

Climate change subject of 2-day training

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BRUNSWICK — If you've spent any time along the coast, you know how much it changes. These changes can be caused by things like the tides, by storms, changes in season, and human uses.

But, you might not think about the bigger picture changes that are happening as a result of climate change. These are often hard to predict and even harder to adapt to.

Fortunately, there is a suite of resources out there for town managers to draw from in thinking pro-actively about how to buffer the impacts of these changes on the coasts themselves as well as the people who live and work there.

The challenge is that for small coastal communities like many of ours in Maine, it is hard to know where to start. In order to provide an introduction to the resources out there, the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve recently invited



experts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association to facilitate a two-day workshop at the Brunswick Hotel and Tavern.

The Maine Coastal Program funded the event. Scientists and coastal managers from around the region also presented information about climate trends, observations and predictions along with examples of local communities that are currently implementing adaptation strategies.

Climate change is a big concept that is hard to get your head around. To break the ice, the first day started with a Mad Lib exercise:

“Climate adaptation is __ (one word) __ because __ (few words) ____.” The responses ranged from “important” to “expensive” to “sneaky,” expressing the breadth of challenges that communities face in dealing with changes along their coasts be it prioritization, preparation or funding.

NOAA trainers then led the group in a planning exercise they have conducted with coastal communities all over the country. Speakers from Bowdoin College, University of New Hampshire and Maine’s Geological Survey along with CBEP’s director, Curtis Bohlen, were among a group who provided expertise on the Casco Bay region’s specific challenges.

Mr. Bohlen asked the thought-provoking questions: “How will a changing bay and its resources impact our coastal economy and our way of life? And, how might we adapt to and prepare for these uncertainties, while supporting and enhancing an ever-growing coastal economy?”

Throughout the day, there were several hands-on activities including a mapping exercise in which participants mapped where community assets such as ground transportation, natural shorelines, parks, storm water and wastewater are in their town. The group also brainstormed who the stakeholders are in their community and how to engage them.

Harpswell Fire Administrator and Emergency Management Agent Arthur Howe noted that Harpswell has a unique set of challenges due to its extensive coastline — 216 miles — and limited resources combined with having the highest average age of any town in Maine. Many residents live in isolated areas that are at high risk for coastal flooding and erosion.

It is important to build their awareness, as well as come up with solutions as a town. Harpswell has a “true sense of community and resiliency,” said Howe.

“Without a lot of resources, the town really strives to work together and build community awareness. There’s a wealth of talent in this town.”

Day 2 focused on taking action – how to assess which coastal assets or areas are most valuable, develop strategies to tackle them, and make a plan for how to move forward.

Participants came away with a specific list of actions and resources they can take back and implement in their communities.

As participant Madelyn Hennessy of West Bath put it, “When tackling a global issue like climate change, a guilt approach is not helpful. The training had a helpful approach by

providing examples of homegrown, concrete actions that a landowner or local community can take to address the issue.”

Hennessy is a West Bath Selectboard member and lifelong resident of West Bath whose family also operates Winterpoint Oysters at Mill Cove.

Trying to look at all of the resources along the coast combined with all the systems we have in place and the different ways in which we use them is likely to give you a big headache.

Fortunately, there are some wonderful digital tools that coastal planners can use. To that end, the next step in this training will be to offer a hands-on opportunity to test-drive these tools while sitting next to experts familiar with using them.

The goal is for participants to leave with new techniques to visualize and assess impacts in their communities.

Stay tuned for the dates and details of this follow-up workshop at www.cascobayeestuary.org, or email Victoria Boundy at [\[email protected\]](#) to be informed when the workshop is announced.

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