

Maine Beaches Conference Plenary Session II

Report Out from *Priorities* Sessions:

During Concurrent Session II, three distinct beach stakeholder groups met to discuss priority issues and consider possible solutions. This *Report Out* session featured summaries of those meetings by representatives of each group. The findings from these sessions will be shared with the Maine Beach Advisory Committee, to help guide their efforts.

Ron Owens

Mr. Owens, Scarborough Town Manager, summarized the discussion at the *Priorities for Public Officials* session. Mr. Owens reported that his group wants everyone to understand the complexity of the issues faced by public officials. How does a town maintain public access when so much of the property is privately owned? How is maintaining public beach property financed? Is the best method of funding taxes, user fees, or some other method? How is environmental quality maintained when there are large numbers of people using the beaches? How do towns see to it that the varying needs of all interest groups are met? The public must realize that there are no easy answers to these questions.

Robert Almeder

Mr. Almeder, Goose Rocks Beach resident and S.O.S. Maine member, reviewed the *Priorities for Coastal Property Owners* session. He expressed several concerns of this stakeholder group. Global warming that will lead to erosion of their property is a major worry of coastal property owners. The group also expressed concern over increased regulatory activity, water quality, beach erosion, and responsibility for beach management and maintenance. The group did not feel that sharing access with the general public is an issue due to the cooperation that has existed between the land owners and the general public.

Ben Keller

Mr. Keller, sports videographer and surfer, summarized the *Priorities for Beach Users* session. Mr. Keller reported that his group's concerns included maintaining public access and dog owner access to beaches, water quality through proper watershed management, and good communication between all interest groups. The group also suggested better public transportation to beaches, upgraded facilities, gaining easements to the beaches along private property, pay as you go for use of facilities, and good communication and cooperation between differing interest groups as goals that should be established.

Maine's Changing Beaches: People and Action

Margaret Davidson, Director, NOAA Coastal Services Center

In this session, Ms. Davidson made a strong case for the importance of coastal communities to plan for natural disasters and offered some ideas for consideration. She began by stating a few points that should be of concern, then went on to discuss various issues coastal communities should be planning for now.

Ms. Davidson opened her session by stating that current climate data indicates a return to normal frequency of major storms, *but with more extremes around the mean*. This statement was followed by several other items that should be taken under advisement by all members of coastal communities:

- 50 % of the people live on 20 % of the land, mostly along the coast.
- Coastal communities represent a major segment of tourism dollars.
- The southwest is running out of water so there will be a migration of people back to coastal areas where there is water.
- Lloyd's of London has notified property insurers that they need to pay attention to trends in the weather and climate when writing policies.
- If a hurricane equivalent to that of 1938 were to strike New England again, it would cause 200 billion dollars (in today's dollars) of losses to insurance companies. That does not include losses not covered by insurance. It should be noted that the National Flood Insurance Program does not have enough money to cover all the losses that would occur should another hurricane of that magnitude strike New England.
- Insurance companies plan to discontinue coverage to 250,000 coastal area policy holders over the next few years.
- There is very little money available for beach replenishment programs.

With the potential for major economic and social losses resulting from the conditions mentioned above, Ms. Davidson went on to suggest a number of things that need to be done now to reduce the effects of storms to our coastal communities. They are all part of the *Community Resiliency Awareness* program. She defined resilience as “the capacity of a system potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing, in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure.”

One of the most important concepts is that each community must decide what its values are and make protection and recovery plans that reflect those values. For some areas it may be preserving natural beauty for its tourists and residents. Other communities may place a higher value on residential or industrial development, or preservation of natural resources in beach areas. Once these priorities and values have been identified, it is important to have cooperation between all parties in developing plans do all that is possible to reduce losses when a storm does strike.

Some examples of what can be done are encouraging property owners to invest in hurricane shutters and/or tie down straps by giving tax incentives or reduced insurance premiums. Communities must require building in environmentally appropriate sites such as behind dunes. It has been observed over and over again that communities separated from the sea by an extensive area of dunes suffer fewer losses from storms than those that allow building on, or in front of, dunes. Setback requirements need to take this into account. They should comply with the *30 year mark*.

It was emphasized that communities must educate their leaders in the concepts of Community Resiliency Awareness, coordinate efforts with NOAA's Climate Services office, spend money on coastal research programs similar to those that California and Florida have in place, and be certain that their efforts reflect a true cooperation between all interested parties.

Additional information on Coastal Resiliency Awareness can be found at www.CSC.noaa.gov,

During the Question and Answer period that followed the presentation, these points were made:

- It is known that beaches provide a major source of revenue to communities but very little data is available regarding exactly how many dollars they are worth to States' economies. This data would be valuable in demonstrating the importance of beach preservation efforts.
- In planning for future development, communities must take into account rising sea level, increased salt water intrusion, and the importance of having natural dune, marsh, and vegetative areas between the ocean and development sites.
- Studies show that natural seacoast areas have greater economic value than developed coasts.
- Congress should consider establishing a Gross Ecological Product, such as in Europe, in addition to a Gross National Product.
- Government funding is stretched so various agencies must be more efficient and cooperative in the spending of funds. The GAO indicates that by 2020 there will be no money for discretionary spending. Barely 25% of social services will be funded so there will be no money for ecological studies, etc.
- Resiliency efforts are truly grass roots and follow a *trickle up* economy.

Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Peter Slovinsky commented that he heard several key words and concepts repeated throughout the sessions that may be keys to protection and wise use of our coastal areas. The *role of individual citizens* in

coastal preservation, as well as the importance of *cooperation* between different interest groups cannot be overemphasized. In addition, communities need to implement plans for *resiliency* and *recovery* to deal with the impending assault on our coasts by climate changes that are already occurring.