Climate migration in the US and New England: A social scientist’s view

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Hazards happen (nearly) everywhere

Source: Spatial Hazard Events and Losses Database for the US, https://cemhs.asu.edu/sheldus/
Why do people persist in hazardous places?

• FEMA disaster recovery and environmental management policies over the past century or more are oriented to in-place adaptation
• Pro-growth community policies protect people and places
• People are:
  • Invested in communities, e.g. homeowners, place-based employment, social networks, churches, health care providers, etc...
  • Attached to places, e.g. cultural and familial roots
  • Housing affordability and access keep people locked in place
• County population growth after a hurricane tends to follow the pre-hurricane pattern
  • Growing counties grow
  • Stable or declining counties remain stable or continue to decline
What does environmental migration look like?

• When people are ready to move, environment plays marginal role in location choice
  • Life cycle migration: young adulthood, family formation, empty nesting, retirement
  • Destination choice reflects life cycle needs:
    • Cities concentrate jobs and people
    • Suburbs concentrate single family housing, schools, green spaces
    • Retirement destinations concentrate more affordable cost of living and natural amenities
• Environmental amenities attract in-migrants and retain residents
  • When does environment become a hazard?
    • Warm weather becomes a heat wave
    • Coastal amenities exposed to extreme storms and sea level rise
    • Mountain views become wildfire pathways
Climate migration in the future?

- Migration in the US will continue to be influenced by environmental amenities and disamenities
  - Changes in geographic population distribution will be gradual
  - Rapid onset events will displace people temporarily and cause more mobility
- Housing and disaster recovery policies will play a strong role in influencing hazard exposure
  - Housing affordability and access
  - Zoning housing out of repeat hazard areas
  - Disaster recovery public and private insurance policies