Fourth National Climate Assessment, Vol II — Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States

Chapter 28 | Reducing Risks Through Adaptation Actions

Robert Lempert
Director, RAND Pardee Center for Longer-Range Global Policy and the Future Human Condition

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Our Chapter Provides Guidance for Managing Climate Risk

Communities across the U.S. face current and future risks from climate change

*Communities are beginning to adapt (Key Message 1), but climate change is outpacing their efforts (Key Message 2)*

Adaptation entails iterative risk management (Key Message 3)

Proactive adaptation can help reduce risk from climate change (Key Message 4)

Integrating climate risk management into existing policies and practices reduces some risk (Key Message 5)

Additional risk reduction calls for new approaches (Key Message 5)
Our Author Team Combines Researchers and Practitioners

Federal Coordinating Lead Authors
Jeffrey Arnold, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Roger Pulwarty, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Chapter Lead
Robert Lempert, RAND Corporation

Chapter Authors
Kate Gordon, Paulson Institute
Katherine Greig, University of Pennsylvania
(formerly New York City Mayor’s Office of Recovery and Resiliency)
Cat Hawkins Hoffman, National Park Service
Dale Sands, Village of Deer Park, Illinois
Caitlin Werrell, Center for Climate and Security

USGCRP Coordinators
Sarah Zerbonne
Fredric Lipschultz

Review Editor
Mary Ann Lazarus, Cameron MacAllister Group

Technical Contributors
Lauren Kendrick, Pat Mulroy, Costa Samaras, Bruce Stein, Tom Watson, Jessica Wentz
Adaptation Entails Iterative Risk Management (Key Message #3)

*Risk* is the potential for adverse consequences when something of value is at stake and the outcome is uncertain.

*Risk management* aims to reduce risk through an ongoing cycle of assessment, action, reassessment, learning, and response.

Adaptation can reduce risk by:

- Reducing exposure
- Reducing sensitivity
- Increasing adaptive capacity
Proactive adaptation:
- Includes changes to policies, business operations, and capital investments
- Can yield benefits in excess of costs in both the near- and longer-term

Evaluating adaptation involves broader measures of well-being, including:
- Equity and justice
- Cultural heritage
- Environment
- Health
- National security
Integrating climate into existing policies and practices reduces some risk (Key Message #5)

Current and future climate ≠ Past climate

But many policies, procedures, and guidelines assume that it does

Adding climate to the risks an organization is already managing provides significant benefits

Such mainstreaming:
• Is beginning to happen
• Can make adaptation more likely to happen
• Can prompt innovation in existing practices, making them more effective and equitable

Increasing use of scenario and multi-objective approaches
New Approaches Can Further Reduce Risks (Key Message #5)

Addressing the *full range* of anticipated climate risk will generally require substantial changes in:

- Organization practices and procedures,
- Public and private sector institutions, and
- Individual and societal expectations and norms

In some cases:

- Integrating climate into existing practices can lead to change that is more than incremental
- Active steps to anticipate, steer, and accelerate change may prove more beneficial than attempting to retain today’s conditions as long as possible
Catalysts and Challenges

Upfront challenges to adaptation include:

- Difficulty in obtaining funding
- Insufficient information and expertise
- Jurisdictional mismatches
- Conflicting interests among relevant parties
- Pressures on those serving the public to act cautiously

Factors accelerating adaptation include:

- Catalytic events
- External incentives
- Leadership and community interest
- Outside funding
- Plans that emerge from community engagement and address multiple community goals