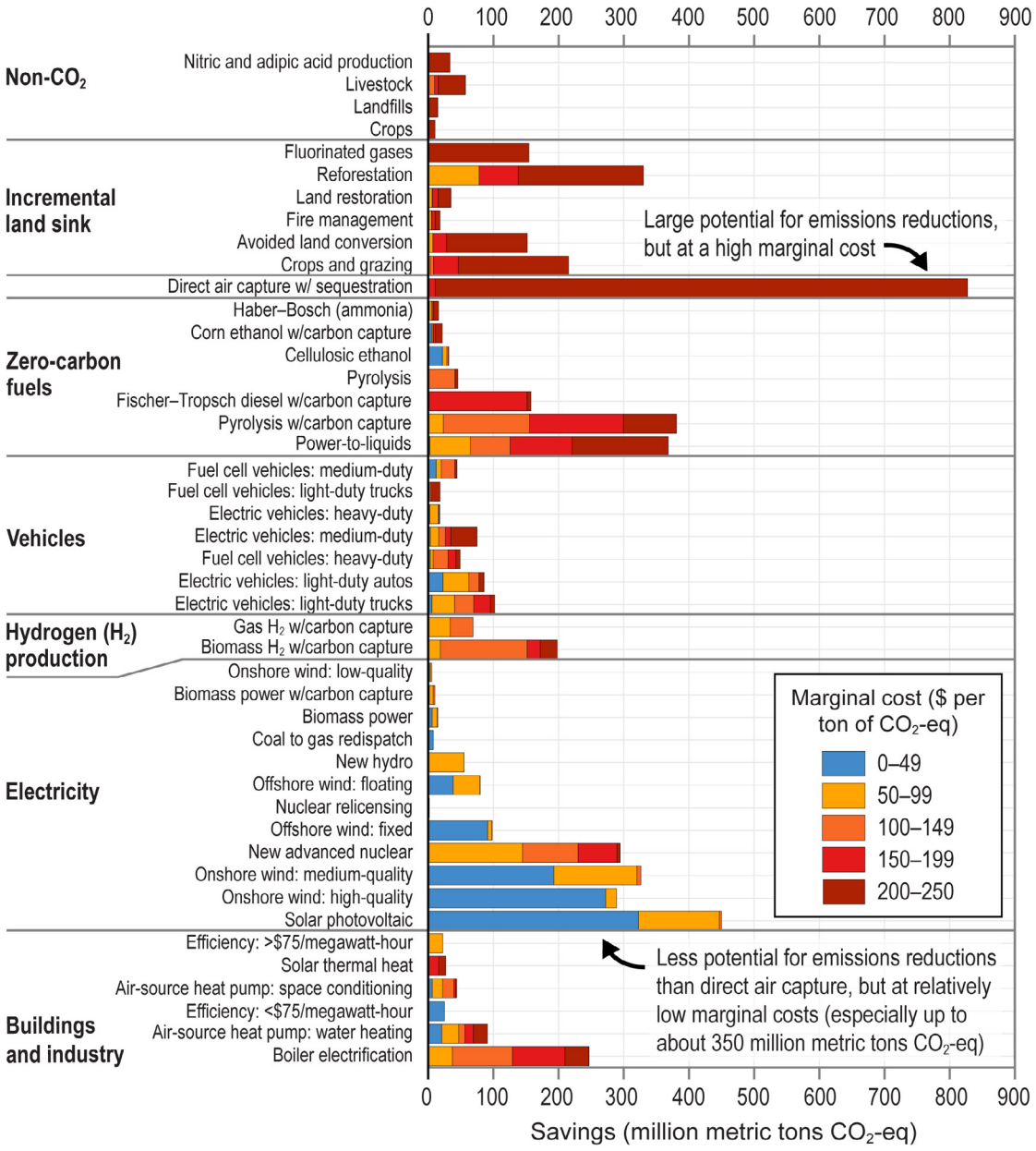
Governments, Organizations, and Individuals Can Act to Reduce Emissions

Mitigation efforts can be supported by a range of actors and actions, from choices made by individuals to decisions made by businesses and local, Tribal, state, and national governments (*high confidence*). Actions with significant near-term potential include sector-based policies accelerating deployment of low-carbon technologies, city-level efforts to promote public transportation and improve building efficiency, and individual behavioral changes to reduce energy demand and meat consumption (*high confidence*).

Potential Emissions Reductions by Action, for the Year 2050

The size and cost of emissions reductions depend on available technologies and the source of related emissions.

Figure 32.22. Energy system, land-sector, and non-CO_2 (carbon dioxide) mitigation options for the year 2050 are shown along with estimated marginal costs, excluding the impact of policy incentives. The sum of the mitigation options shown results in net-negative CO_2-eq (carbon dioxide equivalent) emissions in the United States, not only demonstrating the possibility of reaching net-zero emissions using a combination of these actions but also highlighting a large range of costs for such actions (costs as of 2021). Mitigation options from conservation and lifestyle change are not assessed due to the difficulty in assessing costs for these measures. H_2 = hydrogen. Adapted with permission from Farbes et al. 2021 and Figure SPM.7 in IPCC 2022 (see full chapter for detailed citations).



Recommended Citation

Davis, S.J., R.S. Dodder, D.D. Turner, I.M.L. Azevedo, M. Bazilian, J. Bistline, S. Carley, C.T.M. Clack, J.E. Fargione, E. Grubert, J. Hill, A.L. Hollis, A. Jenn, R.A. Jones, E. Masanet, E.N. Mayfield, M. Muratori, W. Peng, and B.C. Sellers, 2023: Ch. 32. Mitigation. In: *Fifth National Climate Assessment*. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.CH32

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