



[NCAR](#) > [SIP](#) > [Weather and Society Watch](#) > [Guest Editorial](#)

**Current Edition**

- [Guest Editorial](#)
- [From the Director](#)
- [News & Announcements](#)
- [Focus on Research](#)
- [Program Highlights](#)
- [Jobs & Opportunities](#)
- [Conferences](#)
- [Downloadable PDF Version](#)

**Previous Editions**

- [1996-2002](#)

**Future Editions**

- [Submit Your Ideas](#)

**About Us**

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Subscribe to Newsletter](#)
- [Related Resources](#)
- [SIP Home Page](#)

**Weather and Society Watch**  
**Guest Editorial**

[Watch This Space](#)  
by Roger A. Pielke, Jr. \*

In 1990, NCAR's Mickey Glantz had the foresight to recognize that focusing on the societal impacts of weather was just as important to NCAR's mission and to society as its longer term focus on climate impacts. As a result, Mickey organized a workshop that produced a research agenda that remains current 16 years later. The agenda focused on interdisciplinary research in the areas of weather forecasts, impacts, and responses. Recent hurricanes, floods, heat waves, and winter storms demonstrate the importance of continued attention to the societal impacts of weather and the role of research in contributing to the information needs of decision makers.

In 1993, I was fortunate to begin working with Mickey and others at NCAR to implement a societal impacts research program based in the Environmental and Societal Impacts Group (ESIG). The program was designed to foster extensive collaborations with the weather community, including government, academia, and the private sector. During my eight years at NCAR, we focused on developing wide-ranging research and outreach activities to complete the very active efforts of the U.S. Weather Research Program (USWRP), then under the leadership of Rit Carbone. Rit also spearheaded the development of an international focus on the societal impacts of weather through the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

At ESIG we took advantage of the early years of the World Wide Web to produce what became a widely read newsletter, called *WeatherZine*; a societal impacts Web portal (a "Yahoo" for weather impacts), called "SOCASP"; and an extensive bibliography on the use and value of weather forecasts. We also developed the *Extreme Weather Sourcebook*, which contained data on the economic effects of hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes in the United States, along with a range of other data. This product became very popular with the media and with educators in particular.

Over the years, however, the fortunes of the USWRP waned a bit, and its early momentum did not carry through. As a consequence, interest in the societal impacts of weather also diminished.

But the challenges posed by weather and the opportunities to use science to societal benefit have not disappeared. So it's incredibly exciting to see NCAR once again taking a leadership role in this area with its Societal Impacts Program (SIP). Led by Jeff Lazo, SIP is reinvigorating research and outreach in this area. Along with Eve Gruntfest and Julie Demuth, Jeff has also made a major contribution to education with the WAS\*IS program (see "[WAS\\*IS Changes Culture](#)").

As the toll of weather events continues to mount, the potential for research to contribute to the needs of decision makers grows apace. Interdisciplinary research—where physical and social science meet—can play a significant role in improving the effectiveness of research spending in the meteorological sciences. NCAR's SIP has a large role to play in helping to realize this potential.

*\* Roger (pielke@colorado.edu) is the Director of the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Environmental Sciences (CIRES).*