

## **THE STORMSMART NETWORK: HOW LOCAL ACTION ACROSS THE US IS PREPARING COMMUNITIES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

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### **Background**

Coastal communities throughout the US have dealt with the devastating effects of storms for centuries, however today's threats are greater due to three factors. First, the population along the coastline has grown, and is projected to increase.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, past land use management decisions in the coastal zone have rarely led to the greatest protection from threats. Finally, climate change is predicted to affect coastal areas by increasing storm intensity and by accelerating current sea level rise.<sup>2</sup> These factors compounded together mean that coastal communities are facing a very dangerous situation that threatens economies and human life.

While federal and state governments have critical roles to play, any solution to these challenges will require the active participation of coastal communities who will likely continue to be relied upon for most of the land use decisions. Unfortunately, these decisions are often legally contentious, leaving communities in the unenviable position of trying to make proactive, progressive decisions that are legally defensible.

The StormSmart Coasts program was designed to help local officials address the expected impacts of storms, floods, sea level rise, and climate change in ways that are effective, fair, and legally defensible. The program pulls together the best coastal management tools and presents them in ways – both a “one stop shop” website and a variety of fact sheets – that are user friendly and relevant to local officials. Many of these tools are part of the No Adverse Impact (NAI) approach to land management. NAI is a forward-thinking, fair, and legally defensible way to manage coastal areas grounded in a “do no harm” approach. Although nothing can guarantee that a community will not face lawsuits when managing its floodplains, following the NAI approach can minimize lawsuits and position communities to win lawsuits that arise. NAI principles have been upheld in courts at all levels, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

### **Implementation**

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Goudarzi, “Flocking to the Coast: World's Population Migrating into Danger.” Live Science: Environment. 18 July, 2006. Live Science. 11 November, 2008. <[http://www.livescience.com/environment/060718\\_map\\_settle.html](http://www.livescience.com/environment/060718_map_settle.html) >

<sup>2</sup> Adger, Neil, Pramod Aggarwal, Shardul Agrawala et al. (2007), Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Summary for Policy Makers, Working Group II Contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; Fourth Assessment Report, IPCC Secretariat, WHO AND UNEP, Geneva; also Parry et al., 2007.

The StormSmart program entered its implementation phase in September '08, and has been working on two different but intertwined scales. In Massachusetts, the Office of Coastal Zone Management has been working with pilot communities to put the StormSmart Coasts tools into action. With the cooperation of state and local officials efforts have been made to integrate NAI principles into land use ordinances and other permitting regulations. These agencies are also working to implement the most effective floodplain management practices – innovative development standards, comprehensive hazard mitigation planning, and shoreline protection policies – to address climate adaptation at the local level. In order to improve the program a pilot community advisory group meets regularly to provide feedback, thus enhancing the tools provided to other communities.

Concurrently, and tapping into the continuing Massachusetts' efforts, the program is being regionally expanded into the remaining New England coastal states (Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) and the Gulf of Mexico states (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas). The regional effort is currently working with federal, regional and state partners to build a network of interconnected websites. This program hopes to rapidly expand to the remaining coastal states.

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