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Summary of Conference Presentation

There are multiple, complex inter-linkages between the tourism economy and climate change. With its close connections to the environment and climate itself, tourism is considered to be a climate-sensitive economic sector similar to agriculture, insurance, energy, and transportation. Climate defines the length and quality of many types of tourism seasons and plays a major role in destination choice and tourist spending. Climate affects a wide range of the environmental resources that are critical attractions for tourism in many destinations, such as wildlife productivity and biodiversity, water levels and quality, and snow conditions. Climate similarly has an important influence on environmental conditions that can deter tourists, including infectious disease, wildfires, insect or water-borne pests and extreme events. It is the response of tourists to the complexity of destination impacts that will reshape consumer demand patterns, therefore understanding tourist perceptions of climate change impacts is central to more accurate projections of tourist demand.

The tourism economy is predicated on personal mobility and regulatory initiatives developed to mitigate climate change will have significant impacts on transport systems and thus the mobility of tourists. The impacts of forthcoming climate policy on tourism demand are expected to be most pronounced in destinations which are the most peripheral and least accessible to markets. Consequently, it is anticipated that the integrated effects of climatic change, climate-induced environmental change, and climate change policy will have far-reaching impacts on tourism destinations; impacts which are already becoming evident at destinations in the US and around the world.

All tourism businesses and destinations will need to adapt to climate change in order to minimize associated risks and capitalize upon new opportunities, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. Although, climate change is slowly entering into decision-making of a range of tourism stakeholders (e.g., investors, insurance companies, tourism enterprises, governments, and tourists), knowledge of the capability of current climate adaptations to cope successfully with future climate change remains rudimentary within the sector.

Tourism and recreation are important aspects of the Southwest economy. The regional manifestations of climate change will generate both negative and positive impacts in the tourism sector, with differential vulnerability by market segment and destination. Changes elsewhere in the tourism system (impacts in competing destinations and source markets, transportation costs) will also be extremely important for the Southwest. This presentation will provide an overview of these challenges to the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism in the Southwest.

Background Readings:

United Nations World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environment Programme (2008) Climate Change and Tourism - Responding to Global Challenges. Part II: Technical Report. http://www.unwto.org/sdt/news/en/news_det.php?id=2421

IPCC Forth Assessment Report (2007) – Working Group 2 – North America (Chapter 14) – Tourism and Recreation (pgs 626 and 634) <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4-wg2-chapter14.pdf>

U.S. Senate Hearing on: “The Issue of the Potential Impacts of Global Warming on Recreation and the Recreation Industry.” Thursday, May 24, 2007.

http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=9fe58fa8-802a-23ad-45e4-826fcc62683d

http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Statement&Statement_ID=ba19ddb7-7cd3-42f0-8638-7725006b77ae

Morehouse, B., Frisvold, G., Bark-Hodgins, R. (2007) How can tourism research benefit from multi-disciplinary assessments of climate change?. Developments in Tourism Climatology (A. Matzarakis, C. R. de Freitas, D. Scott (eds). http://www.mif.uni-freiburg.de/isb/ws3/report/dTcl_2007_morehouseetal.pdf