

## ***Rural Coastal Communities: Adapting to Sea Level Rise with a Changing Economy***

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Climate change and the related physical impacts of sea level rise (SLR) and saltwater intrusion are affecting coastal urban areas, beach tourism destinations, and rural communities. Coastal urban and tourist destinations, however, receive a disproportionate amount of attention from resilience research. Strategies for mitigation and adaptation have been developed for these areas and disaster relief metrics also favor high property values and high revenue industries like tourism. Despite rural coastal communities being susceptible to greater social vulnerabilities due to lower property values, limited flood insurance, higher poverty rates, lower education levels and lower average incomes, rural coastal communities have not received as much attention within the adaptation dialogue. This research presents a framework for resilience specific to rural coastal communities. This framework was tested on the ground on the Albemarle Pamlico Peninsula of North Carolina through a series of focus groups.

By combining elements from rural sociology and resilience planning, the Rural Coastal Community Resilience framework is comprised of indicators for resilience and risk. These indicators are conceptualized on a series spectrum (e.g., livelihood diversity to livelihood dependency) that functions to both stimulate community dialogue and measure perceptions of rural coastal community resilience. Three separate communities participated in focus groups between January and March 2016. The focus group was contextualized with a presentation of localized SLR projections before local voices were heard. Participants were stakeholders from the dominant industries including farmers, fishers, loggers, business owners, and tourism representatives. Pre- and post-surveys were administered to provide metrics of opinion change from the community dialogue.

What we found were tight knit communities with a commitment to a rural way of life. There was recognition of SLR impacts that contrasted the politicized nature of climate change at the state level. Adaptation was viewed more as a matter of fact or necessity instead of an agenda. While there was high risk and vulnerability to SLR, salinization, and flooding perceived, planning efforts and community engagement activities like workshops were thought to be opportunities to improve resilience and were highly desired. Increasing entry costs for farming, fishing, and logging were seen as barriers while wildlife tourism was viewed as a potential opportunity to maintain the local tax base and economy as livelihoods transition away from the traditional. The consensus was that younger generations will have to become increasingly involved in local planning and entrepreneurial activities for greater resilience to be achieved.