

Scorecard of Climate Change Remediation Policies in Northeast- Midwest States

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Introduction

Threats associated with climate change, which include but are not limited to floods, wildfires, and highly unpredictable weather events, are becoming an increasingly more concerning threat to the people across the United States, including the Northeast and the Midwest regions.

Fortunately, though to variable degrees, most states in the Northeast and the Midwest are pursuing and enacting policies that target the remediation of the effects correlated to climate change, as well as initiatives that focus on other forms of environmental distress. While a select group of states have demonstrated keen interest in curbing the looming impacts of climate change, others have fallen noticeably behind.

This report will highlight how eighteen Northeastern and Midwestern states are approaching climate change and its corollary issues and will examine common trends found throughout the states. In addition, how the select states are tackling this issue will be compared amongst each other, by looking at what the states have and do not have in common. There are 10 key indicators that are analyzed in this report, which measures each state's dedication to climate change action and legislation. The criteria range from whether the state has a carbon pricing system, to whether it has attempted to include climate change in their public schools' curriculums, to whether it has state environmental justice offices. As the topic, or issue, of climate change is so broad, this report attempted to cover the widest and most comprehensive range of initiatives pursued by the states. A corresponding scorecard containing the 10 indicators is attached to this report, offering a quantitative score for each state as well as an overview of each state's commitment.

New England

(Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island)

Overall, New England states appear to be highly committed to addressing climate change. Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts are three primary leaders in this region and the nation. Connecticut in particular has made noteworthy progress in a wide variety of climate change initiatives, as in this coming July, it will become one of the [first states](#) to mandate climate

change educational curriculum in its public schools. In addition, as a participant in the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#) (RGGI), Connecticut engages in a market-based cap and invest program which targets lowering CO2 emissions from the power sector. This is noteworthy as first, efforts to curb CO2 emissions are essential due to CO2 being a powerful greenhouse gas, and second, the RGGI is the first cap and invest initiative implemented in the United States. Lastly, in addition to investing in innovative solutions such as its public-school climate change curriculum mandate, Connecticut's green bank – which is an institution that funds the acceleration and transition to clean energy to address climate change – is the first of its kind in the nation. The [Connecticut Green Bank](#), as it is known, was established thanks to [Public Act 11-80 \(2011\)](#). Connecticut is one of three states that earned a perfect score of 10 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard.

As mentioned before, Rhode Island and Massachusetts are also two leading states in New England on climate change initiatives and policies. Rhode Island, like Connecticut, has a carbon pricing system, due to their participation in the RGGI program. Rhode Island also released their renewed and revised [Climate Action Plan](#) in December of 2022, an update from their 2016 plan. Perhaps the most significant piece of legislation included in their renewed Climate Action Plan is their [2021 Act on Climate](#), which Governor Dan McKee signed into law. This plan outlines mandatory climate emissions reductions to meet the state's net-zero emissions, economy-wide goal by 2050. Rhode Island earned a score of 10 as well on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard; however, unlike Connecticut, their [2022 bill](#) on including climate change education into schools did not pass. Massachusetts is also a strong leader amongst the New England states in climate action and legislation, receiving a solid score of 9. Like Connecticut and Rhode Island, Massachusetts hit similar benchmarks, like having an outlined greenhouse gas emissions reductions target, having a carbon pricing system due to their participation in RGGI, and being a member of the [United States Climate Alliance](#). However, the only indicator that Massachusetts was lacking was having a green bank, which cost them one point.

Out of all the New England states, New Hampshire was the least engaged in climate change policy and action. Though New Hampshire has [outlined clear greenhouse gas reduction targets for 2025](#), they have yet to create a state climate bureaucracy or task force to enforce this goal. It

is the only New England state to not be a part of the United States Climate Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of 24 governors committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to keep global warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius. Furthermore, despite having a [climate action plan](#), it is sorely outdated, having been published in 2009 – no updated plan has been released since. Compared to the rest of the New England states, New Hampshire has made meager progress in climate action and policy. New Hampshire earned a subpar score of 4.5 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard.

All in all, most of the New England states made sound and promising progress on climate change action and legislation. States like Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts display high levels of commitment to mitigate global warming, whereas others like Maine and Vermont (both states have a score of 8) closely follow their neighbors. Unfortunately, New Hampshire is the only state that hasn't made significant progress – the lack of action is perhaps highlighted best by their incredibly outdated Climate Action plan. In order to be on par with its neighbors, New Hampshire should release an updated Climate Action plan and also create a corresponding Climate Task Force, to enforce their renewed goals.

The Mid-Atlantic

(New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland)

Fortunately, many of the Mid-Atlantic states have made significant strides in climate change action policy and legislation. All five Mid-Atlantic states are a part of the United States Climate Alliance, all have a Climate Action plan created in the past three years (since 2020), are members of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), have mandatory [Renewable Portfolio Standards \(RPS\)](#), and have outlined greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. Out of the five Mid-Atlantic states, and the United States in general, New York is a clear leader in climate action and policy. Out of all the 18 states throughout the Northeast and the Midwest examined in this report, New York's Climate Action plan is the most recent, having been published in 2023. In their renewed Climate Action Plan, titled "[New York's Scoping Plan](#)," there is a particular emphasis on prioritizing and including marginalized communities in the

pursuit of climate action, in addition to the creation of equitable, family-sustaining jobs that will support the state's growing green economy. In the plan, the goals of the [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act](#), also known as the Climate Act, are clearly outlined. The Climate Act is one of the nation's most ambitious climate laws, as it requires New York to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 and no less than 85% by 2050, from 1990 levels. Though they did not pass, New York made significant effort in trying to include climate change education into public school curriculums, with a total of [8 bills](#) regarding this topic being proposed in the 2022 legislation cycle. New York earned an excellent score of 10 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard.

Another leader in climate action and legislation in the Mid-Atlantic is Maryland, which is the state with the most aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals in the nation. This is due to the [Climate Solutions Now Act \(CSNA\)](#), which passed in 2022. Under this Act, Maryland has a target reduction of 60% by 2031, at a net-zero goal by 2045, comparing to 2006 levels. Due to their vast shoreline, Maryland is the fourth most susceptible state in the nation to rising sea levels and heightened extreme weather events. To further combat and prepare for the potential threats associated with climate change, the state is currently creating a new greenhouse gas reduction draft plan, with an estimated release date for June 2023. Maryland, like New York, also robustly supports environmental justice efforts; under their Department of the Environment, the state has a [Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities \(CEJSC\)](#), responsible for overseeing the impact of policies related to environmental justice. Maryland's efforts and climate action initiatives earned the state a solid score of 9 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard.

New Jersey is another clear leader in climate action in the Mid-Atlantic and the broader United States. Like New York and Maryland, they have a comprehensive Climate Action Plan, titled "[New Jersey's Global Warming Response Act 80x50 Report](#)," the numerical figures representing their 80% goal reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Perhaps the most noteworthy and admirable action pursued by the state is their commitment to including climate change education in their schools' curriculums. In June of 2020, New Jersey became the first state in the United States to incorporate and obligate [K-12 climate change education](#), when the State Board of Education adopted the [2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards \(NJSLs\)](#). Teaching students

about climate change was not only included in their science classes, but in subjects such as art, language, social studies, and even physical education. On the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard, like Maryland, New Jersey earned a high score of 9.

Though Delaware and Pennsylvania have made some efforts on climate change action and legislation, they lagged slightly behind their neighbors, with Pennsylvania earning a score of 8 and Delaware receiving a 7 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard. Pennsylvania lost a point for not adopting [California's Zero Emission Vehicle \(ZEV\) regulations](#). The Zero Emission Vehicle regulations mandate that automakers produce a certain number of plug-in hybrid or fully electric vehicles, to curb the greenhouse gases produced by vehicles. Furthermore, Pennsylvania lost further points for not attempting to include climate change into their schools' curriculum in 2022. Similarly, Delaware also lost a point for not attempting to include climate change curriculum. In addition, Delaware does not have an environmental justice office or agency, costing them another point. Lastly, Delaware lost a point for not having climate bureaucracy or task force. However, they do have a Renewable Energy Taskforce, which was established under the [Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards Act](#).

Overall, the Mid-Atlantic region has yielded a strong set of composite scores on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard, showing that the states have generally high levels of commitment to climate change action and legislation. States like New York, Maryland, and New Jersey are leaders in their region and nationwide, while Pennsylvania and Delaware trail closely behind.

The Midwest

(Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin)

Out of the regions examined in this report, the Midwest yields the most variable results. While states like Minnesota and Michigan respectively scored a solid 8 and 7 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard, the Midwest also contains the state with the lowest score out of all 18 examined – Indiana, which scored a highly concerning 0. Ohio, another state in the Midwestern region, did not fare much better, receiving a marginally higher score of 1.

Minnesota is a regional leader in climate action policy being a member of the United States Climate Alliance and having recently released a Climate Action Plan in 2022, titled “[Climate Action Framework](#).” Though not as extensive as the Climate Action Plan New York proposed, Minnesota’s Climate Action Framework touches upon key points such as supporting and growing their clean transportation systems and acknowledging climate and environmental injustice. A noteworthy highlight of their report is the section that acknowledges the role and leadership tribal nations play in this ever-intensifying climate warming scenario. Collaboration and respect for the 11 native tribal groups in Minnesota are highly emphasized in the report. The areas in which Minnesota lost points was not having a carbon pricing system and failing to establish a state green bank. However, in 2021, Minnesota representative Todd Lippert introduced legislation to establish a Minnesotan green bank, under bill [H.F No.2044](#). Though this was an admirable attempt, this bill failed to pass. Michigan, like Minnesota, has also made progress in climate change action, being a part of the United States Climate Alliance and having released a Climate Action Plan, titled “[MI Healthy Climate Plan](#),” in 2022. Furthermore, Michigan is one of only two states in the Midwestern region that has an established green bank, known as [Michigan Saves](#). Michigan Saves is the nation’s first nonprofit green bank, having been established in 2009. This green bank focuses on making home energy improvements easier and more accessible throughout the state, by supporting investments in the clean energy industry.

Unfortunately, after Michigan and Minnesota, the rest of the Midwestern states fall sorely behind. Illinois and Wisconsin, both earned a subpar score of 5 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard. Both states each lost a point for not having a carbon pricing system, not adopting the Zero Emission Vehicle standards, and for not attempting to include climate change education into their schools. Unfortunately, both Illinois and Wisconsin have not yet adopted a low emission vehicle standard, either. Though Wisconsin released a comprehensive climate action plan in 2020, titled the “[Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change Report](#),” Illinois has yet to release one of their own. As of now, [their climate and emission goals](#) are simply those of the greater United States Climate Alliance’s, instead of developing a specialized and individualized plan fit for their own state. Out of the 18 states examined in this report, Illinois is the only state that is a part of the United States Climate Alliance that has not released a climate action plan to date.

Lastly, the remaining states in the Midwest – Ohio, Iowa, and Indiana – have fallen greatly behind on enacting climate change action or legislation. As mentioned before, Indiana has a concerning low score of 0, Iowa scored a 1.5, and Ohio scored a 1 on the Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard. Interestingly, all three of these states are not a part of the United States Climate Alliance. Though Iowa does have a Climate Action Plan, it was released in 2008, making it highly outdated, thus gaining them just 0.5 points. The other point Iowa earned was for attempting to include climate change curriculum in their science classes for schools, through their [Senate Bill 2154](#), though it did not pass through the 2022 cycle. The singular point Ohio earned was for having mandatory Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS), as outlined by [House Bill 6](#) – however, even then, in 2019, the state reduced its RPS requirement from 12.5% to 8.5% by 2026.

Though states like Minnesota and Michigan have made meaningful attempts at climate change policy and action, the same cannot be said for the remaining Midwestern states. Illinois and Wisconsin lag a bit further behind, though it can be said that there is some effort on their parts. What is most worrying is the lack of action or urgency demonstrated by Indiana, Ohio, and Iowa, as they have not made any significant or satisfactory progress in achieving any form of substantial climate action legislation and policy, in an era where climate change is an impending threat towards all people and societies. These states should take immediate action towards establishing some forms of climate change policy. The first and foremost step these states could take is joining the United States Climate Alliance.

Overview and Trends

Overall, as a region, the Northeast-Midwest has taken significant action towards combating climate change and its corollary effects. Out of the 18 states in the region, 15 have greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, 15 have mandatory renewable portfolio standards, and 14 are a part of the United States Climate Alliance. A majority of them also have some kind of comprehensive climate action plan, have an environmental justice office or interagency, and

have a carbon pricing system. Out of the 10 indicators outlined in the scorecard, the most indicative of whether a state is actively pursuing some forms of climate change policy, legislation, or action, is if they are in the United States Climate Alliance. Interestingly, the four states that are not a part of the United States Climate Alliance – New Hampshire, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa – also happen to be the four states with the lowest scores on the scorecard. There also seems to be a correlation to the political party of the state to the level of climate action they take, as Ohio, Iowa, and Indiana are three states that swing politically to the right.

The leaders throughout the entire Northeast-Midwestern region in climate action and policy are Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York; all three of these states received a perfect score of 10. These three states are closely followed by Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Maryland, all of which scored a 9. It is an interesting contrast to the states that scored the lowest, as these six states all happen to be states that swing politically to the left. Another trend to take into consideration is the fact that these six states also happen to be all located on the East Coast, whereas Ohio, Iowa, and Indiana are all located in the Midwest. Furthermore, all six Eastern states are coastal, while the Midwestern states are landlocked.

Though these six states all received high scores, it is not to say that further action does not need to be taken. Four of these leading states – Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Rhode Island – happen to fall within the top ten states within the country with the [highest temperature increases](#) in the last 20 years, signifying that consistent action towards battling the effects of climate change will need to be supported.

The three states with perfect scores of 10 – New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island – all had higher per-capita incomes than that of Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa, the states with the lowest scores. This correlation shows that in the face of climate disasters, which often tend to be costly, individuals that are living in New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island are highly more prepared than individuals in Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa, due to having state support as well as more financial flexibility.

Though wholistically, the Northeast-Midwest region has made noteworthy progress in achieving climate action and policy, not enough effort has been made on the parts of some Midwestern states. It is unfortunate that climate change and environmental issues have become such a political and sensitive topic, as in reality, it is a bipartisan issue that all individuals living in these regions – and the broader United States – should be highly concerned about.

Recommendations

Though general policies, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, can be applied to all the states in the Northeast-Midwest region, how each state approaches curbing their environmentally unfriendly activities varies greatly. Effort towards policies and legislation fitting each state's industries, climate, geography, and population must be made. For example, the landlocked states of the Midwest should not focus on issues corresponding to rising sea levels, whereas states on the East Coast should prioritize finding solutions to such issues.

The states that are lagging in climate action should immediately start working to develop and create Climate Action Plans, potentially following and modeling their plans after states within their regions, with similar demographics. Developing these plans and outlining which policies to pursue, then examining which ones are successful and which ones are not, is an imperative first step towards preparing for the threats associated with climate change.

States must also invest in preparing and educating the younger generations for living in an increasingly warming era, as it is the younger generations that will have to cope with the brunt of climate change; thus, if they haven't done so already, there should be some form of climate change education curriculum in all public schools across the region. This curriculum should not only include information on understanding what climate change is and how it came to be, but how to cope with it in the coming years.

Conclusion

In an era where each year is hotter than the previous one, where wildfires rage the West, droughts threaten our farmlands, and sea level rise threaten our coastal states, legislative action against mitigating climate change and remediating its effects is critical. With its widespread impact and the ability to potentially threaten millions, if not tens of millions, of people in the United States, is imperative that individual states take action to protect their people and communities. While some states have made commendable progress, others are failing and are falling quickly behind. If the Northeast-Midwestern states are to effectively combat climate change, individual and collaborative political action is required on all fronts.

Climate Change Initiatives Scorecard

	Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reductions Targets (2025-2030)	Carbon Pricing System	Mandatory Renewable Portfolio Standards	Zero Emission Vehicle Standards	Environmental Justice Offices or Interagencies	United States Climate Alliance	Climate Action Plan	Climate Bureaucracy/ task force	Green Bank	Attempts at Including Climate Change in Curriculum (2022)	Score (Out of 10)	Political Party
Connecticut	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	10	Dem
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	10	Dem
Massachusetts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2022)	Yes	No	Yes	9	Dem
Maine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes (2020)	Yes	No	Yes	8	Dem
Vermont	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2021)	Yes	No	No	8	Dem
New Hampshire	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes (2009)	No	Yes	No	4.5	Dem
New York	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	10	Dem
New Jersey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2020)	Yes	No	Yes	9	Dem
Maryland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2021)	Yes	Yes	No	9	Dem
Pennsylvania	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (2021)	Yes	Yes	No	8	Rep
Delaware	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes (2021)	No	Yes	No	7	Dem
Minnesota	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2022)	Yes	No	Yes	8	Dem
Michigan	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (2022)	Yes	Yes	No	7	Rep
Wisconsin	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (2020)	Yes	No	No	5	Rep
Illinois	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	5	Dem
Iowa	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes (2008)	No	No	Yes	1.5	Rep
Ohio	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	1	Rep
Indiana	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	0	Rep

KEY:	Yes, but not in the past 5 years (0.5 points)	Does not have one (0 points)	New England	The Mid-Atlantic	The Midwest	Democratic State	Republican State
Yes, recent (1 point)	Yes, but not in the past 5 years (0.5 points)	Does not have one (0 points)	New England	The Mid-Atlantic	The Midwest	Democratic State	Republican State

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