

Table of Contents

36
37

38 **PREFACE** 8

39 **P.1 SCOPE AND APPROACH OF THIS REPORT** 9

40 **P.2 FUTURE SEA LEVEL SCENARIOS ADDRESSED IN THIS REPORT** 13

41 **P.3 REPORT ORGANIZATION** 14

42 **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** 18

43 **1. SEA-LEVEL RISE IN THE MID-ATLANTIC** 18

44 **2. KEY FINDINGS** 21

45 *2.1 Sea-Level Rise and the Physical Environment* 21

46 *2.2 Societal Impacts and Implications* 25

47 *2.3 Preparing for Sea-Level Rise* 28

48 **3. MEASURES TO IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING** 29

49 **CONTEXT: SEA-LEVEL RISE AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE COAST** 31

50 **C.1 WHY IS GLOBAL SEA LEVEL RISING?** 33

51 **C.2 SEA-LEVEL RISE AROUND THE UNITED STATES** 39

52 *C.2.1 Future Sea-Level Rise Around the United States: Our Approach* 41

53 **C.3 IMPACTS OF SEA-LEVEL RISE FOR THE UNITED STATES** 43

54 *C.3.1 Coastal Vulnerability Around the United States* 43

55 *C.3.2 Shoreline Change and Coastal Erosion* 45

56 *C.3.3 Managing the Coastal Zone as Sea Level Rises* 48

57 **PART I OVERVIEW: THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT** 55

58 **I.1 COASTAL ELEVATIONS** 56

59 **I.2 OCEAN COASTS** 57

60 **I.3 WETLAND SUSTAINABILITY** 58

61 **I.4 IMPACTS ON PLANTS AND ANIMALS** 60

62 **CHAPTER 1. COASTAL ELEVATIONS** 62

63 **1.1 INTRODUCTION** 63

64 **1.2 DATA AND APPROACH** 67

65 **1.2 RESULTS** 74

66 **1.3 IMPLICATIONS OF TOPOGRAPHY FOR TIDAL WETLANDS** 85

67 **CHAPTER 2. OCEAN COASTS** 93

68 **2.1 INTRODUCTION** 94

69 **2.2 ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SEA-LEVEL RISE ON THE OCEAN COASTS**
OF THE MID-ATLANTIC 97

70 **2.3 GEOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE MID-ATLANTIC COAST** 98

71 **2.4 IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR MID-ATLANTIC SHORELINE CHANGE** 100

72 *2.4.1 Geologic Framework* 100

73 *2.4.2 Physical Processes* 102

74 *2.4.3 Sediment Supply* 103

75 *2.4.4 Human Impacts* 104

76 **2.5 COASTAL LANDFORMS OF THE MID-ATLANTIC** 104

77 *2.5.1 Spits* 105

78 *2.5.2 Headlands* 106

79 *2.5.3 Wave-Dominated Barrier Islands* 106

80 *2.5.4 Mixed-Energy Barrier Islands* 108

81 **2.6 TWENTIETH CENTURY RATES OF SEA-LEVEL RISE** 109

82 **2.7 POTENTIAL RESPONSES TO FUTURE SEA-LEVEL RISE** 110

83

84 2.7.1 Bluff and Upland Erosion 111

85 2.7.2 Overwash, Inlet Processes, and Barrier Island Morphologic Changes 111

86 2.7.3 Threshold Behavior..... 113

87 2.8 POTENTIAL CHANGES TO THE MID-ATLANTIC OCEAN COAST DUE TO SEA-LEVEL

88 RISE..... 119

89 2.8.1 Spits (Compartments 4, 9, 15)..... 120

90 2.8.2 Headlands (Compartments 1, 5, 8, 10, 12, 16) 121

91 2.8.3 Wave-Dominated Barrier Islands (Compartments 2, 6, 11, 13, 17) 121

92 2.8.4 Mixed-Energy Barrier Islands (Compartments 3, 7, 14) 124

93 CHAPTER 3. COASTAL WETLAND SUSTAINABILITY 136

94 3.1 WETLAND ACCRETIONARY DRIVERS AND PROCESSES 140

95 3.1.1 Wetland Accretionary Dynamics 141

96 3.1.2 Influence of Climate Change on Accretionary Drivers and Processes 145

97 3.2 WETLAND VULNERABILITY TO 20TH CENTURY SEA-LEVEL RISE..... 147

98 3.2.1 Sudden Marsh Dieback 148

99 3.3 PREDICTING FUTURE WETLAND SUSTAINABILITY 149

100 3.3.1 Case Study: Mid-Atlantic Regional Assessment, New York to Virginia 154

101 3.3.2 Case Study: Albemarle–Pamlico Sound Wetlands and Sea-Level Rise 164

102 3.4 DATA NEEDS 171

103 CHAPTER 4. VULNERABLE SPECIES 178

104 INTRODUCTION 179

105 4.1 TIDAL MARSHES 182

106 4.2 MARSH AND BAY ISLANDS 189

107 4.3 TIDAL FRESHWATER SWAMP FORESTS 190

108 4.4 SEA-LEVEL FENS 192

109 4.5 SUBMERGED AQUATIC VEGETATION 192

110 4.6 TIDAL FLATS 196

111 4.7 ESTUARINE BEACHES 198

112 4.8 CLIFFS 201

113 4.9 SUMMARY 203

114 PART II OVERVIEW: SOCIETAL IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS..... 213

115 II.1 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PART II CHAPTERS 214

116 CHAPTER 5. SHORE PROTECTION AND RETREAT, LAND USE AND WETLAND

117 MIGRATION: ADAPTING TO SEA-LEVEL RISE..... 218

118 5.1 BACKGROUND 218

119 5.2 SHORE PROTECTION AND RETREAT 220

120 5.2.1 Shore Protection 220

121 5.3.2 Retreat 227

122 5.3 OVERVIEW OF LAND USE ALONG THE MID-ATLANTIC 230

123 5.4 LAND AVAILABLE FOR LANDWARD MIGRATION AND FORMATION OF TIDAL

124 WETLANDS 233

125 CHAPTER 6. POPULATION, LAND USE, AND INFRASTRUCTURE 240

126 6.1 INTRODUCTION..... 242

127 6.2 POPULATION 250

128 6.3 LAND USE..... 256

129 6.4 INFRASTRUCTURE 262

130 6.4.1 Public Works and Infrastructure 262

131 6.4.2 Public Health and Safety 263

132 6.4.3 Transportation Infrastructure 264

133 6.5 SUMMARY 273

134 CHAPTER 7. PUBLIC ACCESS..... 275

135 7.1 EXISTING PUBLIC ACCESS AND THE PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE..... 275

136 7.2 IMPACT OF SHORE EROSION ON PUBLIC ACCESS 280

137 7.3 IMPACT OF REPOSSES TO SEA-LEVEL RISE ON PUBLIC ACCESS 282

138 CHAPTER 8. COASTAL FLOODING, FLOODPLAINS AND COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT

139 ISSUES 287

140 8.1 PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS 289

141 8.1.1 Floodplain Definition..... 289

142 8.2 WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF SEA-LEVEL RISE ON COASTAL

143 FLOODPLAINS? 292

144 8.3 WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF SEA-LEVEL RISE ON THE IMPACTS OF

145 COASTAL STORMS? 294

146 8.3.1 Historical Comparison at Tide Stations 295

147 8.3.2 Typical 100-Year Storm Surge Elevations Relative to MHHW within the Multi-State Area 297

148 8.4 FLOODPLAIN MAPPING AND SEA-LEVEL RISE 299

149 8.5 STUDIES OF FUTURE COASTAL CONDITIONS AND FLOODPLAIN MAPPING..... 301

150 8.5 STUDIES OF FUTURE COASTAL CONDITIONS AND FLOODPLAIN MAPPING..... 302

151 8.5 STUDIES OF FUTURE COASTAL CONDITIONS AND FLOODPLAIN MAPPING..... 303

152 8.5.1 FEMA Coastal Studies..... 303

153 8.5.2 How Do We Capture or Map Potential Impacts of Sea-level Rise on Coastal Floodplains? 306

154 8.6 HOW ARE COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS COPING WITH SEA-LEVEL RISE AND

155 WHAT KIND OF ISSUES ARE THEY FACING? 308

156 8.6.1 Studies by the Association of State Floodplain Managers..... 308

157 8.6.2 Other Federal Agency Coastal Flooding Studies 309

158 8.6.3 Other Floodplain Manager Activities 311

159 8.6.4 Coastal Zone Management Act..... 313

160 8.6.5 The CZMA and Sea-Level Rise Issues 314

161 8.6.6 The Coastal Zone Enhancement Program 316

162 8.6.7 Coastal States Strategies 318

163 PART III OVERVIEW: PREPARING FOR SEA-LEVEL RISE..... 329

164 CHAPTER 9. IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISIONS 335

165 9.1 DECISIONS WHERE PREPARING FOR SEA-LEVEL RISE IS WORTHWHILE..... 339

166 9.1.1 Decisions that Address Large Near-term Impacts 342

167 9.1.2 Decisions Where Preparing Now Costs Little 342

168 9.1.3 Options That Reallocate or Clarify Risks from Sea-Level Rise 343

169 9.2 PROTECTING COASTAL WETLANDS 348

170 9.3 SHORE PROTECTION..... 352

171 9.4 LONG-LIVED STRUCTURES: SHOULD WE PLAN NOW OR LATER? 354

172 9.5 DECISIONS BY COASTAL PROPERTY OWNERS ON ELEVATING HOMES 357

173 9.6 FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT 358

174 9.6.1 Floodplain Regulations..... 358

175 9.6.2 Floodplain Mapping..... 359

176 9.6.3 Federal Flood Insurance Rates 359

177 9.6.4 Post Disaster Hazard Mitigation..... 361

178 9.7 CONCLUSIONS 362

179 CHAPTER 10. ONGOING ADAPTATION 372

180 10.1 ADAPTATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PURPOSES 373

181 10.1.1 Environmental Regulators 373

182 10.2 OTHER ADAPTATION OPTIONS BEING CONSIDERED BY FEDERAL, STATE, AND

183 LOCAL GOVERNMENTS..... 376

184 10.2.1 Federal Government 376

185 10.2.2 State Government 377

186 10.2.3 Local Government 378

187 CHAPTER 11. INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS 381

188 11.1 SOME SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS AND BIASES 383

189 11.1.1 Shore Protection Versus Retreat..... 384

190 11.1.2 Shoreline Armoring Versus Living Shorelines 389

191 11.2 INTERDEPENDENCE: A BARRIER OR A SUPPORT NETWORK?..... 395

192 11.2.1 Definition of Three Fundamental Pathways: Armor, Elevate, or Retreat 396

193 11.2.2 Decisions That Cannot Be Made Until the Pathway Is Decided 397

194 11.2.3 Opportunities for Deciding on the Pathway 402

195 IV.1 INFORMATION IN THE APPENDICES 409

196 IV.1.1 Effects of Sea-Level Rise 409

197 IV.1.2 Social Impacts 410

198 IV.2 EXAMPLES..... 411

199 IV.2.1 Long Island (Appendix A) 411

200 IV.2.2 New York Metropolitan Area (Appendix B)..... 412

201 IV.2.3 New Jersey Shore (Appendix C)..... 413

202 IV.2.4 Delaware Estuary (Appendix D)..... 414

203 IV.2.5 DelMarVa (Appendix E)..... 416

204 IV.2.6 Chesapeake Bay (Appendix F) 419

205 IV.2.7 North Carolina (Appendix G)..... 422

206 PART V. IMPLICATIONS OF SEA-LEVEL RISE TO THE NATION 427

207 V.1 TYPES OF COASTS 429

208 V.1.1 Cliff and Bluff Shorelines 429

209 V.1.2 Sandy Shores and Barrier Beaches, Spits, and Dunes..... 430

210 V.1.3 Coastal Wetlands 431

211 V.1.4 Coral Reef Coasts 431

212 V.1.5 Mudflat Shores 432

213 V.2 SHORELINE SETTINGS AROUND THE UNITED STATES..... 432

214 V.2.1 Atlantic Coast 432

215 V.2.2 Gulf of Mexico Coast..... 433

216 V.2.3 Pacific Coast 433

217 V.3 PREDICTING FUTURE SHORELINE CHANGE..... 434

218 V.3.1 Coastal Vulnerability to Sea-Level Rise..... 435

219 V.3.2 Potential for Future Shoreline Change 437

220 V.4 PREVIOUS SEA-LEVEL RISE IMPACT ASSESSMENTS..... 440

221 V.5 AREA OF LAND VULNERABLE TO TIDAL INUNDATION..... 442

222 V.5.1 Early Cost Estimates of Shore Protection..... 442

223 V.5.2 Coastal Wetlands 444

224 V.6 CONCLUSIONS 445

225 PART VI: A SCIENCE STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SEA-

226 LEVEL RISE AND ITS IMPACTS ON U.S. COASTS 453

227 VI.1 INTRODUCTION 453

228 VI.1.1 Learn From the Historic and Recent Geologic Past..... 456

229 VI.1.2 Monitor Modern Coastal Conditions 459

230 VI.1.3 Predict Future Coastal Conditions 465

231 VI.1.4 Develop Coastal Decision Support Systems for Planning and Policy Making 467

232 APPENDIX A. LONG ISLAND..... 478

233 A.1 LANDS VULNERABLE TO INUNDATION 478

234 A.2 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS..... 482

235 A.3 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL..... 492

236 A.4 EXISTING SHORE PROTECTION AND POLICY CONTEXT..... 492

237 APPENDIX B. NEW YORK METROPOLITAN AREA 501

238 B.1 LAND VULNERABLE TO INUNDATION 501

239 B.2 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS 506

240 B.3 EXISTING DEVELOPMENT AND SHORE PROTECTION 511

241 B.4 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL 512

242 B.5 STATEWIDE POLICY CONTEXT: NEW YORK 513

243 APPENDIX C. THE NEW JERSEY SHORE 519

244 C.1 VULNERABILITY TO INUNDATION AND EROSION 521

245 C.2 VULNERABLE HABITAT 527

246 C.3 DEVELOPMENT AND SHORE PROTECTION 538

247 C.3.1 Statewide Policy Context 538

248 C.3. RESPONSES TO SEA LEVEL RISE 540

249 C.4 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL 543

250 C.5 STATEWIDE POLICY CONTEXT 544

251 APPENDIX D. DELAWARE ESTUARY 552

252 D.1 THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT 554

253 D.1.1 Delaware Bay and the Lower Delaware River 554

254 D.1.2 Delaware River: Above the Commodore Barry Bridge 565

255 D.2 DEVELOPMENT AND SHORE PROTECTION 569

256 D.2.1 Delaware Bay and Lower Delaware River 569

257 D.2.2 Delaware River: Freshwater Portion 574

258 D.3 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL 581

259 APPENDIX E. THE ATLANTIC COAST OF VIRGINIA, MARYLAND, AND DELAWARE

260 (INCLUDING COASTAL BAYS) 591

261 E.1 COASTAL ELEVATIONS AND INUNDATION 592

262 E.2 VULNERABLE HABITAT 595

263 E.3 COASTAL POLICY CONTEXT 603

264 E.4 DEVELOPMENT AND SHORE PROTECTION 605

265 E.5 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL 607

266 APPENDIX F. CHESAPEAKE BAY 616

267 F.1 IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT 619

268 F.1.1 Hampton Roads 619

269 F.1.2 York River to Potomac River 625

270 F.1.3 The Potomac River 631

271 F.1.4 Washington, D.C. 640

272 F.1.5 Western Shore: Potomac River to Susquehanna River 646

273 F.1.6 Eastern Shore: Susquehanna River to Choptank River 650

274 F.1.7 The Lower Eastern Shore: Choptank River to Cape Charles 661

275 F.2 BAYWIDE POLICY CONTEXT 667

276 F.2.1 Land use 668

277 F.2.2 Wetlands and erosion control permits 672

278 F.2.3 Beach nourishment and other shore protection activities 674

279 F.3 DEVELOPMENT AND SHORE PROTECTION 677

280 F.3.1 Hampton Roads 678

281 F.3.2 York River to Potomac River 681

282 F.3.3 Potomac River 683

283 F.3.4 Washington DC 684

284 F.3.5 Western Shore: Potomac River to Susquehanna River 685

285 F.3.6 Eastern Shore: Susquehanna River to Choptank River (Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Caroline,

286 and Talbot counties) 687

287 F.3.7 The Lower Eastern Shore: The Choptank River to Cape Charles 688

288 F.4 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL 691

289 F.4.1 Chesapeake Western Shore 691

290 F.4.2 Potomac River..... 693

291 F.4.3 Chesapeake Bay Eastern Shore 694

292 APPENDIX G. NORTH CAROLINA 709

293 G.1 LAND VULNERABLE TO INUNDATION 711

294 G.2 SHORE PROCESSES 720

295 G.2.1 Ocean Coasts 720

296 G.3 VULNERABLE HABITATS AND SPECIES..... 722

297 G.3.1 Distribution of Wetland Types 723

298 G.3.2 Estuarine Shoreline Erosion 726

299 G.3.3 Will Wetlands Keep Pace With Rising Sea Level? 728

300 G.3.4 Environmental Implications of Habitat Loss and Shore Protection 730

301 G.4 DEVELOPMENT AND SHORE PROTECTION..... 734

302 G.4.1 Statewide Policy Context..... 734

303 G.4.2 Current Land Use..... 738

304 G.5 POPULATION OF LANDS CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL 743

305 APPENDIX H. BASIC APPROACHES FOR SHORELINE CHANGE AND LAND LOSS

306 PROJECTIONS: APPLICATION TO FIRE ISLAND, NEW YORK..... 757

307 H.1 REVIEW OF SHORELINE CHANGE/SEA-LEVEL RISE IMPACT MODELS 758

308 H.2 CASE STUDY: PROJECTING POTENTIAL FUTURE SHORELINE CHANGE, FIRE

309 ISLAND, NEW YORK 767

310 H.2.1 Introduction..... 767

311 H.2.2 Potential Future Sea-level Rise Impacts: Established Concepts 769

312 H.2.3 Projection of Future Shoreline Change Due to Sea-Level Rise Using Simple Quantitative

313 Approaches 770

314 H.2.4 Comparison of Shoreline Change Results 773

315 GLOSSARY 787

316