

C-SMART Op-Ed piece

Point Reyes Light

May 13, 2015

We Need You to help plan for sea level rise along West Marin's shoreline.

Flooding, severe storms, and "king tides" are a problem most of us in West Marin have not just read about, but have likely already encountered personally. With sea level rise and storm severity forecast to increase dramatically in coming years, the threat is only growing to our homes, businesses, roads, and to the utilities and services that support daily life here. At times it might seem as if as individuals we are helpless in the face of a global problem of such vast scale; but the old adage, "act locally", applies now more than ever. In California, Marin County truly is at the forefront of community-driven planning and preparation for sea level rise – and we need your help!

Marin County Community Development Agency's "Collaboration: Sea-level Marin Adaptation Response Team (C-SMART)" is leading efforts to understand and plan for sea level rise on Marin's ocean coast. At public workshops in 2014, citizens gathered to learn about projected impacts and to share knowledge about vulnerable areas in their communities. Endangered assets they identified include homes, critical natural resources, fire stations, schools, businesses, septic systems, and more. Increased flooding and long-term inundation of roads could cut off access, emergency services and evacuation routes for people in need. Our coastal economy would be at risk if visitors couldn't reach scenic destinations, or if artisanal and agricultural products couldn't reach markets. And certain people – especially those with limited mobility or financial resources, and those living in low-lying or isolated areas – would be far more vulnerable to sea level rise than others, and require special attention in planning for a resilient future for our diverse community.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet for adapting to the changes coming to our coastline. All of the potential adaptation measures have differing economic, environmental, and social costs and effects. Seawalls and rock revetments come with their own significant costs, and are discouraged by the California Coastal Commission. Wetland and dune restoration, and creation of natural offshore reefs and breakwaters, may be more feasible in some settings than others. In a region where single access routes are common, rerouting or elevating roads could involve very expensive and disruptive construction projects. Elevating or flood-proofing structures would require innovative policy development. In some areas, managed retreat might be considered. No matter what mix of strategies we eventually employ, all of them will involve tradeoffs – tradeoffs best considered by our community now, while there is still time for a reasoned and thoughtful discussion of our plan of action, rather than having hastily considered, expensive and potentially contentious actions forced on us later through our own inaction.

If you live, work or play along Marin's coast, you will be affected by sea level rise and changes in the ocean environment in the coming years. You have a stake in deciding how to navigate the complicated tradeoffs that you, your children, and generations to come will face in adapting to changes that will accelerate with each passing year.

Marin County's C-SMART program will host Marin's coastal residents at community workshops on Saturday, May 30 from 9am-1pm at the Dance Palace in Point Reyes Station, and Saturday, June 6 from 9am-1pm at the Stinson Beach Community Center. Come learn about potential sea level rise adaptation strategies and share your ideas for the future through an interactive "Game of Floods" activity. Please visit www.marinslr.org for more information, and RSVP to marinslr@marincounty.org.

- Jeff Loomans and Lawrence Crutcher, C-SMART Stakeholder Advisory Committee