

Initial Citizen Committee Recommendations

Goal Statement IX. Statement on Climate Change

In looking ahead 50 years, the Citizen Committee believes it is important for Skagit County to prepare for some of the potential impacts of climate change on our community. The University of Washington is in the process of preparing a report on projected climate impacts to Skagit County. Unfortunately, the full University of Washington report was not complete in time to be included in our process. We have not received a presentation on its findings nor had an opportunity to discuss potential recommendations with university or other researchers.

A preliminary summary of this report, which we have reviewed, cites data showing global temperature increases over the past century and particularly over recent decades. Higher temperatures in Skagit County are best demonstrated by photographic evidence of the shrinkage of glaciers in the North Cascades. Continued warmer temperatures could also likely result in the following local changes: reduced snow pack, loss of glaciers, increased flood potential, lower and warmer river flows in the summer, sea level rise, and increased wildfire risk, based on the preliminary summary report. How large these changes will be and how quickly they will occur are uncertain.

We appreciate all of the work that went into development of the 2010 Skagit County Climate Action Plan. We support its recommendations to reduce the collective contributions of all of us to greenhouse gas generation. However, the Climate Action Plan does not focus on the separate question of how Skagit County and the people who live here should adapt to the likely consequences of climate change. Our planning challenge is how to incorporate such climate uncertainty into land use decisions that relate to floodplain management, water use, development regulations, infrastructure investments, and wildfire management, to name just some of the clearest examples.

When the final University of Washington report is available, we encourage serious and widespread community discussion of these practical implications. We regret not being in a position to incorporate them in our recommendations.