

WCRP OPEN SCIENCE CONFERENCE

CLIMATE RESEARCH IN SERVICE TO SOCIETY

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conference2011.wcrp-climate.org



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An emerging theme from the World Climate Research Program Open Science Conference: The need for actionable science. Decision-makers – including water providers, farmers, insurance companies, oil exploration companies and many more – need climate and other scientific information to guide decisions. Future water availability in a region, for example, may guide crop selection one year, or siting decisions for a new water treatment plant that will be operational for decades.

But there is often a mismatch between the scientific data available and the information these companies need. Future climate projections may be too uncertain regarding precipitation in a small region, or relevant data may be sitting unused on a laptop in an academic's office.

During a panel on private sector climate science and service needs, representatives from several major companies – BP, Northrup Grumman, Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) and The Weather Channel Companies – discussed how scientists and private enterprise can work together toward actionable information. Conversations during conferences such as WCRP are a start: Data users begin understanding the richness of the data available, and scientists begin understanding what kind of data users need to guide decisions.

And both sets of participants agreed that although there may be a gap today between data needs and data availability, that gap is rich with opportunity. "There's a business case to be made here," said Dr. Sharon Hays, Vice President of CSC's Office of Science and Engineering. "On the one side are the people who create and 'own' the data, who may be government scientists, and on the other side are users... In between there's the chance for private companies to take the data and use it to deliver more detailed, relevant information to decision-makers who need it."

In the U.S. Global Climate Change Research Program, leaders recognize this new challenge said Dr. Tom Karl, chair of the group's subcommittee on global climate change research and director of NOAA's National Climatic Data Center. "We need to now go beyond understanding natural systems alone into understanding how natural systems connect with human systems," Karl said. "And that requires us to understand the kinds of information the user community needs to make decisions."