

News from the New York State

Sea Level Rise Task Force

Study: Sea Level Could Rise 23 Inches or More by Century's End

Climate change is resulting in an increased rate of sea level rise, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Fourth Assessment Report*. Conservative projections of sea level rise by the end of the century are 7 to 23 inches; some projections predict a rise of more than four and a half feet by 2100.

Rising seas and increased storm surges will put New York's coastlines at risk. Rising sea levels pose serious threats to coastal communities and natural resources around the globe, altering natural ecosystems and affecting the habitability of coastal cities and towns. More than 62 percent of the state's population lives in marine coastal counties.

According to the *Northeast Climate Impacts Assessment* conducted in 2007 by the Union of Concerned Scientists, as seas rise:

- Beaches and bluffs will suffer increased erosion, while the risk of severe flooding and storm damage will increase.
- Low-lying areas will be inundated, with the potential for saltwater to infiltrate into surface waters and aquifers.
- Transportation infrastructure, sewage and septic systems are at risk from flooding and erosion.

Task Force to Assess Impacts of Rising Seas

To assess impacts to the state's coastlines from rising seas and to recommend protective and adaptive measures, a 2007 state law created the New York State Sea Level Rise Task Force.

The task force held its first meeting on June 27, 2008; its report is due to the Legislature by December 31, 2009.

The task force is charged with applying the best available science to evaluate ways to

- Protect New York's remaining coastal ecosystems and natural habitats
- Increase coastal community resilience in the face of sea level rise.

The task force report will include the coastlines of the five boroughs of New York City, plus Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties and the tidal waters of the Hudson River to the Federal Dam at Troy. Because the river is tidal, Hudson River ecosystems, drinking water supplies and infrastructure are potentially at risk from rising waters.

Stakeholder Involvement

All of the Sea Level Rise Task Force meetings are open to the public. The task force plans to hold two series of public information and comment meetings in 2009. To receive e-mail notification of meetings and other task force activities, enroll in the Sea Level Rise Task Force listserv (accessible from <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/45202.html>). Comments on the task force's work may be submitted to slrtf@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

Report to Cover Impacts, Issues, Recommendations

A steering committee consisting of staff from several state agencies and non-governmental organizations will draft recommendations for Sea Level Rise Task Force approval. Task force work groups will study specific issue areas, such as natural resources, infrastructure, human health and water supply.

The task force's final report will include:

- An assessment of anticipated impacts related to sea level rise
- Recommendations to provide more protective standards and/or enforcement for:
 - Coastal development
 - Wetlands protection
 - Shoreline management/protection
 - Post-storm recovery
- Recommendations for adaptive measures to:
 - Protect and connect terrestrial and aquatic habitats to allow species to migrate with changing temperatures and conditions
 - Protect and restore habitat to maintain natural communities and protect ecological services they provide, e.g., flood control, clean water
 - Identify and monitor early effects of climate change on animals, plants, etc.
 - Integrate climate change adaptation strategies into state environmental plans
- Recommendations to amend local and/or state regulations or statutes to respond to sea level rise

Sea Level Rise Task Force Members Include NGOs, Government, Citizens

The New York State Sea Level Rise Task Force is composed of:

- **State agencies** (Department of Environmental Conservation, Department of State, Department of Transportation, Department of Health, Department of Insurance, Emergency Management Office)
- **Local governments** (Westchester County, Nassau County, Suffolk County, New York City)
- **Not-for-profit** groups and
- **Private citizens** appointed by elected officials.

The Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation serves as chair of the task force.

The task force's membership was established in its enabling legislation, Laws of New York, 2007, Chapter 613.

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