



Practical Pointers Series

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Changes in climate are now apparent across the nation and are already affecting the nation's lands, waters, wildlife and communities. These impacts are expected to increase, threatening past conservation achievements and making future conservation actions all the more important to helping habitats, landscapes and our communities successfully adapt to climate change. Future climate change and its impacts depend on the choices we make over the next few years. Land conservation is one of the most important and cost effective ways to help the lands and resources we love adapt to changes in climate. By considering the impacts of climate change within their normal land conservation activities, land trusts can provide strategic conservation investments.

How is our climate changing?

- Changes in climate are well documented in the U.S. and around the world including rising temperatures, increasingly heavy downpours, rising sea level, longer growing seasons, reductions in snow and ice, and changes in amounts and timing of river flows.
- These changes are due primarily to human-induced emissions of gases that have trapped heat and driven increases in global temperatures over the past 150 years.
- These changes are expected to continue, with larger changes resulting from higher emissions and smaller changes from lower emissions.
- Climate changes are happening quickly compared to the past, raising concerns about the ability of species, habitats, ecosystems and communities to respond and adapt.

How will climate change impact the lands and communities we love?

- Climate change will vary by locality, but many parts of the U.S. are expected to be hotter and drier, sea levels will rise and erosion will increase from more intense storms.
- Species distribution, the condition of natural habitats and agricultural lands, and conservation strategies of government and non-government organizations will be affected.
- Rising temperatures and declining snowpack are reducing summer stream flows threatening salmon and other cold-water fish; increasing wildfires, insects and species shifts pose challenges for forests and other landscapes; sea-level rise increases erosion and land loss, threatening coastal habitats and communities and changing agriculture and other businesses.

Safeguarding The Places We Love in a Changing Climate

1. **Identify the conservation values** that warrant protection, recognizing that some may change over time. Consider how climate change may affect the conservation values.
2. **Be deliberate about conservation choices and the science that underpins those choices.** Opportunistic conservation may serve us less well than in the past. Have a conservation plan with clear goals about how to address climate changes.

3. **Prioritize connectivity and critical habitats.** As habitats and ecosystems change with changing climate conditions, it will be important to prioritize investments that increase connectivity between major landscapes of native habitat, and protect critical areas.
4. **Examine each parcel in its landscape context** as it relates to other conserved or protected land, known species and other resources that are on or adjacent to the land.
5. **Understand and participate in broader conservation efforts in your area.** Understand conservation and adaptation plans of other organizations to see how your efforts contribute to and benefit from other conservation actions in your area.
6. **Prioritize to achieve multiple conservation goals where appropriate.** Sites that meet multiple conservation purposes can help ensure greater permanence and flexibility.
7. **Understand the ownership context of the easement** Current protected areas in government or private ownership can provide the backbone to adapting to climate change. Ensuring connectivity may require cooperative land management with private landowners.
8. **Encourage participation in conservation planning for a changing climate.** Let people know what is likely to happen with climate change in simple tangible language and explain how to help the landscapes we love respond to climate change.
9. **Promote hope in changing times.** Land conservation is one of the most important and cost effective ways to help the lands and resources we love adapt to changes in climate.

RESOURCES

Global Climate Change Impacts In The United States, 2009. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, D.C. <http://www.globalchange.gov/>

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Conservation Defense Clearinghouse at <http://clearinghouse.lta.org> and **The Learning Center** at <http://learningcenter.lta.org>. are digital libraries from the Alliance to assist attorneys and conservation practitioners with publications, sample documents and other material.

DISCLAIMER

These pointers are provided with the understanding that the Land Trust Alliance is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional counsel. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of competent professionals should be sought. These pointers were prepared by the Stanford Conservation Climate Change Drafting Committee and the Land Trust Alliance.