

Climate change impacts in the La Crosse area

In 2012, the Sustainable La Crosse Commission held a workshop on climate change with La Crosse area government staff and community leaders. Attendees learned about climate science and how climate change will likely impact the La Crosse area. Climate models of the Mid-western states used weather records to forecast changes in the La Crosse area over the next half century*:

- Temperature to rise 4-9°F, with greatest increases in the winter
- Ten to twenty-four fewer nights a year with temperatures below 0°F
- Ten to twenty-six more days a year with temperatures above 90°F
- Increased precipitation and more severe storms
- Less snow cover and more freeze-thaw cycles

Based on these projections, attendees were polled for their specific concerns for the La Crosse area, which included:

- Flooding and associated damage and health consequences
- Bigger storms overwhelming storm water systems
- Back up of sewage into basements
- Contamination of private wells
- Erosion and collapse of bluffs and roads
- Silt accumulation in river channels
- Saturation and weakening of levees
- Waterfront damage
- Flood-born disease and mold
- Wind, tornado, hail, and ice damage
- Exhaustion of municipal budgets



Riverside Park, April 2001 (US Geological Survey)



Bliss Road, August 2011 (Erik Daily/La Crosse Tribune)

What adaptations can make La Crosse more resilient?

Participants identified a wide range of short- and long-term measures that could make human and natural systems more resilient to climate change, such as:

- Clean and slow the flow of storm water runoff with rain gardens and other green infrastructure
- Manage storm water better in neighborhoods where flooding is new
- Stabilize steep slopes to prevent mudslides and road collapse
- Plant trees in street terraces to cool the city and absorb water
- Fund runoff and flood management practices with the city's new storm water utility
- Collaborate to solve problems across borders and levels of government
- Incorporate climate change when emergency management and other community plans are updated
- Provide information about climate change to the public
- Implement programs to identify and educate vulnerable populations
- Set new landscaping standards to permit and encourage native plants
- Update regional farmland and open

space preservation plans to account for climate change

- Seek federal/state technical and financial assistance on emerging needs
- Update cooling shelter plans

How these adaptation measures will be prioritized, planned, funded, and implemented over the coming years will be determined by La Crosse area residents, acting through their local and regional government bodies.

What can I do?

Learn more

Residents and business owners can learn more about climate change adaptation from resources listed at the end of this brochure. Informed citizens make the best choices about investing in adaptation measures, whether for their households, businesses, or local governments.

Minimize your personal impact

Individuals and families, working together, can adapt to those changes already in progress. Some adaptation measures are more appropriately pursued by governments, but homeowners can take many helpful steps.

Planting trees on private property provide many benefits, including cooling, water management, noise reduction, removal of air pollutants, and beautification. Replacing urban trees will be particularly important in the wake of the emerald ash borer devastation of Wisconsin's native ash trees. Property owners can also take steps to better **manage rain water** on their property, by installing rain barrels and rain gardens, and insuring downspouts are clear and drain to gardens or lawns rather than to streets.

Be prepared

More severe weather is one important consequence of climate change for La Crosse. Preparing your own household for potential flooding, high winds, heat waves, drought, and wild fires may include planning, stocking emergency supplies, and building improvements.

While local governments can recommend resilient building practices and provide financing programs and other incentives, these measures will be ineffective unless building owners make changes. A good place to start your personal emergency planning is at <http://www.ready.gov>. One source of La Crosse-specific information is <http://cityoflacrosse.org/index.aspx?NID=1041>.

Join others

Adapting to climate change is a challenge we all share. Join a group working to protect the people, places, and things you love. You can learn interesting and valuable information, meet great people, and have fun! Many of the organizations on the "community" page of the Sustainable La Crosse Commission website work on

climate change adaptation, as do the government agencies below.

Contact Information

Sustainable La Crosse Commission

<http://sustainablelacrosse.com/climatechange>

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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

<http://dnr.wi.gov/climatechange>

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Environmental Protection Agency

<http://epa.gov/climatechange>

*The University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have established the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (<http://wicci.wisc.edu>) to study historical weather data, model climate, and develop strategies for the state.

Last revised September 19, 2012, SLA

Climate Change Adaptation La Crosse, Wisconsin

The Sustainable La Crosse Commission has created this brochure as a starting point for residents to learn about climate change, how it affects Wisconsin and the La Crosse area, and what can be done to minimize its negative impacts.



Why care about climate change?

Climate is the pattern of day-to-day weather over periods of decades or more. Climate models forecast that Wisconsin will have higher temperatures, warmer winters, gradual increases in annual rainfall, and bigger storms separated by longer dry spells.

The impacts from these changes include flooding along rivers and the Great Lakes, local flash flooding and erosion, heat waves, drought, wild fires, and changes to ecosystems and agriculture. While there could be some benefits, most consequences are negative, including **disruption of our daily lives, and damage to health, property, and critical infrastructure and ecosystems.**

