

Afternoon plenary

Tin Smith Wells Reserve National Estuarine Research Reserve

Brought people up from NJ to tell their story to town managers, etc.

Messages of preparation are very difficult.

Then we did a tour of resilient properties, in partnership with Sea Grant. Many property owners know when they will have to abandon their property – as they renovate and elevate infrastructure.

FL took 22 years to pay off Hurricane Andrew. 1/3 recovered, 1/3 had not even started.

Returning to normal as quick as possible is important. Town halls, schools. Their schools, designated emergency shelters, were overwhelmed with people who lost their homes, so kids couldn't go to school, so parents couldn't deal with work, etc.

How prepared would you be to walk out of your home and not come back for 2 months? They had no cash, no paperwork, no photos of what they owned, computer passwords, medications, etc.

How do you get people to prepare, or prepare again after false alarms, or the "superstorm" that already happened?

when people could finally make it back to the island three months later, they didn't leave, and started cleaning up, putting debris out at the curb – they should have been sorting it as they went, would have sold millions.

Large banks worthless, local banks made all the difference. Hard to connect people with donations, etc. Volunteers showed up who needed housing, feeding, etc. Things were confusing. Eventually web pages went up for those who had moved away. But people didn't know what their options were.

Q. Was there any thing that would be different in Maine?

A. We don't have built up beaches. Our population is less dense. We won't get the attention, and can't expect government help. Steve Dickson: our high storm season is in the winter – this could happen in ice and snow conditions.

Jon Carter

Wells is 60 square miles; 40 are from Route 1 inland; 20 are from Route 1 to the beaches. 2/3 of valuation is in the 20 square miles. Planning for storms and slr has been on the radar. We've been working with the Wells Reserve and MIT on education and awareness about climate change and slr.

Even 20 months later, people were battle weary. They were working with constituents daily on FEMA relations, etc.

Preparing for returning to the island varied town by town. Those that waited for FEMA had setbacks; those who took quick action (emergency bonding, citizen assistance etc.) fared better. But after 20 months they were all still waiting and working to straighten things out.

Actions taken: Hoping to permit a demolition site (closed gravel pit) for emergency demolition. Develop a resiliency plan.

Loretta Hoglund, Drakes Island property owner: I was interested from a scientific background. Our property is two lots back. I never thought it would apply to me personally. I was shocked. Houses that were many many blocks back from the beach were torn off their foundations. Even properties a half mile away were flooded by several feet of water. I realized we were in trouble when I remembered that Sandy was at one point projected to live in Maine.

You could see a difference between the communities that had been proactive vs. reactive. Some places were already rebuilding, others had vacant lots. The ones farther ahead didn't wait for FEMA.

The second thing that struck me was the volume of debris still present. And I started thinking about the empty paint cans in my garage, and the basement with its oil tank and utilities being flooded, and my lack of insurance. I don't know what I'm going to do, but I have to start thinking about a plan. I'm still not sure what to do personally.

Incredible emotional toll taken on Town officials. Responsibility on their shoulders – clearing roads for emergency vehicles, fires from natural gas pipelines, residents without insurance who had to abandon their properties. But I was amazed by the recovery efforts and rebuilding.

businessperson and Representative Robert Foley, House District 7, Wells: I sell insurance for a living. Going to NJ was eye opening. I don't know how you prepare for that level of destruction. Or the need for psychologists to help residents deal with disaster. How do we deal with it at the state level? At one point we had a Coastal Caucus to discuss the issues and think about policy. 67% of tax dollars in ME from York and Cumberland Counties. What happens here matters – if we don't prepare and protect the resource (tourist industry) we will be in trouble. We need to include funding in any bill, or a bonding bank that towns could tap into. The towns that prepared to do this themselves did better after Sandy. Having a funding available is important.

Out of sandy, 10 towns have formed a "Better Safe than Sorry" partnership to figure out what they can do and learn from each other.