

The North Carolina State Climate Program 25th Anniversary

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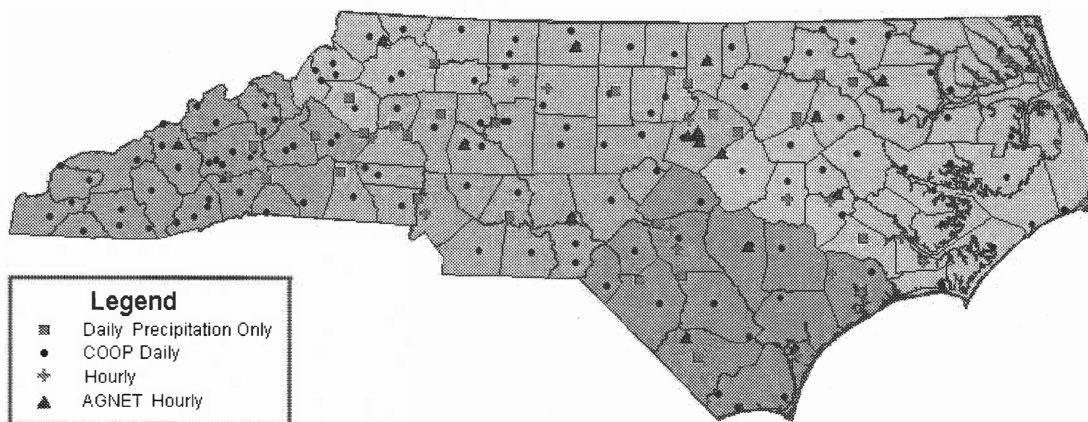
Twenty-five years ago the State Climate Office (SCO) of North Carolina was created. The mission was to provide climate information and services to the people and institutions in the state. The Office was housed in the Geography Department at UNC-CH. Many of the early users of the service were geographers - often educators in schools and colleges and many of their students. Over the next 25 years the SCO grew and expanded, the office moved to NCSU, and the NC State Climate Program developed as an inter-university entity. At the 25th Anniversary it is useful to remind everyone of the services offered by the Office, and to look at where we have been and where we can go in providing better and wider service. This is a brief report of the history and current plans. Comments to the author are very welcome.

For many years up until 1973 there was a federal program of state climatologists. They were primarily involved in work with the agricultural community. In that year the program was terminated, with the federal government encouraging the states to take over the abandoned functions. So, in 1976 there was a joint

agreement between the University of North Carolina system and the National Climatic Data Center to start the Office in NC. Peter Robinson was the first State Climatologist.

In those early days the budget was tight (nothing changes) and the main services provided were responding to requests for information. In 1976 a telephone represented fast communication, and a photocopier was high-tech. Requests came by mail or telephone. Most responses were either mailed copies of parts of the NCDC publications or numbers dictated over the phone. Agriculture and education provided the bulk of the requests. But this was also the time of oil crises and gas lines. So there were many requests for information related to energy, and the State Climate Office was involved in research into alternative sources.

The first expansion occurred in 1980, when the Office moved from UNC-CH to NCSU. At the same time the NC State Climate Program was organized as a joint effort between the two campuses. Although the State Climatologist, Jerry Davies, was housed in



the Department of Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, close connections were established with the College of Agriculture. This connection led to the development of a series of weather observing stations complementing in both parameters measured and geographical location, the stations of the National Weather Service. During this time, technology also changed. Data became electronic and an easily accessible data base was created. Faster response to more detailed requests became the order of the day.

From a start in the middle 1990s under the direction of the current State Climatologist, Sethu Raman, the agriculture-based observing system, now known as ECO-net, is being transformed into a denser network covering more aspects of the environment and more places in the state. Modern technology now allows the measurements to be available through the SCO home page in near-real time. Indeed, many more data are now available online. Check the home page at <http://www.nc-climate.ncsu.edu>. Despite this new technology, the Office still has phone lines, and many, many requests come by phone (919-515-3056).

The 25th Anniversary was celebrated on October 26th 2001, with a day-long gathering on the Centennial Campus of North Carolina State University. In the morning system President Molly Corbett Broad briefly reviewed the development of the Office and then officially inaugurated the ECO-Net as an hourly real-time climate data collection network with 25 stations scattered across the state. Others in attendance, including the Chancellor of NCSU and representatives of UNC-CH and several state and federal agencies, emphasized the many and various needs of the state and nation for the type of information provided by the State Climate Office. This part of the proceedings was concluded with a Keynote Address on climate, climate observations and climate change, by Tom Karl, Director of the National Climatic Data Center.

The rest of the day was spent exploring future directions. Presentations and panels with representatives of federal, state and local agencies and representatives of various universities - including several geographers - explored the information needs of the state and its people, the research and education needed to produce the information, and the mechanisms for actually providing information to

users. There are great needs for research, pure and applied, statewide and local, complex and simple. Plans are being developed to expand the State Climate Program to include any and all institutions of higher education, public or private, and anyone with an interest in climate or its impacts. If you fit, or think you might fit, let me know.

The State Climate Office and the State Climate Program are designed to assist everyone - especially geographers! - who has a need for climate information. Use the services, and join us in the Program.