

New Jersey Resilience Action Plans

Scoping Document

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Prepared by NJ Interagency Council on Climate Resilience



New Jersey skyline view from Exchange Place in Jersey City. Photo credit: Sean Pavone.

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Introduction

Climate change is humanity's single greatest long-term threat. In New Jersey, the effects are already visible. Based on the research summarized in the 2020 New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change, New Jersey is one of the fastest warming states in the country, sea-levels are increasing at a greater rate than other parts of the world, and significant increases in precipitation events and flooding are projected. With a dense population and significant coastline on which a large portion of the economy depends, the state is at increased risk from the impacts of a changing climate. While the state remains committed to reducing emissions, New Jersey is past the point of avoiding all climate change impacts and needs to enact measures to adapt.

Our environment, economy, communities, and infrastructure are all at risk. New Jersey has taken many steps to improve decision-making to reduce risk, including the establishment of the Interagency Council on Climate Resilience, and release of New Jersey's first Scientific Report on Climate Change and the initial Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy. The Scientific Report and Resilience Strategy serve as the foundation to guide New Jersey state agency actions to address climate resilience.

Over the next few years, beginning in 2023, the Interagency Council will work together to develop Resilience Action Plans around specific hazards that outline how State agencies will incorporate climate resilience into their policies, programs, and regulations. In 2023, the Extreme Heat Resilience Action Plan will be developed. Additional action plans will be developed in subsequent years to address different climate change impacts. State agencies have a duty to protect state residents to the best of their ability, as well as the resources and communities which they serve. Developing plans to address climate resilience is a significant step to be taken.

This document provides a high-level description of the purpose, process, and intent of the Resilience Action Plans.

Defining Resilience

Per the Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy, New Jersey defines "climate resilience" as "the ability of social and ecological systems to absorb and adapt to shocks and stresses resulting from a changing climate, while becoming better positioned to respond in the future."

Resilience is not an end-state, but a dynamic state-of-being that will grow more difficult to attain as the climate continues to change. Resilience is not solely about the physical ability to change and adapt, but about people and their quality of life. It is perseverance with grace, strength in the face of adversity and hardship, resourcefulness to leverage what is available, and faith in the road that lies ahead.

To view the Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy in its entirety, visit <https://nj.gov/dep/climatechange/resilience-strategy>.

Purpose and Authority

In 2019, Governor Murphy signed Executive Order No. 89 (EO 89), which ordered New Jersey to take proactive and coordinated efforts towards climate resilience. EO 89 called for the development of a Scientific Report on Climate Change, utilizing the best available science and data specific to New Jersey, and considering a wide range of climate change related hazards. The executive order additionally established the Interagency Council on Climate Resilience (the Interagency Council), now encompassing 22 state departments and agencies and the Governor's Office, to enhance coordination on the state's resilience efforts. The Interagency Council was charged with the development of a Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy (Resilience Strategy), released October 2021, and its implementation thereafter. The Resilience Action Plans (RAPs) are intended to serve as the first biennial update to the Resilience Strategy.

The Interagency Council developed a workplan in early 2022, identifying the need for agencies to identify opportunities to incorporate climate resilience across their programs. The statewide plans will discuss the impact of a selected topic and include actions from participating agencies that detail how climate resilience will be considered and incorporated into agencies' policies, programs, and decision-making. The Interagency Council will develop the Extreme Heat RAP in 2023 in line with the mandated two-year review of the Resilience Strategy. In future years, the Interagency Council will develop RAPs that address additional climate change impacts such as increased precipitation, extreme weather, inland and coastal flooding.

Resilience Action Plans will ultimately lay out ongoing, achievable, and aspirational actions that lend to the resilience of the state as a whole. It is important to remember that each agency is very different, and thus actions may vary. That said, all agencies will consider the climate hazard and how it impacts their decision-making with the same end goal of increased resilience. Periodically, the Interagency Council will review the Resilience Strategy and existing RAPs to evaluate updates or changes, and determine how effectively they have been implemented. This process is meant to establish these plans as living documents, allowing for transparency and progress-tracking.

Advisory Groups, comprised of external subject matter experts from varying sectors, will meet with the Interagency Council throughout the RAP development process, guiding agencies to consider all avenues and opportunities for achieving resilience in relation to the specific hazard. RAPs will additionally be developed with stakeholder and public feedback at several points in the process.

Background

The Scientific Report on Climate Change

In 2020, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) released the [New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change](#) (the Scientific Report), the first State-led assessment summarizing current and projected climate conditions. The impacts identified are wide-ranging and have both direct and indirect implications.

Climate change is driven by increases in atmospheric levels of greenhouse gas concentrations, absorbing increased levels of heat in the Earth's atmosphere – a process accentuated greatly by emissions released from human activities. The science finds that New Jersey has already warmed more rapidly than the rest of the Northeastern U.S., a trend that is expected to continue. Climate impacts identified and studied include extreme heat, increased precipitation both in intensity and frequency, ocean acidification, sea-level rise, increased air pollution, threats to water supply and quality, changes in crop and livestock productivity, lengthened wildfire seasons, increase in invasive pests and plants, loss of wetlands and forested habitats,

changes in habitat suitability, increased prevalence of infectious diseases, and unique mental health challenges.

The identified climate hazards pose threats to our ecosystems and natural resources, our existing infrastructure, our physical and mental health, our industries, and economies – our entire way of life. The conclusion to be drawn from the Scientific Report is that climate change is affecting all areas of the state, in different ways, and that action needs to be taken so that agencies may prepare for and react appropriately to the impacts of a changing climate.

Since this initial document, New Jersey has released additional scientific publications that will be considered by all participating agencies. As of November 2021, New Jersey now has state-specific studies confirming rainfall has, and will continue to, intensify as a result of climate change¹. Additionally, [Human Health & Communities](#) to the Scientific Report was released September 2022 providing additional documentation about how human health, both physical and mental, will be impacted by climate change.

The Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy

The Scientific Report provided the baseline on which the Interagency Council developed the inaugural [Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy](#), with a final release date in October 2021. The Resilience Strategy covers six priority topic areas and a total of 127 actions that provide a policy framework to guide state agency actions to address climate resilience. The priority areas (number does not indicate degree of importance) include the following:

- 1) Build Resilient and Healthy Communities
- 2) Strengthen the Resilience of New Jersey's Ecosystems
- 3) Promote Coordinated Governance
- 4) Invest in Information and Increase Public Understanding
- 5) Promote Climate-Informed Investment and Innovative Financing
- 6) The Coastal Resilience Plan

Both the Scientific Report and Resilience Strategy recognize that the impacts of climate hazards are not evenly distributed. Socially vulnerable populations and overburdened communities will bear a larger burden and must therefore be more heavily considered for resources and policies. Environmental justice is a priority of New Jersey's resilience efforts and is to be incorporated throughout agency RAPs and decision-making.

The Resilience Strategy exists as a model and guidance document, establishing resilience goals for the State and its agencies. With actions already being integrated into decision-making processes, the RAPs will take the next step by outlining actions which agencies will undertake individually and collectively.

Resilience Action Plans

The purpose of the RAPs is to emphasize the importance of climate resilience in all aspects of state agencies' programs and lay out state agency plans to address the impacts of climate impacts. Plans will describe the climate hazard, the threat it poses, and why it is an important consideration. RAPs will identify actions specific to individual agencies and actions to be implemented across numerous agencies, all put forth to support implementation of the Resilience Strategy. Actions may include changes to and/or new policy, procedures, programs, authorities, legislation, permitting requirements, funding criteria, capital programs and projects, data and research initiatives, and regulation. Actions are not meant to be site-specific or overly detailed; for example, agencies are not expected to identify projects or actions to protect specific facilities

¹ <https://www.nj.gov/dep/dsr/publications/projected-changes-rainfall-model.pdf>
<https://www.nj.gov/dep/dsr/publications/nj-atlas-14.pdf>

from climate impacts, but could identify an action such as assessing or addressing vulnerabilities to State-owned facilities.

RAPs will be developed through a collaborative effort across all the agencies of the Interagency Council with guidance and feedback from Advisory Groups and stakeholders.

Format

All RAPs will follow a consistent format, each containing some information consistent across each plan, as well as information specific to the hazard. Each RAP will generally follow the same outline.

I. Introduction

- a. Purpose of Resilience Action Plans
- b. Discussion of Climate Change Resilience Strategy and Scientific Report
- c. Plan Development Process/Advisory Group

II. Topic Description

- a. Overview
- b. Statewide Impacts
- c. Identification of how this climate change impact will affect the state, include effects to state assets, natural and built environments, communities, and existing State programs and policies.

III. Actions: Narrative and Table

Actions will both address the activities of individual agencies and activities across several or all state agencies. A narrative will accompany each action to provide a description of why the action is important, how it addresses climate resilience in relation to the hazard, anticipated challenges, co-benefits, and next steps for implementation.

Within each RAP there will be actions that address community health, equity and justice, research needs, coordination of government, and funding, financing, and investment needed to implement the action.

Each action will also include a table (see below). Items identified in the table will be consistent across agencies and actions and will allow for transparent updates to stakeholders and more effectively communicate across state agencies. Italicized categories will offer a menu for responses to maintain consistency and avoid confusion.

Activity	<i>Agency Activity Title</i>
Action type	<i>Legislative/programmatic/funding/etc.</i>
Lead Program	<i>Agency Program Lead</i>
Status/Progress	<i>Conceptual/Planned/Implementation</i>
Timeframe	<i>Ongoing/Short-term/Mid-term/Long-term</i>
Funding available	<i>Yes/No</i>
Connection to Strategy	<i>Identify action from Strategy: Example Action 5.2.3</i>
Relevant Agencies/Stakeholders	<i>If applicable</i>
Additional needs	<i>Staffing, external partners, etc.</i>

IV. Conclusion

Each RAP will be updated biennially. As such, each RAP should end with a general description of the next steps to be taken for the coming two years.

Monitoring Progress

The actions identified in the Resilience Action Plans will serve as living examples of how New Jersey state agencies and departments will implement the vision laid out in the Resilience Strategy. As state and local leaders grapple with any uncertainties at the core of planning for changing climate, it will be imperative that they do so with an eye towards continuous improvement. While government agencies have deep experience managing resources, staffing, and infrastructure through myriad changes and transitions, resilience planning calls for an intentionally iterative, transparent, and collaborative form of monitoring and evaluation that feeds newly available information and on-the-ground lessons learned back into program and policy design and development. The Interagency Council will seek to monitor the status and effectiveness of actions, allowing an opportunity evaluate performance and improve or revise programs on an on-going basis.

Advisory Group and Stakeholder Process

The Interagency Council will utilize the expertise found outside of New Jersey state government to supplement the knowledge and experience found within the agencies, ensuring that the state agencies are considering a broad range of options and opportunities during the drafting of each RAP.

An Advisory Group will be formed for each RAP and will consist of subject matter experts with experience in climate resilience and with representation across a broad variety of interests and sectors. Professionals from academia, private consulting, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profits, and municipal leaders will come together to advise agencies on the development of their RAPs. Advisory Group members will provide a lens beyond that of state government to ensure that state agencies are considering all angles. Advisory Groups will meet with agencies throughout the process to provide initial guidance, as well as advice on intermediate products and final drafts.

In addition to the Advisory Groups, state agencies will seek stakeholder and public feedback in developing the action plans. As necessary and appropriate, the Interagency Council will request targeted feedback from invited stakeholders with vested interests in the specific action plan under development. This feedback will be conducted through surveys, with the results being shared across the Interagency Council.

There will also be a public process to gather feedback on the action plan development process and the specific actions that agencies should consider for enhancing climate resilience. A public webinar will be scheduled at the beginning of the action plan development process to present the purpose and process for action plan development. The Interagency Council invites feedback on the information included in this scoping document, the impacts the state should address, and those actions the state should consider. Finally, the action plans will be released as drafts to allow public review and feedback before being finalized. For more information, please visit <https://nj.gov/dep/climatechange/resilience-action-plans.html>.

Next Steps

This document is intended to set forth the intent and development process for topic-specific resilience action plans that will be developed by the Interagency Council. The foundational documents – the Scientific Report and the Resilience Strategy – establish the scientific basis and overarching policy framework for addressing climate change in New Jersey. The Resilience Action Plans will allow New Jersey to take the next step and identify the actions needed to better equip New Jersey to improve resilience to specific climate change hazards.