



AAG

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
of GEOGRAPHERS

AAG Resolution On Climate Change¹

(adopted by the AAG Council April 3, 2019)

Whereas: The American Association of Geographers (AAG) is a nonprofit scientific and educational society founded in 1904 with close to 12,000 members in 2019 who are located in the United States and nearly 100 other countries;

Whereas: The objectives of the Association are to further professional investigations in geography and to encourage the application of geographic findings in education, government, and business;²

Whereas: Gilbert F. White (1911-2006) was among the most distinguished and honored American geographers of the 20th Century who stimulated efforts to foster and improve human adjustments to the risks of our endangered planet through better-informed public and private sector decision-making;

Whereas: Gilbert F. White was awarded the National Medal of Science by President Clinton in 2000 for “major contributions to the study of water systems in developing countries, global environmental change, international cooperation, nuclear winter, geography education and the mitigation of natural hazards including earthquakes, hurricanes, and drought;”

Whereas: The planet is now experiencing more frequent, more intense, and more costly disasters associated with anthropogenic climate change in the forms of prolonged drought, wildfires, intensified hurricanes, coastal and river flooding and extreme temperatures. Deglaciation of mountainous regions threatens water supplies and hydropower generation for hundreds of millions of people in Asia, Europe, western Latin America, and the Pacific Northwest. Accelerated melting of Arctic and Antarctic land ice will cause rising sea levels to inundate portions of coastal cities worldwide by mid-century;

Whereas: At the global scale, the last four years have been the hottest on record. One-fifth of all corals have died in the past three years. World carbon emissions rose 2.7 percent in 2018 despite efforts by many nations to meet the goals of the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement;³

Whereas: As climate change renders vast areas of the globe uninhabitable, mass population migrations and competition for water, arable land, and living space will heighten the likelihood of armed conflict, either conventional or nuclear;

Whereas: Gilbert F. White challenged professional geographers to study and communicate the risks of our endangered planet and to help stimulate responsible policies and decisions by all sectors of human society;

Therefore be it resolved that: In the spirit of Gilbert F. White, the American Association of Geographers urges the Government of the United States to resume its leadership in combating climate change, including (but not limited to) strategies that:

1. *Recognize human activities as the preeminent cause of accelerating climate change*, as emphatically concluded by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)⁴ and the Fourth U.S. National Climate Assessment,⁵ among many other authoritative studies around the world;
2. *Reaffirm U.S. commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement*, and—in cooperation with the international community—intensify efforts to limit emissions of greenhouse gasses to control further rise in global temperatures;
3. *Ratify Kigali Amendment of the Montreal Protocol to limit hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) production and consumption;*⁶
4. *Encourage transition of the U.S. economy to embrace energy conservation and substitution of sustainable energy sources in place of fossil fuels;*

5. *Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions* through incentives, taxes, regulations, public transit, carbon recapture and other means;
6. Promote *continued innovation by states and local governments and the private sector* to conserve energy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels (e.g. through “LEED” green building codes, reforestation and reduced deforestation, watershed management, sustainable transportation, and other means);⁷
7. Stimulate public and private sector decision-makers to *prepare for rapid-onset impacts of climate change* (e.g. wildfire, electrical grid failure, fuel and water shortages, and coastal flooding) through enhanced emergency response, relief, and recovery capabilities;
8. Reaffirm that climate change policy at all levels of society from international to local must be based on *sound, verifiable science* as reflected in the IPCC reports, the U.S. National Climate Assessment Reports, and other authoritative studies by scientists around the world;

Be it further resolved that: The AAG will publicize this resolution to government leaders, to other scientific bodies, and to the general public through a press release and other available means. The AAG should further encourage its membership to stimulate public understanding of climate change and its potential impacts (including armed conflicts) through relevant research, teaching, publications, and participation in public forums, study panels, op-ed columns, blog posts, and other available means.

¹ This resolution was presented by members of the panel session on “Recalling Gilbert F. White” at the AAG Annual Meeting, April 3-7, 2019 in Washington, DC (Rutherford H. Platt, Ian Burton, Susan Cutter, James Kenneth Mitchell, James L. Wescoat, Claire Rubin, Martin A. Reuss). This resolution complements the earlier AAG Resolution on Climate Change of March 6, 2006.

² AAG Constitution, Article II, first sentence.

³ The Paris Climate Agreement seeks to limit global temperature rise to less than 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels. As of March, 2019, 185 nation-states out of 197 original signers have ratified the agreement: <https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/status-of-ratification>.

⁴ The IPCC was created by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988 to provide policymakers with regular scientific assessments on climate change, its implications and potential future risks, as well as to put forward adaptation and mitigation options. As of March, 2019, 195 nation-states are members of IPCC and thousands of scientists worldwide contribute to its reports: <https://www.ipcc.ch/>. A Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C (SR15) was published by the IPCC on 8 October 2018: <https://unfccc.int/topics/science/workstreams/cooperation-with-the-ipcc/ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-15-degc>

⁵ The Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II was released in November, 2018. Based on the findings of thirteen U.S. Government agencies and other scientists, it focuses on the human welfare, societal, and environmental elements of climate change and variability for 10 regions and 18 national topics, <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/front-matter/about/>

⁶ The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer entered into force on 1 January 2019, following ratification by 65 countries, not including the United States. <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/kigali-amendment-enters-into-force-bringing-promise-of-reduced-global-warming/>

⁷ LEED refers to “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design”: <https://new.usgbc.org/leed>