

EXPANDING THE FLOODPLAIN: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH IN PLANNING FOR SEA LEVEL RISE

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Sea level rise is creating complicated economic, social, infrastructural, health, legal and safety concerns for coastal communities who are experiencing higher tides, increased flooding and intensified storm surges. NOAA predicts that global sea levels will rise between eight inches and 6.6 feet by 2100.

New research by Matt Hauer at the University of Georgia and Jason Evans at Stetson University estimates that between 62,000 to 159,000 people living in coastal Georgia are at risk of between 3.3-6.6 feet of sea level rise during this time period.

When a community floods, it can compromise drinking water, overwhelm stormwater systems and cut off evacuation routes. As flood insurance rates rise, it can affect the affordability of housing and change the fabric of the community. Local governments are facing difficult choices and overwhelming costs in planning for the future. Recent storms like Sandy, Katrina and Joaquin illustrate the excessive damage and life-threatening situations that flooding can bring.

An integrated, interdisciplinary approach utilizing expertise in communications and outreach can help engage the public and inform decision makers in addressing these challenges. While the importance of communications and outreach in climate adaptation planning is often referred to abstractly, it can be very difficult to implement on the ground in an equitable and efficient way. Georgia Sea Grant Communications Director Jill Gambill will share insights from working hand-in-hand with coastal communities in Georgia to plan for sea level rise and nuisance flooding, highlighting proven strategies for opening doors and facilitating dialogue, challenges encountered along the way and lessons that have been learned as the state of Georgia begins to grapple with rising seas.

This presentation will share emerging strategies, new tools and tested methods to connect with diverse audiences, such as marginalized stakeholders, concerned citizens, local government staff, elected officials, state legislators and federal contacts, exploring how to tailor approaches, customize messaging and build bridges. Examples will be drawn from communities throughout the Georgia coast, including Tybee Island, the state's first community to formally plan for sea level rise and recipient of the 2014 National Superior Outreach Programming Award (the highest award given by the national Sea Grant network).

Partnering with Georgia Sea Grant, the University of Georgia Marine Extension and UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the City of Tybee Island will save property owners nearly \$1 million this year, due to their floodplain management efforts and advancement within FEMA's Community Rating System.

Gambill will additionally share tips on how to utilize social and mainstream media, navigate political divides and harness the power of regional collaborations, such as those enabled

by the Social Coast Forum.