

FACT SHEET

# Social Equity Key to Southeast Florida RCAP 2.0

February 8, 2018

The Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact is recognized globally as a model for regional climate planning. Leaders from the four compact counties—Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach—are part of a growing number of officials across the country who have committed to fighting climate change.<sup>1</sup> These leaders are working to secure a prosperous and healthy future for county residents. They recognize that they must curb pollution by transitioning away from fossil fuels to clean and renewable energy, as well as upgrade community and economic infrastructure to withstand more intense and frequent extreme weather trends.

In December 2017, the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact released an improved version of its Regional Climate Action Plan (RCAP 2.0), which includes new recommendations to increase social equity and reduce climate change threats in low-income areas and communities of color.<sup>2</sup>

## What is the Southeast Florida RCAP 2.0?

- The RCAP 2.0 updates the original RCAP, launched in 2012.<sup>3</sup> It is designed as a tool for local leaders in the four-county region, including the leaders of more than 100 municipalities, to implement coordinated actions to curb greenhouse gas emissions and prepare communities for a new norm of more extreme weather events fueled by climate change.
- The RCAP 2.0 will help Southeast Florida's leaders reduce the economic, public health, and societal risks of rising sea levels; hotter heat waves; and more intense and frequent storms, particularly in communities where historic inequities exacerbate these risks.

## Social equity is a new, essential focus of the RCAP 2.0

- The RCAP 2.0 substantially expands and strengthens the climate solutions presented in the 2012 RCAP, including important social equity and racial justice recommendations. These additions aim to help leaders in the four-county region reduce climate change threats while tackling the historic racial and economic inequities that put low-income areas and communities of color most at risk from pollution and a changing climate.<sup>4</sup>

- Communities of color and low-income areas are disproportionately exposed to heat, flooding, and pollution risks—meaning extreme weather events often hit them hardest.<sup>5</sup> In a region where city streets flood even on sunny days, and in the wake of the record-breaking 2017 hurricane season, local leaders recognize that they have little time to waste.<sup>6</sup>
  - Climate change threats exacerbate and multiply historic inequities that exist in low-income areas and communities of color. Recent economic booms have left many residents of Southeast Florida behind, meaning that they do not have the financial stability to safely weather more intense storms, heat, and floods.<sup>7</sup> And many communities of color were purposefully sidelined by 20th century development decisions resulting in economic and racial segregation, making it particularly difficult for communities without targeted policies and resources to build local economies that are just and resilient to climate change.<sup>8</sup>
  - Low-income areas and communities of color are particularly vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather because they are often located in or near flood-prone areas, heat islands—urban neighborhoods where concrete and asphalt surfaces absorb and radiate heat, producing temperatures that are warmer than average—or toxic waste sites. They are also often overburdened by disproportionately high air and water pollution.<sup>9</sup>
- The new Social Equity section of the RCAP 2.0 makes important policy, infrastructure-planning, and community engagement recommendations for local leaders, such as:<sup>10</sup>
  - Make equity an “integral part of policy making at every level of government” and a key objective when “developing plans, budgets, and in prioritizing and designing climate projects.”
  - “Prioritize investments in infrastructure that enable economic mobility, health, and safety,” such as green infrastructure and transit that is accessible from affordable housing, schools, and community spaces.<sup>11</sup>
  - Effectively engage communities, remove barriers to participation, and support community leadership in planning processes related to preparedness and infrastructure design.
- The RCAP 2.0 also includes social equity and racial justice recommendations in other chapters of the plan, such as:
  - **Public Health:** Assess indoor heat exposure in low-income households that may not have access to air conditioning or the ability to pay for air conditioning.

- **Energy and Fuel:** Increase accessibility to “energy efficiency solutions for limited-income families” and renewable energy financing options for homeowners and communities.<sup>12</sup>
- **Sustainable Communities and Transportation:** Require development planning to support pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit services. Maximize existing transit services through route expansion and regular maintenance; assessing and enforcing safety solutions for pedestrians and transit accessibility; and basic improvements, such as providing real-time transit arrival information; providing adequate seating at transit stops; and planting trees to provide shade for pedestrians, bicyclists, and passengers at transit access points.<sup>13</sup>
- **Agriculture:** Address heat exposure risks posed by rising temperatures on agriculture and farm workers.<sup>14</sup>
- **Natural Systems:** Reduce heat island effects, flood, and pollution risks by expanding tree canopy “in low-income areas and communities of color where the existing tree canopy is disproportionately sparse.”<sup>15</sup>
- These improvements were informed by the June 2017 South Florida Climate Change Equity Solutions Summit hosted by The CLEO Institute, Catalyst Miami, and the Center for American Progress, as well as years of grassroots advocacy to ensure that Southeast Florida’s climate change policies are equitable and reduce economic, public health and safety threats in under-resourced communities.<sup>16</sup>

### Climate change disproportionately threatens Southeast Florida communities and economies

- In 2017, Hurricane Irma caused an estimated \$50 billion in damage and 97 deaths nationwide, with the worst effects occurring in Florida.<sup>17</sup> Global and national trends show that extreme weather events are increasing in frequency and intensity. In 2017, the most destructive extreme weather events across the country—including hurricanes Irma and Maria—caused more than \$300 billion in damage, setting a new annual record.<sup>18</sup> While upper-income households often have the resources to rebuild relatively quickly in the wake of such disasters, it can take years for low- and moderate-income households to rebuild—if they are able to do so at all.<sup>19</sup>
- Sea level around Southeast Florida is projected to rise from 6 to 10 inches above 1992 levels by 2030, increasing flood risks and the need for resilient infrastructure and housing. Nuisance floods—small, frequent floods that can block roads and create other hazardous conditions—have outsized impacts on working people when they are forced to spend limited funds or go into debt to meet flood recovery costs; when places of employment close; or when commutes become physically impossible. By 2035, numerous Southeast Florida communities could flood an average of twice per month.<sup>20</sup> Without serious action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution from fossil fuel use, the sea level around Southeast Florida could rise more than 5 feet by 2100.<sup>21</sup>

- Credit rating agencies and insurance companies such as Moody's and Swiss Re are increasingly warning that without action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and build climate resilience, coastal cities will face critical financial risks including default, loss of insurance, and credit downgrades.<sup>22</sup>
- Without rigorous action to safeguard their economies and growing populations from climate change impacts, Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties could experience damages as high as 11.2 percent, 11.3 percent, 7.4 percent, and 8.5 percent of their gross domestic products, respectively, by the end of the century.<sup>23</sup>

In the face of increasingly dangerous climate change and extreme weather trends, the RCAP 2.0 serves as an important guide to local leaders as they shape policies and actions to build safer, healthier, and more prosperous communities.

---

## Endnotes

- 1 We Are Still In, "Cities and Counties," available at <https://www.wearestillin.com/cities-counties> (last accessed January 2018).
- 2 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "Welcome to the RCAP 2.0," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/regional-climate-action-plan/> (last accessed February 2018).
- 3 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "A Region Responds to a Changing Climate" (2012), available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/regional-climate-action-plan-final-ada-compliant.pdf>.
- 4 Center for American Progress, The CLEO Institute, and Catalyst Miami, "South Florida Climate Change Equity Solutions Summit," available at [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/06/26135419/RCAP-2.0\\_Recommendations\\_Miami-Climate-Solutions-Summit-FINAL-6.21.17.pdf](https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/06/26135419/RCAP-2.0_Recommendations_Miami-Climate-Solutions-Summit-FINAL-6.21.17.pdf) (last accessed February 2018).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Cathleen Kelly, Miranda Peterson, and Madeleine Boel, "Miami-Dade in Hot Water: Why Building Equitable Climate Resilience is Key to Public Health and Economic Stability in South Florida" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/28122217/MiamiDade-report1.pdf>.
- 7 Kelly, Peterson, and Boel, "Miami-Dade in Hot Water."
- 8 Cathleen Kelly, Cecilia Martinez, and Walker Hathaway-Williams, "A Framework for Local Action on Climate Change: 9 Ways Mayors Can Build Resilient and Just Cities" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2017/09/28/439712/framework-local-action-climate-change/>.
- 9 Kelly, Martinez, and Hathaway-Williams, "A Framework for Local Action on Climate Change"; Kelly, Peterson, and Boel, "Miami-Dade in Hot Water."
- 10 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "Social Equity," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendation-category/eq/> (last accessed January 2018).
- 11 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "EQ-3: Support equitable public infrastructure," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/support-equitable-public-infrastructure/> (last accessed February 2018).
- 12 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "EF-3: Increase access to energy efficiency," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/ef-3/> (last accessed February 2018); Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "EF-4: Increase access to distributed renewables," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/ef-4/> (last accessed February 2018); Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "EF-7: Help homeowners invest in renewables," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/ef-7/> (last accessed February 2018).
- 13 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "ST-18: Increase the use of transit," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/increase-the-use-of-transit/> (last accessed January 2018); Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "ST-12: Design sustainable and equitable transportation systems," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/recognize-vulnerable-users-in-planning/> (last accessed January 2018).
- 14 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "AG-11: Assess health risks to workers," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/assess-health-risk-workers/> (last accessed January 2018).
- 15 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "NS-14: Promote urban tree canopy," available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/recommendations/ns-14/> (last accessed January 2018).
- 16 Center for American Progress, The CLEO Institute, and Catalyst Miami, "South Florida Climate Change Equity Solutions Summit."
- 17 National Centers for Environmental Information, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Table of Events," available at <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events/US/1980-2017> (last accessed January 2018).
- 18 National Centers for Environmental Information, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Overview," available at <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/overview> (last accessed January 2018).
- 19 Kelly, Peterson, and Boel, "Miami-Dade in Hot Water"; Center for American Progress, The CLEO Institute, and Catalyst Miami, "South Florida Climate Change Equity Solutions Summit."
- 20 Union of Concerned Scientists, "Florida Faces Chronic Inundation," available at <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2017/07/when-rising-seas-hit-home-florida-fact-sheet.pdf> (last accessed February 2018).
- 21 Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, "Unified Sea Level Rise Projection: Southeast Florida" (2015), available at <http://www.southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-Compact-Unified-Sea-Level-Rise-Projection.pdf>.
- 22 Energy and Environmental News, "Moody's to cities: Prep for climate change or get downgrade," November 30, 2017, available at <https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/stories/1060067661/search?keyword=moody;Jennifer+Kay;Swiss+Re;Miami+Is+More+Vulnerable+to+Hurricanes+Like+Andrew;> Insurance Journal, August 21, 2017, available at <https://www.insurancejournal.com/magazines/mag-features/2017/08/21/461563.htm>.
- 23 Natalie Delgadillo, "MAP: How Much Climate Change Will Cost Each U.S. County," *Governing*, August 23, 2017, available at <http://www.governing.com/topics/transportation-infrastructure/gov-counties-climate-change-damages-economic-effects-map.html>; Miranda Peterson, "Miami-Dade Should Consider Hurricane Matthew a Wake-Up Call. Here's Why," Medium, October 17, 2016, available at <https://medium.com/@amprog/miami-dade-should-consider-hurricane-matthew-a-wake-up-call-heres-why-fc2763d1ef6b>.