

# Iowa and the Rising Cost of Extreme Weather

Many Iowans are under **enormous and increasing financial strain from the COVID-19 pandemic** and its economic fallout. Over one hundred thousand people have filed for unemployment, and countless small businesses have shuttered. Yet even during this crisis, Iowans face the growing threat of additional economic harm and damage to public health from severe storms and other extreme weather events, confirming that climate change is a “threat multiplier” making other challenges to our country that much harder to fight.

A new report from Datu Research, *Climate Change-Fueled Weather Disasters: Costs to State and Local Economies*, reveals how extreme weather has already cost Iowa taxpayers billions of dollars, and confirms we cannot fully rebuild America’s economy if we continue to ignore the threat of steadily worsening weather that we now know is driven by climate change.

## Climate change is fueling rising disaster costs

### Nationwide, since 1980:

- The number of annual severe weather disasters has increased fourfold, costing U.S. taxpayers **more than \$1.75 trillion**.
- The annual cost has risen from **\$17 billion to \$84 billion**.
- The direct cost has increased **eleven-fold**.

### Projections say it’s going to get worse if we don’t act:

- Atmospheric conditions that led to the devastating 1993 flood, one of the worst in the state’s history, are becoming the new normal, and what used to be a ‘100 year flood’ could happen every 25 years.
- Scientists anticipate that without action, we could see an increase in days that have conditions ripe for severe thunderstorms, particularly over the Midwest and Southern Plains.

### Iowa experienced this devastation firsthand

- Heavy downpour events in Iowa have increased by 28% on

average since 1950, and Iowa has seen four ‘100 year floods’ in the past three decades.

- The 2008 Iowa floods are the two largest on record in the state, and were the biggest on record in Cedar Rapids , — covering 14% of the city and causing \$5.4 billion in damage to the city, surrounding towns and farms — and spurring ambitious efforts to rebuild better to increase flood resilience throughout the Cedar Rapids River watershed.
- **This raises the critical question: how will governments, businesses and communities, in the future, afford to keep pace with increasingly intense disasters fueled by a changing climate?**

## We can avoid the most costly extreme weather impacts if we act now

To avert the trend of ever-more-destructive and costly weather, we must immediately reduce climate pollution, reward farmers for being part of the solution and move toward a 100% clean economy. We can invest in a cleaner energy and transportation system, modernize our buildings and manufacturing, and increase the use of climate-smart farming practices all while creating good jobs, including in wind and solar energy.

And knowing that climate impacts are already here, policymakers must also prioritize pre-disaster planning, mitigation, and responses that increase resilience and decrease future costs. Anything less will mean increasing strain on local and state economies.

**With discussions happening in Congress now on COVID-19 recovery, it’s critical that our leaders prioritize policies that mitigate the costs of future disasters. We can’t afford not to act.**