

N.C. Coastal Resources Commission
DRAFT Sea-Level Rise Policy
Public Hearing Version – August 30, 2012

15A NCAC 07M.1301 DECLARATION OF GENERAL POLICY

The Coastal Resources Commission (hereafter referred to as the “Commission”) is charged under the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) with the protection, preservation, orderly development, and management of the coastal area of North Carolina. To that end, the Commission is specifically charged with the protection of certain rights and values, which include ensuring the protection of public trust resources and access to those resources, preserving the quality and optimum use of water resources, managing land use and development to minimize environmental damage, and preserving private property rights.

The Commission finds that global sea-level rise is occurring and presents a gradual but significant coastal hazard along the coast of North Carolina. While uncertainties exist with any kind of forecast or projection, continued or accelerated sea-level rise is expected to intensify the challenges that the Commission faces in protecting public trust resources including the estuarine system, coastal sounds and inlets, and barrier dune systems and beaches.

While sea-level rise can be difficult to perceive in the short-term, it presents a gradual threat that may intensify other coastal hazards such as flooding, storm surge, shoreline erosion, and shoreline recession. Sea-level rise can also pose a threat to freshwater resources and quality, private property and development, tourism and economic vitality, historic and cultural resources, agriculture, forestry, and public property and infrastructure.

The goal of this policy is to establish a framework for improved understanding of the potential impacts of sea-level rise, and for supporting planned adaptation and resilience to rising sea levels. Planned adaptation can help to minimize economic, property and natural resource losses, minimize social disruption and losses to public trust areas and access, and lessen the need for disaster recovery spending.

History Note: Authority G.S. 113A-102; 113A-106; 113A-107; 113A-124

15A NCAC 07M.1302 DEFINITIONS

As used in this Section:

1. “Accommodate” means designing development and property uses such that their function is not eliminated as sea level rises.
2. “Conservation measures” are non-regulatory tools that can include easements, land acquisition, habitat restoration and similar measures.
3. “Planned adaptation” means taking a proactive and deliberate approach to promoting resiliency of communities, economies and ecosystems, by identifying hazards and vulnerabilities and designing and implementing measures to adjust to, or relocate from, rising seas.
4. “Relative sea-level rise” means an increase in the average surface height of the oceans over a long period of time that may be caused by an absolute increase in the water level, by sinking of the land at the water’s edge, or by a combination of the two.
5. “Resilience” is the ability of communities, economies and ecosystems to withstand, recover from, or adjust to disruptive influences without collapse.
6. “Sea-level rise” means a long-term increase in the average surface height of the oceans.

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7. “Shoreline erosion” refers to the chronic or episodic landward migration of a shoreline caused by the loss or displacement of sediment.
8. “Shoreline recession” means the long-term landward migration of the average position of a shoreline.
9. “Subsidence” is the sinking or decrease in land elevation over time.

History Note: Authority G.S. 113A-102; 113A-107; 113A-124

15A NCAC 07M.1303 POLICY STATEMENTS

(a) The Commission will promote public education of the impacts associated with rising sea levels and measures to adapt to changing shorelines.

(b) The Division of Coastal Management shall be responsible for providing the Commission, local governments, and coastal residents information on sea-level rise trends, research, projections, implications, and adaptation options through ongoing collaboration with federal and other state agencies and the scientific community. Based on this information, the Commission should provide an assessment of sea-level rise to the twenty coastal counties at least every five years for their consideration in local land-use and hazard mitigation planning.

(c) Relative sea-level rise is not uniform across the State’s coastal zone, and the differences are amplified by topographical variations and regional subsidence. As a result, specific adaptation measures might not be appropriate for all communities in the coastal zone, or at the same time. The Commission encourages coastal communities to consider regional trends and projected rates of sea-level rise in hazard mitigation, local land use, and development planning. The Commission also supports the development of scientific data and the advancement of adaptation measures that are tailored to different regions of the coast.

(d) As sea level rises, intertidal areas are being flooded at greater frequency and to greater depths, spurring the natural, landward migration of coastal habitats. In order to maintain their ecological functions, fisheries habitats and coastal wetlands may migrate landward to keep pace with rising waters. In consultation with appropriate resource protection agencies and stakeholders, the Commission should consider conservation and regulatory measures to enhance the resilience of natural systems and habitats.

(e) The Commission has the responsibility to assist local governments with land-use planning guidance and support. Due to the technical nature of sea-level rise science and varying needs for adaptation strategies, the Commission shall, to the best of its ability, provide local governments with scientific data to support local education and planning efforts. The Division may also provide financial assistance for local adaptation planning and implementation as available.

(f) It is in the State’s interest to invest in long-term sea-level rise research and monitoring, as such investments will contribute to enhanced natural, economic, and societal resilience, and reduced future losses and disruption. The Commission will actively support state, federal, and private efforts to fund data collection, research, monitoring, and utilization of results.

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(g) In order to minimize the impacts of hazards, disruption and losses associated with rising water levels, the Commission encourages new private development and public infrastructure be designed and constructed to accommodate projected sea-level rise impacts within the structure's design life.

History Note: Authority G.S. 113A-102; 113A-106; 113A-107; 113A-110; 113A-112; 113A-124

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