NYS Sea Level Rise Task Force Summary of Public Outreach Meetings

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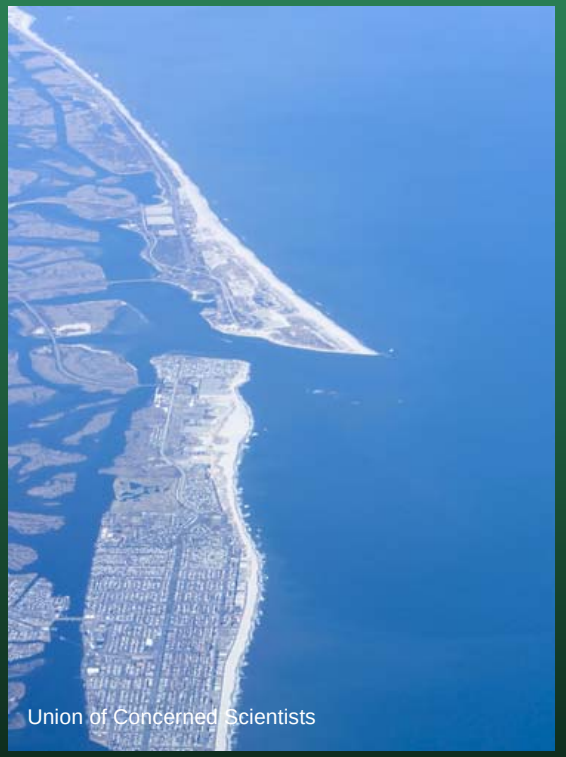
4 Outreach Meetings

- Locations: Poughkeepsie, New York City, Nassau County, Suffolk County
- Presentations on:
  - Framework of Task Force
  - Climate science and SLR
  - Ecosystems
  - Infrastructure



Climate change and sea level rise projections

- Acceptance of climate change science and sea level rise – i.e. that it is real
- Public wants to know why we aren't doing more to help adapt to sea level rise
- Public wants answers we don't have yet
  - How much SLR by when?
  - Which projections are most likely to occur?
  - Large natural disaster that overwhelms the city or will it be a slow process over time?

Primary Concerns by Region

Hudson Valley - LIDAR and flood studies, visual tools to bring to local officials to help them understand vulnerabilities

NYC - Emergency planning and evacuation, leaders aren't aware of vulnerability, Columbia University construction, Frustration about continued waterfront development

(Note that this meeting was prior to the release of the NYC report.)

Nassau/Suffolk - Greatest attendance because already experiencing impacts, coastal erosion, high risk development, lots of frustration over local government decisions

General Concerns and Recommendations

- What will happen to this effort after December 31st? Will the task force continue its work? What will make this a living document?
- How are we measuring sea level rise and where it will go on the landscape when elevation data quality is inconsistent across study area?
- Must consider the SLR impacts of coastal storms – that is the most important risk, will resonate with public
- Funding mechanisms must be included in the report

Examples of specific considerations for infrastructure

- How will we handle likelihood of future updates to projections as we make recommendations for infrastructure?
- Will our assessment consider the future plans for the Tappan Zee Bridge?
- How do we replace what is lost on beaches and shoreline (5-6’ per year in East Hampton) without beach nourishment and without hardening the shoreline?
- Is task force evaluating desalination plants?
- Evacuation plans are old and outdated, some evacuation routes flood now (ex. Long Island, Hempstead Bay area)

Examples of specific considerations for ecosystems

- Will TF be monitoring change in SLR only or also change in temperature?
- Is there anything that can be done to rebuild wetlands in areas like Jamaica Bay?
- Will salinity and flow of Hudson be affected?
- Can tidal wetland regulations be strengthened?
- Can we use Phragmites to hold sediment/sand on our barrier islands and raise island elevation?

Concern over lack of local gov't leadership on this issue

- Public frustrated with local leaders not being aware of or addressing implications of SLR
- Large developers have too much power over local decisions
- Lots of development still being approved in high risk areas – including coasts, floodplains, tidal wetlands
- Local government not coordinated across political boundaries, no communication
- Fear that we may be forced to build sea walls at great cost (aesthetically and economically) because we allowed development for too long in high risk areas

Community leaders – What should we be doing about SLR?

- How can communities make themselves more resilient?
- Should they be encouraging water dependent transport in waterfront communities?
- Should they be reconnecting with waterfront or retreating?
- What should local gov’ts be doing to plan for emergency mgmt/planning? What do they need to know?
- How can we restrict development in high risk areas?

State Action is Needed

Coordination between:

- CT, NY and NJ on SLR recommendations
- DEC and NYC on permitting
- Climate assessment projects (NYSERDA, DEC, TNC, NYC)
- Agency coastal polices (DEC, DOS, NYC, FEMA, USACE, etc.)

State Action is Needed

Planning

- Assess cumulative effects of towns & cities decisions when developing guidance
- Develop a comprehensive plan for coastal shoreline areas including a comprehensive erosion management plan.
- Public frustrated that state is not mandating decisions at the local level to reduce risk - may need a statewide strategy to deal with the challenge of local government decision making
- Evaluate planned retreat/abandonment vs. structural protection
- Planning for coastal migration corridors

State Action is Needed

Permitting

- Consider specific time horizons
- Require SLR in EIS and SEQR
- Larger buffer regulations for tidal wetlands, high risk areas
- Update or go beyond the NFIP
- Incorporate climate risk into every aspect of permitting and funding

State Action is Needed

Science and Monitoring

- Need regular timeframe for evaluation of science and recommendations with updates to the legislature.
- Data collection and monitoring
  - LIDAR data and flood studies esp. in the HV
  - Monitoring for changes in tidal wetlands, sediment, wave energy, biodiversity
  - Better understanding of current and projected erosion rates

Outreach Concerns and Recommendations

Challenging message

- Frustration that the public and public officials are not concerned.
- Difficult to make issue relevant in an economic crisis
- It is hard to get people to take SLR seriously because the increases are incremental and slow to appear
- Local reaction to this information may elicit a strong negative response especially from shoreline property owners who fear the decline in property values

Outreach Concerns and Recommendations

Ways to communicate

- Simplify presentations and technical information
- Include case studies/illustrations, show concrete ways a locality can best respond to climate change
- Use effects of strong storms get people's attention
- Define resilience
- Set up meetings specifically for mayors/supervisors
- Better quantify costs/benefits of ecosystem services to clarify what's at stake
- Show what shoreline will look like with build out in the next 20, 50 years to demonstrate consequences of prior, current and future decisions
- Visual tools (maps, models) are most important. Should be cheap or free.

Offers of Assistance

- Scenic Hudson is developing coastal waterfront development guidelines and a model overlay zone that they will share with TF
- National Park Service is also working with Columbia on this issue and willing to partner with us as we go through this process
- State and national parks on LIS will share information we develop with their public audience on SLR
- Fish and Wildlife service would like to offer their help in joining the ecosystems workgroup.