

Community Climate Outlook

ERIE COUNTY, PA

Erie County residents will face increasingly severe weather- and climate-related hazards, such as heat waves, flooding, and shifting seasons.

As the frequency and intensity of local hazards change, it is important for all of us to protect communities and local habitats. Using the best available evidence, scientists can project how climate (long-term averages in daily weather) will change in the future, and the effects this will have on local communities.

Climate information can guide decision-making to help us plan and prepare for future weather and climate hazards. It is important that action includes areas with limited resources and people at higher risk. With justice-minded planning and preparation, Erie County can build a resilient community for all residents and future generations.



SHIFTING SEASONS



KEY MESSAGE: Seasons are changing in length and timing in Erie County with an earlier spring, delay of fall, and a shorter winter with less ice covering Lake Erie. While a longer frost-free period can benefit some crops or allow for double cropping, it can limit plant diversity including wine grape varieties, encourage invasive species, and threaten human and ecosystem health. Within the next 50 years (by 2070), the frost-free period will average 4 to 7 weeks¹ longer in Erie County.



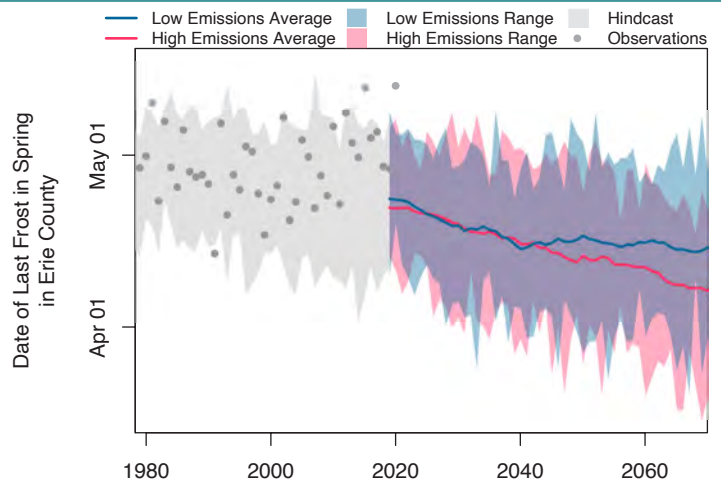
REDUCED HUMAN HEALTH: Milder winters help more ticks and mosquitos survive the winter and earlier springs make their biting season longer. Earlier springs also cause trees and flowers to bloom earlier leading to a longer allergy season.



REDUCED ICE COVER: Shorter winters and warmer water in Lake Erie increase the evaporation season length and delay ice formation. Ice cover on Lake Erie has decreased by 50% between 1973 and 2010. While reduced ice cover keeps shipping lanes open longer in winter, lower lake levels can force ships to reduce their cargo load and cause erosion. Reduced ice cover also increases lake effect snow and disrupts ice fishing.



Photo courtesy of Derek, stock.adobe.com



The graph shows the date of the last frost (less than or equal to 32°F) in spring. Dots represent observed dates of the last frost in spring and the gray shading shows the hindcast². Two scenarios³ of the future are shown as a high-emissions scenario (RCP 8.5) in red and a low-emissions scenario (RCP 4.5) in blue. Data for the future scenarios³ are retrieved from Multivariate Adaptive Constructed Analogs (MACA), and observed data are from the Gridded Surface Meteorological Dataset (gridMET).

FUTURE SCENARIOS³: Future climate will depend, in part, on the efforts that we take today to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and methane gas. This fact sheet presents two scenarios³ of future climate based on a combination of climate models scaled to Erie County, PA. The first scenario, a higher-emissions scenario (RCP8.5), assumes continued increase of fossil fuel emissions, with no mitigation. The second, a lower-emissions scenario (RCP4.5), is a scenario where we tackle the issue of emissions head-on by responsibly using our natural resources and implementing strategies that begin to reduce global fossil fuel emissions by 2050, stabilizing carbon dioxide concentrations before 2100.

Access resources for adaptation, data references, and additional outlooks by visiting: marisa.psu.edu/outlooks



CHANGING TEMPERATURE PATTERNS



KEY MESSAGE: Human health, lake health, and infrastructure are all threatened by higher temperatures. At 95°F, it is hard to keep indoor areas and our bodies cool. Erie County's summers are getting hotter. Over the past 30 years, it was rare to have any days with temperatures above 95°F in Erie County.¹ Within the next 50 years (by 2070), Erie County can expect a yearly average of 3 to 11 days above 95°F, with associated increases in cooling costs, reduced air quality, and heat-related illnesses.



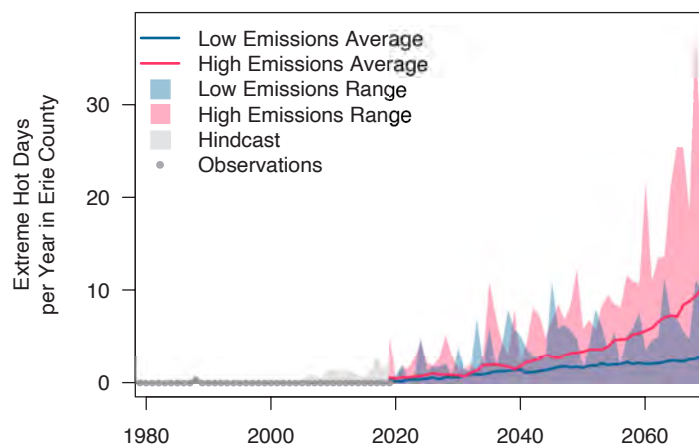
HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES: Heatwaves can kill people and pets. In Pennsylvania, more than 80 people have died from extreme heat between 2010 and 2019. Individuals at higher risk include children, pregnant women, older adults, outdoor workers, and lower-income residents.



REDUCED LAKE HEALTH: Across the Great Lakes, surface water temperature has increased. Warmer water expands dead zones⁴ and the range of invasive species like zebra mussels in Lake Erie, which threaten the survival of yellow perch, walleye, and steelhead, disrupting local fisheries and ecosystems. Warmer water also worsens algal blooms which can close beaches and contaminate drinking water.



Photo courtesy of Daveynin, Flickr



The graph shows the number of days in a year with temperatures above or equal to 95°F. Dots represent observed annual days of extreme temperatures and the gray shading shows the hindcast². Two scenarios³ of the future are shown as a high-emissions scenario (RCP 8.5) in red and a low-emissions scenario (RCP 4.5) in blue. Data for the future scenarios³ are retrieved from MACA, and observed data are from gridMET.

CHANGING RAINFALL PATTERNS



KEY MESSAGE: Heavy rainfall in Erie County is increasing in frequency and intensity, causing property damage, septic backups, well contamination, mold and indoor air quality issues, fluctuations of water level in Lake Erie, and impacts to water quality in local streams, rivers, and Lake Erie. Annual rainfall in Erie County will likely increase by an average of 2 to 3 inches (2050-2079 average compared to the 1990-2019 average).



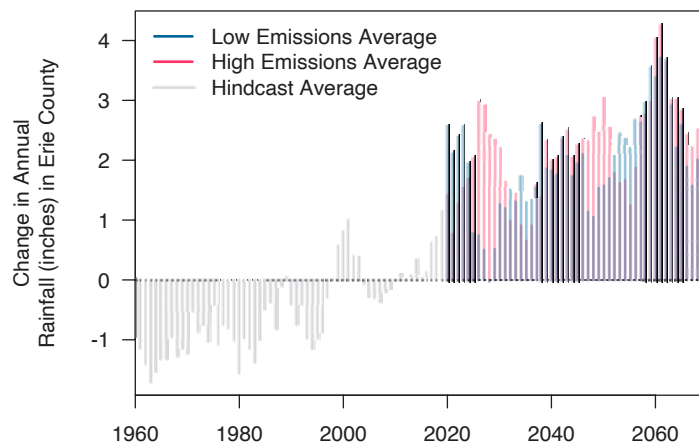
FLOODING: Heavy rain overwhelms infrastructure and drainage systems, causing property damage and increasing lake water levels. It can quickly cover streets and become deadly to drivers.



Photo courtesy of M. Goralski, Wikimedia Commons



REDUCED HUMAN HEALTH: Rising water tables cause septic backups and groundwater pollution, putting drinking water at risk of contamination. Changing moisture levels impact the spread of mold and illness, including tick- and mosquito-borne diseases as high humidity promote their activity.



The graph shows the change in annual rainfall compared to the average between 1990 and 2019. The gray lines show the hindcast². Two scenarios³ of the future are shown as a high-emissions scenario (RCP 8.5) in red and a low-emissions scenario (RCP 4.5) in blue. Data for the future scenarios³ are retrieved from MACA.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ Relative to a 1990 to 2019 average.

² Hindcasts are model results for a historical period. Hindcasts are useful for comparing observations with model estimates.

³ Scenarios are a plausible representation of future events. They are not predictions or forecasts, but they offer insight into the implications of developments and actions.

⁴ Dead zones are areas of water where aquatic life cannot survive due to low dissolved oxygen levels.