

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and  
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

February 1994

## **Review of *Symposium on the Impacts of Climatic Change and Variability on the Great Plains* by Geoffrey Wall**

Paul A. Kay

*University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Kay, Paul A., "Review of *Symposium on the Impacts of Climatic Change and Variability on the Great Plains* by Geoffrey Wall" (1994). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 168.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/168>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**Symposium on the Impacts of Climatic Change and Variability on the Great Plains.** Geoffrey Wall, Editor. Department of Geography Publication Series, Occasional Paper No. 12. Waterloo, Ontario: University of Waterloo, 1991. x + 376 pp. Figures, tables, and references. \$25.00.

This book collects the papers from a 1990 symposium in Calgary that brought American and Canadian experts together to share knowledge and insights on the regional implications of global change. The symposium was sponsored by government agencies on both sides of the border, attesting to the recognition of the importance of the issues and implications. The volume

opens with nine overview papers on climatic change, climate models, scenarios of international and Plains agriculture under climatic change, socio-economic adaptability, and response strategies. The following six topical sections each contain five or six brief papers (most with short bibliographies) by specialists. Introductory summaries to each topical section identify the state of and gaps in knowledge, and recommend research initiatives. The topics of focus are agriculture, water resources, forestry, wetlands and wildlife, rangelands, and a catch-all of energy, transportation, and recreation. The symposium summary actually exists as the introduction to the book.

The symposium organizers defined the Great Plains with political borders—the three Canadian prairie provinces and the eight north-central U.S. states from Montana to Minnesota south to Colorado and Kansas. The organizers claim that such a large area so defined “shares many common characteristics, such as a semi-arid climate . . . an agricultural resource base . . . [and] sparse water resources” (p.1). The region in fact stretches across climatic gradients from mid-continental to subarctic, and encompasses high mountains and boreal forest as well as grasslands and extensive agriculture. The southern Plains fall outside the purview of the symposium, and some papers in the topical sessions stray outside the region. It is clear that the regional definition may be too simplistic, especially when state- or province-wide statistics are used.

Ian Burton, of Canada's Atmospheric Environment Service, stresses the importance of the regional focus and the quest for resilient regional responses in his introductory paper. He also draws an informative distinction between the conventional impact view (how will climate change? how do these changes ramify? what will be the economic impacts of these changes?) and the approach that posits possible future economies, overlays climatic shocks, and asks how to adjust now to ensure future resiliency. Many of the papers in, and much of the organization of the book, come out of the former approach, yet can serve well as the basis for the latter approach.

All in all, despite the flaws identified here (which are typical of symposium collections), this volume is extremely important, informative, and useful to any student of the Great Plains and Prairies. It serves both as a checkpost of current thinking about what we know of the Plains environment in the context of climatic change, and as a beacon illuminating research directions. **Paul A. Kay**, *Department of Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.*