



Office of the Washington State Climatologist

# Strategic Plan



**W** EARTHLAB  
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



Image: Two people kayaking  
in Olympic National Park





Office of the Washington State Climatologist

## Report prepared in 2023 by:

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### **Website**

<https://climate.washington.edu/>

Image: Mount Rainier  
on a clear spring day



# History

The Office of the Washington State Climatologist (OWSC) was established in 2003 and funded by the state in 2004. The Office fills a valuable niche in Washington State, with a focus on current and past climate, providing data and information, and extensive media and public engagement on current climate conditions and climate change. OWSC is an impactful resource in spite of its small size, and plans to expand its reach and increase its impact with increased capacity. Stakeholders highlight several current key strengths of the office:

- Go-to source for current and past climate information; focus on “the here and now”
- Deep relationships with agencies, media, and research community
- History of applied science that answers key societal questions
- Extensive public and media engagement

Through its work, OWSC has developed valued long-term relationships with key partners, particularly in the water sector and drought response. One of the big successes of OWSC has been nearly a decade of close coordination with the Water Supply Availability Committee (WSAC), a Washington State interagency coordination committee.

In addition to monthly coordination on drought conditions, OWSC’s participation has served to build the capacity of agency staff to access and interpret data as well as plan for the effects of climate change. OWSC also has a history of engaging in applied climate research that addresses key questions about trends and impacts – for example, our journal article on past trends in heat waves has been widely cited; the Office is currently working on updating that analysis.

Image: Aerial atmospheric  
photo with moon



## Mission

Our **mission** is to support the use and application of climate information by the public, local and state decision makers, communities, tribes, and other organizations in Washington State, with a focus on equitably supporting access and use of this information. We provide technical information and analysis, data resources, training and capacity building, and facilitate collaboration.

## Vision

We **envision** a society where all people in Washington State are informed about past, present, and future climate. Climate information is accessible to all, equitably, and used to support informed decisions about a climate-resilient future.

## Goals, Strategies, & Activities

We have developed four goals that support our mission and vision and several strategies to achieve each goal. There is a wide range of potential activities to advance our revised mission and vision, and they are designed to be scaled with increasing resources. The following pages include longer descriptions of our goals, along with a few examples of the activities that are envisioned for each.

### GOALS

1. Provide reputable climate data and interpretation
2. Broaden climate services through targeted engagement
3. Coproduce new applied climate research
4. Ensure resources for the sustainability of the Office

Image: Round hay bales at sunset in Palouse



# GOAL

Image: Seattle skyline sunset in summer

## 1

### Provide reputable climate data and interpretation

Expand and maintain the Office's role as a reliable source for climate information and data. This includes maintaining a well-functioning website with a curated selection of data resources as well as a more targeted approach of tailoring climate services for new and distinct audiences.

#### Strategies:



Facilitate access to data and support its interpretation



Provide the climate context for past and current weather events



Develop tailored communications for specific audiences



Provide resources on projections and impacts



Proactively engage with the media and priority stakeholders

For example, OWSC will develop new communication products to highlight the “shifting baselines” in our climate system: how the changes experienced so far provide us with a window into future climate change impacts. To help dissem-

inate climate change science while also building capacity in the region, we will partner with other local groups – such as Conservation Districts – to engage with communities, practitioners, and others across Washington State.

# GOAL

Image: Autumn leaves changing along the Spokane River

## 2

### Broaden climate services through targeted engagement

Engage with practitioners and researchers to support decision-making, build capacity, and motivate decision-relevant research. Prioritize collaborators based on their needs and alignment with the expertise of the Office.

#### Strategies:



Develop long-term collaborative relationships with priority stakeholders



Build capacity among public sector staff and professionals



Build better partnerships across UW



Build capacity among K-12 students and educators

Two key elements of our new engagement approach will be to prioritize efforts based on need, and a focus on capacity building. For example, we plan to engage

with existing networks, such as WSU Extension, to provide technical support and capacity building, thereby leveraging their reach across the state.





Image: UW students on a winter hike in the Cascades

# 3

## Coproduce new applied climate research

Initiate new applied research in partnership with practitioners. Leverage new and existing partnerships, with a focus on decision-relevant research that is multidisciplinary in scope and tailored to Washington State.

### Strategies:



Conduct research on the regional weather and climate



Cultivate applied, multidisciplinary research collaborations on regional climate

OWSC's work already includes many examples of timely, collaborative, and decision-relevant research – our priority is to expand on this work with a specific focus on long-term research collaborations with communities and practitioners. This could include, for example, new research with the Northwest Avalanche Center to evaluate trends in their station network, or a partnership with the Washington Department of Ecology to evaluate soil moisture estimates. We also plan to expand our collaborations with other researchers, such as our ongoing work with health experts to link current weather and climate conditions to adverse health outcomes in Washington State.

# GOAL

Image: Honey bee on apple blossoms in Central Washington

## 4

### Ensure resources for the sustainability of the Office

Explore a variety of different funding sources to grow the capacity of the Office. Adopting a model of continuous learning, periodically evaluate past and ongoing engagement efforts to understand our impacts and identify ways to improve over time.

#### Strategies:



Seek additional state funding



Investigate opportunities for university support



Explore private funding opportunities



Evaluate impact and effectiveness of activities



Support professional staff development

This work will include exploring possible requests to the Washington state legislature, pursuing opportunities for private funding, and working with academic, agency, and other collaborators to apply for research grants. Ensuring the

sustainability of the Office will also require periodic revisions and updates to the strategic plan – we plan to couple this with evaluations of the impact of OWSC's work to prioritize efforts going forward.