

In Brief: Prehistoric cultural changes linked to climate change in northeastern United States

December 8 2010

Cultural changes among prehistoric people in parts of the northeastern United States likely coincided with major environmental changes in the region, according to a study published this week in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Researchers have established that changes in climate alter terrestrial ecosystems, but the link between climatic shifts and prehistoric human culture is less understood.

Samuel E. Munoz and colleagues analyzed environmental and [archaeological data](#) from a number of sites throughout the northeastern United States that were first settled by prehistoric people nearly 13,500 years ago.

The authors combined radiocarbon dates from archaeological sites with ecological and climate records from lake sediments, and found that past climatic changes altered forest composition.

For example, whereas sedge and pine trees dominated during the early years of the region's archaeological timeline, chestnut and spruce trees flourished during the later years.

Furthermore, the ecological changes coincided with changes in both the population size and food-procuring strategies of prehistoric people.

The findings suggest that [environmental change](#) likely influenced the population size and hunter-gatherer culture of prehistoric people in the northeastern [United States](#), according to the authors.

More information: "Synchronous environmental and cultural change in the prehistory of the northeastern United States," by Samuel E. Munoz, Konrad Gajewski, and Matthew C. Peros, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Dec. 6, 2010.

Provided by Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

Citation: In Brief: Prehistoric cultural changes linked to climate change in northeastern United States (2010, December 8) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-12-prehistoric-cultural-linked-climate-northeastern.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--