

Survey gauges top leaders' views of environmental policy landscape

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In spring 2017, researchers at North Carolina State University (NCSU) and Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions set out to determine what and how a broad cross-section of thought leaders at private corporations, nonprofits, government agencies, and universities think about emerging environmental trends, risks, and opportunities.

Through the Emerging Environmental Issues Survey, the researchers aimed to assess both the reach and the manageability of environmental change.

"We received responses from over three dozen CEOs, presidents, executive directors, senior economists, chief scientists, and sustainability managers, representing a wide variety of sectors and industries," said John Virdin, Ocean and Coastal Policy Program director at the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, who conducted the survey with the Nicholas Institute's Water Policy Program director Martin Doyle and Christopher Galik, NCSU associate professor of public administration. "By virtue of their personal and professional experience these individuals are uniquely qualified to foresee new and developing [environmental issues](#) as, or even before, they arise."

Responses suggested that in the initial months of the Trump administration almost half of survey respondents reported that they were at least somewhat optimistic about the general state of the environment. That perception changed when looking to the future.

"Looking ahead five years, more than half the respondents stated that they were somewhat or very pessimistic about environmental conditions in the future," said Galik.

And nearly all of the more than three dozen respondents said that the recent election altered their strategy for engaging on environmental issues. They said the most important drivers of their new strategy are the Trump administration's moves to deregulation and the increasing physical manifestations of climate change.

Other findings:

- Climate change is a dominant concern. Issues pertaining to air quality, water quality, biodiversity, and forest loss are also cited, as are more existential issues like deregulation and an increasing need to justify the need for environmental protection.
- Some respondents were sanguine about the future, others hopeful that coming challenges will trigger needed innovation, while still others were seeking to directly engage, looking to states and NGOs to fill expected gaps at the federal level.
- Many respondents signaled a need for more nimble approaches to environmental management. Being adaptable was an ever-present undercurrent to the responses received.
- Governance and rules to protect the environment were seen as failing to keep pace with changes, particularly in the presence of technology innovation.

The survey, which will be conducted yearly, is intended to help researchers, [policy](#) makers, and other stakeholders better appreciate environmental changes and increase our awareness of new and growing trends in the environment.

"The survey provides unique insight into how global thought leaders

perceive coming environmental problems, allowing stakeholders to mount more effective responses: Businesses may make more informed investment decisions, policy makers can craft more proactive policy solutions, non-profits can be more effective in their outreach and implementation, and researchers can better leverage their work in the service of society," said Doyle.

More information: To learn more about the survey and the results from its first year, visit the survey site. nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/eme...mental-issues-survey

Provided by Duke University

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