

EDITORS' PREFACE

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The United States initiated the National Assessment of the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change in 1997. The National Assessment is the first response of the United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) to a congressional mandate to assess the potential consequences of global change on the USA. Specifically, the Global Change Research Act of 1990 decreed that the USGCRP 'shall prepare and submit to the President and the Congress an assessment which:

- integrates, evaluates, and interprets the findings of the Program and discusses the scientific uncertainties associated with such findings;
- analyzes the effects of global change on the natural environment, agriculture, energy production and use, land and water resources, transportation, human health and welfare, human social systems, and biological diversity; and
- analyzes current trends in global change, both human-induced and natural, and projects major trends for the subsequent 25 to 100 years' (USGCRP 2000).

The National Assessment aims to evaluate what is known about the impacts of climate variability and change in relation to other pressures on the public, the environment, and the USA's resources. To reach that goal, the National Assessment developed a structure that includes 3 essential elements: regional assessments, sectoral assessments, and national synthesis. There are 19 regional assessments devoted to uncovering the potential impacts of climate change on their areas and to determining climate-related concerns and priorities of regional stakeholders. The 5 sectoral assessments are national in scope; they assess the impacts of climate change on the goods and services on which individuals, society, and the economy depend. The national synthesis integrates findings of the regional and sectoral assessments and builds upon these findings to develop and address overarching questions about climate variability and change (USGCRP 2000).

This SPECIAL presents one of the regional assessments: the Mid-Atlantic Regional Assessment (MARA),

supported by, and conducted in partnership with, the EPA Global Change Research Program. *Climate Research* (CR) has shown special interest in the integrated assessment of climate change impacts at regional and national levels. The previous 4 SPECIALS have addressed the topic from varying perspectives. CR SPECIAL 3 (Dixon et al. 1996) focused on issues of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change in African ecosystems. CR SPECIAL 4 (Ramos-Mañé 1997) concentrated on problems that Latin American resource systems are facing today and will be facing under conditions of climate change. CR SPECIAL 5 (Kalkstein et al. 1998) looked at particularly vulnerable regions around the world, while CR SPECIAL 6 (Mimura 1999) assessed resource impacts and management strategies for selected countries.

CR SPECIAL 7 continues that tradition by offering a more holistic, integrated view of a relatively small geographic area, the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States. Key topics of MARA include positive and negative climate impacts on water, forests, ecosystems, agriculture, coastal zones, and human health. The assessment integrates science with substantial stakeholder participation. This SPECIAL concludes by summarizing important findings and the most important research gaps for similar assessments.

LITERATURE CITED

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