

Hawai'i and U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands

Regional Climate Impacts

Hawai'i, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Sāmoa, Guam, Pacific Remote Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau

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Fast Facts Series

Climate impacts harm health, local economies, and infrastructure



82% of **heat-related deaths** in Honolulu, Hawai'i, are attributable to higher temperatures caused by climate change.



Climate change is driving **sea-level rise**. In Hawai'i, 3.2 feet of sea-level rise above 2000 levels could displace 20,000 residents and result in over \$20 billion in economic loss. This could occur as soon as 2100 under an intermediate sea-level rise scenario.



Some Pacific Islands are experiencing increases in the length and intensity of **droughts** due to climate change. Droughts are the primary cause of crop loss in Hawai'i.



In American Sāmoa, increased extreme precipitation events stress water filtration systems and degrade **drinking water quality**.

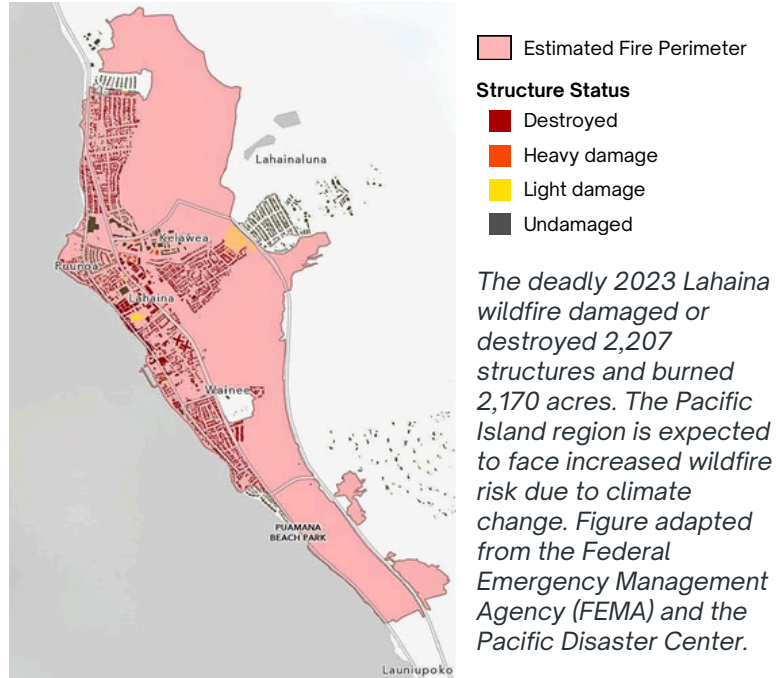


Climate change is expected to increase **wildfire** risk across the region. Wildfires already burn a higher proportion of total land area in the Pacific Islands than in the continental United States.

Wildfire damage can lead to litigation

Communities in Hawai'i and the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands are experiencing economic losses and health risks as a result of wildfires and other climate impacts. Cases increasingly feature climate-related harms and damages from these events.

Burn Area of Lahaina Wildfire, Maui County, Hawai'i (August 10, 2023)



CASE SPOTLIGHT: WILDFIRES

Nova Burnes v. HECO (Haw. 2d Cir. Ct. 2024)

Summary: Following the **Lahaina wildfire** in 2023, Maui County and thousands of individuals filed lawsuits. Most were consolidated in a class action in state court, where allegations centered on Hawaiian Electric Company's (HECO) decision not to de-energize power lines during **extreme fire conditions**. In August 2024, the court approved a **\$4-billion global settlement**.

Science: Although the case settled before trial, science played a central role in shaping the claims. The plaintiffs argued that high winds from Hurricane Dora, prolonged drought conditions, and the presence of non-native grasses could have increased **wildfire risk**. One plaintiff, for example, argued that **climate-driven increases in storm strength** resulted in more extreme winds that accelerated the wildfire spread.



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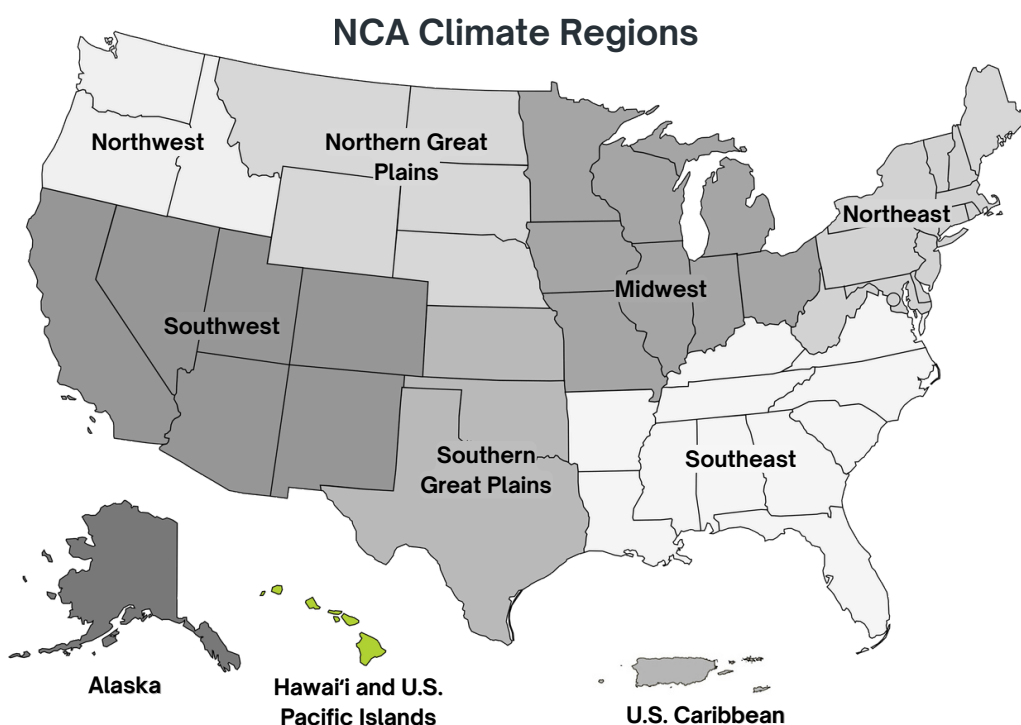
Providing judges with authoritative, objective, and trusted education on climate science and the law.

Climate change impacts all regions of the United States

The Fifth National Climate Assessment (NCA5) of 2023 divides the United States into ten regions to assess the current and future risks posed by climate change in each region. View fact sheets for other regions at cjp.eli.org and learn more about climate impacts at nca5.climate.us/regions.

Primary impacts from climate change vary regionally, typically affecting:

- Heat
- Sea-level rise and flooding
- Precipitation patterns
- Hurricanes and tropical storms
- Wildfires
- Air quality
- Sea ice and glacier melt



SO Why should judges care?

The effects of climate change are reshaping society and, with it, many aspects of the law. There are thousands of cases in courts throughout the country raising issues related to climate change that cover an extremely wide variety of topics, including, for example, insurance, permitting, and land use. As the impacts of climate change accelerate, judges can expect more cases that will draw upon scientific and technical evidence about these impacts.

SOURCES

Abby G. Frazier et al., *Chapter 30: Hawai'i and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands in Fifth National Climate Assessment* (2023), <https://nca5.climate.us/>.

Compl., *Nova Burnes v. Hawaiian Elec. Co., Inc.*, No. SCAP-25-0000531 (Haw. 2d Cir. Ct. Aug. 12, 2023).

Pacific Disaster Center and the Federal Emergency Management Agency Release Fire Damage, Cnty. of Maui (Aug. 12, 2023), <https://www.maui-county.gov/m/newsflash/Home/Detail/12683?arc=17713>.

