



## Preparing for future weather extremes and a changing climate

### WHAT IS ADAPTATION AND WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

#### Preparing for a more extreme future

This spring set records for extreme weather-related events,<sup>1</sup> including:

- Record rainfall for the Ohio River Valley in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky
- Record flooding along the mid- and lower Mississippi River
- Record driest spring in Texas
- Record setting tornado season, with 875 tornado reports in April alone, including the tragic Missouri and Alabama tornados
- Record to near-record snowpack in the Northern Rockies and High Plains and above average snowpack in the Upper Midwest, which contributed to river flooding
- Record wildfire in Arizona driven by dry conditions and hot winds

These deadly events have disrupted lives and cost billions of dollars in damages. Though scientists can't attribute any one of these to climate change, these are the types of events scientists have predicted as the planet continues to warm. Preparing for a future that looks more like this spring is fundamentally what climate change adaptation is all about. Should federal agencies be planning their programs based on the past, or using the best available science to plan for the future we are likely to see?

#### What is climate change adaptation?

Climate change adaptation is simply preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change and variability. Being prepared will save lives, property, and money. Climate adaptation is not about regulating greenhouse gas pollution. Though emissions reductions are essential to limit the



severity of impacts, climate adaptation recognizes that the climate is already changing and we need to prepare now.

#### How we can do it?

The same way America has always solved big problems: through ingenuity, foresight and hard work. We need a plan, a strategy and leadership to get started. And we need to provide Americans with the tools they need to protect themselves. Below are just some of the things we can and should do now:

- Give our counties, towns and states better tools to prepare for disasters and restore their communities after disasters happen
- Help farmers plan now for an environment with less water
- Assist at-risk coastal communities as they prepare for rising sea levels
- Protect key public lands, forests and other areas that are vital to a healthy ecosystem
- Identify at-risk wildlife and take steps to help them migrate and adapt

Together, we can protect ourselves and adapt to our changing world. All we have to do is simply plan ahead. Just a little foresight and the will to act are all we need to protect our communities and our natural heritage from tremendous physical and economic damage.

<sup>1</sup> National Climatic Data Center, <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/special-reports/2011-spring-extremes/>