

Nebraska News Service

LINCOLN—Things are about to start heating up.

So say a panel of five environmental scholars and professionals, who presented “Climate Change and Nebraska: What Does Our Future Hold?” Saturday at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to warn of the dangers of a potential four-to-10 degree temperature increase in the state.

The speakers examined the scientific evidence for climate change, the impact this could have on the future and the steps that can be taken to assuage it.

Robert Oglesby, a professor of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at UNL, said after considering all the factors, the one that is the cause for most alarm in Nebraska is the reduction of snowpack in the Rocky Mountains.

“We need that steady release of water due to the slow, steady melt of the snow in the spring through early summer to maintain river flow of the Platte,” Oglesby said.

Song Feng, of the School of Natural Resources at UNL, offered a study into the effect droughts have had in the United States and the likelihood of their continuation in the future.

“The drought will become the normal condition by the end of the century,” Feng said.

From 1980-2011, \$195 billion in damage from 16 droughts has been amassed in the U.S., with an average damage cost of about \$12 billion. This year's drought in the Midwest has cost \$30 billion.

Warmer climate threatens state's water resources by Benjamin Welch

Written by Gothenburg Times
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Adam Liska of the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture explained the ramifications of sea-level rise. The first ice-free arctic in likely 800,000 years could be possible by 2030-37.

Four to six meters of ocean are expected to rise somewhere in the next 100-300 years, which will sink portions of Florida. Record rainfall in some areas of the nation has caused expensive and destructive flooding.

"Everything's connected in this world," Liska said. "Climate change that goes on elsewhere in that region has tremendous impact on us."

It's not all bad news, though. Changes in habits and regulation could curtail an otherwise unwelcome forecast.

Duane Hovorka, the executive director of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation, said making efficient energy a top priority could help save the environment.

According to an example Hovorka derived from the Rocky Mountain Institute, 80 to 90 percent of energy could be reliably derived from wind, solar and new gas efficiencies by 2050. Therefore, at the same or less cost than being used today, America could achieve advances in reducing greenhouse gases and provide reliable energy.

"Human beings can be the solution. And we have to be the solution," Hovorka said. "It's up to us. We can do it with current technology... We don't need magic."

Liska's data supported that view. He noted that oil demand by 2025 can drop by 50 percent with new breakthroughs in energy efficiency coupled with biofuels. Global energy could be reduced by 73 percent when utilizing vehicles like the Volkswagen X11, which achieves approximately 250 miles per gallon.

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Currently, Nebraska's plan for the future isn't quite up to par with Hovorka's standards. He said the state's 20-year plan is to continue running coal plants, increase wind power by 10 percent and make modest investments in efficiency, even though the state will need 28 percent more power in 20 years than we have today.

"If you add these things together, there are opportunities," he said. "We can do this in Nebraska. But it's not blind hope; it's hope through action."

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