

MWCOG 2013 Draft National Climate Assessment Comments

Overall Comments

This report's usefulness and strength is greatly increased by the inclusion of more case studies of current adaptation practices. It is also helpful that the report begins to assess nation's preparedness, and to identify adaptation strategies needed. Other positive changes include:

- More emphasis on equity, social vulnerability
- More emphasis on placing climate change in the context of other drivers (natural cycles, urban heat island, land use change, etc.)
- Several new sections including Urban, Rural, Biogeochemical Cycles, Water/Energy/Land Use, Decision Support, Mitigation, Adaptation

Decision Support Chapter

The Decision Support chapter is an excellent start towards bringing pertinent climate information to decision makers. The 2013 National Climate Assessment provides more case studies and outlines more policy solutions than the previous report, which makes this report potentially more effective and more useful. MWCOG has been working with local, regional, and national leaders across the National Capital Region on climate change for several years and has some additional recommendations that are based on feedback from stakeholders in the National Capital Region.

In 2008, the COG Board adopted the National Capital Region Climate Change Report, which identified goals for climate mitigation and adaptation. In 2009, the Climate, Energy and Environment Committee (CEEPC) was established to help move the region toward meeting the goals of the Climate Change Report. The CEEPC Action Plan identifies short term mitigation- and adaptation-related targets and strategies to facilitate movement to achieving the long-term goals. CEEPC is currently redeveloping the Action Plan. In the discussions regarding the draft Action Plan, local jurisdictions have pointed out decision support tools that they need to assist them in implementing climate adaptation strategies, including:

- Information on costs and benefits of different strategies
- Costs of inaction in general or in specific cases
- Near-term economic, societal, and environmental co-benefits of adaptation and mitigation actions

Based on this feedback, it is suggested that national statistics, case studies, a list of benefits for best practices, and additional cost related support tools be developed to assist local jurisdictions in their decision making processes and that the Decision Support Section reflect the need for these tools. National guidance that consists of tools such as a simple set of facts, figures, rules of thumb, and analogies could help make the case to the public and decision makers for the need to analyze and address climate change and climate impacts, and integrate climate considerations in standard operating procedures.

The MWCOG Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee (ACPAC) advises CEEPC on issues related to climate and energy and consists of citizen, non-profit, and business stakeholders from northern Virginia, District of Columbia, and suburban Maryland. In March 2013, ACPAC heard an overview presentation of the NCA and evaluated the report in terms of the type of traction the report will have with policy makers. The group advised that in communicating the need for action, it is important to keep in mind that elected decision makers respond first to their constituents. It was pointed out that how the information is communicated is key and that policy makers want to hear about the solutions rather than the problems. Committee members observed that people do not relate to negative messaging and discussing long-term scenarios; it is more effective to discuss short-term objectives, co-benefits, and win-win options. Based on this feedback, it would be useful to add a section to the NCA Decision Support Chapter that discusses how to communicate to policy makers and the public to gain support for implementation of strategies.

In 2010, MWCOG applied for and received technical assistance through the EPA Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program. An EPA guidebook is expected to be published in 2013 that provides an overview of climate adaptation approaches that are relevant to four sectors: buildings, land

use, transportation and water. Over 200 local, regional, and federal leaders representing the four sectors were educated/ trained on climate impacts and adaptation, vulnerability assessments, and best practices throughout this project. Examples of participants include DC Water, Metropolitan Washington Transit Authority (WMATA), U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), University of Maryland climate scientists as well as local government energy managers, transportation planners, and more. Beyond what was learned during this adaptation planning process, participants have identified the following needs for climate adaptation/impacts planning:

- The need for regional-scale data that is in the same units and scale that engineers are using in current plans
- The need for the identification of funding streams
- The need to integrate climate resilience with current work, including meeting current environmental regulations
- The need to communicate climate information to the public and to policymakers in an understandable fashion
- The need for specific technical approaches to adapting to the impacts of climate change in specific sites and under specific conditions

Based on our experience with stakeholders, we recommend that you develop decision support tools to assist with their needs and that the Decision Support Chapter identifies the need for these tools.