

In California, Climate Issues Moved to Fore by Governor

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Photo



Gov. Jerry Brown of California addressed scientists gathered in Sacramento for a conference on the drought's impact on state agriculture. Credit Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Portraying California as the front line of [climate change](#), Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) said Monday that the effects of man-made global warming were devastating the state, drawing a direct link between climate change and both the record-setting drought that has left the state parched and the [early-season wildfires](#) that broke out across California last week. He declared that people must find a way “to live with nature, not collide with it.”

Saying that California was at the “epicenter” of the impact of climate change, Mr. Brown said that states and nations in general were “not on a sustainable path” when it came to global warming and the harsh weather patterns and other problems it brings.

“We have to adapt because the climate is changing,” Mr. Brown said in a speech to scientists gathered in Sacramento for a conference on the drought’s impact on state agriculture. “Now there’s no doubt that the evidence has been strong for quite a while, and it is getting even stronger.”

[Mr. Brown](#) has made battling climate change one of the centerpieces of his tenure, traveling as far as China to marshal support for efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. He has pressed for continued

enforcement of the state's [cap-and-trade](#) program — which places limits on emissions from major polluters — despite some critics' calls to scale back amid the weak economy. And he has repeatedly criticized Congress for not doing enough to take action.

Mr. Brown is at the forefront of governors across the country who are grappling with ways to deal with climate change through legislation and infrastructure changes, rather than waiting for coordinated efforts from the federal government. Governors from states including Maryland, New York and Washington are pushing for ways to combat what they say are dangerous threats to their state's economic and environmental future, citing worries of rising sea levels, drought and snowmelt.

Eight states so far have passed legislation calling for the reduction of carbon emissions in the coming decades, though none with plans as ambitious as California's. Nine Northeastern states along with California have adopted cap-and-trade policies for the largest greenhouse-gas-emitting industries.

Last month, Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington signed an executive order to create a cap-and-trade program similar to California's and updating the state's emission limits.

"This is not a hypothetical thing for governors on the West Coast — this is fire alarms and floods," Mr. Inslee said Monday in a telephone interview. "It's not a next-century issue. This is a next half-hour issue."

Some East Coast leaders have also sounded alarms: In New York, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has praised proposals to improve state utilities to reduce emissions and has begun to issue warnings to investors in the state that climate change poses a long-term risk to the state's finances.

Gathering support from other state and national leaders for stricter environmental regulations has been a cornerstone of Mr. Brown's efforts. This summer, he plans to travel to Mexico as part of a trade mission and plans to press leaders there to sign a pledge to reduce greenhouse gases.

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California officials are also preparing what many predict will be the worst wildfire season in the state's history. The state plans to spend roughly \$242 million on the wildfires this year, but Mr. Brown has warned that it might not be enough in coming years. And the record-level drought this year is expected to cost California's agricultural industry \$1.7 billion and cause about 14,500 workers to lose their jobs, according to a [forecast released by the University of California, Davis](#).

In an effort to start "aligning our economy and our way of life in California with the demands of nature as we now understand them scientifically," as Mr. Brown put it, he intends by 2025 to have about 1.5 million [electric cars](#) on California's roads — a fraction of the state's 32 million vehicles, but a big step nonetheless. The goal will require cooperation from other states to encourage the purchase of such vehicles. In his remarks on Monday, Mr. Brown said that drivers in the state traveled about 332.3 billion miles last year.

Mr. Brown added that the state was only "1 percent" of the problem globally.

"We have to get other states and other nations on a similar path forward," he said, "and that is enormously difficult because it requires different political jurisdiction, different political values, to unite around this one challenge of making a sustainable future."