

Northwest

Regional Climate Impacts

Idaho, Oregon, Washington

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ENVIRONMENTAL
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Fast Facts Series

Warmer and drier conditions threaten ecosystems



Since 1900, **average air temperatures** have risen by nearly 2°F in Washington and Idaho and 2.5°F in Oregon.



Droughts in the Northwest are projected to become longer and more severe, impacting habitat and lengthening the wildfire season.



The frequency and intensity of **extreme precipitation** events are expected to increase.



Along the coast, climate change will continue to drive **sea-level rise**, placing infrastructure, communities, and ecosystems at risk.



More frequent wildfires will cause more poor **air quality** days, creating health consequences such as increased respiratory problems.

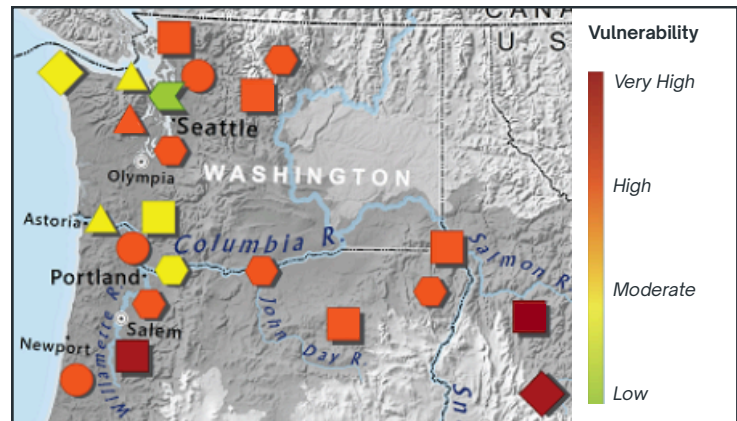


Together, heat and **wildfire** smoke have contributed to health impacts in the Northwest, including thousands of deaths since 2018.

Climate impacts on wildlife are leading to litigation

Climate change adversely impacts ecosystems. Climate issues have been raised in cases related to endangered species listings, habitat designations, and management decisions that affect wildlife.

Climate Vulnerability of Pacific Salmon and Steelhead



Different shapes represent different species of Pacific salmon or steelhead. Each icon indicates a distinctive population group. Map adapted from NOAA Fisheries.

CASE SPOTLIGHT: IMPACTS ON WILDLIFE

National Wildlife Federation v. National Marine Fisheries Service (D. Or. 2016)

Summary: For more than two decades, environmental groups, Tribes, and the state of Oregon have challenged federal management of endangered steelhead trout and salmon populations in the Columbia River Basin. In a 2016 decision, a federal district court in Oregon found, among other things, that NOAA violated the Endangered Species Act by failing to consider how climate change might impact its mitigation. The parties settled in 2021 but litigation was re-opened in 2025 after federal parties withdrew from the MOU.

Science: The 2016 decision stated: “[t]he best available information indicates that climate change will have a significant negative effect on the listed populations of endangered or threatened species” including from changes in stream temperatures, catastrophic weather events, and diminished snowpack. Moreover, “[e]ven a single year with detrimental climate conditions can have a devastating effect on the listed salmonids.”



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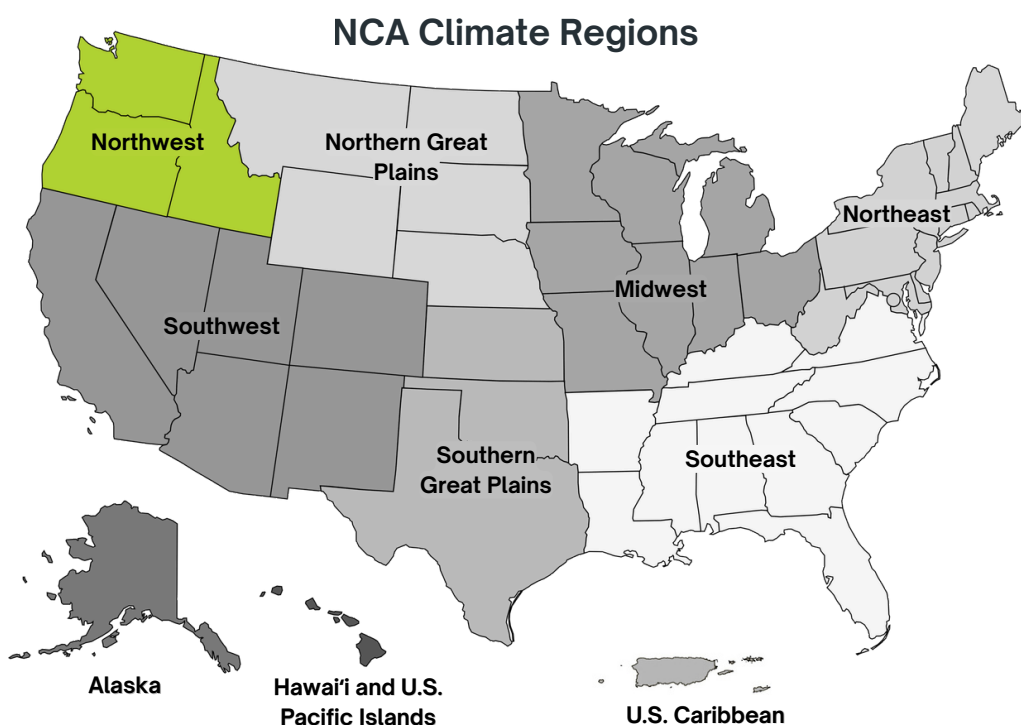
Providing judges with authoritative, objective, and trusted education on climate science and the law.

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

Michael Chang et al., *Chapter 27: Northwest* in Fifth National Climate Assessment (2023), <https://nca5.climate.us/>.

Nat'l Wildlife Fed. v. Nat'l Marine Fisheries Serv., 184 F.Supp.3d 861 (D. Or. 2016).

Pacific Salmon Climate Vulnerability, NOAA Fisheries (Feb. 11, 2025), <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/climate/pacific-salmon-climate-vulnerability>.

