



Case Study: Annual “Better Safe Than Sorry” Workshop Series Inspires, Tracks Action

Wells NERR in Maine Keeps Finger on the Adaptation Pulse and Spurs Further Progress

Overview

The Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve (WNERR) annually hosts the “Better Safe Than Sorry” workshop series, bringing together representatives from ten Southern Maine coastal communities to learn from each other about how to plan and prepare for coastal storms, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events.

The Reserve’s Coastal Training Program assists Southern Maine communities by tracking actions taken by local governments in an annually updated spreadsheet to show progress over time.

When communities come together every fall, they learn of others’ efforts, discuss challenges, hear about the latest science, and learn new skills. In subtle ways, the action tracking nudges communities to “keep up with their neighbors.”



Photo: Courtesy of Wells Reserve

In 2013 and 2015 (pictured) Southern Maine coastal communities participated in NOAA’s Climate Adaptation for Coastal Communities training. Wells NERR thus knew there was great interest from communities for working on climate change adaptation. The SAIM workshop helped to make the conversation local and accountable.

Background

Coastal Southern Maine is no stranger to erosion of its expansive beaches, inland and coastal flooding during intense storms, and—increasingly—the signs of sea-level rise. People tend to think of Maine’s rocky shoreline (mostly further north), so many are not aware that Maine was the first state in the U.S. to pass a law in 1988 that made explicit reference to sea-level rise and required coastal development to show it would be safe from a rising ocean.

But staff turn-over, politics, and other competing issues have pushed adaptation planning on and off the agenda over the years. Now there are significant differences among the local home-rule governments in terms of their readiness to address sea level rise and climate change impacts.



This case study was created to serve as a reference for individuals interested in indicators and metrics to help communities define and track progress on their climate adaptation goals. Additional background and resources are available on the website: www.ResilienceMetrics.org. This website was developed in partnership with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System with funding from NOAA.

Facilitation Tools and Job aids

- Facilitation Tool: Adaptation Action Tracking and related Job Aid and Hand-out
- Facilitation Tool: Convening Municipal Stakeholders to Jointly Track Adaptation Actions
- Job Aid: Good Adaptation Actions

Resources

- Georgetown Adaptation Clearinghouse's coastal adaptation framework : <https://www.georgetownclimate.org/reports/adaptation-tool-kit-sea-level-rise-and-coastal-land-use.html>
- Better Safe than Sorry workshop series: <https://www.wellsreserve.org/blog/better-safe-than-sorry>
- Maine Adaptation Toolkit: <https://www.maine.gov/dep/sustainability/climate/adaptation-toolkit.html>
- Tourism Resilience Index: <https://www.wellsreserve.org/project/decreasing-vulnerability-for-our-beach-based-businesses>
- Sandy Dialogues: <https://www.wellsreserve.org/project/the-sandy-dialogues-fostering-resilience-through-stories>
- New England Climate Adaptation Project (NECAP): <http://necap.mit.edu/>
- Climate Solutions New England (University of New Hampshire) for scientific information, assessments etc.: <https://sustainableunh.unh.edu/climate-solutions-new-england>
- NOAA tide gauge data: <http://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/>

Contact

- **Annie Cox**, Wells NERR, acox@wellsnerr.org

However, some of the most vulnerable Southern Maine beach communities were reminded of the need to prepare for the growing risks from climate change by their counterparts from New Jersey: Superstorm Sandy-affected communities paid them a visit through a project called the “Sandy Dialogues,” saying, “We now wish we had done more to prepare for these emergencies.”

Outcomes

The first “Better Safe Than Sorry” workshop in June 2015 leveraged this recognition that preparedness and proactive adaptation planning might pay off many times over. Prior to the workshop, WNERR staff contacted planners in each of the ten Southern Maine coastal communities to gauge their community’s levels of preparedness and engender interest in the “Better Safe Than Sorry” workshop. The information was collected in a spreadsheet and shared with workshop participants.

In the workshop discussions, participants brainstormed which goals they might pursue together to maintain the vibrancy and character of the Southern Maine region, including:

- Building a clearinghouse of tools and information that communities could draw on, and ensuring that planners are working off the same information basis
- Better integrating emergency response planning with long-term planning
- Developing a regional vision of a vibrant Southern Maine future by
 - Protecting lives and ensuring public safety
 - Preserving the economic and tax base of the region
 - Preserving water quality

The exchange that followed quickly turned into “shop talk among experts,” with planners and emergency managers discussing the need to update emergency route maps, use updated precipitation data in local infrastructure design (e.g., updated design storm standards to inform the selection of the size of culverts), and educate homeowners about future flooding impacts.

Tracking and sharing with communities what they had each done to date (and how they accomplished it technically, financially, and politically) served subtly to spur on those who had not yet taken certain actions. These actions vary widely, but examples captured in the tracker include communities developing chapters in their comprehensive plan updates on climate change and sea-level rise, as well as funding for a regional sustainability and coastal resilience coordinator at the regional planning commission.

Since then, WNERR has convened annual “Better Safe Than Sorry” workshops, used them to update the adaptation action-tracker and to share new developments, and create a forum for discussion and mutual learning to nudge communities to take adaptation planning to the next level.