

Headline: Walk a virtual forest for increased awareness about climate change

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A typical Wisconsin forest was modeled to recreate the effects of climate change. Image: Alexander Klippel and Jiawei Huang, Pennsylvania State University via AFP Relaxnews.

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Researchers at the Pennsylvania State University have created a forest simulation that enables the effects of global warming to be visualized through virtual reality headsets. The goal is to make these effects less abstract and to raise awareness among both the public and leaders.

This virtual forest is modeled after a typical Wisconsin forest of today. Those who “stroll” through it can discover the different species of trees, change their elevation from forest floor to birds’-eye view, as well as examine the forest composition in detail.

Several scenarios can be selected to visualize the evolution of the setting through time, in 10, 50 or 100 years from now. Depending on the scenario, very concrete effects are rendered visible on the trees and the environment. The researchers note that the model is powerful enough to deal with events such as windstorms, fire and flooding, and climate change as a whole.

This experiment is still in a test phase, but its goal “is to create visceral experiences of forests under climate change [that] can facilitate communication among experts, policymakers and the general public,” the researchers said. CC

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