

MORRIS AREA

CLIMATE DIALOGUE

JUNE 2014



RURAL CLIMATE DIALOGUES

Rural communities are at-risk to be seriously affected by both the direct impacts of a changing climate (e.g. extreme weather) and by efforts to mitigate those changes. This is especially true in considering solutions and policies that increase energy, resource, or transportation costs.

At the same time, much of the “production” in climate-sensitive economies will occur in rural areas, including through renewable energy deployment, reinvigorated local and regional food economies, and changes to land use patterns. Rural communities will and must play an integral role in addressing climate issues.

Despite this significance, rural communities have often been overlooked in climate conversations; political debate and policy changes have tended to emphasize urban and suburban perspectives. In many communities, incomplete information and limited public participation have prevented sound, publicly-supported policy from emerging.

But it doesn't have to stay this way.

Rural residents and communities can develop innovative solutions that respond to local and regional challenges to remain vibrant and prosperous. Recent research has shown that 85 percent of rural Minnesotans feel that people like themselves can make an impact and improve local quality of life; 75 percent believe their community can work together across differences.

Drawing on this resilient attitude, rural communities – in conjunction with the [Jefferson Center](#) and the [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](#) – are seeking to move conversations on climate change forward.

Climate Dialogues help rural communities think critically and plan strategically to address local challenges related to weather and climate. To foster high-quality engagement, we use the time-tested Citizens Jury method for community problem solving and leadership development. This approach—which brings together a microcosm of the community to study an issue in-depth and generate a shared community response—has consistently provided a productive, educational, and inclusive way to address complex, divisive challenges.

[The Morris Area Climate Dialogue](#) is the first in a series of projects aimed at galvanizing rural citizens to assert leadership and build resiliency in the face of extreme weather and changing climate conditions.

This Dialogue brought together a randomly selected but demographically balanced group of 15 citizens from Stevens County in an intense, three-day moderated study and deliberation forum. They were tasked with creating a shared, community-based response to changing weather conditions and extreme weather events. Beyond that charge, the group was completely citizen-driven— no one told them what to do or what to think. The panel had the liberty, information, and resources to produce their own recommendations that respond to community needs, priorities, concerns, and values in order to maintain and strengthen the resilience and prosperity of Stevens County. These recommendations will serve as a starting point for community conversations on extreme weather and climate.

The Jefferson Center and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, along with our local partners, will work to widely publicize the event and engage panelists and community members inspired by the conversation to work on these issues as local leaders. We'll continue to support the community as they work to implement citizen recommendations.

The Rural Climate Dialogues help develop and amplify an informed voice of the people so that regional, state, and national policymakers can take their needs into account when developing climate policy. Through the expansion of this project, we hope to build better climate change policy and stronger, civic-minded communities across rural Minnesota.

DIALOGUE PROCESS

Fifteen Stevens County citizens met at the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris, Minnesota for 3 days, 8:30am to 5:00pm, starting Thursday, June 12th and concluding Saturday, June 14th. Participants were randomly selected and stratified to include a balanced representation of the Stevens County population. Participants were paid \$375 plus expenses for the three days.

The group was tasked with deciding how the Morris Area might best address extreme weather and a changing climate in order to remain a healthy and prosperous community. To respond to this charge, community panelists identified and prioritized significant concerns to the long-term prosperity of the community, opportunities to respond to those concerns, and individual and community actions to directly address challenges or realize opportunities. Those challenges, opportunities, and actions, along with other important outcomes from the three days, are highlighted in this report.

A detailed outline of the three day process is offered below.

DAY 1

- » Panelists meet one another and discuss goals and expectations for the 3 days
- » Panelists engage in a simulation exercise as an introduction to the process of assessing information and working together to achieve shared results
- » Panelists identify factors associated with community resilience
- » Panelists assess what makes a question “good” for getting clear and useful information
- » Presentation on local extreme weather and climate conditions by Mark Seeley (*University of Minnesota Extension*)
- » Determine the keys weather and climate facts from Mark Seeley’s presentation

DAY 2

- » Presentation by Center for Earth, Energy & Democracy on energy burdens
- » Panelist discussion of community values and concerns related to energy use and energy poverty
- » Presentation by Mark Kulda (*Insurance Federation of Minnesota*) on extreme weather and insurance
- » Presentation by Abdullah Jaradat (*USDA Agricultural Research Service*) on climate and agriculture
- » Presentation by Blaine Hill (*City of Morris*) on local infrastructure concerns
- » Presentation by Bill Klyve of Otter Tail Power on energy and energy efficiency
- » Presentation by Troy Goodnough (*University of Minnesota – Morris*) on options to strengthen resilience

DAY 3

- » Panelists identify and select top challenges
- » Panelists identify and select top opportunities
- » Panelists identify key fact, implications, and actions
- » Panelists write final statement in group editing process

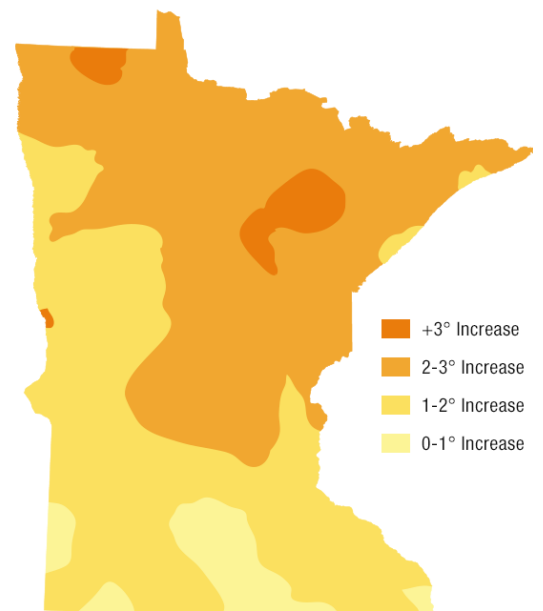
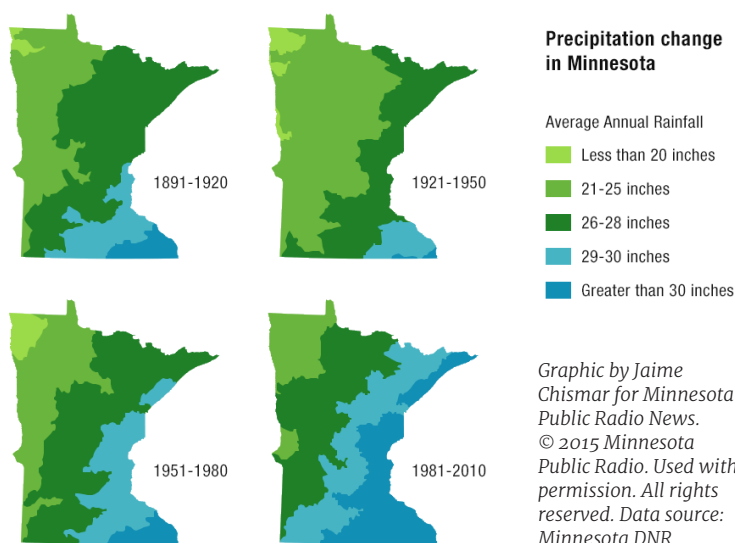
STATEMENT FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

Climate change is happening and we need to adapt our behavior and infrastructure to meet the challenges of our new world, which include extreme weather events, financial difficulties, and long-term adverse effects on agriculture. Research, education, and improvements are underway in the Morris area concerning extreme weather and climate change; however, there seems to be a lack of communication between researchers and the general public and policymakers. Climate change presents short- and long-term challenges and opportunities for everyone. We must all participate to solve these issues. Education is key.

Devastating weather is becoming more frequent in Stevens County. Increased living expenses brought about by climate change and extreme weather, including food, clean water, transportation, property damage, and energy costs currently, and will continue to, adversely affect all members of the community, especially those with low or fixed-incomes. Because of a lack of community awareness and underutilization of tools and resources, community members need to be both educated on climate change and given tools they can use to deal with its effects. Once again, education is key.

KEY WEATHER AND CLIMATE FACTS

- » Minnesota has experienced more frequent than average weather-related disasters in recent years.
- » Average temperatures have been increasing, particularly due to warmer winters and higher minimum temperatures.
- » The trend in our community shows more precipitation overall, falling in more intense precipitation events.
- » We have experienced more frequent periods with “tropical-like” dew points, increasing humidity and Heat Index values.



TOP CONCERNS FOR THE MORRIS AREA

1. ***Changes in extreme weather and climate may raise energy and food costs, which would disproportionately impact low-income households and elderly citizens living on a fixed income.***

- Extreme weather will add additional food and energy costs to people already strapped for money.
- Lack of resources to heat and cool homes could cause illness and death.
- Costs of low-income people needing more public services will affect everyone.
- Increased prices could lead to shortages of necessary products.
- People may not be able to afford transportation to buy goods in other towns.
- Prolonged food shortages could lead to civil unrest.

2. ***Many community members are not aware of changes in extreme weather and climate and actions they can take to address changes.***

- The lack of education on these issues overall, particularly among public officials who are responsible for advocating change to the general public, undermines the ability to make changes.
- People are not aware of the personal impacts of these issues.
- A consistent message through the media will improve understanding of these issues.

3. ***Changes in extreme weather and climate patterns may negatively affect agriculture.***

- The monoculture farming system is vulnerable due to changes in weather and climate patterns.
- Farms are not designed to withstand the consequences of soil erosion due to heavy rainfall and extreme rainfall events.



TOP OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORRIS AREA

1. *The Morris area can sustain and strengthen its agricultural economy.*

- More diversity in farming may lead to new enterprises, manufacturing, and distribution.
- Sustainable agriculture means Morris will be taken care of in face of high global population and food shortage.
- Strong, sustainable, marketable, and diverse agriculture is more attractive to younger generations in terms of the careers they pursue.

NECESSARY ACTIONS:

- » Educating producers and lenders
- » Money pool to support new ventures
- » Encouraging farmers to use resources, like the Soils Lab, for new information

2. *The Morris area community can utilize local expertise and resources to build a more resilient community.*

- Building and reinforcing community relationships through discussion and facing the issues related to climate change.
- Involving social and local media and others in promoting sustainable and energy-efficient practices and habits with messages and resources from UMM, USADA-ARS, and other organizations in the Morris area.

NECESSARY ACTIONS:

- » Forming a group (volunteer or otherwise) that unifies and reflects various community members and stakeholders on the issues
- » Father support from organizations to create such a group, to foster awareness, and promote tools
- » Find funding and other resources needed to create and support such a group

3. *The Morris area can strengthen its economy and address problems associated with changes in extreme weather and climate.*

- Diversify crops and create new markets.
- Opportunity to increase tax base which could be used for educational reforms, parks, and facilities.
- More efficient use of water and electricity for farms, businesses, and homes.

NECESSARY ACTIONS:

- » Finding marketing options in and beyond Morris
- » Committing money and time for research to determine which crops are best for diversification in our changing climate



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

1. Assess your home for potential structural and energy-saving improvements
2. Encourage better construction in new homes, quality retrofitting of old homes, and investment in energy-efficient appliances and alternative energy sources
3. Use water channeling and drainage to control flooding, erosion, and, where possible, capture water for other uses
4. Encourage and implement diversity in crops and crop rotation
5. Implement discussion of climate change into K-12 education
6. Hold town meetings where government officials, agricultural producers, utility providers, human services, and the public can generate and discuss new ideas so voters and consumers can make more informed decisions

For the full list of challenges, opportunities, actions, and other resources, visit:

JEFFERSON-CENTER.ORG/MORRIS

RURALCLIMATENETWORK.ORG/CONTENT/RURAL-CLIMATE-DIALOGUE-MORRIS-MN



PANELIST DEMOGRAPHICS

Invitations to participate in the Morris Area Climate Dialogue were sent to 3,300 randomly selected households in Stevens County. Interested citizens completed a questionnaire with demographic information and were then added to a pool of potential panelists. 15 panelists were selected from that pool, chosen anonymously to match the demographics, as near as possible, of Stevens county.

DEMOGRAPHIC	STEVENS COUNTY PERCENTAGE	IDEAL # OF PARTICIPANTS	ACTUAL # OF PARTICIPANTS
GENDER			
Female	50%	7-8	7
Male	50%	7-8	8
RACE/ETHNICITY			
Caucasian/White	90%	13	11
Persons of Color/Multiracial	10%	2	4
PARTY AFFILIATION			
Democrat	35%	5	7
No Party, Other	37%	6	5
Republican	28%	4	3
AGE			
18-39	40%	5-6	4
40-64	40%	5-6	6
65 & over	20%	4	5
EDUCATION			
Less than High School	8%	1	1
High School or GED	52%	7-8	5
Associate's/Bachelor's	30%	4-5	5
Graduate degree	10%	1-2	4
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	100%	18	18

PANELIST PERSPECTIVES

“I wasn’t sure what to expect. I thought it’d be a bunch of people who were very adamant about this topic and would want to get together and “hurrah” about it. I was very impressed with this group’s ability to come together as community members, as neighbors, and talk about these things in an open, civil, and friendly manner.”

“It was really a learning experience for myself. I did not grow up in a rural area. I’ve lived here for a few years but I’ve not been in touch with the rural area. I think I’ll be a bit more active and learn a little bit more in the future as a result of that. The overall experience was wonderful and the people were great.”

“I have to admit when I came here when people talked about climate [change] I thought ‘oh, come on’ – did I ever learn a lot. I am grateful.”

“We talk about liberal–this conservative–that, republicans–this democrats–that, at the end of the day we are our government. We are the ones responsible for making these decisions...**I’m thrilled and honored to be a part of a process that reminds me why this grand [democratic] experiment continues. And it’s not been perfect, and it will not be perfect, but we can always make it better, and things like this are a start.** Thank you for the opportunity.”



INTERESTED IN YOUR OWN CLIMATE DIALOGUE?

The Jefferson Center and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy are in the process of identifying communities across Minnesota for future Climate Dialogues. If you are interested in hosting a Dialogue in your community, or would like to receive additional information, please contact:

Andrew Rockway at arockway@jefferson-center.org / 651-209-7672

Anna Claussen at aclaussen@iatp.org / 612-870-3423

Hosting a Climate Dialogue requires significant engagement with community members months prior to the event in order to identify issues of principal concern, engage local and regional experts, work with community institutions to develop information sources, and determine community receptivity among policymakers and the general public to incorporate Dialogue findings into community planning efforts.



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The Jefferson Center is a nonpartisan organization committed to strengthening democracy by advancing informed, citizen-led solutions to challenging public issues through deliberation and community action. We're collaborating with governments, nonprofits, and others to unleash the power of citizens and solve today's toughest challenges. We focus on building powerful coalitions, creating meaningful opportunities for education and public deliberation, and empowering citizen-led action.



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The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy is a Minnesota-based nonprofit working locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems and to foster vibrant, prosperous rural communities. We support rural communities through research, market development, and policy advocacy to address local challenges, including issues associated with extreme weather and a changing climate.