Moving Coastal Virginia Toward Adaptation Action

Wetlands Watch, a non-profit based in Norfolk, Virginia, diligently promotes sea level rise adaptation. Sea level rise is the biggest threat to our tidal wetlands; we work with local governments to encourage adaptation measures like green infrastructure that incorporate the natural ecosystem and allow wetlands to survive. This newsletter offers information on recent Wetlands Watch projects, events, media coverage, and staff updates. Email mc.stiff@wetlandswatch.org if you would like to receive information about our organization.
Student Adaptation Designs Make Impact

Wetlands Watch, with Virginia Sea Grant funding, launched the Tidewater Rising Resiliency Design Challenge, a creative collaboration involving students & professors from Hampton University’s Architecture Department, Old Dominion University’s Civil & Environmental Engineering Department, Virginia Sea Grant, the Hampton Roads Green Building Council, & a cross-disciplinary advisory team of over 30 professionals concluded in May. The innovative student designs tackled today’s water quality, flooding, & shoreline erosion problems with several nature-based, adaptation solutions: a living shoreline, permeable pavement, cisterns, bioretention, & much more. When modeled against a 2009 storm, students demonstrated that these practices could reduce neighborhood flooding by 90%.

This was the first time nature-based adaptation designs have been developed for a community before the storms hit. The student work was so impressive it was included in the five-day international adaptation design effort, the Dutch Dialogues Virginia: Life at Sea Level. These design recommendations were incorporated into Norfolk’s grant application for the National Disaster Resilience Competition. If awarded, the grant will fund the actual implementation of these designs in Chesterfield Heights, making the neighborhood a safer & more resilient place to live. The project was recently presented the Environmental Resilience Award of Excellence by the City of Norfolk.

Flood Insurance Update: CRS Task Force in Norfolk

The Community Rating System (CRS) lowers a community’s flood insurance rates when they take additional flood reduction steps. Wetlands Watch staff, Mary-Carson Stiff, chairs the Coastal Virginia CRS Workgroup, an organization of locality floodplain managers, city planners, state agencies, businesses, & non-profits that meet together to offer support, information, & guidance to help localities enroll & succeed in the NFIP’s incentive-based Community Rating System program. This September, the National CRS Task Force, a group of floodplain experts who advise on CRS policy reforms, held one of their meetings in Norfolk & invited Wetlands Watch staff to speak. We proposed a policy reform that would more easily credit nature-based flood protections like living shorelines & small-scale flood reduction practices (rain gardens, etc.). Click here for details on this needed reform.

Lunar High Tides + Strong Winds = Future 2 Feet SLR

Late Sept. & early Oct. brought extremely high tides to the east coast, simulating future daily tide levels of 2 feet of sea level rise. Current projections predict we will experience 2 feet sea level rise by 2050-2060.
Wetlands Watch’s phone app “Sea Level Rise” allows network members to crowdsource information on flooding in their communities. Designed to accelerate sea level rise adaptation efforts, the app allows citizens to map the extent of flooding during events & transfer that data to researchers, emergency managers, & planners in their community.

Lunar high tides & Hurricane Joaquin-related flooding offered the perfect opportunity for an east coast mapping and app training event in September and October. App users from Florida to New York recorded the extent of flooding in their neighborhoods, building a database that will inform local government and individual decision-making. News outlets in Florida & Georgia reported on the mapping efforts, raising awareness of the app & its purpose.

In addition to the late Sept. & early Oct. flooding, the app was used to map flooding during the Galveston, Texas flood event in late Oct. If you would like to join our effort, download the app on iTunes & Google Play and email skip.stiles@wetlandswatch.org if you have any questions. We welcome your participation!

Wetlands Watch Staff Presentations & In the News

- Joint Subcommittee to Study Recurrent Flooding
- Wavy 10 News Phone App Coverage
- VA American Planning Association Conference
- Green Industries (DC) & VNLA Field Days
- Nansemond River Preservation Alliance River Talk
- Preservation Virginia
- Dutch Dialogues Virginia: Life at Sea Level
- Chesapeake Watershed Forum
- Franklin Garden Club & Suffolk Rotary Club
- Community Rating System National Task Force

Wetlands Watch Welcomes New Staff

Wetlands Watch is pleased to announce that Ross Weaver joined our staff to help with our adaptation work with local governments. Ross recently earned a Masters in Urban & Environmental Planning from the University of Virginia & was interning at the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. While at UVA, Ross also worked with the Institute for Environmental Negotiation, a frequent Wetlands Watch collaborator. Ross received his undergraduate degree from Virginia Tech with a double major in Political Science & Environmental Policy & Planning.
In May, Skip Stiles, Executive Director, received a Coastal Climate Champion award from Chesapeake Climate Action Network for his leadership in sea level rise adaptation.

In September, Wetlands Watch & the Design Challenge team received a Norfolk Environmental Action Award for the student design adaptation work completed in the Chesterfield Heights neighborhood.

Thank you to the grant funders below for their support of our exciting work.

We would also like to thank the individual donors who help sustain Wetland Watch's mission. Click here to donate or renew your membership.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Protecting and Conserving Wetlands

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Help us map flooding in your community!

If you would like to join the coastal US effort to map flooding in your community, download our phone app "Sea Level Rise." Developed with Concursive, a local software company, our app allows citizens to track sea level rise and flooding in their neighborhoods. Join our mapping partners in Texas, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, New York, & Massachusetts as we map the changes in flooding along our coasts. Your contribution will help local governments plan more accurately for sea level rise.