

UW-Madison: Meet Wisconsin's new state climatologist, Steve Vavrus

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MADISON — Steve Vavrus has been named the new state climatologist and director of the Wisconsin State Climatology Office.

“It’s an honor to serve as director of the revitalized office. We’re looking forward to using the new resources to deliver expanded climate services so that Wisconsinites can use weather and climate information most effectively,” says Vavrus, who is also a senior scientist and the assistant director of the Nelson Institute’s Center for Climatic Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Vavrus has served as the interim director of the SCO since the start of 2023. He is an expert on global climate change, extreme weather and Wisconsin climate. He also co-directs the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts and formerly served as the chair of the American Meteorological Society’s Polar Meteorology and Oceanography Committee.

“Steve’s expertise in Wisconsin climate variability and change and extreme weather events, along with his extensive experience in supporting Wisconsin stakeholders as the co-director of the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts, ensures his ongoing and future success as the director of the Wisconsin State Climatology Office,” says Michael Notaro, director of the CCR. “Our state climatology office is in good hands with his decades of practical experience and passion for studying and understanding weather and climate.”

The SCO aims to help Wisconsinites use climate data as efficiently and effectively as possible across a wide range of communities, businesses and agencies.

By making the data they collect on the state’s climate and climate impacts publicly

available, SCO researchers support agriculture, crop management, education and climate research around the state.

For example, as part of the Wisconsin Rural Partnership, –the SCO will receive funds to revamp and expand. Not only will this help UW–Madison maintain its position as a leader in climate change research, but it will also advance the university’s land-grant mission to support community-based projects and create new partnerships that better serve rural communities.

A current SCO project that supports this goal is the Wisconsin Environmental Mesonet (Wisconet), directed by plant and agroecosystem and environmental studies professor Chris Kucharik. The Wisconet is a system of weather and soil monitoring stations throughout the state that will provide more than one dozen measurements every five minutes.

The SCO will also continue to regularly provide data on precipitation, temperature and snow as they have done for decades.

“The office will build on its long history of serving Wisconsin, most recently through the leadership provided by emeritus director John Young and continuing assistant state climatologist Ed Hopkins,” says Vavrus. “Our services and research will focus on information, interpretation and investigation to help residents better understand the climate of our state and how they can use that knowledge for their own purposes.”