Environmental and Energy Study Institute

Briefing Notice

Drier and Hotter: Managing Climate Risks in the Southwest

Thursday, February 13, 2014
2 PM – 3:30 PM
210 Cannon House Office Building
Please RSVP to expedite check-in: www.eesi.org/021314southwest#RSVP

The **Environmental and Energy Study Institute** (EESI) invites you to a briefing examining the current and projected impacts of climate change in the Southwest and regional efforts to manage these risks. The Southwest is already the driest and hottest region in the United States, and California is in the midst of a historic drought. The draft Third National Climate Assessment (NCA) – the final version is due in March – projects that the region's climate may become even more severe. These changes are having substantial adverse effects on the regional economy and quality of life, forcing local leaders to develop creative solutions to combat drought and other extreme conditions. How can the Southwest best address current impacts while also building climate resiliency to manage risk and foster long-term prosperity? Speakers for this forum are:

- **Eleanor Bastian**, Legislative Director, Office of Rep. Diana DeGette (D-CO)
- **Patrick Gonzalez, Ph.D.**, Climate Change Scientist, U.S. National Park Service
- **Chris Treese**, External Affairs Manager, Colorado River District
- **Margaret Bowman**, Acting Environment Program Director, Walton Family Foundation

The effects of climate change already are being felt in the Southwest, which the NCA defines as Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. Snowpack levels have fallen over the past 50 years, limiting a key source of the region's water supply. From 2001-2010, the streamflow of the region's major rivers was 5-37 percent lower than the 20th century average. Prolonged droughts and insect infestations have made forest ecosystems more vulnerable to wildfires and disease. Rising sea levels have increased flooding and erosion in California's coastal areas.

Climate change is expected to disrupt the livelihoods of many in the Southwest. Today, 56 million Americans live in the region. By 2050, its population is projected to rise to 94 million, putting additional strain on water resources. Water scarcity threatens the region's irrigation-dependent agriculture sector, which accounts for 79 percent of regional water withdrawals. The Southwest is home to more than half of the nation's high-value specialty crops, such as vegetables, fruits, and nuts. Because these crops are particularly vulnerable to weather extremes, climate change will likely reduce yields.

Many state and local authorities in the Southwest are moving forward with climate adaptation initiatives. California released a draft update of its adaptation strategy in December 2013. New Mexico's Active Water Resource Management program, which gives the state the tools to administer scarce water resources in cases of drought, has been cited as a model for other states. Salt Lake City, Tucson and Flagstaff formed the Western Adaptation Alliance in 2010 to share resources and best practices to improve local resiliency. The Alliance has grown to include Denver, Las Vegas, Phoenix, and others.

This event is free and open to the public.
For more information, contact John-Michael Cross at jmcross@eesi.org or (202) 662-1883.