

# Climate-Smart Community Profile: San Luis Obispo, CA



Nearly equidistant from metropolitan hubs San Francisco and Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo County (SLO) remains one of the most rural and undeveloped counties of California's central coast. Its population of 296,000 is supported mainly by agriculture (primarily vineyards), tourism, and the California Polytechnic State University. The population is distributed among a series of small communities scattered along beaches, coastal foothills, the San Lucia Mountains, and semi-desert conditions towards the east. The geographic diversity of the county also lends itself to a high level of ecological diversity.

Cities and towns across the United States are beginning to prepare for the impacts of climate change, a process known as climate change adaptation. SLO is using a variety of nature-based approaches to protect people and property that also confer adaptation value for wildlife and habitat areas. SLO is particularly concerned with preparations for **water shortages, habitat connectivity issues, coastal flooding, erosion, and wetland destruction.**

## Climate Planning Activities

- November 2009: Organized by the non-profit Local Government Commission (LGC), a panel of experts convened to determine biggest climate change related challenges facing wildlife and ecosystems in SLO. The panel identified water shortages, connectivity, sediment runoff, wetland destruction, sea-level rise, oak-woodlands destruction, endangered species habitat loss, and poor or uncoordinated planning and monitoring efforts as the biggest pending obstacles.
- April 2010: LCG (in conjunction with National Center for Conservation and Policy and USDA Forest Service) released a report on **projected climate and ecological conditions** in SLO.
- May 2010: LCG commissioned report details SLO's most climate-change susceptible features.
- November 2010: The GeosInstitute and LCG released the **Integrated Climate Change Adaptation Plan (ICCAP)**, aggregating previous impact assessments and recommending adaptation strategies of both wildlife and human interest.



# Implementation of Adaptation Activities



## Water Resources (ICCAP)

- Concerns include shortages, saltwater or sewage contamination, and poor groundwater recharge.
- Proposals include stricter water use policies and regulations (particularly in agriculture), enforcement of the Clean Water Act, and encouragement of low-impact development.
- These steps should improve the overall safety of water resources for human purposes and restore their ecological health.

## Coastal/Marine Ecosystems (ICCAP)

- Problems include increased sedimentation in shallow marshes and estuaries, sea level inundation of marshes used as bird nesting habitat, and saltwater intrusion of creeks and estuaries.
- Plan suggests land management improvements to reduce sedimentation and runoff, thorough protection of areas immediately uphill of coastal dunes and wetlands, and more aggressive habitat protection for rare/endangered species.



## Woodland and Forest Threats (ICCAP)

- Increased heat and drought is likely to put additional pressure on already sensitive blue-oak woodlands, pine forests, and their related ecosystems. Conifers may no longer be able to survive in SLO.
- Plan calls for targeted management on privately held ranches, reformed grazing practice regulations, and identification and protection future refuge areas for woodland species.

## What's helping SLO?

- Excellent set of recommendations by LCG and associated groups
- Good partnership between NGOs, public experts, and government agencies in identifying problems and solutions

## What's holding SLO back?

- Outdated federal, state, and local legislation that developed under assumptions of stable climate conditions
- Lack of officially sanctioned monitoring projects



*For more information, please contact:*

Kara Reeve  
Climate Smart Communities  
National Wildlife Federation  
[www.nwf.org/climate-smart-communities](http://www.nwf.org/climate-smart-communities)  
202.797.6653  
[reevek@nwf.org](mailto:reevek@nwf.org)

Local Government Commission  
<http://www.lgc.org/index.html>  
1303 J St, Ste 250  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916.448.1198