

Climate Change and Impacts on Coastal and Human Heritage

By Magdalena A K Muir, Advisory Board Member, Climate Change, EUCC

Climate change impacts equally on the natural and human world along the world's coasts. A discussion ensues about the initiatives to address climate change and coasts from the World Heritage of UNESCO and the National Trust in the United Kingdom

Climate Change and World Heritage Expert Meeting

Climate change is affecting many natural and cultural World Heritage properties, and is likely to affect many more in the years to come. Among the Natural Sites under stress are the Great Barrier Reef (Australia), the Kilimanjaro National Park (Tanzania) and many biosphere reserves such as the Cape Floral Region (South Africa). Cultural sites are also threatened by rising sea levels (Venice and its lagoon, Italy), increased storminess and subsequent structural collapse (The Megalithic Temples of Malta), desertification (Timbuktu, Mali).

At its 29th session in Durban, South Africa in 2005, the World Heritage Committee decided to launch an initiative to assess the impact of global climate change on World Heritage sites. As requested by the Committee, a meeting of experts was organized at the UNESCO's headquarters in Paris on March 16th and 17, 2006. The meeting is organized by the UNESCO's World Heritage Centre in co-operation with the government of the United Kingdom and the United Nations Foundation. Invited participants are coming from around the globe and include researchers, representatives of international conventions and organisations, and non-governmental organisations. Expected outcomes of the March 16 and 17, 2006 meeting are:

- to review the nature and scale of the risks posed to World Heritage properties arising specifically from climate change,
- to prepare a report on the prediction and management of the effects of climate change on World Heritage and
- to propose a strategy framework to assist States Parties to implement appropriate management responses.

This discussion of climate change and world heritage is not without its controversy. The US became a Member of the World Heritage Committee after the Durban decision, and has issued a position paper stating that it opposes moves by the Committee to address the issue of climate change. The US Administration's position paper raises a number of objections, including:

- Continuing to cast doubt on the science of climate change as
"There is not unanimity regarding the impacts, causes, and how to or if man can affect the changes we are observing."
- Insisting that the five sites put forward by petitioners for inclusion on the World Heritage 'In Danger List' must have the support of the State concerned even though the regulations do not specify this.
"It continues to be the position of the USA that inclusion of any World Heritage Site on the List of World Heritage in Danger, even though not specifically articulated in Article 11.4 of the Convention, also requires consent of the State concerned."
- And suggesting the camaraderie of World Heritage may be undermined by these efforts:
"There is no compelling argument for the Committee to address the issue of global climate change--especially at the risk of losing the unified spirit and camaraderie that has become synonymous with World Heritage."

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/301>

http://www.foe.org.uk/resource/press_releases/usa_opposing_world_heritag_15032006.html

National Trust 's Climate Change Strategy for UK Heritage and Coastal Properties

In February 2006, the National Trust called upon the UK government to deliver a robust and targeted climate change adaptation strategy to help people and businesses reduce the risks from climate change. The Trust highlighted the ways in which climate change was posing new challenges to the National Trust's historic buildings and extensive countryside properties, mirroring impacts that will be felt right across society and the economy. The National Trust is rethinking its strategy because climate change is affecting hundreds of properties and stretches of coastline. A stocktaking on the impact of global warming and other forces of nature has concluded that they can't always conserve things exactly as they have in the past, whether species, habitats, coasts or buildings.

The National Trust has a climate change campaign, and several reports have been issued by the Trust (see titles and links below). The Trust, which owns 10% of the coastline of England, Wales and Northern Ireland - around 700 miles in all - says it is sounding a warning about what is going on before anyone else realises it. One report, *Shifting Shore and Change Climate*, states 126 National Trust coastal sites are already at risk of flooding, with another 33 facing inundation by tidal and river water in the next 100 years. One of the most dire predictions suggests 169 sites along nearly 380 miles of coast will be hit by erosion. Over the next century, it is forecast that some 15 per cent of the Trust's 700 miles of coastline will have eroded by as much as 100m, raising significant issues about how to enable the shoreline and all the interests there to adjust to rising sea levels and associated erosion and flooding.

Since the beginning of 2000, the National Trust has had to make over 850 separate insurance claims – to the value of over £7 million - for damage arising from either flooding or storm damage. There will be more flash floods like the one that devastated Boscastle, the Cornish village inundated in August 2004, where the trust's properties alone needed £1.4m worth of repairs and cleaning up, nearly a third of it not covered by insurance.

The Trust also predicts a difficult future for its historic properties, not built to cope with the havoc caused by drier summers, warmer winters and increasing storms. Pests, some new to Britain, others now active throughout the year, are changing the nature of famous parks and gardens and threatening precious tapestries and other fabrics; algal blooms are invading ornamental ponds; and lawns, the pride and joy of famous houses, need mowing year round.

Exceptionally long periods of dry weather have also taken their toll. Each year, the Trust is having to deal with moorland fires exacerbated by the dry conditions. Dry weather is also impacting the Trust's historic houses, gardens and parks. The stream at Hughenden dried up entirely for the first time last summer, while the beech trees there are under increasing strain from the dry conditions.

A number of other climate impacts whose effects are incremental but none the less significant for the Trust's work. Increasingly mild winters and hotter summers mean that the Trust's historic gardens need to be maintained in different ways and the elongation of the growing season places new demands on the Trust's gardening teams – already the mowing season has extended by a month. The changing distribution and growing patterns of a range of species is also having a growing impact on our countryside properties - and in many instances - our historic collections where infestations of destructive insects are becoming more common, potentially threatening historic tapestries and fabrics.

The Trust plans to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions by cutting its electricity bills by 10% by next year, and using green technologies even in old properties such as the 200-year-old Gibson Mill, near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, where energy saving measures include solar thermal panels for heating, water turbines and composting toilets. The trust is also looking at whether it should offer its land for small-scale hydro, wind and wood fuel power schemes.

The Trust believes it can show on the ground the effects of climate change and educate the public, for instance in the need to encourage more carfree visiting, as scientists and politicians grapple with the problems and argue at national and international level. Golden Cap and Studland in Dorset, West Wight on the Isle of Wight, Formby Sands in Cumbria, and Porlock in Somerset are areas at risk from erosion and or flooding.

http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside_environment/w-climate_change.htm

[Forecast? - Changeable!](#)

Examples of climate change impacts around the National Trust (PDF/1.28MB)

http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-climate_change-forecast_changeable.pdf

['Shifting Shores - living with a changing coastline'](#)

Our experience as Britain's largest coastal landowner, (PDF/930KB)

http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-shifting_shores.pdf

['Gardening in the Global Greenhouse'](#) (summary)

The impacts of climate change on domestic gardens, nationally important heritage gardens, the landscape industry and the retail horticultural industry (PDF/4.4MB)

http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-gardening_global_greenhouse_summary.pdf

[Environmental practices](#)

http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside_environment/w-environmental_practices.htm