

**AAG Newsletter  
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## Geography and Climate Change

Geographers have long played key roles in climate change research, and geography's tools and methods are and will be crucial to understanding, limiting, and adapting to climate changes in the decades ahead.

After years of delay and denial, responsible climate change research and responsive policy agendas are now assuming center stage in the Obama administration. Nearly all federal agencies now have legacy or newly-mandated and funded research programs that actively seek to identify causes and impacts of global climate change, and policies for mitigating or adapting to these impacts. As a discipline with long experience in the integration of the physical and social sciences, geography offers a well-placed bridge that can bring together the disparate natural and human system elements of climate change research and policy.

The US Congress is now poised to undertake debate and potential definitive legislative action on several major climate change legislative bills during Spring of 2010, precisely during the timeframe of the AAG's upcoming Annual meeting. For these reasons and more, *Geography and Climate Change* has been designated as one of several key overarching and featured themes of the AAG's Annual meeting to be held in Washington, DC this next Spring, on April 14-18, 2010. Both the timing and the venue of this particular AAG Annual Meeting affords geographers around the world a uniquely significant opportunity to showcase geography's contributions to climate change research, and to engage and influence US national and international policy on climate change, at a critical juncture in its formulation. This will be a most meaningful moment for geographers to interact with federal agency researchers and US national policy makers on perhaps the most consequential issue of

our generation, both at the AAG meeting itself and throughout the city, including on Capitol Hill.

The AAG currently has invitations pending to several high-level Obama administration officials to attend and speak at our AAG gathering, expected to number 7,000 attendees. Based on the responses we have received to date, we anticipate that several senior climate change officials and scientists will be in attendance, and that the dialogue at the AAG meeting this spring will provide an important national and international forum for addressing and moving forward key science and policy dimensions of the climate change issue.

Many special sessions on Climate Change at the AAG Annual Meeting will also bring together top scientists and climate change policy leaders to explore coordination and synergy of climate change research and mitigation programs across multiple government agencies, and to enhance collaboration among governmental researchers and policy makers with university researchers and educators.

For example, Carol Harden's presidential plenary will form the Opening Keynote Session of this year's AAG Annual Meeting, and will feature *America's Climate Choices*, a major ongoing National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study in which geographers and geographic analysis have played a central role. This study will be released just prior to the AAG Annual Meeting, and this AAG keynote session will be one of the first public presentations of the study results. A primary goal of the NAS *America's Climate Choices* study is to address cross-cutting issues associated with global climate change, including the science and technology challenges involved, to identify effective steps and promising strategies that can inform and



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guide national and global responses to climate change.

Geography was exceptionally well represented in the NAS study, with three of the study's four investigative panels led or co-led by geographers, and many other geographers involved in key components of the research. Presenters at the AAG's presidential session on *America's Climate Choices* will include Diana Liverman, vice-chair of the NAS study's Informing Decisions panel; Marilyn Brown, vice-chair of the Limiting Emissions panel; Tom Wilbanks, vice-chair of the Adapting to Impacts panel; and Billie Lee Turner of the Advancing Science panel. Other geographers involved in the NAS study included Ruth DeFries, Bob Kates, Susi Moser, Jim Buizer, and Linda Mearns.

Hundreds of other sessions addressing geographical dimensions of Climate Change are planned for the AAG's Washington, DC meeting. These include a ten-year retrospective analysis of the AAG's *Global Changes, Local Places* research program and publication, with implications for current policy and research in the climate change field; presentations on three new AAG programs focused on climate change education and teaching; perspectives on the use of GIS in climate change regulatory and enforcement strategies, including cap and trade scenarios; and sessions sponsored by US federal agencies on fostering inter-agency synergies and coordination of climate change programs. Numerous other sessions will cover the full gamut of current climate change research, ranging from

carbon sequestration and climate change modeling to vulnerability analyses and social equities of climate change control and adaptation policies.

I encourage geographers from around the globe to bring to the fore their research and perspectives on climate change and related topics during the coming pivotal months of this debate. The AAG's Annual Meeting in Washington, DC may well represent the most important time and place for geography to engage and influence the far reaching science and public policy (and inherently geographical) decisions now confronting us on the issue of climate change.

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