

Focus on: Climate Resilience



WHY IT MATTERS

Climate change is impacting Washington's communities and ecosystems now. Air and water temperatures are increasing, and the changes are fueling extreme heat waves, wildfires, drought and flooding. Sea levels are rising and our water supplies, water quality, and air quality are being threatened.

Preparing for and addressing these challenges is an urgent priority for Washington, and the longer we wait to update and support a coordinated state response, the more we risk taking actions that are ineffective, maladaptive, and duplicative. And we risk real and continued harm to our communities and ecosystems.

The problem

Even if we can rapidly cut greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts of climate change are happening now and will continue to affect our communities and ecosystems for decades to come. This means we need to take action to reduce and prepare for these impacts, and to make our economy and our infrastructure strong and resilient.

Our state's current integrated climate response strategy is outdated and lacks the specificity needed to be an effective framework for coordinating and implementing the state's work on climate resilience.

An updated strategy also needs to incorporate equity and environmental justice, including the requirements in the HEAL Act, as we seek to protect all residents of our state from the effects of climate change.

The solution

The state needs an updated comprehensive strategy on climate resilience to bring together existing work across multiple agencies and to identify outcomes and actions that address that highest climate change risks and vulnerabilities. This includes identifying the needs and gaps in state authorities, programs, policies and capacity. With such a strategy in place, Washington will be able to deliver services and advance climate resilience more effectively.



Wildfire smoke near Mattawa in 2019, photo Inciweb

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ADA Accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-628-3900 or email at effie.bolinger@ecy.wa.gov, or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.



Ecology's proposal

Ecology's proposed legislation seeks to amend current law, which authorized Ecology to develop the state's original climate response strategy in 2009 (RCW 70A.05). The proposal would:

1. Require Ecology to update the statewide strategy for climate resilience, with collaboration and assistance from other state agencies and input from entities like tribes, local governments, and overburdened communities.
2. Strengthen requirements for agencies to consider climate impacts in state agency efforts.
3. Improve cross-agency coordination and reporting on climate resilience work, including federal funding opportunities.

Under the proposal, Ecology would also coordinate a regular cycle of reporting on the state's implementation of and updates to the strategy. The bill shifts the role of serving as a central clearinghouse for technical and scientific information on climate impacts from Ecology to the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group.

How it benefits Washington

Improving our state's approach to climate resilience means we can safeguard and adapt our communities, help people – particularly the most vulnerable – thrive in the face of change, address systemic inequities, and preserve our natural resources. An updated climate resilience strategy will improve the efficiency of state efforts. It will target and leverage activities and funding across agencies more systematically and at the scale necessary to drive meaningful outcomes. It would fulfill recommendations made in a 2020 report by Office of Financial Management to update the climate resilience strategy to better prioritize state funding.

Stronger communication and coordination about resilience efforts among agencies helps reinforce roles, reduce duplication and boost local efforts. This is particularly important given increased state and federal funding for climate resilience activities.

An updated strategy can also set clear expectations, actions and accountability to guide the state's work toward achieving common goals for improved climate resilience.

Finally, strengthening the requirements for agencies to consider and incorporate climate resilience in state funding and activities protects state investments, reduces our risks and maximizes the public's long-term return and benefit.