



## Working to Change the Climate on Climate Change

The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization is the only public education and advocacy organization in the interior West devoted exclusively to tackling climate disruption. Focusing on local climate impacts, partnering with influential allies, and directly engaging with key individuals in government and

out, we supplement the work of other groups.

Our president has been the national policy director in a presidential campaign and manager of statewide and congressional political campaigns in Colorado—experience that gives our organization more than the usual political savvy.

### RMCO Climate Impacts Initiative

#### What Needs to be Done

RMCO is a partner with the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and others in a new collaborative to reframe the political debate on climate by focusing on local impacts and using local voices to build support for climate action. The Rocky Mountain region, especially Colorado, is one of the two top geographic targets for this national effort.

This new partnership is a perfect match with RMCO's mission and record. The national amplification of our climate impacts work will make it more effective, in the West and beyond.

Our immediate priorities include:

- Maximizing the impact of a just-launched Colorado climate change vulnerability assessment—which we were decisive in bringing about (see below.) We will be the lead group in bird-dogging the report as it is prepared, to

ensure it ends up being an effective messaging tool. RMCO and UCS plan a joint conference to draw further public attention to the state's vulnerabilities.

- A RMCO-UCS report pulling together climate change impacts on western forests—more wildfires, more beetle-killed trees, losses of whitepark pines and aspen trees, and more.
- Reports on national parks in Colorado and extreme heat in the West (see the next pages).

#### Why RMCO?

RMCO has a record of credibly and persuasively documenting climate change impacts. Our previous reports have been covered on NBC Nightly News; in 18 of the nation's top 25 newspapers, including on their front pages; and in hundreds of other TV, radio, press, and Internet outlets.

#### Climate Action in Colorado: What RMCO Has Done

In 2005, when Colorado's governor was denying climate change, RMCO undertook a Colorado Climate Project, becoming the only nonprofit organization to develop a statewide climate agenda through a stakeholder panel. John Hickenlooper, then mayor of Denver, was foremost among the prominent Coloradans who appointed the blue-ribbon panel.

Our panel came up with the statewide emission goals which Governor Bill Ritter, Jr., included in his official Colorado Climate Action Plan. Other panel recommendations, too, have

been adopted, and we continue pushing for action on the rest.

This year, our long-standing relationship with Governor Hickenlooper and our two years of conversations with him and his staff are paying off: We are the ones who persuaded him to take steps he is undertaking (for now, quietly), including a vulnerability assessment and a state preparedness plan. This makes his the only current gubernatorial administration in the interior West directly tackling climate change.

## Partnerships with Mainstream Forces

In everything that RMCO does, our credibility and effectiveness is enhanced by our formal and informal partnerships with influential allies—including unexpected messengers, not just usual suspects.

We have a mainstream coalition comprised of formal partner organizations:

- Eleven local governments in Colorado and Utah, including three of Colorado's four largest cities.
- Denver Water, Colorado's largest water provider.
- Businesses, from New Belgium Brewing Company to Wright Water Engineers.

- Nonprofit groups, from the Colorado Municipal League to Western Resource Advocates.

We also bring together people and groups with a full range of interests to develop common agendas, from statewide actions to addressing climate change impacts on water. We make connections among groups that otherwise lack relationships.

Our board of directors includes current and past heads of the Colorado River Water Conservation District, the Colorado Municipal League, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, and Colorado State Parks.

## National Parks and Climate Disruption

### What Needs to be Done

We have documented climate change impacts to national reports in nine reports, eight done in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council and one with the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. As part of our climate impacts initiative, our next priority is a report on climate change impacts on national parks in Colorado: Rocky Mountain National Park, Mesa Verde, and more.

Then, other reports on national parks in Arizona; Utah; and Washington and Oregon.

### Why This Matters

Impacts to our national parks offer a unique opportunity to reach Americans, who love the parks enough to visit them 280 million times a year. And because these special places include our nation's most magnificent natural resources, they are highly vulnerable to a changed climate and powerfully illustrate what we have at stake.



Rocky Mountain National Park Courtesy of John Fielder.

### Why RMCO?

RMCO is now a leading authority on climate change and national parks. Our president is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior over the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Colorado Climate Network

### What Needs to be Done

RMCO administers the Colorado Climate Network, which supports local government efforts to protect the climate and adapt to climate change. Priorities for the Network are:

- Pushing for more state government action to meet the state's emission goals.
- New messaging materials to help Network members make the case for climate action.
- A fourth annual conference, more workshops, and communications with network members.

### Why This Matters

Local governments have an essential role in reducing emissions, preparing for climate change, and bringing about state climate actions. Without the Network, the local governments in Colorado that are directly tackling climate change would be working in isolation. And the local officials who keep asking RMCO to arm them with climate impacts information are the best possible spokesmen to reach out to local audiences about climate change impacts.

## Extreme Heat in Colorado and the West

As part of our climate impacts initiative, RMCO is working to document and communicate how much Colorado (to begin with) and then other western states are being changed by extreme heat. This is one of the clearest, least ambiguous climate changes. Even skeptics are far more willing to accept information on climate change and extreme heat than on other manifestations of an altered climate—because people are aware from their everyday how hot days and heat waves have become more frequent. And extreme heat drives multiple impacts, from increases in mortality and illness to the ignition and spread of wildfires.

The figure below is from a new analysis by RMCO for a Colorado local government, which will use it to build local support for aggressive climate action. Three straight days of 90°—one definition of a heat wave—now occur three times as often as just a few years ago. If we keep changing the climate, there could be

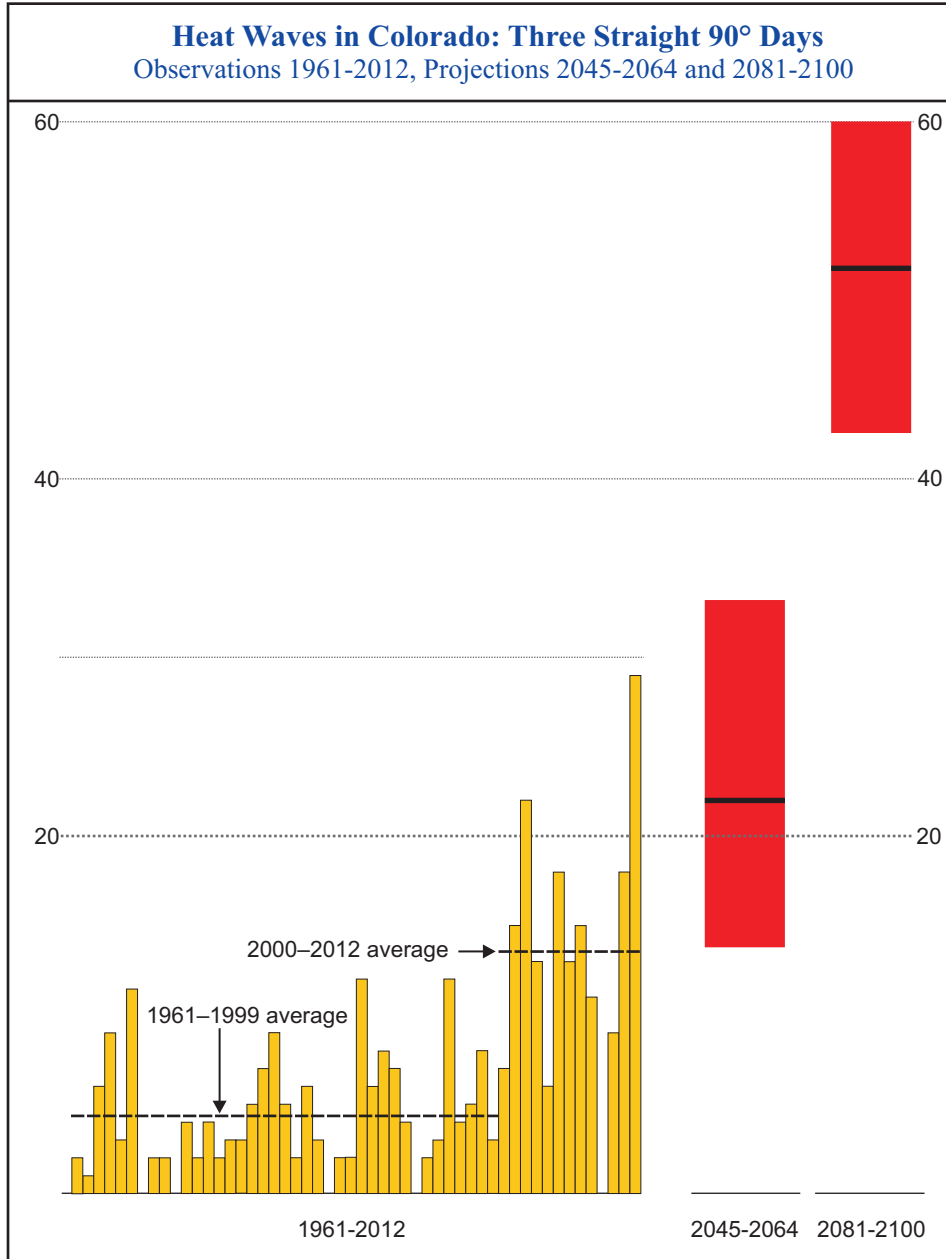
eight times as many heat waves by mid-century and 12 times as many before the century's end. Those are averages of many projections; half suggest even greater increases.

Extreme heat leads to destructive wildfires. Colorado's three most destructive wildfires in the last decade started on days with temperatures of 93°, 97°, and 100°—the latter two being record highs.

People in the West readily grasp the connections between fires and heat, making information about extreme heat one of the best ways to reach them about what we have at stake as we change the climate.

RMCO's forthcoming report documenting extreme heat in one Colorado city is a pilot. We want to do a dozen, on different locations around the state. Each would get substantial local press, because they would have new, detailed information and a specific, local focus.

Then we want to move on to other western states. Next are Montana and New Mexico, the two other priority western states in the new national climate impacts collaborative.



Numbers per year of 3 straight days of 90° in a Colorado city. Projections assume medium-high future emissions of heat-trapping pollution. The boxes show the ranges of the middle 50% of all projections; within the boxes, the lines show the averages. Preliminary data, subject to change. Analysis by RMCO.