

THE SCIENCE AND HUMANITY OF WEATHER, CLIMATE, AND SOCIETY

The advent of *Weather, Climate, and Society* signals a major change in both the content and the organization of climate science. It has been obvious for some time that research in the social and the climate sciences often runs in parallel tracks and that both fields could benefit from more collaboration. One significant area of substantive overlap is research on weather and climate change. Both the anthropogenic influences on climate and weather and the impacts of climate and weather on human behavior, policies, and current and future well-being are of interest to natural sciences scientists regardless of their discipline. Moreover, the results of research at this nexus of the physical and the social and behavioral sciences also provide critical information to decision and policy makers and to managers in both the public and private sectors. But until the decision to publish *Weather, Climate, and Society* by the American Meteorological Society (AMS), scientists and decision makers lacked a scholarly forum where they could go to find research articles that met their needs.

What is *Weather, Climate, and Society*? It is an interdisciplinary, international, scientific, and policy journal. It is *interdisciplinary* because it is targeted at publishing outstanding research that goes beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries. It focuses on the critically important research problems that can no longer be examined within a single discipline or even field of science. It is *international* because it recognizes that issues of weather, climate, and society are not neatly confined to national boundaries. They are often global or regional in their scope, as are many of the policy and managerial decisions related to these topics. At the same time, valuable research is being conducted by scientists in many countries on a more focused scale, often at the national or subnational level, and the journal will cover that research as well. The journal is *scientific*, drawing on the expertise of leading scientists in these fields and selecting articles through the same stringent peer-review process that is characteristic of all journals published by the American Meteorological Society. Finally, it is oriented toward *policy*. The journal speaks not only to the research interests of scientists, but also to the growing policy and information needs of a wide range of individuals who are increasingly forced to make decisions related to weather, climate, and society that affect the lives and economic security of millions of people.

Given the breadth of the journal, its sponsorship by the American Meteorological Society, and its interdisciplinary and international orientation, it is legitimate to ask what it could mean to the social sciences. Quite simply, I believe that *Weather, Climate, and Society* can open up new worlds of research and help redefine the social sciences so that they can better address the critical emerging problems of society. In the mid-twentieth century, social scientists, along with national leaders and even ordinary citizens, assumed that human society had conquered nature, that societies, governments, and economies were able to function independently of the physical world. To be sure, extreme natural disasters occasionally threatened that perception, but once the disaster had been overcome, feelings of mastery over nature reasserted themselves. With the emergence of the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s and our growing understanding of

climate change in the 1980s and 1990s, social scientists began to recognize that human societies, economies, and cultures are not independent of the physical world. Instead, they function both in partnership with that world and as stewards of it. As a consequence, the social sciences must focus their attention on the complexity of that partnership and expand their focus to the physical as well as the social worlds, just as physical scientists are increasingly taking account of socio-economic impacts on physical processes and interactions. *Weather, Climate, and Society* challenges social scientists to focus their understanding of human behavior and human society and their long experience in these important research fields on issues related to human society on earth. If this challenge is accepted, the social sciences and the use of science in the service of humanity will be forever changed for the better.

That *Weather, Climate, and Society* exists at all is because of the vision of a large number of people over the past several years. The dramatis personae include Bill Hooke, director of the AMS Policy Program, who prodded the American Meteorological Society to consider publishing a journal in this underserved arena. Keith Seitter, executive director of AMS, Ken Heideman, AMS director of Publications, and his staff, Dave Jorgensen and the AMS Publications Commission, and the AMS Council provided sustained support for the idea. Once the decision was made to move ahead, the journal took shape under the scientific guidance of three outstanding and dedicated editors, Ben Orlove, Lisa Dilling, and Jeff Lazo, and an editorial board comprising leaders in this field. I invite you to join us in this endeavor, as readers and contributors, as we explore *Weather, Climate, and Society*.

Roberta Balstad
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Weather, Climate, and Society