

UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE INTERPRETATIONS

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Climate change has been in the news recently with impacts projected to vary from little change to catastrophic. To adequately understand what is being presented, one needs to understand how the data is being interpreted and in some cases “spun.” Examples of how earlier records are ignored, data is interpreted, and the same data can be interpreted differently was presented with numerous examples. Examples will consist mostly of Montana data. The main emphasis will be on weather records, mountain snow pack, fires, and stream flow. Long-term records will be compared to short term records that are currently being used to advance the impact of climate change. Words such as “if,” “when,” “current trends,” and “should” are being interpreted as “will,” “inevitable,” or “absolute” by many observers. Sometimes, changes that are reported to be caused by climate change result from other factors. In some cases, natural variability is interpreted to imply climate change. By understanding how the data is collected, modified, and reported, individuals will be better able to evaluate how climate change might impact their operations, or how it might influence their interpretation of field data or natural processes.