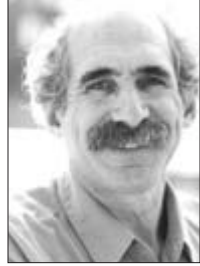


Jamestown could become three islands if sea-level rise predictions are accurate

By Sam Bari

According to experts in the field of climate change, the future of the East Coast of the United States is rather grim. Although opinions differ dramatically, the best case scenario, which is not good, is that seas could rise from two-to five-feet by 2100.



Michael Oppenheimer, a Block Island resident and climate change professor at Princeton University, is also a member of a

United Nations panel of scientists and government officials that predict sea levels will rise up to two feet by 2100. Oppenheimer was the lead author of the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The panel won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. Their information is being used as the starting point for draft regulations for the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council concerning the effects of rising sea levels.

However, as sea-level rise appears to accelerate, other scientists advised the CRMC to be prepared for a bigger rise than predicted by the United Nations. State experts from the University of Rhode Island say that Rhode Island should prepare for a rise of three-to five-feet by 2100.

Some say that unless greenhouse gases are not reduced dras-

tically before that time, the actual sea-level rise may be even higher than predicted. Oceanographer John King of the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography told CRMC that the U. N. panel often generated "rosy estimates." He said that sea levels could rise as much as 20-feet in the next century.

Whether the seas rise two-feet or 20-feet, neither prediction is good news for Conanicut Island. According to Oppenheimer, every six-inch rise in sea level will take away approximately 50-feet of beach in the Northeast.

If these predictions are to be believed, the geography of Jamestown will change dramatically. A mere two-foot rise in sea level would cut the island in two by covering the isthmus at Mackerel Cove with water. The Beavertail area at the south end would become Beavertail Island, quite separate from Conanicut Island.

North Main Road would also be covered with water at Great Creek, flooding the salt marsh, and dividing the island still again. East Shore Road and Seaside Drive would both be flooded, cutting the island into three parts. Jamestown could be know as the Conanicut Islands and be connected by small bridges much like the bridges used to connect the Florida Keys.

For more exact details, Jonathan T. Overpeck and Jeremy Weiss at the University of Arizona have produced interactive maps that plot the consequences of sea-

level rise on all of the country's coastlines. These maps are available at www.geo.arizona.edu/dg-esl/index.html.

Rhode Island's CRMC is the first state agency to draft regulations to prepare for the rise in sea levels. However, some climate change experts encourage drafting regulations for worst-case scenarios in case estimates are too conservative and regulations are inadequate to compensate for more

severe outcomes.

U. S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), a member of the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works announced new legislation calling for a national strategy to address the threat of climate change to America's wildlife. Whitehouse said that global warming had already begun to have severe impact on wildlife and marine ecosystems, both locally, and around the globe.

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