Climate Change Summary, New River Gorge National River, West Virginia

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Climate Trends for the Area within Park Boundaries

- Average annual temperature (Figure 1) and total annual precipitation (Figure 2) have increased since 1950, but the rates have not been statistically significant.
- If the world does not reduce emissions from power plants, cars, and deforestation by 40-70%, models project substantial warming and increases in precipitation (Table 1, Figure 3).
- The greatest temperature and precipitation increases could occur in autumn (September-November).
- Projections under the highest emissions scenario project 9-15 more days per year with a maximum temperature >35ºC (95ºF.) and an increase in 20-year storms (a storm with more precipitation than any other storm in 20 years) to once every 4-6 years (Walsh et al. 2014).

Historical Impact in the Region

- Analyses of Audubon Christmas Bird Count data across the United States, including counts in West Virginia, detected a northward shift of winter ranges of a set of 254 bird species at an average rate of 0.5 ± 0.3 km per year from 1975 to 2004, attributable to human climate change and not other factors (La Sorte and Thompson 2007).

Future Vulnerabilities in the Region

- The combination of higher precipitation and increased frequency of large storms could lead to more river flooding (Horton et al. 2014).
- Under the highest emissions scenario, climate change could shift the ranges of numerous tree species northward, reducing potential densities of red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and chestnut oak (*Quercus prinus*) (Iverson et al. 2008).
- Under high emissions, hotter temperatures and increased precipitation will continue to make the Appalachians suitable for the invasive tree species tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) (Clark et al. 2014).

Table 1. Historical rates of change per century and projected future changes in annual average temperature and annual total precipitation (data Daly et al. 2008, IPCC 2013; analysis Wang et al. in preparation). The table gives the historical rate of change per century calculated from data for the period 1950-2010. Because a rate of change per century is given, the absolute change for the 1950-2010 period will be approximately 60% of that rate. For the projections, note that under RCP6.0, temperature ramps up more slowly than under RCP4.5, but eventually overtakes the low scenario after mid-century. This is a property of how the emissions scenarios are written, with population and energy hitting their peak earlier, but at an eventually more sustainable level in RCP4.5. The table gives central values for the park as a whole. Figures 1-3 show the uncertainties.

	1950-2010	**2000-2050**	**2000-2100**
Historical			
temperature	+0.4ºC/century (0.7ºF./century)		
precipitation	+9%/century		
Projected (compared to 1971-2000)			
Low emissions (IPCC RCP 4.5)			
temperature		+2.2ºC (+4ºF.)	+2.7ºC (+4.9ºF.)
precipitation		+6%	+7%
High emissions (IPCC RCP 6.0)			
temperature		+1.8ºC (+3.2ºF.)	+3.1ºC (+5.6ºF.)
precipitation		+6%	+8%
Highest emissions (IPCC RCP 8.5)			
temperature		+2.7ºC (+4.9ºF.)	+4.8ºC (+8.6ºF.)
precipitation		+7%	+11%

Figure 1. Historical annual average temperature for the area within park boundaries. Note that the U.S. weather station network was more stable for the period starting 1950 than for the period starting 1895. (Data: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Daly et al. 2008. Analysis: Wang et al. in preparation, University of Wisconsin and U.S. National Park Service).

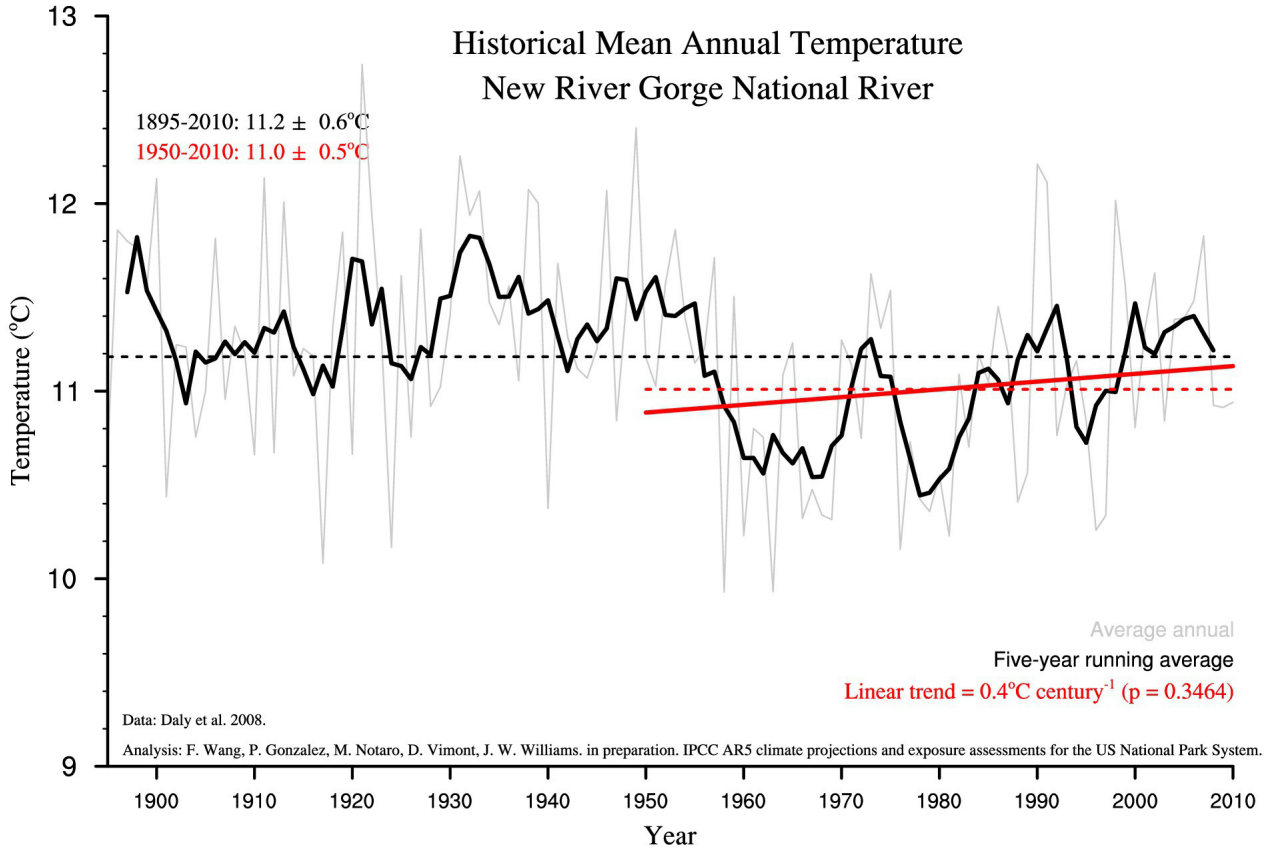


Figure 2. Historical annual total precipitation for the area within park boundaries. Note that the U.S. weather station network was more stable for the period starting 1950 than for the period starting 1895. (Data: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Daly et al. 2008. Analysis: Wang et al. in preparation, University of Wisconsin and U.S. National Park Service).

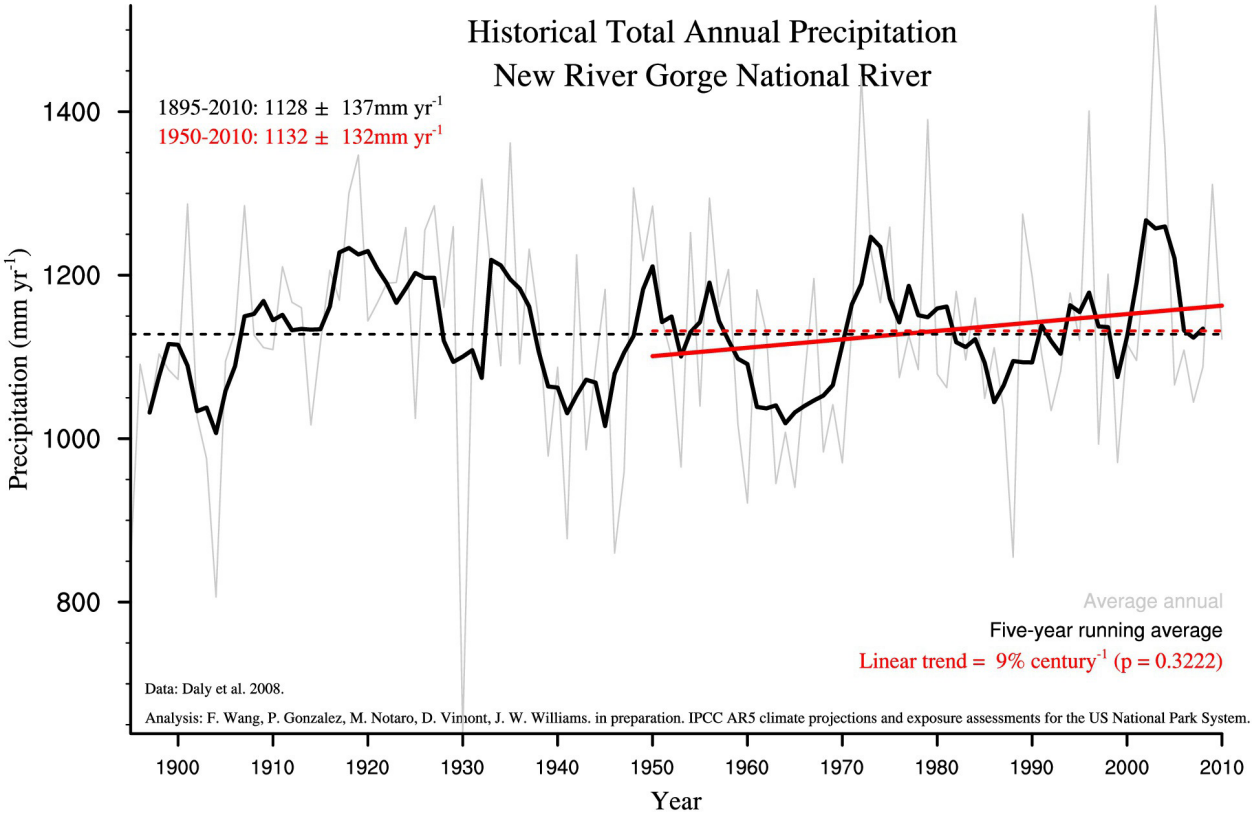
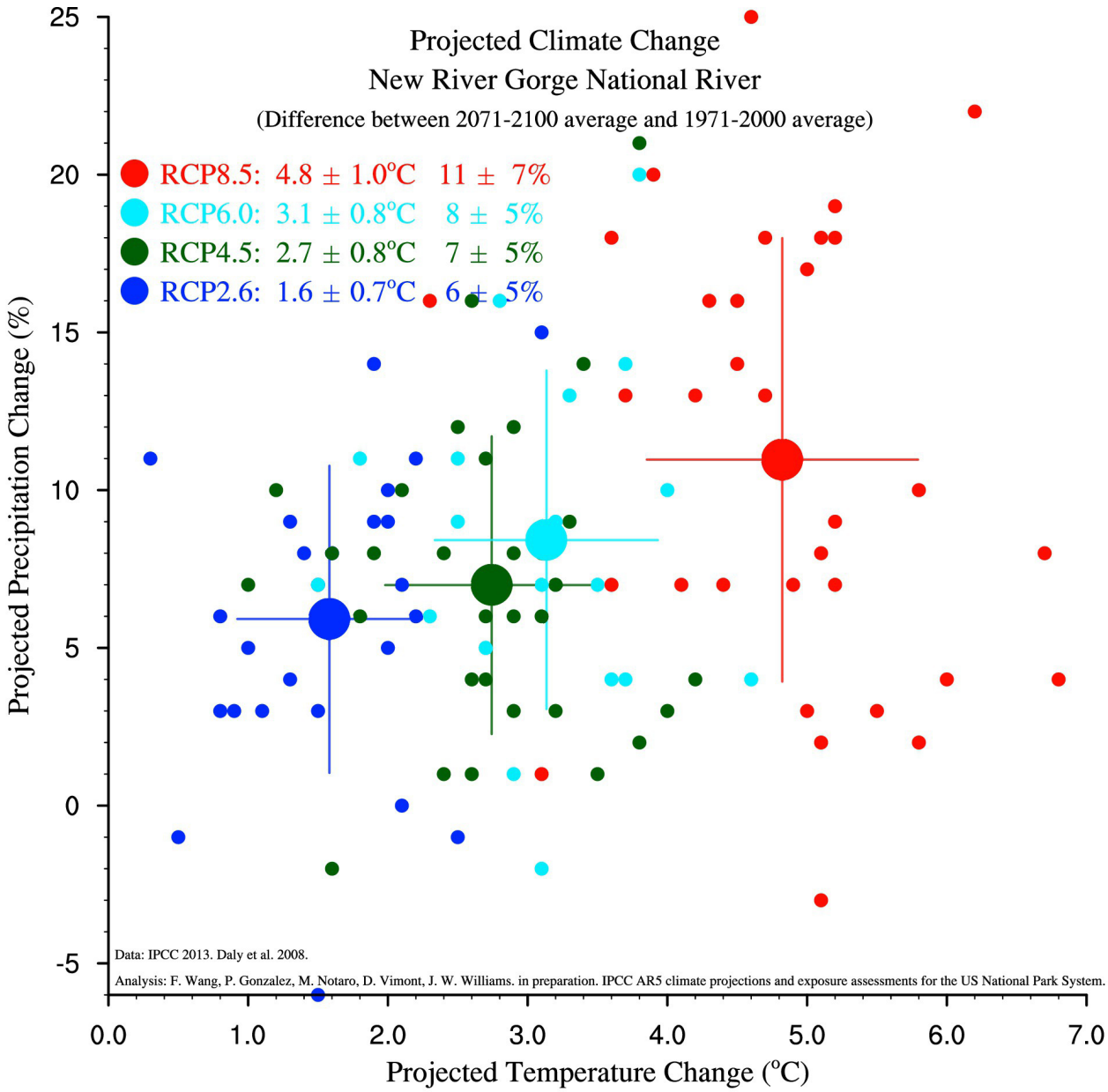


Figure 3. Projections of future climate for the area within park boundaries. Each small dot is the output of a single climate model. The large color dots are the average values for the four IPCC emissions scenarios. The lines are the standard deviations of each average value. (Data: IPCC 2013, Daly et al. 2008; Analysis: Wang et al. in preparation, University of Wisconsin and U.S. National Park Service).



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