

THE STATE OF CLIMATE ACTION IN NEW MEXICO: *A Call to Action*



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The Toll of Climate Change on Outdoor Recreation

Climate change will directly and indirectly impact all outdoor enthusiasts, including hunters, anglers, hikers and birdwatchers, through impacts on wildlife, ecosystems, public health and public access to the outdoors. The New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division (2023) reports that outdoor recreation accounts for \$2.4 billion in added value and revenue for the state and provides 28,000 jobs. However, heat, drought and the resulting impacts on wildlife and natural resources will decrease the window through which tourists and New Mexicans can enjoy the outdoor economy, impact revenues and directly harm the health of recreationists and the economic contribution of the outdoor recreation industry.

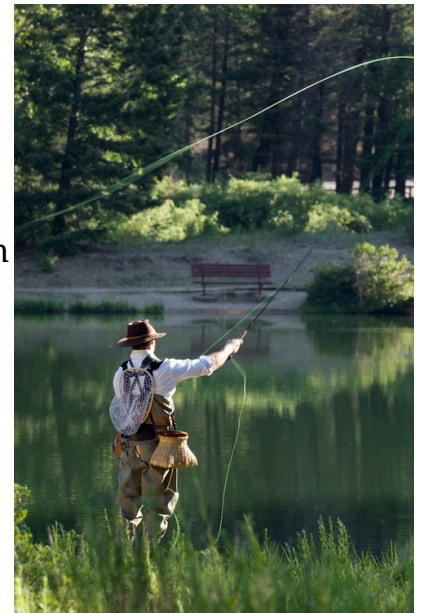


Elevated temperatures and heat waves will bring an increased risk for outdoor recreation heat-related illnesses, such as heat stroke, and a higher risk for injuries due to heat-induced fatigue and disorientation. **The New Mexico Department of Health reported nearly 1,000 hospital visits in 2023 due to heat-related illnesses, with a majority occurring during the summer's hottest month, July (New Mexico Department of Health, n.d.).** An article published by New Mexico Epidemiology estimates that heat-related illnesses are likely to double by 2030 (Woods et al., 2020).

With new record temperatures and heat waves being recorded each year, this trend could be problematic for New Mexico's outdoor recreation industry and life threatening for recreationists. In 2020, a 16-year-old boy hiking in Las Cruces with family tragically died after exposure to high heat combined with delayed rescue efforts (Heild, 2023). In neighboring Texas, a teen and his stepfather died after hiking in temperatures exceeding 119°F (Fortin & Gahan, 2023). These heartbreaking deaths reflect a pattern of heat-related deaths seen nationwide during heatwaves and temperature extremes.

In rural regions of the state, outdoor recreation also represents a vital economic boon, from whitewater rafting along the Chama to fishing and hiking in Silver City, and boating on reservoirs across the state. **These communities rely on adequate water flow in their rivers and streams to attract hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts.** Warming has already led to less regular flow in intermittent (seasonal) streams and permanent watersheds, resulting in less reliable sources of drinking water, low river water levels and diminished water for wildlife (Dunbar et al., 2022; Easterling, 2019; Prokup, 2023).

Warmer water temperatures will also increase the likelihood of disease spreading by water, and warmer water and lower flows will lead to lower water quality and pressure to reduce the water quality criteria for specific segments and the associated water quality standards. **These impacts will further deteriorate waterways for recreational purposes and impact the surrounding landscape.**



Drought- and heat-stressed trees are more vulnerable to disease, resulting in increased pest devastation and death (Anderegg et al., 2015). Increasingly devastating wildfires in the southwest have also incinerated large swaths of forest, forever altering ecological structure and function as well as cultural, historic and other public uses of the landscape. Changes in seasonal timing caused by a warming climate can also disrupt patterns of emergence and mating, thereby impacting the food chain (U.S. Department of Energy, 2023). Drought, pests, disease, food scarcity and wildfires have altered wildlife migration paths and fragmented habitats. These changes directly impact the ability of wildlife to thrive, impact public use of the outdoors and diminish the economic revenue generated by wildlife enthusiasts.



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