

CLIMATE TALK

Climate Change Preparedness in the Up-North

George Einar Busséy

Climate Change, it's personal. Chiggers? Makes me itch just to think about it. Will those nasty little lawn varmints come north with climate change? I'm just not prepared for that!

I contacted our Public Health department where I learned about "BRACE:" Building Resilience Against Climate Effects. "The Wisconsin BRACE program seeks to develop climate adaptation strategies.... The Climate and Health Program will explore the ability to predict the public health burden for the following climate-related risk factors: extreme heat, changing precipitation patterns and flooding, drought, impacts on ground water aquifers and surface waters, vector-borne diseases, and winter weather events." (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/climate/index.htm>). I guess that includes the risk of chiggers.



I visited our UW Extension agricultural agency to ask about chiggers among other things. It turns out that our governmental agencies are doing a lot more planning to deal with climate change than I realized. This next nifty web site by our National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration projects climate change impacts by county (<http://toolkit.climate.gov/climate-explorer2/>). So for example, I can look at the projections for Ashland and Bayfield counties. On average we currently have about 175 days per year when the low temperature gets below freezing. Here I can see that by year 2050 the number is expected to be about 160 days. There will always be year over year variation, but the trend will be a lengthening of our growing season.

On this same web site you can get a sense of what will be happening to average annual rainfall. You can also get a sense of what may be happening to your winter heating bill (degree-days). You might even be encouraged to realize that we live in a pretty good part of the country. And at the same time you can start anticipating effects that will bear on your own family's future.

I learned about "Socioeconomics and Climate Change in the Great Lakes Region" (<http://headwaterseconomics.org/wphw/wp-content/uploads/great-lakes-methods-definitions.pdf>). when I called Northland College. I was wondering about likely social impacts on our local culture. For example, this web mapping " ... shows the relative job dependence at the county level on three sectors of the economy that may be affected by climate change: tourism, timber, and agriculture. For example, warmer winters may affect winter recreation, such as skiing; warmer summers and winters may increase the incidence of diseases and pests affecting the timber industry; and increased drought conditions may negatively affect agriculture. The details of the long-term trends in these three sectors are shown.... Other sectors, such as the shipping industry, may also be influenced by a changing climate."

Climate change concerns entered my family planning about ten years ago when we were thinking about where to retire. With all the possible risks related to climate change Northern Wisconsin seemed like a really good bet. I felt good about creating a safe haven for ourselves, our children and grandchildren in northern Wisconsin. It stands out as a potential refuge from the worst ravages of climate change, even those already taking place in our lifetimes.

As humans we are so adaptable that family members (in a climate change driven crisis) could easily migrate to our haven of clean water, clean air and good land. What is of greater concern is that our species of wildlife and vegetation are not so flexible. So even though my grand kids on the East Coast could escape a climate driven refugee crisis and my grand kids on the West Coast could escape a climate accelerated earth quake catastrophe (driven by increasing temperature and expansion of the earth's crust), the plant and animal species of Wisconsin might not be so adaptable.

I can imagine that in one sense climate change could be good for business up here on Lake Superior. People will move here from more troubled regions of the country -- or the world. There is a concept in business that growth is good. But it can also bring challenges. Seems likely we will be adapting to cultural change as the number of new arrivals in the community ("climate change refugees" so to speak) increases over time. For better or for worse, things won't be the same. What are we to expect? Are we prepared? A problem? Or opportunity?

I contacted the City of Ashland where officials are thinking about climate change preparedness. Major concerns thus far include increased shoreline erosion, impacts on water quality, and more frequent and extensive storm damage. With "100 year" storms showing up more frequently, and even a "500 year" storm this summer, preparing for these issues becomes a matter of future cost and affordability. So Ashland is drawing on grants to study our anticipated future needs in the context of climate change. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

I called on the National Guard who so often serve as our better angels in times of trial. Statewide, the Guard is installing energy efficient light fixtures and water saving fixtures. Small steps, but the attitude there is for us to be ever better stewards of our environment. Perhaps we should all take that to heart. In some sense we are all guardians of our environment and of our nation.

Most of us have heard of many small ways in which we can individually take action to help limit climate change. Participation in the Chequamegon chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby would be a good one to add to your list. Like I said, it's personal.

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