

ASSESSING THE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES TO RESPOND TO EXTERNAL STRESSORS

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Adaptation to environmental change is one of the greatest challenges facing society today. It is well recognized that small coastal communities are particularly vulnerable to environmental change because of their exposure and sensitivity to external stressors (i.e., direct proximity to coastal hazards, reliance on declining fishery and forestry sectors, limited socio-economic resources). Less is known, however, about the adaptive capacity of coastal communities and specifically, the role that local governance plays in adaptive responses. Better understanding is needed of factors in community vulnerability and adaptation to external stressors to inform policies that aim to improve socio-economic and environmental resilience in coastal areas. We used a qualitative case study approach to compare and contrast the ways six coastal communities in Oregon have experienced and responded to external stressors. We identify key factors in communities' abilities to be resilient to challenges and, in particular, the role that local governance plays in enabling or constraining responses. Our research improves understanding of coastal community resilience and adaptation to external stressors. We identify opportunities for enhancing the resilience of coastal communities in response to external stressors through policy and programs.