

Community Climate Outlook

SUSSEX COUNTY, DE

Sussex County residents will face increasingly severe weather- and climate-related hazards, such as **heat waves, flooding, and storm surge**.

As the frequency and intensity of local hazards change, it is important for all of us to protect communities and local habitats. Using the best available evidence, scientists can project how climate (long-term averages in daily weather) will change in the future, and the effects this will have on local communities.

Climate information can guide decision-making to help us plan and prepare for future weather and climate hazards. It is important that action includes areas with limited resources and people at higher risk. With justice-minded planning and preparation, Sussex County can build a resilient community for all residents and future generations.



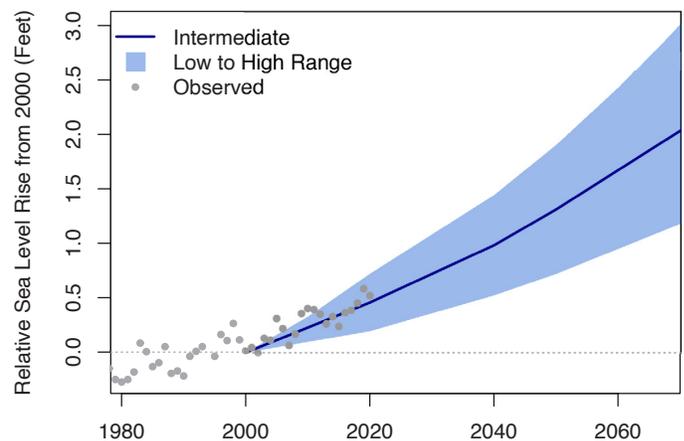
SEA LEVEL RISE

KEY MESSAGE: As temperatures warm, land ice melts and seawater expands causing sea levels to rise around the world and in Delaware Bay, Chesapeake Bay, and the Inland Bays. Between 1960 and 2019, sea levels near Sussex County rose roughly 0.8 feet leading to more frequent and severe coastal flooding, and property damage. Sea levels will rise an additional 0.7 to 2.6 feet in the next 50 years (by 2070), submerging property and permanently reshaping Sussex County's coastline and Inland Bays.

FLOODING: Rising sea levels allow tides, waves, and severe flooding to push further inland. This causes more frequent high tide flooding and increases the impacts of storm surge, putting low-lying housing, commercial property, and infrastructure at risk.



LOSS OF WETLANDS, FARMS, AND BEACHES: Wetlands, beaches, and dunes protect communities and infrastructure from coastal storms, support tourism, and provide unique habitats. Saltwater intrusion can alter wetland species and force farmers to abandon fields, and coastal erosion eats away the beaches and dunes.



The graph shows the projected change of sea level in feet above mean sea level relative to 2000. The blue line shows the intermediate scenario (50% probability) and the blue shading shows the low to high scenario range (5 to 95% probability) of sea level rise used for official planning purposes in the state of Delaware. Dots show the observed changes in sea level in Lewes, DE. Data for the future scenarios¹ are based on a high-emissions scenario (RCP 8.5).

FUTURE SCENARIOS¹: Future climate will depend, in part, on the efforts that we take today to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and methane gas. This fact sheet presents two scenarios¹ of future climate based on a combination of climate models scaled to Sussex County, DE. The first scenario, a higher-emissions scenario (RCP8.5), assumes continued increase of fossil fuel emissions, with no mitigation. The second, a lower-emissions scenario (RCP4.5), is a scenario where we tackle the issue of emissions head-on by responsibly using our natural resources and implementing strategies that begin to reduce global fossil fuel emissions by 2050, stabilizing carbon dioxide concentrations before 2100.

Access resources for adaptation, data references, and additional outlooks by visiting: marisa.psu.edu/outlooks



CHANGING TEMPERATURE PATTERNS



KEY MESSAGE: Human health, wildlife, and infrastructure are all threatened by higher temperatures. At 95°F, it is hard to keep indoor areas and our bodies cool. Sussex County's summers are getting hotter. On average, Sussex County sees 4 days per year with temperatures above 95°F (1990-2019 average). Within the next 50 years (by 2070), Sussex County can expect a yearly average of 20 to 38 days above 95°F, with associated increases in cooling costs, reduced air quality, and heat-related illnesses.



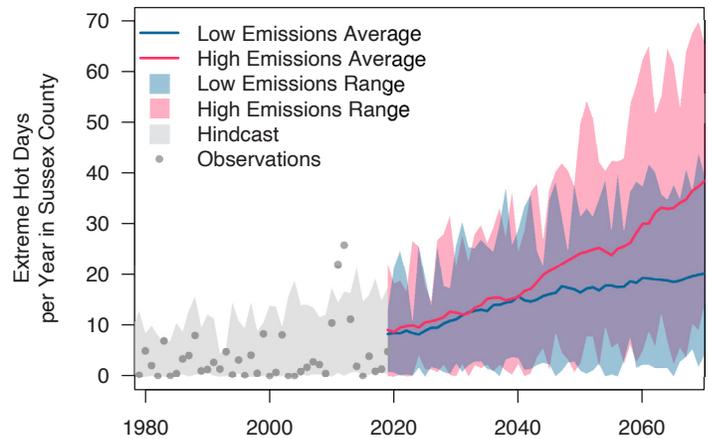
HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES: Heatwaves can kill people and pets, and can cause difficulty breathing, exhaustion, cramping, and heatstroke. Individuals at higher risk include children, pregnant women, older adults, outdoor workers, and lower-income residents.



REDUCED INLAND BAY HEALTH: Water temperature across the Inland Bays have increased. Warmer water stores less dissolved oxygen and also worsens algal blooms, which threaten the survival of fish, clams, oysters, blue crabs, and horseshoe crabs, disrupting fisheries and recreational fishing.



Photo courtesy of A. Tetrault, Wikimedia Commons



The graph shows the number of days in a year with temperatures above or equal to 95°F. Dots represent observed annual days of extreme temperatures and the gray shading shows the hindcast². Two scenarios¹ of the future are shown as a high-emissions scenario (RCP 8.5) in red and a low-emissions scenario (RCP 4.5) in blue. Data for the future scenarios¹ are retrieved from Multivariate Adaptive Constructed Analogs (MACA), and observed data are from the Gridded Surface Meteorological Dataset (gridMET).

CHANGING RAINFALL PATTERNS



KEY MESSAGE: Heavy rainfall in Sussex County is increasing in frequency and intensity, causing property damage, septic backups, mold and indoor air quality issues, and impacts to water quality in wells, Inland Bays, the Chesapeake Bay, and the Delaware Bay. Annual rainfall in Sussex County will likely increase by an average of 2 inches (2050-2079 average compared to the 1990-2019 average).



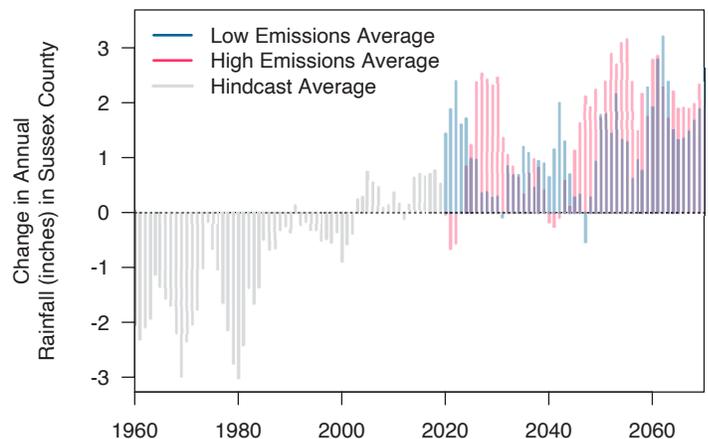
FLOODING: Heavy rain overwhelms infrastructure and drainage systems, causing property damage and covering roads.



Photo courtesy of C. Tomblason



REDUCED HUMAN HEALTH: Rising water tables cause septic backups and groundwater pollution, putting Sussex County's drinking water at risk of contamination. Changing moisture levels impact the spread of illness, including tick- and mosquito-borne diseases as high humidity promote their activity.



The graph shows the change in annual rainfall compared to the average between 1990 and 2019. The gray lines show the hindcast². Two scenarios¹ of the future are shown as a high-emissions scenario (RCP 8.5) in red and a low-emissions scenario (RCP 4.5) in blue. Data for the future scenarios¹ are retrieved from MACA.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Scenarios are a plausible representation of future events. They are not predictions or forecasts, but they offer insight into the implications of developments and actions.
- 2 Hindcasts are model results for a historical period. Hindcasts are useful for comparing observations with model estimates.