

PREFACE

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In 1997, planning started for an integrated assessment of climate variability, change and vulnerability in the United States Southwest. The overall aim of this initiative was to assess and to improve regional climatic and hydrologic information and understanding of climate vulnerability. A critical goal was to communicate this information and understanding in a form that is useful to stakeholders. In 1998, a pilot project, the Climate Assessment Project for the Southwest (CLIMAS), was initiated with support from the Office of Global Programs (OGP) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

CLIMAS is a continuing process rather than a study culminating in a single product, which distinguishes it from the national and regional assessments made under the United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). Although it addresses some of the same topics as do the USGCRP regional and national assessments (see Sprigg & Hinkley 2000), CLIMAS is distinguished by being a highly participatory research and applications process. As a process, it still has discrete products, but not a final report or ending point. CLIMAS attempts to influence decision-making that uses climate information or that could benefit from using climate information. It accomplishes this task by improving the accessibility of climatic and hydrologic

information, by introducing climatic and hydrologic information to decision-making and by initiating research to improve the climatic and hydrologic information that is available.

The following 7 papers offer a multi-faceted view of climate and climate information in the semi-arid Southwest. The CR SPECIAL begins with a paper that develops the climatic context of the Southwest. This is followed by 3 papers that review climate information and forecasts for the region, including a case study of the 1997-98 El Niño. The next 2 papers highlight the CLIMAS sectoral studies of ranching, which is a major land use in the region and is especially vulnerable to climate variability, and of urban water consumption, which in parts of the region is rapidly displacing agriculture as the principal water use. The final paper takes an integrated look at one community cutting across all sections of the economy.

LITERATURE CITED

Sprigg WA, Hinkley T (2000) Preparing for a changing climate: the potential consequences of climate variability and change. Southwest Regional Assessment Group, Institute for the Study of Planet Earth, University of Arizona

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