

Town: Newfields, NH

Timeframe: 1 year (2012)

Funding source: Grant from NH Department of Environmental Services, Coastal Program

Partners: University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension & NH Sea Grant and partners of the NH Coastal Adaptation Workgroup

Project Background

Newfields is located within the coastal zone and spans two subwatersheds (Lamprey and Squamscott Rivers) of the Great Bay Estuary. It is a semi-rural community and one of the smallest communities in the coastal watershed with a population of just under 2,000. While coastal New Hampshire has seen major flood events in the last decade, the majority of impacts in Newfields were felt indirectly as roads were flooded in neighboring communities. Newfields has also experienced frequent and prolonged power outages as a result of extreme weather events.

The Approach: Getting Started by Talking About Impacts, Actions, and Priorities

The project began with discussions with the planning board and emergency management to identify local stakeholders and map out a schedule for community engagement. Community members gathered in June for a catered dinner and discussion following a presentation of local climate change research from the University of New Hampshire. This information formed the basis for a series of small roundtable discussions about (1) how extreme weather affects the people of Newfields and their natural resources and infrastructure, and (2) what possible actions the town could take to reduce these impacts.

Facilitators helped each table record the input on flipcharts for an hour, then posted it on a wall for the small group report-outs. After each group summarized their discussion, each participant placed three sticky dots on what they felt was a priority focus area moving forward. Two focus areas emerged: stormwater management and emergency preparedness.

Community members continued to meet just before the monthly planning board meeting for the following six months to develop an action plan around those two themes. The community developed 18 action items while working in “stormwater” and “emergency preparedness” groups.

Project Outcomes

Highlights of the community’s strategies in their action plan include a discount generator purchase program for Newfields residents led by the Newfields Chief of Police, whereby residents sign up, the town orders the generators, and after residents pay the town they receive the discount and professional installation. The planning board has also utilized a model stormwater regulation, originally prepared for the Southeast Watershed Alliance by the UNH Stormwater Center and Rockingham Planning Commission with funding by the DES Coastal

Program, and revised it to fit their local site plan and review regulations. Other action items included a community calendar with extreme weather preparedness tips, inventorying stormwater infrastructure in the town, and creating a stormwater infrastructure map.

Lessons learned:

- Broad stakeholder engagement coupled with local knowledge can go a long way toward identifying and reducing vulnerabilities
- Begin adaptation by setting a few priorities or focus areas
- Holding short meetings before a regular meeting (in this case, the planning board) helped to keep up participation

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