

7. Where We Go From Here

The Commission was established to develop guidance and recommendations for New Hampshire that will set our state on a responsible path toward enhancing coastal community and watershed resilience to the effects of storm surge, sea-level rise, and extreme precipitation. Because the timing and magnitude of these changes are uncertain, so are the assumptions on which we base our recommendations. While it is true that our level of understanding and degree of certainty about the impacts of climate change will improve over time, we know more than enough now to recognize that we cannot afford to wait for certainty to act. The key to managing economic and social costs and risks of climate-related impacts in the coastal region is to begin early and adapt incrementally.

Our central message is this: **begin now**. Even though we expect most of the impacts from climate change to be gradual, instances of severe flooding from

extreme precipitation and storm events will occur, as they always have, and are likely to worsen with changes in storm surge and sea level. Actions taken now, even costly ones, will more than likely pay for themselves in the form of reduced losses and greater resilience. In addition, the normal cycles of reconstruction, replacement and redevelopment can be utilized to introduce more resilient design into structures and facilities.



Photo credit: Ralph Morang

7.1 Actions Already Underway

The Commission's report and recommendations are the culmination of a collaborative process that recognized a diversity of views and came to a strong consensus about common sense actions to be taken to move New Hampshire forward on a path to coastal resilience. Consensus was achievable in large part because of the work on this issue done by various parties in various coastal communities that preceded the Commission. The Commission is also aware that the difficult and vital work of **implementation** is yet to come and its members are committed to supporting implementation efforts beyond the Commission's sunset on December 1, 2016. As of this publication, the Commission has already taken several actions and identified existing mechanisms to ensure continuity and implementation of the recommendations.

1. As a first step towards implementation of the Commission's recommendations, Senator Watters (District 4), Senator Stiles (District 24), Senator Fuller Clark (District 21), Representative Rice (Rockingham 21), Representative Cushing (Rockingham 21), and Representative Borden (Rockingham 24) introduced two pieces of legislation in the fall of 2015 that have since both passed into law: Chaptered Law 121 / SB 374 and Chaptered Law 195 / SB 452.
 - **Chaptered Law 121 / SB 374** implements Recommendation S1 and requires the NH Department of Environmental Services to regularly update the storm surge, sea-level rise, precipitation and other relevant projections recommended in the Commission's 2014 Science and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) Report at least every five years, commencing July 1, 2019. SB 374 was signed by the Governor on May 20, 2016, effective July 19, 2016.

- [Chaptered Law 195 / SB 452](#) implements Recommendation CC3 and requires certain state agencies to conduct an audit of existing state statutes, rules, and agency policies governing state properties, projects, and actions in coastal and Great Bay regions to determine if any changes are necessary to enable appropriate state and local actions to prepare for projected coastal flood risks. Additionally, Chaptered Law 195 / SB452 also requires state agencies involved in planning, siting, and design of state-funded structures and facilities, public works projects, and transportation projects, as well as land acquisition and management, and other environmental activities in the coastal and Great Bay regions to reference the 2014 STAP Report, as updated, for guidance on all potentially affected activities. SB 452 was signed by the Governor on June 6, 2016, effective immediately.
2. A State Agency Climate Change Work Group has been formed to coordinate agency actions, enhance New Hampshire’s capability to reduce the causes of and prepare for the impacts of climate change, and better serve our agencies and the citizens of NH. This group will be instrumental in carrying out Recommendation CC3 and Chaptered Law 195 / SB 452, which requires certain state agencies to conduct an audit of laws governing coastal regions to enable the state and municipalities to take appropriate actions.
 3. The NH Department of Environmental Services Coastal Program and partners have secured funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office for Coastal Management to support outreach and begin implementation of the Commission’s recommendations. Broadly, this project, entitled NH Setting SAIL, seeks to achieve the following goals:
 - Ensure through education and outreach that the CRHC recommendations are understood and championed by state, municipal, and regional stakeholders;
 - Assist Great Bay coastal municipalities to prioritize and implement actions that meet their unique needs, including the development of a climate adaptation chapter for the City of Dover Master Plan (similar to what has been done for the Atlantic Coast municipalities under the Tides to Storms 2 project funded by the Northeast Regional Ocean Council); and
 - Provide capacity for the State Agency Climate Change Work Group to coordinate audits of existing state statutes, rules, and agency policies as required by Chaptered Law 195 / SB 452; complete inventories of vulnerable state assets; and conduct other implementation activities.
 4. Commission members have begun exploring opportunities to establish a climate adaptation coordinator (see Recommendation CC8) within a state agency/office to coordinate implementation of the Commission’s recommendations and other recommendations that follow.
 5. The ongoing work of New Hampshire Coastal Adaptation Workgroup (NHCAW) and its member communities and agencies will be instrumental in ensuring continued coordination and implementation of the Commission’s recommendations. NHCAW assists communities in New Hampshire’s coastal watershed prepare for the effects of extreme weather and long term climate change by providing resources, facilitation, and guidance that enhance readiness and resilience. A list of NHCAW-related projects is included in [Appendix G: Related Projects](#).
 6. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that many coastal municipalities have begun taking initial steps toward implementing climate adaptation actions. These steps include, but are not limited to, coastal hazards and climate adaptation master plan chapters, enhanced standards for floodplain development and shoreline buffers, and outreach to raise awareness of the importance of coastal buffers in protecting life and property. These “first responders” have repeatedly sought technical assistance and committed dollars and staff time to their efforts with the goal of creating more resilient and sustainable communities and local economies. We hope their actions will serve as encouraging examples for other municipalities to act.

7.2 Suggested Next Steps

Drawing on the recommendations and actions presented in this report, the Commission suggests the following next steps for state legislators, state agencies, and municipalities to get started.

1. State legislators, state agencies, and municipalities should familiarize themselves with all of the Commission recommendations and actions and identify, prioritize, and implement those recommendations and actions most relevant to their needs.
2. State agencies should implement all laws enacted to carry out the Commission's recommendations, including Chaptered Laws 121 and 195.
3. State legislators, state agencies, and municipalities should identify financial resources and mechanisms needed at state and municipal levels to address storm surge, sea-level rise, and extreme precipitation events.
4. State agencies and municipalities should conduct broad-based public education and outreach to raise awareness of flood hazards and risk, and strategies to protect property and investments.
5. State agencies and municipalities should undertake detailed analyses to determine site-specific vulnerabilities and appropriate management actions for state and municipal structures and facilities, including historical resources, and other key assets.
6. State agencies and municipalities should work cooperatively to develop integrated response, recovery, and continuity plans to reduce and recover from impacts of severe coastal flooding.
7. State agencies and municipalities should conduct planning, siting, design and construction of publicly funded or supported structures, facilities, public works projects and transportation projects in a manner that is consistent with the findings and guidance of the 2014 Science and Technical Advisory Panel Report, as updated.
8. Municipalities should strengthen land use and development standards (e.g., flood hazard overlay districts, building codes, and floodplain management) to reduce vulnerability of existing and future development in areas with highest flood risk.
9. State agencies and municipalities should take immediate action to protect and restore natural resource assets that provide flood storage, erosion protection, hydrologic connectivity, migration opportunities for fish and wildlife and maintain other critical and important services.
10. State agencies and municipalities should accelerate and broaden existing efforts to develop a tidal shoreline management plan that will identify appropriate strategies and conceptual plans to increase resiliency in New Hampshire's most vulnerable sections of shoreline.
11. Finally, state legislators, state agencies, and municipalities should regularly review the recommendations and actions in this report to ensure implementation progresses where needed and the recommendations themselves are refined or replaced as new information and better understanding comes to light. Given the dynamic nature of climate change and the threats it poses to New Hampshire's coastal region, this guidance needs to be treated as a living, evolving document.