

Non-Profit Study Warns of Montana Water Shortages

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A study released by the non-profit organization *American Security Project*, warns Montana's agriculture sector could lose up to \$79 million a year due to climate change by the year 2050. The study suggests a failure to mitigate the effects of climate change could result in job losses and losses to Montana's gross domestic product.

According to the study average temperatures in Montana have increased 3 degrees Fahrenheit since 1950 and are expected to increase another 6 to 7 ½ degrees by 2050. This could seriously impact Montana's two largest economic sectors recreational activities and agriculture. Rising temperatures may force wildlife to seek colder climates and reduce the state's attractiveness to anglers, fishers and hunters. The predicted temperature change will also affect access to vital natural resources.

Approximately ten million out-of-state tourists visit Montana each year and the tourist industry directly supports thirty-four thousand Montanans. The study also estimates that by 2060 the state's coldwater trout and salmon population could lose 34% of their suitable habitat in Montana.

Agriculture generates approximately \$2.4 billion in revenue per year in Montana and employs about 31,000 Montanans. The study warns water demands by Montana farms will be difficult to meet.

Eastern Montana currently receives 10% less precipitation than it did 100 years ago. Snowpack has begun to melt earlier in the season and has decreased in size by 60% over the last 50 years. While Montana is shielded from hurricanes and rising sea levels it is susceptible to wildfires. Approximately \$18 million is spent each year in Montana on wildfire suppression. Environmental models used for the study predict an increase in temperatures will begin drying out wide sections of the state resulting in a 175% increase in wildfire burn areas,

On the positive side the study says Montana could benefit significantly by maximizing its renewable energy potential, especially wind power.