

Climate Change and Urban Form in the West

Rebecca Carter, Social Science and Climate Change Researcher, Sonoran Institute, Tucson, Arizona

Global climate change adds another dimension to the role of urban land use planning in determining the future of the West. The West has been one of the fastest-growing regions of the U.S. for decades. Much of the region's growth is taking place in sprawling development patterns on the edges of major urban areas. Land is being consumed for development almost three times faster than the population is growing. Population growth alone only accounts for a quarter of the increase in vehicle miles driven over the past couple of decades. The region faces additional challenges including a changing economy and limited resources such as water, energy and open space, which must increasingly be shared among additional residents.

Land use patterns will have major implications on how well the region is able to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Land use-related climate change practices and policies have the potential to be among the most cost effective and efficient ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and are essential in adapting to existing and inevitable climate change – and often provide additional economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits as well. This session will explore the role of urban form in mitigating and adapting to climate change in the West.

Rebecca Carter is the Social Science and Climate Change Researcher for the Sonoran Institute. She works within the Institute's Growth Policy Program to conduct research on the socioeconomic and climate change implications of land use and conservation in the Intermountain West. As a graduate student and postdoc, Rebecca researched and wrote about the impacts of drought, population growth and policy on urban water supplies in the Southwest through her work with the Climate Assessment for the Southwest (CLIMAS). Rebecca earned bachelor's degrees in Journalism and interdisciplinary studies, and a master's and PhD in Cultural Anthropology, at the University of Arizona.