Impacts

Communities identify vulnerabilities, capitalize on strengths, assess future impacts in Sea Grant-initiated planning efforts

**RELEVANCE:**

Coastal communities in Mississippi and Alabama provide vital economic, social and recreational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of Americans, but decades of population migration and coastal hazards have transformed coastal landscapes and intensified demand on finite coastal resources. As a result, it has become increasingly important for communities to create and implement plans that address the dynamic nature of the coastline (watershed deterioration, changes in sea level) and assist in visualization of future scenarios (working waterfronts, greenspace).

**RESPONSE:**

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant was responsive to planning needs by providing resources for climate adaptation planning for coastal communities, conducting greenspace analysis, convening workshops to discuss future development options and providing technical assistance to 15 communities in Mississippi and Alabama.

In addition, vulnerability assessments were conducted in 8 coastal communities, financial indicator analysis was conducted in one community and 12 coastal jurisdictions received technical assistance to implement activities in the Community Rating System (part of the National Flood Insurance Program).

MASGC is one of the leaders of the Gulf of Mexico Climate Community of Practice, which provides a forum for extension, outreach and education professionals and planners to share approaches and strategies to assist local communities in planning for climate change.

Finally, a full suite of Sea Grant expertise is being used to provide input in the development of a coastal Mississippi regional plan that will span three coastal counties and 11 communities and is sponsored by a federal initiative to develop regional plans throughout the nation.

**RESULTS:**

- Communities are incorporating sea-level-rise scenarios into hazard mitigation planning.
- Communities are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and are using the results from the Coastal Community Resilience Index to quantify whether the steps they are taking are moving them toward a more resilient community.
- Stewardship program managers are using research findings to refine prescription plans for burning on state lands and to minimize risks to vulnerable high marsh areas.
- Decision makers are using outputs from charrette graphics to visualize environmental improvements.
- Local governments are using research on takings law to determine their legal ability to implement sea-level-rise adaptation policies.
- State legislators have been provided with recommendations that address planning/zoning, financial incentive, socio-economic and infrastructure issues regarding waterfront access in Mississippi and Alabama.
- Communities are planning to correct watershed deterioration due to development impacts.
- Local governments are informed of financial disaster resiliency through educational programming.
- A coast-wide Mississippi regional planning process is using Sea Grant’s on-the-ground experience to identify needs and strategies to address them.

Efforts to keep working waterfronts in business continue throughout Mississippi and Alabama.

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