

# What the Climate: Glossary of Terms

Whether you are new to climate planning or informed on the topic, having a shared understanding of frequently used terms can help remove barriers to participation. The terms on Page 1 are most currently used in climate planning, with additional terms providing important context and detail. Found a term not in this document and have questions? Contact the Climate Project Team at [climateplanning@spokanecity.org](mailto:climateplanning@spokanecity.org).

Frequently Used Terms	
<b>Assets</b>	People, resources, ecosystems, infrastructure, and the services they provide. Assets are the tangible and intangible things people or communities value.
<b>Climate</b>	Climate in the usual weather of a place over a longer period – the typical seasons, yearly highs and lows of temperatures, average rainfall, etc. Weather is the changes we see and feel outside from day to day.
<b>Climate Impact(s)</b>	Effects on natural and human systems that result from hazards. Evaluating potential climate impacts is a critical step in assessing vulnerability.
<b>Climate Justice</b>	Climate justice focuses on addressing the unequal, compounding, and disproportionate impacts of climate change to benefit the health and safety of those who face the greatest risk to climate impacts, addressing historical injustices, and supporting resilience against the changing climate. Climate justice is also about safeguarding the rights, lands, and cultural heritage of Indigenous communities as they face the impacts of climate change and emphasizes the need for policies recognizing and respecting the traditional knowledge and practices of Native peoples.
<b>Climate Resilience</b>	The ongoing process of anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to changes in climate and minimizing negative impacts to our natural systems, infrastructure, and communities.
<b>Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA)</b>	A framework for data analysis to identify the likelihood of future climate hazards and their potential impacts and vulnerabilities for cities and their communities, including exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity that contribute to overall climate risk.
<b>Environmental Justice</b>	The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
<b>Greenhouse Gas (GHG)</b>	Greenhouse gases – such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and certain synthetic chemicals – trap some of the Earth's outgoing energy, retaining heat in the atmosphere.
<b>Hazard</b>	An event or condition that may cause injury, illness, or death to people or damage to assets.

Common Terms	
<b>Active Transportation</b>	Active transportation means forms of pedestrian mobility including walking or running or the use of a device such as a wheelchair, bicycle, scooter, or skateboard. Active transportation is an alternative to vehicles such as single-occupancy cars and buses.
<b>Adaptation</b>	The process of adjusting to new (climate) conditions to reduce risks and harm.
<b>Adaptive Capacity</b>	The ability of a person, asset, or system to adjust to a hazard, take advantage of new opportunities, or cope with change.
<b>Assets</b>	People, resources, ecosystems, infrastructure, and the services they provide. Assets are the tangible and intangible things people or communities value.
<b>Carbon Footprint</b>	A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions. An individual or family, company, country, or other grouping can have its own carbon footprint.
<b>Carbon Sequestration</b>	Carbon sequestration is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide. Biologic carbon sequestration refers to storage of atmospheric carbon in vegetation, soils, woody products, and aquatic environments. Geologic carbon sequestration is the process of storing carbon dioxide (CO <sub>2</sub> ) in underground geologic formations.
<b>Climate Stressor</b>	A condition, event, or trend related to climate variability and change that can exacerbate hazards. Essentially, it is a climate related variable that can cause additional difficulties.
<b>Co-Benefits</b>	The additional benefits of policies that are implemented with a primary goal. For instance, co-benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions include cleaner air, the creation of green jobs, improved public health from active travel, and the support of biodiversity. Also referred to as "multiple benefits."
<b>Community Trip Reduction (CTR)</b>	The intent of CTR is to reduce automobile-related air pollution, traffic congestion, and energy use through employer-based programs that encourage the use of alternatives to the single occupant vehicle traveling during peak traffic periods for the commute trip.
<b>Defensible Space</b>	Defensible space is the area around a building in which vegetation, debris, and other types of combustible fuels have been treated, cleared, or reduced to slow the spread of fire to and from the building.
<b>Ecosystem Services</b>	Ecosystem services are the benefits that humans receive from the environment. These benefits are far reaching, including the support of our food and water, security, health, and economic systems.
<b>Embodied Carbon</b>	Embodied carbon refers to the greenhouse gas emissions arising from the manufacturing, transportation, installation, maintenance, and disposal of building materials.
<b>Environmental Equity</b>	When achieved, no single group or community faces disadvantages in dealing with environmental hazards, disasters, or pollution. Environmental equity is considered a basic human right.

<b>Equity</b>	Everyone can reach their highest level of health and potential for a successful life, regardless of their background and identity.
<b>Exposure</b>	The presence of people, assets, and ecosystems in places where they could be adversely affected by hazards. Due to one's location, the risk or exposure to climate hazards is increased.
<b>Extreme Heat</b>	Extreme heat is defined as summertime temperatures that are much hotter and/or humid than average. Increased temperatures can cause uncomfortable or dangerous conditions in areas not equipped for the heat, such as locations with limited air conditioning.
<b>Frontline Community</b>	Frontline community members are people who experience the first and worst consequences of climate change. Such residents' health and livelihoods are often highly vulnerable to and disproportionately impacted by climate-exacerbated hazards and economic disruptions.
<b>Hazard Mitigation</b>	Any sustainable action that reduces or eliminates long-term risk to people and property from future disasters.
<b>Indicator</b>	A sign that shows what something is like or how a situation is changing. A climate indicator can be a data point showing change or impacts over a period of time.
<b>Magnitude</b>	The measure of consequences — for example, high, medium, or low — for an asset that is impacted by a climate hazard.
<b>Multimodal</b>	Multimodal transportation includes public transportation, rail and waterways, bicycles, and walking or use of mobility aids. Multimodal access supports the needs of all users whether they choose to walk, bike, use transit, or drive. It means more connections and more choices.
<b>Net-Zero</b>	Refers to achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere and the amount that is removed from the atmosphere.
<b>Overburdened Community</b>	A geographic area where vulnerable populations face multiple environmental harms and health impacts, and frequently includes lower-income residents.
<b>Per Capita Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)</b>	This means the number of miles traveled using cars and light trucks in a calendar year divided by the number of residents. The calculation of this value excludes vehicle miles driven conveying freight.
<b>Probability</b>	The likelihood of hazard events occurring, determined from the historic frequency of events.
<b>Risk</b>	The potential for negative consequences where something of value is at stake. In the context of the assessment of climate impacts, the term risk is often used to refer to the potential for adverse consequences of a climate-related hazard. Risk can be assessed by multiplying the probability of a hazard by the magnitude of the negative consequence or loss.
<b>Sector</b>	Topic of consideration identified by Commerce for analysis of climate impacts (i.e. water resources, transportation, buildings, agriculture, zoning and development, ecosystem, etc.)
<b>Sensitivity</b>	The degree to which a system, population, or resource is or might be affected by hazards.

<b>State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)</b>	The SEPA process identifies and analyzes environmental impacts associated with governmental decisions, related to issuing permits, constructing public facilities, or adopting regulations and plans.
<b>Urban Growth Area (UGA)</b>	As required under RCW 36.70A.040, Spokane is located within an urban growth area. The UGA creates a boundary within which urban growth is encouraged and outside of which growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature. The UGA attempts to control urban sprawl and encourage infill development near existing infrastructure and services.
<b>Vulnerable Populations</b>	Vulnerable populations are groups that are more likely to be at higher risk for poor health outcomes in response to environmental harms due to adverse socioeconomic factors (including unemployment, high housing and transportation costs relative to income, limited access to nutritious food and adequate health care, linguistic isolation) and sensitivity factors (including disabilities and other causes for higher rates of hospitalization). Vulnerable populations include, but are not limited to, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income populations, disabled communities, and other populations disproportionately impacted by environmental harms.
<b>Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)</b>	Wildland-urban interface means the geographical area where structures and other human development meets or intermingles with wildland vegetative fuels, leading to increased fire risk.

## Glossary References

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[\*Appendix K – Glossary of Terms\*](#), Washington State Department of Commerce

[\*Climate Justice\*](#), Washington State Department of Health

[\*Climate Kids\*](#), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

[\*Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment: Training Guide for Cities\*](#), CDP, Sandy Morris, et al.

[\*Ecosystem Services – EnviroAtlas\*](#), United States Environmental Protection Agency

[\*Embodied Carbon 101\*](#), Carbon Leadership Forum

[\*Environmental Justice Task Force\*](#), Health Equity

[\*Glossary\*](#), U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit

[\*HB 1181 Climate Change – Planning\*](#), 68<sup>th</sup> Washington Legislature 2023 Regular Session

[\*Multimodal Accessibility\*](#), Washington State Department of Transportation

[\*The Nature Conservancy\*](#)

[\*RCW 36.70A.110\*](#), Washington State Legislature

[\*RCW 70A.65.010\*](#), Washington State Legislature

[\*State and Local Climate and Energy Program Glossary Terms\*](#), United States Environmental Protection Agency

[\*What is Net Zero\*](#), University of Oxford

[\*What's the Difference Between Geologic and Biologic Carbon Sequestration\*](#), United States Geological Survey (USGS)