

Iowa Climate Statement 2015: Time for Action

Over the past four years, researchers and educators at nearly every college and university in Iowa have produced annual statements to communicate in plain language the state of climate science and the impacts of climate change on Iowans. This process has been open to all of our state's academic climate experts to ensure that our statements are factual. Climate change has been measured, and the integrity of the measurements has been accepted through review by thousands of scientists worldwide.

The upcoming Iowa caucuses provide Iowans with a unique opportunity to bring their questions into the national conversation about climate change. As presidential candidates come to our state to ask Iowans for their votes, we feel it is important to know how candidates use science to inform decisions. Therefore, we hope that all candidates will be asked and will answer at least the following question:

Iowa farmers and communities are already adapting to climate change, and 188 researchers and scientists at 39 Iowa colleges and universities have signed a statement warning that its effects are expected to get worse. What policies do you support to address this critical issue?

In support of this question, we share the following information:

- Humans are adding heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere. These gases are a major contributor to climate change.
- Climate change is already having significant effects on Iowans economically, socially, and psychologically, and these impacts are expected to intensify.
- As the climate warms, evaporation increases. During dry periods with little rain, increased evaporation makes dry soils even drier, while during wet periods it adds even more moisture to the atmosphere. In these ways, climate change may strengthen both droughts and floods. The recent sequence of extreme rainfall years—flood events in 2008, 2010, and 2014 interrupted by the drought of 2012—illustrates the Iowa impacts from enhanced evaporation. The emergence of years with both drought and flood, as in 2011 and 2013, is concerning.
- There is clear evidence that the frequency of intense rain has increased in Iowa over the past 50 years.
- Natural systems are responding to the increase in the global average temperature. The northward expansion of species formerly restricted by a colder climate could disrupt natural ecosystems and introduce new agricultural pests and diseases.
- The changes are also expected to lead to negative health effects for Iowans, including the direct impacts of flooding, stresses on the heart and lungs, allergens that are more abundant and have a longer season, and the spread of diseases carried by organisms like mosquitoes and ticks.
- If greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, agriculture, human health, and economic stability will be affected in new and dramatic ways.
- There are policies and practices that, if implemented, would help Iowans adapt to climate change in the short term and avoid unmanageable consequences in the long term.

We recognize the important responsibility Iowans have in the process of vetting presidential candidates, and we encourage all Iowans to demand that political leaders ground their decisions in sound, peer-reviewed science and ask them what specific policies they will advocate to address climate change in Iowa.

Signed by -

David Courard-Hauri
Associate Professor
Director, Environmental Science and
Policy Program
Drake University

Chris Anderson
Research Assistant Professor
Assistant Director, ISU Climate
Science Program
Iowa State University

David Osterberg
Clinical Professor
Occupational & Environmental Health,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Jerald Schnoor
Co-Director
Center for Global and Regional
Environmental Research
University of Iowa

Gene Takle
Director, ISU Climate Science Program
Professor of Geological & Atmospheric
Sciences
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

Yogesh Shah
Associate Dean
Department of Global Health
Des Moines University

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Peter S. Thorne
Professor and Head
Occupational & Environmental Health,
Director, Environmental Health Sciences
Research Ctr, College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Neil Bernstein
Chair, Department of Natural and
Applied Sciences
Mount Mercy University

Matt Abbott
Biology Professor
Des Moines Area Community College

Marc P. Armstrong
Professor and CLAS Collegiate Fellow
Department of Geography and
Sustainability Sciences
University of Iowa

Mark Aronson
Department of Biology
Scott Community College

Neil C. Aschliman
Assistant Professor
Biology Department
St. Ambrose University

Richard G. Baker
Professor Emeritus
Department of Earth and Environmental
Sciences
University of Iowa

Paul E. Bartelt
Professor and Chair
Department of Biology
Waldorf College

William D. Beavis
Professor of Agronomy
Department of Agronomy and Plant
Sciences Institute
Iowa State University

Philip W. Becraft
Professor of Genetics & Agronomy
Genetic, Development and Cell Biology,
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Iowa State University

Russ Benedict
Professor of Biology
Director of Prairies for Agriculture Project
Central College

Peter Berendzen
Associate Professor
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Bryson Bergerud
Biotechnology Coordinator
Iowa Central Community College

Greg Carmichael
Co-Director
Center for Global and Regional
Environmental Research
University of Iowa

E. Arthur Bettis III
Academic Coordinator, Environmental
Sciences Program, Associate Professor,
Department of Earth and Environmental
Sciences
University of Iowa

Ryan Bezy
Assistant Professor of Biology
Dept. of Natural & Applied Sciences
Mount Mercy University

Diane Birt
Distinguished Professor
Food Science and Human Nutrition
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
and College of Human Sciences
Iowa State University

Gail A. Bishop
Professor of Microbiology & Internal
Medicine, Director, Center for
Immunology & Immune-Based Diseases
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of
Medicine
University of Iowa

Andrea Bixler
Associate Professor
Department of Biology
Clarke University

Amy Blair
Associate Professor
Department of Biology
St. Ambrose University

Garry R. Buettner
Professor
Free Radical and Radiation Biology
Department of Radiation Oncology
College of Medicine
University of Iowa

Anya Butt
Associate Professor of Biology
Environmental Studies Program
Central College

Beth E. Caissie
Assistant Professor
Department of Geological and
Atmospheric Sciences
Iowa State University

David G. Campbell
Professor of Biology and
Chair of Environmental Studies
Department of Biology
Grinnell College

David A. Swenson
Associate Scientist
Department of Economics
Iowa State University

Ryan Carnahan
Associate Professor
Department of Epidemiology
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

James Cheaney
Associate Professor of Biology
Department of Science & Mathematics
Ellsworth Community College

Silvia Cianzio
Professor
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

Russell Ciochon
Director of Museum Studies
Professor and Associate Chair
Department of Anthropology
University of Iowa

Ronald J. Cisar
Assistant Professor
Biological Sciences
Iowa Western Community College

Elizabeth Collins
Science Instructor
Science Department
Iowa Central Community College

John Collins
Instructor
Sustainable Living Department
Maharishi University of Management

Alejandro Comellas
Assistant Professor
Department of Internal Medicine
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of
Medicine, University of Iowa

Charles Connerly
Professor and Director
School of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Iowa

James L. Cornette
Emeritus Professor of Mathematics
Iowa State University

Mary Kathryn Cowles
Professor
Department of Statistics and Actuarial
Science
University of Iowa

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Travis Cox
Co-Director, Undergraduate Sustainable Living Program, Assistant Professor, Sustainable Living Department
Maharishi University of Management

Richard Cruse
Professor and Director of the Iowa Water Center
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

Dennis Dahms
Professor
Quaternary Geochronology & Stratigraphy, Department of Geography
University of Northern Iowa

Radford Davis
Associate Professor of Public Health
Department of Veterinary Microbiology and Preventive Medicine
College of Veterinary Medicine
Iowa State University

Thomas A. Davis
Professor of Biology
Division of Molecular and Life Sciences
Loras College

John Dawson
Associate Professor
Department of Mathematics and Science
Kirkwood Community College

Robert L. De Haan
Chair, Department of Environmental Studies
Professor of Biology
Dordt College

Diane Debinski
Professor
Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology
Iowa State University

Rhawn Denniston
Professor
Department of Geology
Chair, Environmental Studies Program
Cornell College

Gary Donnermeyer
Biology Professor Emeritus
Kirkwood Community College

Dale Easley
Professor of Geology
Department of Natural and Applied Sciences
University of Dubuque

Julie Ehresmann
Advanced Instructor, Science
Science Department
Iowa Central Community College

Kenneth Elgersma
Assistant Professor
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Kamyar Enshayan
Director
Center for Energy & Environmental Education
University of Northern Iowa

Barry Ferm
Laboratory Coordinator
Chemistry Department
St. Ambrose University

R. William Field
Professor
Occupational & Environmental Health, Department of Epidemiology,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Brittany Flokstra
Instructor
Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
University of Northern Iowa

Andrew A. Forbes
Assistant Professor
Department of Biology
Academic Co-Coordinator, Environmental Sciences Program
University of Iowa

Johanna Foster
Associate Professor of Biology
Biology Department
Wartburg College

Laurence Fuortes
Professor
Occupational and Environmental Health,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Laurie Furlong
Professor
Biology Department
Northwestern College

Lonnie Gamble
Co-Director
Sustainable Living Department
Maharishi University of Management

Stratis Giannakouros
Assistant Director, Center for Sustainable Communities
Environmental Studies
Luther College

Jack Gittinger
Professor
Science Education
Simpson College

Charles E. Glatz
Professor
Chemical and Biological Engineering
Iowa State University

Jenny Gernhart
Instructor, Science
Iowa Central Community College

Fredric Gerr
Professor
Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Vicki F. Grassian
Wendell F. Miller Professor
Departments of Chemistry & Chemical and Biochemical Engineering
University of Iowa

David Grewell
Associate Professor
Department of Agricultural & Biosystems Engineering
Iowa State University

Bill Gutowski
Professor of Meteorology
Department of Geological and Atmospheric Sciences
Iowa State University

Bill Harwood
Professor of Chemistry
University of Northern Iowa

Mary Mincer Hansen
Adjunct Associate Professor
College of Health Sciences and Global Health Department
Des Moines University

Emily Heaton
Assistant Professor
Biomass Crop Production
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

John R. Helms
Assistant Professor of Chemistry
Biology and Chemistry Department
Morningside College

Steve Hendrix
Professor, Department of Biology
Director of Academics and Research, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory
University of Iowa

Brian Hornbuckle
Associate Professor
Department of Agronomy, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering,
Department of Geological & Atmospheric Sciences
Iowa State University

Iowa Climate Statement 2015: Time for Action

Keri C. Hornbuckle
Professor, Department of Civil &
Environmental Engineering
Associate Dean for Academic Programs,
College of Engineering
University of Iowa

Stephen Howell
Professor
Plant Sciences Institute
Department of Genetics, Development
and Cell Biology
Iowa State University

Mohammad Iqbal
Professor of Geology & Environmental
Science
Department of Earth Science
University of Northern Iowa

Erin Irish
Associate Professor of Biology
University of Iowa

Laura Jackson
Director, Tallgrass Prairie Center
Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Samuel W. James
Adjunct Associate Professor
Department of Biology
University of Iowa

Brandi Janssen
Clinical Assistant Professor
Occupational and Environmental Health,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

John Jorstad
Science Instructor
Western Iowa Tech Community College

Craig Just
Assistant Professor
Department of Civil & Environmental
Engineering
University of Iowa

Kristopher J. Keuseman
Assistant Professor of Chemistry
Mount Mercy University

Frederick Kirschenmann
Distinguished Fellow
Department of Religion and Philosophy
Iowa State University

Andrew Kitchen
Assistant Professor
Department of Anthropology
University of Iowa

Erwin Klaas
Professor Emeritus of Animal Ecology
Natural Resources Ecology Management
Iowa State University

Joel N. Kline
Professor of Medicine & Occupational
and Environmental Health
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of
Medicine, University of Iowa

Witold Krajewski
Director, Iowa Flood Center,
Rose & Joseph Summers Chair in Water
Resources Engineering
University of Iowa

Dennis Lavrov
Associate Professor
Department of Ecology, Evolution, and
Organismal Biology,
Iowa State University

Hans-Joachim Lehmler
Associate Professor
Occupational and Environmental Health
University of Iowa

Louis Licht
Adjunct Associate Professor
Department of Civil & Environmental
Engineering
University of Iowa

Matt Liebman
Professor and H.A. Wallace Endowed
Chair for Sustainable Agriculture
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

Ronald Lindblom
Science Instructor, VESTA Coordinator,
Outdoor Learning Lab Manager
Northeast Iowa Community College

Marc Linderman
Associate Professor
Department of Geographical and
Sustainability Sciences
University of Iowa

Gabriele Ludewig
Professor
Occupational & Environmental Health
University of Iowa

Charles F. Lynch
Professor
Department of Epidemiology
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

J. Elizabeth Maas
Instructor
Math/Science Department
Kirkwood Community College

Mark T. Madsen
Professor
Department of Radiology
University of Iowa

Amy Madsen-Smith
Biology Department
Clinton Community College

Sunil Malapati
Associate Professor of Biochemistry
Clarke University

Dave May
Professor
Department of Geography
University of Northern Iowa

Paul Mayes
Professor of Biology-Retired
Eastern Iowa Community College

M. Patrick McAdams
Emeritus Faculty
Division of Health and Life Science
William Penn University

Katherine McCarville
Associate Professor of Geosciences
School of Science and Mathematics
Upper Iowa University

Paul B. McCray
Professor
Department of Pediatrics
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of
Medicine, University of Iowa

David McCullough
Professor of Biology, Co-coordinator
Environmental Science and Studies
Wartburg College

Paulina Mena
Assistant Professor of Biology
Central College

James Merchant
Professor Emeritus
Occupational and Environmental Health,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Laura C. Merrick
Lecturer
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

Tammy Mildenstein
Department of Biology
Cornell College

Kenneth J. Moore
Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor
Department of Agronomy
Iowa State University

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Peter L. Moore
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Natural Resources Ecology &
Management
Iowa State University

Marian Muste
Research Engineer and Adjunct Professor
IIHR-Hydrosience & Engineering
University of Iowa

Connie Mutel
Senior Science Writer
IIHR-Hydrosience & Engineering
University of Iowa

Robert Mutel
Professor of Astronomy
Department of Physics and Astronomy
University of Iowa

William M. Nauseef
Director, Inflammation Program
Professor of Medicine and of
Microbiology
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of
Medicine
University of Iowa

Maurine Neiman
Associate Professor
Department of Biology
University of Iowa

Marit Nilsen-Hamilton
Professor
Department of Biochemistry, Biophysics
and Molecular Biology
Iowa State University

Fred Ochs
Professor of Chemistry and Earth Science
Kirkwood Community College

Steve L. O'Kane, Jr.
Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Resmiye Oral
Clinical Professor of Pediatrics
Director, Child Protection Program
University of Iowa Children's Hospital,
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of
Medicine, University of Iowa

Patrick T. O'Shaughnessy
Professor
Director, Heartland Center for
Occupational Health and Safety
Occupational & Environmental Health
University of Iowa

Dale W. Olson
Professor of Physics
Department of Physics
University of Northern Iowa

Corrine Peek-Asa
Professor, Associate Dean for Research,
Occupational and Environmental Health,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Maria Perez
Adjunct Instructor
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Reuben J. Peters
Professor
Department of Biochemistry, Biophysics
& Molecular Biology
Iowa State University

Laura Peterson
Associate Professor
Environmental Studies Program and
Department of Chemistry
Luther College

Gary Phillips
Professor
Environmental Studies Department
Iowa Lakes Community College

Jeffrey T. Ploegstra
Assistant Professor of Biology
Dordt College

Jim Raich
Professor
Department of Ecology, Evolution and
Organismal Biology
Iowa State University

Mark Rasmussen
Director
Leopold Center for Sustainable
Agriculture
Iowa State University

Mark Reagan
Professor
Department of Earth and Environmental
Sciences
University of Iowa

Ryan Rehmeier
Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Biology and
Environmental Science
Simpson College

Rachel Reimer
Associate Professor
Chairperson and Program Director
Master of Public Health Program
College of Health Sciences
Des Moines University

Peter Reilly
Anson Marston Distinguished Professor
Emeritus in Engineering
Chemical and Biological Engineering
Iowa State University

Michael Renner
Professor
Environmental Science and Policy
Program
Drake University

Larry Robertson
Professor
Occupational & Environmental Health
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Jennifer G. Robinson
Professor, Departments of Epidemiology
& Medicine, Director, Prevention
Intervention Center,
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Nilda E. Rodriguez
Assistant Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Diane Rohlman
Associate Professor
Occupational & Environmental Health
College of Public Health
University of Iowa

Thomas Rosburg
Professor
Department of Biology
Biodiversity Center and Herbarium
Drake University

Amber D. Ruskell-Lamer
Natural Sciences Instructor
Department of Math and Sciences
Southeastern Community College

Ann E. Russell
Adjunct Associate Professor
Natural Resources Ecology &
Management
Iowa State University

James B. Sacco
Assistant Professor
College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Drake University

Melanie H. Sadeghpour
Professor/Program Chair, Environmental
Science
Des Moines Area Community College

Aliasger K. Salem
Professor and Head
Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
and Experimental Therapeutics
College of Pharmacy
University of Iowa

J. Michael Sallee
Biology Instructor
Southeastern Community College

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Paula Sanchini
Professor
Department of Biology
Coe College

Michelle Scherer
Professor and Chair
Department of Civil and Environmental
Engineering
University of Iowa

Lisa Schulte Moore
Associate Professor
Natural Resource Ecology & Management
Iowa State University

Timothy M. Sesterhenn
Assistant Professor of Biology
Department of Biology and Chemistry
Morningside College

Paul M. Shand
Interim Head
Physics Department
University of Northern Iowa

David A. Shealer
Associate Professor of Biology
Loras College

William W. Simpkins
Professor and Chair
Department of Geological and
Atmospheric Sciences
Iowa State University

Mindy Skarda
Biology Instructor
Math, Science and Health Department
Southwestern Community College

Daryl Smith
Professor of Biology and Advocate
Tallgrass Prairie Center
University of Northern Iowa

Tex A. Sordahl
Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
Luther College

Scott Spak
Assistant Professor
Public Policy Center
University of Iowa

Muhammad A. Spocter
Assistant Professor of Anatomy
Department of Anatomy
Des Moines University

Martin St. Clair
Professor
Department of Chemistry and
Environmental Studies
Coe College

Charles Stanier
Associate Professor of Chemical and
Biochemical Engineering
College of Engineering
University of Iowa

Bill Stigliani
Professor
Center for Energy & Environmental
Education
University of Northern Iowa

Elizabeth A. Stone
Assistant Professor
Department of Chemistry
University of Iowa

Monica R. Storm
Instructor, Biology, Anatomy & Physiology
Biological & Chemical Sciences Dept.
Iowa Western Community College

Jim Stroh
Professor
Biology and Chemistry Department
Morningside College

Robert Summerfelt
Professor Emeritus
Department of Natural Resource Ecology
and Management
Iowa State University

Keith S. Summerville
Professor, Environmental Science and
Policy
Associate Dean, College of Arts and
Sciences
Drake University

Geb Thomas
Associate Professor
Department of Mechanical and Industrial
Engineering
University of Iowa

Richard L. Valentine
Professor
Department of Civil and Environmental
Engineering
University of Iowa

Kristina Walkup
Associate Professor
Biology
Des Moines Area Community College

Michael Walter
Associate Professor
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Alan D. Wanamaker Jr.
Assistant Professor
Department of Geological and
Atmospheric Sciences
Iowa State University

Emily O. Walsh
Associate Professor of Geology
Cornell College

Anna J. Waterman
Assistant Professor
Department of Natural and Applied
Sciences
Mount Mercy University

Larry Weber
Edwin B. Green Chair in Hydraulics
Director, IIHR - Hydroscience and
Engineering
University of Iowa

Paul Weihe
Associate Professor
Biology & Environmental Science
Biology Department
Central College

Jerrold Weiss
Professor
Department of Internal Medicine,
The Inflammation Program, Roy J. and
Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine,
University of Iowa

Michael D. Wichman
Associate Director
Environmental Health Division
State Hygienic Laboratory
University of Iowa

Darrell Wiens
Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
University of Northern Iowa

Sally L. Wilson
Professor
Biology & Agriculture
Iowa Valley Community College

Lee Wymore
Professor and Program Director
Department of Science and Math
Indian Hills Community College

Mark A. Young
Associate Professor
Department of Chemistry
University of Iowa

Catherine Zeman
Professor
Environmental Health Division
University of Northern Iowa