

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK AND MAINE'S ECONOMY FACE MAJOR DISRUPTIONS FROM RISING TEMPERATURES, HIGHER SEAS IF CLIMATE CHANGE GOES UNCHECKED

At Risk: 2 Million Annual Park Visitors Spending \$160 Million and Supporting 3,000 Maine Jobs; A Glimpse of a Future With "No Thunder" from Thunder Hole And Atlantic City Temperatures.

AUGUSTA, ME//November 10, 2010//Life in Acadia National Park and the Maine communities that depend on it for economic activity are in for some major and unpleasant changes if steps are not taken to rein in climate change, according to a detailed new report issued today by the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization (RMCO) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) .

The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and the Natural Resources Defense Council identified Acadia National Park in October 2009 as one of the 25 units of the national park system most endangered by climate change. Titled "Acadia National Park in Peril: The Threats of Climate Disruption," the new report provides important new details about the dangers that face both Acadia and Maine's economy under a scenario under which the federal government does little or nothing to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change.

The third most-visited national park in the Eastern U.S., Acadia National Park is a special place to the residents of Maine and Americans everywhere. Its almost 48,000 acres include mountains, woodlands, lakes and ponds, and ocean shores. The new RMCO/NRDC study reaches the following key findings:

- Acadia National Park draws more than two million visitors a year, making it a major mainstay of Maine's economy. Visitation to the park generates nearly \$160 million in spending and supports over 3,000 Maine jobs. But these economic benefits are at a direct risk as a changing climate threatens the resources and values that draw people to Acadia. Almost every major aspect of the park that makes it such a powerful magnet for tourism would be undercut by unchecked climate change, according to the new report.
- Through September, the year 2010 is on course to be the hottest ever for Maine. Based on two scenarios of possible future emissions and 16 climate models, a scenario with "medium-high" future emissions would mean average projections are for Acadia National Park to be 4.5°F hotter by 2040-2050 and 8.5°F hotter by 2070-2099. If Acadia were to become 8.5°F hotter, the average projection with medium-high emissions, that would make it as hot as Atlantic City historically has been.
- Current scientific projections are that global sea levels will rise by about 2.3 feet by the end of the century in a lower emissions future, or about 3 to 4 feet under the medium-high emissions scenario. For Maine, the local extent of sea-level rise likely will be about nearly one foot higher than the global average. At Acadia, a higher ocean level would threaten low-lying park roads, first with damage from storm surges and ultimately perhaps with permanent inundation. A higher ocean also threatens to damage saltwater and freshwater marshes, key park ecosystems. Higher seas could take the thunder out of Thunder Hole, a crevice-and-cave combination which causes waves to make a thunderous, booming sound as they explode high into the air. This is one of the park's top destinations, visited by about 75 percent of park visitors.
- With a changed climate, wildfires could become more widespread and rage farther, not just interfering with park visitors but also threatening nearby homes, businesses, and towns. Wildlife species from fishers, and flying squirrels to many of the park's 22 breeding species of warblers could disappear from the park. Air pollution levels in Acadia will more often violate federal health standards.

Stephen Saunders, the president of RMCO and the lead author, said, "Human disruption of the climate is the greatest threat ever to America's national parks. Much of what makes Acadia so special could be undercut if we continue changing the climate the way we are. Fortunately, we can head off the worst possible effects on

Acadia by reducing the heat-trapping pollution that is changing the climate – and do so while strengthening our economy. We can, in short, choose a better future for Acadia and the rest of Maine.”

Theo Spencer, a senior advocate at NRDC, said, “The stark economic consequences of failing to deal with climate change are plainly evident in Acadia National Park and the surrounding areas in Maine. Along with Glacier National Park in Montana, Acadia National Park is perhaps a uniquely significant driver in the economy of the state in which it is located. And like Glacier National Park, Acadia is particularly at risk if climate change goes unchecked in the coming years. Of course, we should do what’s right by nature first, but there also is here a compelling bottom-line rationale for action that should strike a chord with those in Maine who might never consider themselves to be ‘environmentalists.’”

OTHER KEY FINDINGS

- Hotter and drier conditions may diminish Acadia’s fall foliage. There could be shifts to less colorful, southern tree species. Also possible are losses of colorful understory shrubs and plants. Increased drought also may reduce the intensity of leaf colors from the remaining hardwood trees.
- Of the park’s 22 nesting species of warblers – which ties it for the highest such total of all national parks – 10 are projected to be eliminated from the park and 5 to have their populations there diminish, according to one study. The other 7 species were not addressed in the study. Other nesting birds in Acadia that could be adversely affected by a changed climate are loons, bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and seabirds that nest on low-lying islands. Of mammals in the park, the National Park Service staff has expressed concerns about fishers (a rare member of the weasel family, which recently returned to the park), brook trout, alewives, and others, which generally survive only in waters with year-round temperatures under about 70°F.
- Acadia has ground-level ozone levels that cause it to annually exceed federal health-based air quality standards. Hotter temperatures promote formation of more ozone, so improving the park’s air quality enough to protect people’s health will be more difficult in a hotter future.
- A projected reduction in snow cover will adversely affect snow-dependent winter recreation in the park, such as snowmobiling, ice fishing, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. There is evidence that these changes are already taking in place in the park with a shorter winter season for most activities.
- Stronger storms coming atop higher seas may affect Sand Beach, one of Acadia’s most popular spots. This is one of only two beaches north of North Carolina comprised of sand and broken bits of shells and skeletons from marine life. Storminess is also increasing in inland areas. Over the past century, the amount of rain falling in heavy storms increased by a staggering 67 percent in the Northeast. A U.S. government report says there is at least a 90-percent likelihood that heavy downpours will become even more frequent and intense. The increased flooding would threaten Acadia’s roads, trails, and other resources, including its unique carriage roads – broken-stone roads constructed under the close personal supervision of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the philanthropist whose donations made possible the creation of the national park.

See the full RMCO/NRDC report on the Web at <http://www.rockymountainclimate.org>.

ABOUT THE GROUPS

The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization studies climate disruption and its impacts. RMCO spreads the word about what a disrupted climate can do to us and what we can do about it. Learn more at <http://www.rockymountainclimate.org>.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national nonprofit organization with more than 1.3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world’s natural resources, public health, and the environment. Visit NRDC on the Web at <http://www.nrdc.org>.

MEDIA CONTACT: Leslie Anderson, (703) 276-3256 or landerson@hastingsgroup.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A streaming audio replay of the news event will be available on the Web at <http://www.rockymountainclimate.org> as of 6 p.m. EST on November 10, 2010.