

US Forest Service
Climate Change Adaptation Priorities Team
Charter
March, 2009

The Climate Change Adaptation Priorities Team is appointed by the Climate Council and under the guidance of the Sustainable Landscape Management Board of Directors (Directors of the National Fire Plan; Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air, and Rare Plants; Forest Health, Forest Management; Range; and Forest Management Sciences). The Strategic Framework for Responding to Climate Change and related documents serve as the guide for actions implemented by the Adaptation Priorities Team.

The team is responsible for Action 2.1 - Set agency priorities for where, when, and how to employ adaptation actions. Coordination and consultation with the other chartered Framework teams is essential to reduce duplication and maximize effectiveness.

The Adaptation Priorities team will provide a workplan for their overall effort. The team is to provide guidance to the National Leadership Council priority setting in May 2009 for 2011 budget request. The team is to complete guidance for setting agency priorities for adaptation actions by June 1, 2009. Extension or modification of the team's charter must be approved by the Climate Council.

Background

As climate changes, managers and policymakers will need to be nimble in using new information to adapt to evolving conditions. Management will not be possible or needed everywhere. Risk and uncertainty will be part of management decisions because the scope of climate change and its impacts on ecosystems are difficult to predict. The magnitude and effects of climate change and its impacts will vary in different regions of the country.

Approaches to adaptation will need to be regional and site-specific. Actions that minimize disruptions in ecosystem services and that facilitate adaptation must be central priorities for the Forest Service; many of ecosystem services may be lost or significantly altered if the ecosystems are left to adapt on their own. Mitigation activities can only provide significant benefits if ecosystems are adapted to their new environments.

Many activities currently underway to restore forests and grassland health and reduce the risk of severe wildfires or pest outbreaks (such as thinning overstocked stands, thinning to alter species composition, fuels reduction, and prescribed fire) also serve to restore ecological health and resilience in the face of future stressors.

Some methods may be expanded, such as planting more diverse species or genetic mixes in reforestation efforts. New management strategies (e.g., assisted migration of species, solutions to moderate and manage extreme stream flows) may be useful, but specific techniques need to be developed and evaluated. Experimentation, learning from

experience, monitoring actions, and changing methods and techniques will help managers adjust actions.

However, it is not possible to do all these activities everywhere. Guidelines for adaptation priorities will help managers and policymakers focus on important areas.

Roles and Responsibilities

The work of the team should:

- Identify existing priority setting efforts and actions.
- Identify existing resources and tools or innovative approaches that could be used to help set priorities.
- Identify types of actions that can be taken with current knowledge to facilitate adaptation.
- Coordinate with other agencies, and consider models such as the Wildland Fire Leadership Council for interagency coordination.
- Develop national guidelines for identifying agency priorities.
- Develop guidelines for “adaptation demonstration projects”.
- Identify issues or policies that need additional consideration.
- Assist the Executive Leadership Team to identify agency priorities in preparation of the 2010 budget.
- Design the system to be effective and cost-efficient.
- Make provisions for periodically updating guidance.
- Provide an estimate of costs (money and people) to implement the system.

The team is to consult and coordinate with the other chartered Framework teams, especially the Mitigation team, to avoid duplication and maximize effectiveness. The team will also consult with other experts and users during their work.

Team Operations

Team members will carry out these roles in conjunction with the duties of their current position. Additional task teams and support staff from the Washington Office and the field can be requested as needed through the Climate Council, appropriate Directors and line officers. Adaptation team members may seek some relief of their current duties to meet limited duration high priority assignments if approved by the employee’s Director or line officer and recommendation of the Climate Council Executive Sponsor, Dave Cleaves.