

**Highlights from the National Climate Assessment Development and Advisory Committee:
Remarks by John Holdren, Shere Abbott and Jane Lubchenco
April 4, 2011**

Dr. John Holdren, Science Advisor to the President, Director OSTP

On behalf of President Obama and OSTP, Dr. Holdren greeted the participants and thanked the NCADAC for the work they have agreed to assist with, to establish a continuing, inclusive national climate assessment process. The NCADAC is asked to synthesize the current science, be clear about what we know and what we don't, to work with regional and economic sector interests, to evaluate the current and future implications of climate change, mitigation and adaptation options, and most important, to build a transparent and robust process to assess climate change. The NCADAC is also tasked with how best to integrate the science findings and engage the public to work together with the federal government. Members of this committee represent more than two dozen states, government agencies, research labs, are a cultural cross-section of community stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, and range across disciplines.

Climate change is a dangerous problem because climate is the envelope within which all earth systems function. It is an intractable problem because 80% of greenhouse gas emissions come from the way we generate and use energy; this system won't be easy to change. The second greatest contributor of greenhouse gas is deforestation; the forces driving it are deeply embedded in the economics wealth-generation and trade in the societies in which deforestation is occurring. Because it is so difficult to change the trajectory of processes driving climate change, we're not going to stop it in its tracks. We're going to have to learn to adapt.

We have three choices: mitigation, adaptation, and suffering. A strategy of either mitigation or adaptation alone won't work; we need both. We need to do enough mitigation to limit the extent of future climate change to a level where adaptation can plausibly cope with most of the effects. At the same time, both mitigation and adaptation actions will bring benefits beyond responding to climate change. Mitigation will reduce dangerous over-dependence on oil, improve air quality, preserve forests, put the U.S. in the lead of the green-energy economy and create millions of jobs. Many adaptation actions also bring benefits beyond reducing the impacts of climate change. For example, even if climate were not changing it would make sense to strengthen defenses against tropical diseases, limit construction of infrastructure near sea level and on flood-plains, and so on.

The new vision for the National Climate Assessment means that the NCADAC will be on the front lines of pulling science and decisions about adaptation and mitigation together in a more useful form. This assessment process will have an unprecedented degree of openness and transparency; it started with the creation of this group in a process that reached out far and wide and it will continue as this group upholds the highest level of scientific integrity. Where there are still unknowns, the Committee is expected to acknowledge them; provide context for its findings; and stick to the facts in the face of political challenges.

Shere Abbott, Associate Director for Energy and Environment, OSTP

The Assessment is a priority for this administration and the US Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) agencies are committed to work toward an assessment process that builds continuity across the cycles mandated under the Global Change Research Act. The Administration supports investing in basic science as well as making scientific information more easily used and useful in the context of supporting mitigation and adaptation as well as communication about climate change and its impacts.

The National Climate Assessment (NCA) plays a prominent role in the new vision for the USGCRP, which is part of the broader National Science and Technology Council structure. The Subcommittee on Global Change Research (SGCR) is within the Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Sustainability (CENRS). This administration added the “S” – recognizing the need to aim science and technology for environment and natural resources management toward goals for sustainability. In this administration and under this structure, global change research and climate science is viewed through the lens of sustainability challenges. Tom Karl chairs this recently reconfigured SGCR.

Within this framework, the important new pieces of the federal climate puzzle include: (1) The USGCRP, which is undergoing a strategic planning process, to position investments in climate science to respond to impacts as well as improve basic scientific understanding. (2) The newly chartered Climate Information and Services Roundtable within CENRS, which is working toward integrating climate information and services across the agencies. (3) The Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force, which is developing a climate adaptation strategy and has developed an initial report to the President and a set of actions that use the USGCRP’s 2009 assessment “Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States” as the science foundation. (4) A new task force, which is establishing the federal structure for integrated earth observations and climate observations, both in-situ and space-based.

One week ago, Tom Armstrong took on the important role of Director of the National Coordination Office for the USGCRP. Tom, who has years of experience in interagency climate issues, will bring an important new vision to integrating all of the pieces of the climate puzzle. All of the USGCRP agencies have a significant stake in this assembly and are committed to its integrity and to serving the nation. As director of the NCA, Kathy Jacobs has been playing an important role over the past year and will continue to do so.

Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Undersecretary, Department of Commerce, Administrator NOAA

For Dr. Lubchenco's full remarks, please visit

http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2011/20110404_ncaspeech.html.

Dr. Lubchenco opened her remarks by emphasizing that in the U.S., climate changes are being increasingly documented. She referenced the scientific research that predicts future changes will be larger and more rapid than those experienced over the last century and will extend across all economic sectors. Climate variability and climate change are profoundly affecting our society and way of life. Some impacts of climate change may benefit sectors in certain areas of the country, and others will pose major challenges to our economy, our health, and our planet's resources. The National Climate Assessment should strive to help the nation prepare for both the opportunities and challenges of climate change. People can better prepare if they are informed about what to expect. The NCA must be accessible to decision makers at all levels and contain new and updated information on climate science and account for both current and future impacts. Today's decisions will determine if climate change will present insurmountable or manageable challenges in the future. While it is important to understand the physical, chemical, and biological science of climate, we must also incorporate social science disciplines in order for this information to be relevant, salient, and useful to our communities and the nation. This assessment follows the 2009 NCA, which succinctly synthesized the impacts on sectors and regions across the nation, in plain English and understandable graphics.

The people on this committee were chosen for their expertise and experience, and include a great diversity of perspectives. Every region of the country is represented in the committee, which also crosses disciplines and sectors, as well as private companies and non-profit organizations.

The NCA aims to incorporate advances in our understanding of climate science into larger social and economic policy systems, provide integrated information about impacts and vulnerability, and identify economic opportunities that arise as climate changes. It serves to integrate information over time, signal key information gaps, and help the federal government prioritize climate science investments. We are committed to transparency through every aspect of this process and to upholding the highest ethical and scientific standards in conducting all activities. The Assessment is an opportunity to capture the latest information and state of science of climate impacts in the U.S. It will be robust, reliable, and trustworthy.

The first task is to establish a framework strategy to guide the development of the NCA and chart a direction. In addition to planning challenges, we also need to be mindful of funding challenges and adapt and work within the budgetary process to produce a strong report. If well executed, the Committee will lay the ground work for years to come, facilitate a continuing assessment process, and build linkages among stakeholders.