

NATIONAL PARKS IN PERIL THE THREATS OF CLIMATE DISRUPTION

State Fact Sheet: North Dakota

Human disruption of the climate is the greatest threat ever to our national parks.

At risk are nearly every resource and value that make our national parks so special. In *National Parks in Peril*, the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization and the Natural Resources Defense Council identify 25 national parks as having the greatest vulnerabilities to human-caused climate change. In North Dakota, Theodore Roosevelt National Park is among the 25 parks most at risk. Theodore Roosevelt is vulnerable to a more downpours and floods, a loss of plant communities, and a loss of wildlife.

Many of these impacts are already happening, as human activities—the emission of heat-trapping gases—are now changing the climate. To preserve our national parks for ourselves and future generations, we need to both stop changing the climate and take actions to preserve the resources and values that make our parks special. For detailed recommendations, see the full report, *National Parks in Peril*.

More Downpours and Floods

With a changed climate, more precipitation now comes in downpours. The amount of rain falling in heavy storms increased by 20 percent over the past century, while there has been little change in the amount from light and moderate storms. In its recent report, the U.S. Global Change Research Program says there is at least a 90 percent likelihood that heavy downpours will become even more frequent and intense. With an increase in downpours, flooding also is likely to increase. Virtually all national parks in North Dakota and elsewhere are at risk, as the forecast is for more downpours everywhere. An extreme downpour in Mount Rainier National Park in 2006 illustrates the risk—it caused so much flooding that the entire park was closed for a full six months.



To read the full report on the impacts of global warming on national parks, visit www.nrdc.org/policy or www.rockymountainclimate.org

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Loss of Plant Communities

An altered climate can lead to fundamental changes in the natural plant communities of parks. Theodore Roosevelt preserves one of the few expanses of prairie in the national park system, but is already struggling with over 60 species of exotic plants threaten the local ecosystem, a problem which could be worsened by an altered climate. Two especially aggressive invasive plants, leafy spurge and spotted knapweed, produce a toxin that reduces the growth of other, native plants.

Loss of Wildlife

For many Americans, the highlight of a trip to a national park is the wildlife they see. But a changed climate could mean less of the wildlife species now in the parks. Some species may go completely extinct, and, local populations in particular parks may be eliminated or decline sharply. In Theodore Roosevelt, wildlife could lose habitat and food sources because of invasive plant species that thrive in a hotter climate. Leafy spurge and spotted knapweed, for example, are not eaten by bison, elk and deer.