

Delaware Coastal Management Program
Approval of Department-wide Sea Level Rise Policy
February 2010

As part of its Sea Level Rise Initiative, the Delaware Coastal Programs (DCP) was asked by the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Cabinet Secretary to craft a sea level rise policy that would inform and guide decision-making within the DNREC.

To meet this request, the DCP put together an ad hoc technical committee comprised of DNREC scientists, representatives from Delaware's two Estuary Programs and University of Delaware scientists to review current literature on sea level rise and provide recommendations regarding planning scenarios. The committee recommended that planning scenarios mirror Federal agency recommendations and local conditions and planning scenarios of 0.5, 1.0 and 1.5 meters of sea level rise by the year 2100 resulted. A white paper was written to describe pertinent federal agency recommendations, factors influencing local rates of sea level rise and to recommend planning scenario levels.

Using Delaware's statewide LiDAR dataset, bathtub inundation models were developed for use with the new policy. GIS layers depicting inundation at Mean Higher High Water (MHHW), MHHW plus 0.5 meters, MHHW plus 1.0 meters and MHHW plus 1.5 meters have been made available to all DNREC staff and other interested parties. These layers will also provide the basis for a statewide sea level rise vulnerability assessment.

The policy itself directs each DNREC program to communicate the potential consequences of sea level rise, to consider the effects of sea level rise on their programs and to conduct vulnerability assessments on their holdings. The policy was signed in January, 2010 and was effective February 1, 2010.

The DCP is now conducting seminars focused towards DNREC staff and offering assistance to programs to implement this new policy and evaluate their vulnerability. The Sea Level Rise policy, and inundation scenarios, is a significant opportunity to work one-on-one with affected programs to implement change and to set an example for other state agencies.