

## **Rural Coastal Community Resilience: Adapting to Rising Seas and Salinization on the Albemarle Pamlico Peninsula**

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By the end of the century, 45% of the Albemarle Pamlico Peninsula (APP) of Eastern North Carolina, an area of roughly 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> and home to 100,000 residents, is projected to be inundated from sea level rise. Chronic flooding and salinization already pose significant threats to the local infrastructure, economies, and communities. Yet, the rural coastal communities that comprise the “Inner Banks” do not receive the same flow of tourism dollars that enhances adaptive capacity on the Outer Banks. As a result, resilience on the APP is tied to stakeholder reliance on local natural resources, as the economy depends on agriculture, commercial fishing, timber harvesting, and some wildlife tourism opportunities. These communities’ vulnerability is further challenged by rural to urban migration patterns, aging populations, a declining workforce, rising health care needs, and prohibitive entry costs into traditional livelihoods. As a component of a larger interdisciplinary project, this research presents a framework for understanding risk and resilience within a rural coastal context. Through a mixed methods approach utilizing semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and both visitor and residential surveys, we analyze the ability of these communities to build adaptive capacity to sea level rise and salinization. Additionally, we explore the potential for the development of ecotourism opportunities as a possible future source of economic growth and resiliency, including a forecast of changing visitor demands on the Outer Banks related to increasing frequency of beach nourishment projects, lodging taxes, and road closures. Ultimately, our resilience analysis will delve into the differences between communities and counties on the APP in an effort to describe adaptive capacity needs on a more specific level given its historical context and current environmental justice concerns.