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Trio of PNW universities to develop new tools for climate change planning

The nearly \$3.6 million in Interior Department funding announced today, Sept. 22, will ramp up efforts already underway at three Pacific Northwest universities to help resource managers tailor the latest climate change findings to forests, waterways, parks and other lands where they work.

The new Northwest Climate Science Center brings an initial \$1.4 million to the University of Washington, \$1.2 million to Oregon State University and \$980,000 to the University of Idaho during the next five years. After prioritizing research needs, the Department of the Interior intends to provide additional funds for three to six federal scientist positions based at the UW and OSU to work collaboratively with university researchers.

The money just awarded will be used each of the next five years to fund three graduate students at the UW, two at OSU and one at UI to provide science, maps, tools and other assistance managers need to apply what scientists are learning about climate change. For example, a graduate student with the UW School of Forest Resources will model how climate change could affect where herds of elk, mountain lions and other wildlife live as their environments changes. Ways the ranges of animals might change at five-year intervals during the next 100 years will then be provided to wildlife managers so they can plan accordingly.

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The consortium will be led by Lisa Graumlich, dean of the UW College of the Environment; Philip Mote, director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute at OSU; and Steven Daley-Laursen, senior executive, Office of Research and Economic Development at UI.

“There’s a reason the Northwest Climate Science Center is in the first wave of the eight regional centers being created. It’s because of the leadership on climate impacts that’s already been done or is underway in the region,” says Graumlich. “At the UW, for example, our Climate Impacts Group has been in operation for more than 15 years. These resources will enable us to build on this work and develop more of the tools needed to make effective management decisions on the ground.”

The Interior Department today also announced a Southeast Climate Science Center led by North Carolina State University and, last spring, an Alaska Climate Science Center led by the University of Alaska.

The center’s federal scientists and graduate students at the UW will be part of that university’s College of the Environment now two years old with 185 faculty, \$74 million in grants and contracts in 2009 and 1,400 students. Graduate students involved with the climate science center will have chances to interact with federal scientists and stakeholders and better prepare to move directly into the work force.

The regional climate science centers are a key element of the Interior Department’s first-ever coordinated strategy to address current and future impacts of climate change on America’s land, water, ocean, fish, wildlife and cultural resources, according to a news release from the Interior Department. The department will soon announce the host institutions for the North Central and Southwest climate science centers and intends to seek proposals next year for centers in the Northeast and South Central regions and the Pacific Islands, the release says.

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