



# ITASCA CLIMATE DIALOGUE

## CITIZENS EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

From May 14-16, 2015, we came together as 18 residents of Itasca County to consider changes in our weather and climate and the impacts of those changes on our economy, tourist industry, public infrastructure, forests, fish and wildlife, and water resources. Based on this experience and testimony from local subject matter experts, we created the following report.

Evidence points to changing weather patterns, which will likely affect all of our lives in some way. These changes will have a real measurable impact on our overall economy, personal finances, health, and culture.

The tourism, lumber, and outdoor life (fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, etc.) components of our economy can adapt and thrive with thoughtful long-term management.

We as individuals and communities have the power to take action by working together. By doing so, we can improve our environment, save our natural resources, address the effects of changing weather, and create more opportunities to make a more vibrant community.

### Top 3 Challenges

- 1) Extreme temperature variations and severe flooding conditions reduce the life of capital assets and increase operational disruptions for public infrastructure. We need to consider new design standards for our stormwater systems to address larger precipitation events and new regulations. There are significant economic costs associated with future designs.
- 2) We need to emphasize management of natural resources from a long-term perspective (such as 50 years or more) and use a systems approach (recognizing that everything is interrelated) to more effectively manage and protect natural resources.
- 3) Stormwater runoff can increase sediment and phosphorus load in waterways, which can reduce water quality.

### Top 3 Opportunities

- 1) We can manage forests so that they're more adaptable in the face of changing conditions. We can:
  - a. Manage forests for diversity so that they contain their full array of native tree species, some of which may be adapted to future climate conditions, and evaluate tree species southwest of the Itasca area for suitability to future climate conditions.
  - b. Thin overly dense pine forests on a regular basis to increase soil moisture and tree growth, to improve pine resistance and resilience against drought, and to produce a marketable supply of good-sized pines to timber mills.
  - c. Address the potential loss of ash trees (due to Emerald Ash Borer) by managing forests to ensure growth of new species, using small patch cutting to create suitable habitat for new species and by evaluating the species best suited to replace ash trees.
- 2) Information is power. We can ensure information is accessible. Decision-makers at all levels – including individuals, government, and businesses – need to be informed and engaged concerning how changes in climate affect our natural resources and economy. It's important to adapt present practices based on new information.
- 3) We can accept changes to natural systems and change the way we manage these systems. Move natural resource management into a long-term planning and sustainability mode, which includes empowering citizen interests in the planning process and being adaptive but realistic about changes.

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### Top Individual Actions

We can change the way we manage our individual properties to protect wildlife habitat and water quality:

- Create more natural or wild areas so that birds and insects have more habitat
- Build birdhouses to provide habitat for birds
- Leave dead trees and snags on our property (if they don't threaten our structures)
- Plant flowers and native plants on our property (without diminishing our property values)
- Plant early blooming plants on our property to provide more food sources for insects
- Encourage attitude shifts away from highly manicured "Home and Garden Magazine" lawns (which remove habitat for insects and birds and adds carbon dioxide into the atmosphere to maintain) to "wilder" properties
- Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides to protect insects
- Raise our own bees
- Address stormwater runoff and noncompliant septic systems (if you own waterfront property)

Actions by individuals add up! We can insulate our homes, use efficient bulbs and appliances, use solar power, travel by bike, improve the fuel efficiency of our vehicles, travel less, increase energy efficiency, and pursue alternative energy sources.

We can participate in public decision making meetings related our infrastructure systems. Get involved by asking what you can do on your property to address stormwater and infrastructure issues. To understand and be involved in managing our public infrastructure, we can get educated on local regulations, the latest research and trends, and the consequences of pursuing different public policies; and we can share knowledge with our friends, peers, and neighbors.

### Top Community Actions

We can install green infrastructure to reduce stormwater runoff on new developments. We can reduce risks associated with stormwater runoff by pursuing low impact development best practices. Educate our public officials and our general public about balancing risks associated with stormwater and costs of managing stormwater. For maintaining our infrastructure, we can pay attention to new data and research.

To ensure tourists come to Itasca County, we can be adaptive and focus on what we have. Create new reasons for tourists to come to Itasca County if weather conditions don't support traditional tourist activities.

To improve our infrastructure systems, we can get creative and keep an open mind, for example, by implementing green design ideas (e.g. new thermal pavements that reduce damage related to severe fluctuations in temperature).

Read more at:

*[jefferson-center.org/itasca](http://jefferson-center.org/itasca)*

or

*[ruralclimatenetwork.org/content/rural-climate-dialogue-itasca-county-mn](http://ruralclimatenetwork.org/content/rural-climate-dialogue-itasca-county-mn)*