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Contacts:

Bruce Stein, 202-420-0998, steinb@nwf.org

Naomi Edelson, 202-797-6889, edelsonn@nwf.org



New Guide to Help Natural Resource Managers Make Climate-Smart Conservation Decisions

WASHINGTON, DC – A new guide released today offers conservationists and resource managers a way to understand the impact of climate change on species and ecosystems and will support efforts to safeguard these valuable natural resources.

Scanning the Conservation Horizon: A Guide to Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment is the product of an expert workgroup consisting of leading scientists from federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, and universities. The peer-reviewed guide is designed to help conservation professionals and natural resource managers craft effective strategies to prepare for and cope with the effects of rapid climate change on the nation's fish, wildlife, and natural habitats.

“The crucial first step in protecting our wildlife and wild places from global warming is to understand which ecological resources are in greatest jeopardy,” **said Dr. Bruce Stein, Director of Climate Change Adaptation for the National Wildlife Federation** and a report author. “Vulnerability assessment is an essential tool for crafting truly climate-smart conservation strategies.”

Preparing for and coping with the effects of a changing climate—known as climate change adaptation—rapidly is becoming the dominant framework for conservation and natural resource management. Increasing air and ocean temperatures, rising sea levels, and shifting rainfall patterns already have begun to impact wildlife and habitats across the United States. Understanding and dealing with these impacts has become a top priority for land and wildlife managers across the country.

“Vulnerability assessments are critical to nationwide conservation planning efforts such as those being undertaken by Landscape Conservation Cooperatives—a network of partnerships utilizing shared science to address climate change and other landscape-scale environmental stressors,” **said Rowan Gould, Acting Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**. “This new guide is a powerful tool to help the conservation community support climate adaptation efforts aimed at ensuring the sustainability of our natural resources in the face of uncertainty.”

“Climate change is the most pervasive threat to parks that we have faced,” **said Jon Jarvis, National Park Service Director**. “This guide will help managers determine what is most threatened, and why. We need these kinds of scientific tools to effectively design and implement adaptation actions that protect National Park Service cultural, natural and historic resources in a changing environment.”

The 176 page guide includes:

- An overview of the general principles of climate change vulnerability as it relates to species, habitats, and ecosystems.
- A description of the scientific methods currently available for assessing vulnerability and its components, and for tailoring these approaches to particular situations and needs.
- Examples of vulnerability assessments carried out by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders.

“Even the best climate change science, such as that being produced by the new Department of the Interior Climate Science Centers hosted by university partners, will fall short of its full potential if it is not transferred to natural resource managers,” **said Marcia McNutt, U.S. Geological Survey Director.** “This new handbook can help these environmental stewards reduce vulnerability and facilitate adaptation strategies.”

“Climate change is putting additional stress on our already beleaguered ocean, coastal and inland wildlife and habitat resources,” **said Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.** “This guide provides resource managers and partners with important tools to assess and respond to impacts of climate change as part of ongoing management actions.”

“Forests and grasslands are experiencing climate-related stress like longer fire seasons and widespread insect epidemics,” **said Tom Tidwell, Chief of the USDA Forest Service.** “Understanding risks through better vulnerability assessments will help us manage ecosystems to be more resilient. This guide is a great tool to help us do that.”

“The Department of Defense (DoD) is committed to providing tools and guidance to help its natural resources personnel manage for anticipated climate change impacts in ways that enable the military’s testing and training mission,” **said Peter Boice, DoD’s Deputy Director of Natural Resources.** “This new guide will help the Department maintain healthy habitats on its installations, allowing our Servicemen and women to train in the most realistic, natural conditions possible, today and into the future.”

Releasing this guide is only the first step in helping federal and state resource managers incorporate vulnerability assessment into their climate change planning efforts. Training in vulnerability assessment based on this guide is now in development, and courses will be piloted later this year at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Conservation Training Center.

“We can no longer assume that the climate of tomorrow will be the same as the climate of today,” **said Naomi Edelson of the National Wildlife Federation** and co-chair of the report’s working group. “Without this type of information, adapting to climate change would be like fumbling in the dark.”

To download a copy of the report, visit www.nwf.org/vulnerabilityguide.

The [National Wildlife Federation](#) is America's conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

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