

Conclusion

Over the next century, climate change will significantly affect human and ecological systems. In the past few decades, climate change science has grown in certainty. While attention has historically focused on mitigation efforts, adaptation is beginning to emerge as an important area. Climate adaptation is critical, since current GHG concentrations will already cause climate change impacts in the next few decades. As a result, society must begin to take steps to prepare for and buffer against climate change impacts. At Gateway National Recreation Area, climate change adaptation means increasing ecosystem resilience and protecting cultural and recreational resources from damage or loss.

Gateway does not currently have a climate change adaptation plan in place. The development of a new General Management Plan this year is the ideal opportunity to incorporate climate change considerations into planning and decision-making across all three park units. A comprehensive climate change adaptation strategy may include both reactive and preventive responses to both observed and projected impacts. It may also include broad management responses, such as forming task groups and partnerships and specific physical responses such as fortification technologies. Finally, a successful climate change adaptation strategy will include adaptive management. Strategies will need to be revised as new climate change projections from the IPCC and other sources come to light.

The options for an adaptation strategy outlined in this report are an initial framework from which Gateway can build an adaptation strategy. It is not a complete plan, but rather a starting point intended to provide ideas and suggestions to develop further. The findings in the climate change impacts sections may help guide Gateway in making the case for proactive planning, incorporating climate change into its General Management Plan, as well as educating visitors about climate change and its impacts.

These suggestions are specific to Gateway, but climate change will impact all National Park System units. As is clear from the recent Secretarial Order, climate change will exert significant stress on Department of the Interior resources; the National Park System, in particular, can act proactively to stem these effects. Climate change adaptation is critical for Gateway National Recreation Area and fellow NPS units. Implementing an adaptation strategy can help Gateway fulfill its mandate to continue to preserve and protect the park's natural and cultural resources for future generations.

