

A Controlled Burn Approach to Stimulate Change

Polonkey, Alba

Sustainable Sandhills

Climate change will continue to bring communities to reassess the way they manage their resources. As planning leaders we can either allow a tragedy, such as hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, to force us to make changes or, much as in the way foresters use controlled burning to support a healthy ecosystem, we can take a controlled burn approach at getting rid of familiar, yet unsustainable practices to stimulate the growth of resilient communities.

In 2015, the Model Forest Policy Program (MFPP), the Cumberland River Compact, and Sustainable Sandhills, an environmental nonprofit, came together to create a climate adaptation plan for the community of Cumberland County, North Carolina. Development of the plan came about because all parties recognized the critical need for resilience against the impacts of climate change by protecting forest and water resources. Sustainable Sandhills took the leadership role to engage with stakeholders and lead their community toward climate resilience with an adaptation plan that addresses their local climate risks and fits their local conditions and culture. Representatives from The U.S. Army Fort Bragg Department of Public Works, the City of Fayetteville, the Cape Fear River Assembly, and the Fayetteville Public Works Commission formed a Core Group of members that worked to engage with other multi-level and sector representatives.

This achievement was made possible by the guidance and coaching of the Climate Solutions University: Forest and Water Strategies program (CSU) created by MFPP in partnership with the Cumberland River Compact. The goal of CSU is to empower rural, under-served communities to become leaders in climate resilience using a cost effective distance-learning program. The program leads communities through four phases designed to: 1) Activate a planning team, 2) Assess the existing natural, economic and cultural resources, 3) Identify priority climate risks for the region, and 4) Develop a strategic action plan that prepares the community for the projected impacts.

The subsequent Cumberland County Climate Resiliency Plan (C3RP) presents the findings of a team effort, deep and broad information gathering, critical analysis, and thoughtful planning. The result of this collaborative effort is a powerful climate adaptation plan that the municipality can support and implement in coming years. The process enabled stronger partnerships and stakeholder engagement that has resulted in the integration of climate projections into the Cumberland-Hoke Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and a governmental objective to include an element of climate resilience into both the upcoming Fort Bragg/Regional Joint Land Use Study, and the City of Fayetteville's strategic planning process. The outcome will be a community that can better withstand the impacts of climate upon their natural resources, economy and social structure in the decades to come.