

The Trump administration just disbanded a federal advisory committee on climate change

By **Juliet Eilperin** August 20 at 7:00 AM

The Trump administration has decided to disband the federal advisory panel for the National Climate Assessment, a group aimed at helping policymakers and private-sector officials incorporate the government's climate analysis into long-term planning.

The charter for the 15-person Advisory Committee for the Sustained National Climate Assessment — which includes academics as well as local officials and corporate representatives — expires Sunday. On Friday, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's acting administrator, Ben Friedman, informed the committee's chair that the agency would not renew the panel.

The National Climate Assessment is supposed to be issued every four years but has come out only three times since passage of the 1990 law calling for such analysis. The next one, due for release in 2018, already has become a contentious issue for the Trump administration.

Administration officials are currently reviewing a scientific report that is key to the final document. Known as the Climate Science Special Report, it was produced by scientists from 13 different federal agencies and estimates that human activities were responsible for an increase in global temperatures of 1.1 to 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit from 1951 to 2010.

The committee was established to help translate findings from the National Climate Assessment into concrete guidance for both public and private-sector officials. Its members have been writing a report to inform federal

officials on the data sets and approaches that would best be included, and chair Richard Moss said in an interview Saturday that ending the group's work was shortsighted.

"It doesn't seem to be the best course of action," said Moss, an adjunct professor in the University of Maryland's Department of Geographical Sciences, and he warned of consequences for the decisions that state and local authorities must make on a range of issues from building road projects to maintaining adequate hydropower supplies. "We're going to be running huge risks here and possibly end up hurting the next generation's economic prospects."

But NOAA communications director Julie Roberts said in an email Saturday that "this action does not impact the completion of the Fourth National Climate Assessment, which remains a key priority."

While many state and local officials have pressed the federal government for more concrete guidance on how to factor climate change into future infrastructure, President Trump has moved in the opposite direction.

Last week, the president signed an executive order on infrastructure that included language overturning a federal requirement that projects built in coastal floodplains and receiving federal aid take projected sea-level rise into account. Some groups, such as the National Association of Home Builders, hailed the reversal of that standard from the Obama administration on the grounds that stricter flood requirements would raise the cost of development and "could make many projects infeasible."


Seattle Mayor Ed Murray (D) said in an interview Saturday that the move to dissolve the climate advisory committee represents "an example of the president not leading, and the president stepping away from reality." An official from Seattle Public Utilities has been serving on the panel; with its disbanding, Murray said it would now be "more difficult" for cities to participate in the climate assessment. On climate change, Trump "has left us all individually to figure it out."

Richard Wright, the past chair of the American Society of Civil Engineers' Committee on Adaptation to a Changing Climate, has been working with the federal advisory panel to convey the importance of detailed climate projections in next year's assessment. The society establishes guidelines that form the basis of building codes across the country, and these are based on a historical record that may no longer be an accurate predictor of future weather extremes.

"We need to work on updating our standards with good estimates on what future weather and climate extremes will be," Wright said Saturday. "I think it's going to be a serious handicap for us that the advisory committee is not functional."

The committee was established in 2015, but its members were not appointed until last summer. They convened their first meeting in the fall. Moss said members of the group intend to keep working on their report, which is due out next spring, even though it now will lack the official imprimatur of the federal government. “It won’t have the same weight as if we were issuing it as a federal advisory committee,” he said.

Other Trump Cabinet officials have either altered the makeup of outside advisory boards or suspended these panels in recent months, though they have not abolished the groups outright. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt decided to replace dozens of members on one of the agency’s key scientific review boards, while Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is “reviewing the charter and charge” of more than 200 advisory boards for his department.

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