Maine Climate Council Coastal and Marine Working Group (CMWG)

Monday, January 22, 2024
9:00 am-12:00 pm
Via Webinar/Zoom

Meeting Summary

The Coastal and Marine Working Group (CMWG) for the Maine Climate Council met for the forth meeting over Zoom. Caroline Noblet from the University of Maine Mitchell Center attended the meeting to provide an overview of their work on engaging with priority populations and seeking feedback from the CMWG. Angela Brewer from Department of Environmental Protection shared information on the state's seagrass mapping work and Jeremy Gabrielson from Maine Coast Heritage Trust provided an update on tidal marsh restoration and monitoring. See the appendix for a list of meeting participants.

Note: All comments which have been assigned to participants were taken down in paraphrase. Not all comments were captured as they may have been missed or were not pertinent to the broader conversation.

Meeting Objectives

- Share scope of work for UMaine Mitchell Center outreach strategy for priority
- populations and solicit working group feedback
- Learn about DEP's eelgrass mapping work as an outcome of Maine Won't Wait

Meeting Objectives

1. Reflect on recent storms and impacts on Maine
2. Presentation from UMaine on engaging with priorities populations and equity considerations
3. Learn about current work related to CMWG
4. Meet as subcommittees

Welcome and Reflections

Laura Singer gave mention of the special meeting of the Maine Climate Council session being held tomorrow (Tuesday, January 23) related to community resiliency and preparedness in light of the recent major storm events in December and January. She noted that the agenda for today offers a brief period for the CMWG to reflect on the coastal storms.

Carl Wilson began the discussion by opening the floor to reflections on the recent storms we saw in coastal Maine, starting with experiences in and around the Boothbay Harbor lab which included taking the monitoring station at DMR offline temporarily.

Discussion/Reflections

- Monitoring stations maintained by Friends of Casco Bay were not impacted.
- As a state, we need to better identify where barriers to communication exist between private (fishing) industry and government help in the wake of environmental disasters. We also need to study what infrastructure/engineering methods showed resiliency through the storms so that we can build back better. This will be especially necessary as we may struggle to avoid building in places where we can wholly avoid storms, and thus we need to build infrastructure that can withstand exposure.
- It may be advantageous to prepare a fund for storm aftermaths moving forward that rely less on FEMA. It was also highlighted that having access to equipment to aid in salvage of debris right after the storm was invaluable, and that this could be helpful to other communities moving forward.
- Much of our coast's waterfront infrastructure seems aged when compared to that seen in Canada, and it would behoove the state and its residents to invest in resilient waterfront infrastructure.
- Private entities are lacking the resources to rebuild quickly and insurance is problematic.
- Concerns about long timelines and delays when the fishing season needs to be ready in a few months.
- Communities are responsible to clean up beaches and many don't have the capacity to respond.

Amplifying Voices: Presenting Diverse Perspectives (Caroline Noblet, UMaine)

Caroline Noblet, Associate Professor of the University of Maine, presented information about the Mitchell Center's work, under contract with GOPIF, to support the engagement with priority population in the MCC's work, including supporting the working groups. Students Catherine Mardosa and Louise Chaplin joined Dr. Noblet. Slides from the presentation can be found here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1abZ8s4hugoCh_cDrEqtMhRXnR4wUR1d4Nz_oFXovRH8/edit#slide=id.g2aba6ea6bed_0_120

Goal: To ensure the populations in Maine most impacted by climate change are aware of and have the opportunity to influence State climate programs and policies by iteratively and intentionally engaging these "priority populations" in the Maine Climate Council process in ways that are meaningful for each population.

Through the presentation, Caroline identified the demographics that comprise priority populations, including those in disadvantaged and underserved communities. She introduced the group to the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool and Social Vulnerability Index for Maine Communities, which were used to help identify the geographic locations of those priority populations. She provided evidence from the Equity Subcommittee report from March 2023, and presented the next steps as establishing baseline data on use of green space/working

land/waters, expanding access to natural resource grants, and assessing impacts on vulnerable groups due to climate change. She then briefly listed many of their current organizational partners.

The following questions were presented to the WG, and Caroline asked that everyone consider how they relate to their relevant communities of focus:

- Q1: What are preferences for, and possible interventions to, further access and use of natural and working lands and waters, including working and recreational waterfronts?
- Q2: What barriers/needs exist to access natural resource funding opportunities and technical assistance?
- Q3: what are needs, preferences, barriers, and opportunities related to locally produced foods?

Timeline from here:

1. Detailed engagement plan with Partner Organizations (by 2/9)
2. 1st round of engagement activities (by 4/15)
3. Report to WG about 1st round (by 4/26)
4. 2nd round of engagement activities (by 6/7)
5. Report to MCC about 2nd round (by 6/17)
6. Reflection discussion with WG & MCC members from "priority populations (by 9/30)

Caroline then opened the floor to others, asking for questions that may have been missed, populations that may have been missed, or partners that they would benefit from working with. She then provided a link in the chat, which could be used to provide additional feedback: https://umaine.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_blWCQDOn65wL5dQ

Discussion

- Are there ongoing conversations regarding the topic of housing and gentrification along working waterfronts?
  - *Caroline replied that her team is engaged with all the WG's, including housing, but that there is understandable overlap with the Coastal and Marine WG.*
- Bill Needleman highlighted the need for work to be done to capture the stressors on vulnerable downtown populations
- Jeremey Gabrielson commented that those who work in natural resource industries are usually vulnerable to impacts from climate change due to their location of work, and asked how efforts are being made to reach these people, particularly those in the lower income demographic.
  - *Caroline replied that they recognize the importance of capturing these perspectives and aims to include them in their surveys.*

- Meredith White (in chat) noted that housing in particular will be an even larger challenge for shellfish harvesters because most municipal licenses are reserved for residents of coastal towns.
- Joshua Stoll made a comment that the focus appears to be geography-based, and was curious if the surveys were also targeting specific demographic or social classes interspersed throughout various geographic locations. Bill Needleman added support to Joshua's comment, providing the example of the seafood processing sector, which is a critical employer for the Southern Maine community.
- Curt Brown (in chat) supported Josh and Bill. We couldn't do what we do at Ready Seafood without our team members from these communities. Housing, transportation, language education and many other aspects are all part of what we do as a business to make this work for everyone. Moses Mulamba is a great example of this. He is an electrical engineer at our Saco facility and he is also on the Energy Working Group of the Climate Council.
    - *Caroline responded that they are hoping to target some of those populations in addition to focusing on geographic scope for survey work, and was open to suggestions from others on how best to do so.*
- Carla Guenther highlighted that access to health care in wake of storms can be limited to some communities, and that we should consider these instances. In the chat, Carla also mentioned a fishermen wellness project funded by the CDC through the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety: https://necenter.org/fishing/.
    - *Caroline replied that they're likely going to need to lean on some project partners, like the Island Institute, to get those voices forward.*
- Jessica Joyce asked how the timeline put forward by Caroline's team aligns with the broader WG timelines.
    - *The timeline for the work is tight and is planned to intersect with the working group deliverables in June and the full discussions at the Maine Climate Council later in the summer and fall.*
- Jessica Joyce made a comment asking more about the involvement with Tribal Nations.
    - *Caroline responded that the university has a standing advisory group with Tribal Nations. The conversations began solely on the topic of energy, but the university plans to expand the dialogue to include climate change issues as one way to address this need.*
- Helena Tatgenhorst (in chat): One possible connection- First Light also has working groups that are thinking about some of the same questions from the perspective land trusts working with the Wabanaki Commission (there are food sovereignty and access working groups). https://dawnlandreturn.org/first-light/about-first-light/working-groups
- Ivy Frignoca commented that there are some who would like to have input but may not fit the definition per se of a priority population. Where will these people have a voice?

- *Caroline replied that their group is still figuring some details out. They are very happy to have conversations with other members, and recommended that members of the WG reach out if they see opportunities for engagement with difference communities.*
- *Maggie Kelly-Boyd of GOPIF then introduced herself and mentioned that there are public outreach plans moving forward, and will check in with the WG to provide updates to this relevant work as it advances*.

- Caroline closed out this section of today's agenda and provided Catherine Mardosa's email for those interested in following up, as well as her own email
    - Catherine.mardosa@maine.edu
    - caroline.noblet@maine.edu

Seagrass Mapping as an outcome of Maine Won't Wait (Angela Brewer, DEP and Jeremy Gabrielson, MCHT)

Laura Singer introduced Angela (Angie) Brewer from DEP, to discuss the eelgrass mapping overview and Jeremy Gabrielson from Maine Coast Heritage Trust to talk about actions related to saltmarshes.

- Angie Brewer started her presentation by covering the history of eelgrass surveys by the DMR (92-10) and DEP (since 2013). The mapping program was created by legislation in 2021 and is now called the Marine vegetation mapping program. In summary, from 2005 to 2023 the Midcoast observed a 60% decline in eelgrass, mostly within estuaries where water is more turbid. She described how strategies E1-E4 in the Maine Won't Wait 2020 plan prioritized this level of work, which included topics of coastal vegetated habitats, carbon stock inventory, and monitoring including sequestration. A number of examples were provided demonstrating the deliverables from the DEP's work towards improving eelgrass monitoring and management.

- Jeremy Gabrielson gave a presentation on the updates to tidal marsh work. The work focused primarily on studying marshland size and peat-mediated carbon capture in conjunction with annual carbon capture estimates. Ongoing research focuses on long term monitoring, the source of sediment accumulation, the influences brought about by tidal restriction, and the relation and interactions between tidal marshes and adjoining mud flats. He closed out the presentation by commenting that future research will continue and will integrate new habitat information; as it currently stands, more than 20 restoration projects are underway, with more coming down the pipeline.

Discussion

- Carl Wilson asked that given projections for sea level rise, what (and where) are the implications for these environments?
    - *Jeremy replied that tidal marshes gain elevation with tidal fluctuation. Thus, there could be land behind tidal marshes which could become tidal marshes. For*

mudflats, they're just starting to look into this. Data from DEP is going to help us map mudflat territory more accurately. Some work done by other organizations have looked at places like the Presumpscot, and it was pretty foreboding (90% reduction). We don't have the data to know exactly what this will look like for the state. A lot of work needs to be done in this area. As for eelgrass, Angie commented that they need to look at where eelgrass and realistically migrate to and where it may not be viable.

- Bill Needleman asked how sediment movement and erosion from storms affect eelgrass survivability and distribution.
    - *Angie replied that this is an ongoing task and that understanding the distribution of these sediments from storms is going to be important for future planning.*
- Curtis Bohlen added that when working in saltmarshes, we are dealing with historic or community infrastructure as well. These are closely tied into what communities need when it comes to things like road resilience, and we need to keep this in mind for a collaborative approach. Kathleen Billings followed up with comments about Stonington and Deer Isle erosion, saying that sea level rise and sediment movement impacts land development in our coastal communities, hers included.
- Angie commented that there is some work on bringing heat-tolerant eelgrass seeds up to our region, but there are some mixed thoughts about bringing vegetation in from out of region (echoed by others).
- Carl Wilson noted that from the WG perspective, our questions must translate to actions which are demonstrable, and this has been a great conversation that shows have work was put into pursuable action.
- In the chat, conversation continued with regard to sediment accumulation and mapping/estimating future mud movement and erosion. Two scientists, Jaize Wang (UMaine) and Jon Woodruff (UMass Amherst) were suggested as possible contacts who study these topics. Marissa McMahan highlighted that loss of mudflats would lead to loss of shellfish resources and create jurisdictional issues with intertidal becoming subtidal. Michelle Staudinger indicated that when considering these scenarios, coastal response models may be beneficial [usgs.gov/centers/whcmsc/science/coastal-landscape-response-sea-level-rise-assessment-northeastern-united]

Public Input

No comments were given.

Next Meeting

- Thursday, February 15th at 9am in person at DMR lab in West Boothbay Harbor.
- Subcommittee updates, DMR Commissioner and External Affairs Director.
- All files for the Coastal and Marine Working Group can be viewed on the publicly accessible Google Drive:: tinyurl.com/48arx8hc

Laura Singer invited members and attendees to fill out a demographic survey to see who is engaged in these climate conversations: https://forms.gle/uo5dqMsEVzMpb1A1A. Laura then allowed for participants to separate into their breakout rooms.

Appendix:

Working Group	**Members:**	
Carl	Wilson	Department of Marine Resources (Co-chair)
Curt	Brown	Ready Seafood (Co-chair)
Susie	Arnold	Island Institute
Nick	Battista	Island Institute
Christine	Beitl	University of Maine
Kathleen	Billings	Town of Stonington
Curtis	Bohlen	Casco Bay Estuary Partnership
Angela	Brewer	Maine Department of Environmental Protection
Ivy	Frignoca	Friends of Casco Bay
Jeremy	Gabrielson	Maine Coast Heritage Trust
Wendy	Garland	Maine Department of Environmental Protection
Jessica	Gribbon-Joyce	Tidal Bay Consulting / DMR Shellfish Advisory Council
Carla	Guenther	Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries
Ben	Gutzler	Wells Estuarine Research Reserve
Heather	Hamlin	University of Maine
Bev	Johnson	Bates College
Anne	Langston Noll	Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center
Ben	Martens	Maine Coast Fishermen's Association
Marissa	McMahan	Manomet
Gabe	McPhail	Resilient Communities, L3C
Bill	Needelman	City of Portland
Caroline	Noblet	University of Maine
Rebecca	Peters	Maine Department of Marine Resources
Cameron	Reny	Maine State Legislature
Melissa	Smith	Maine Department of Marine Resources

Michelle	Staudinger	University of Maine
Joshua	Stoll	University of Maine
Jesica	Waller	Maine Department of Marine Resources
Meredith	White	Maine Department of Marine Resources
Lisa	White	Maine Department of Marine Resources
Amy	Winston	Coastal Enterprises, Inc.

Staff/Observers:

Susie	Arnold	Island Institute/Maine Climate Council
Beth	Bisson	Maine Sea Grant
Ed	Billings	Deer Isle planner
Baily	Bowden	
Melissa	Britsch	Department of Marine Resources, Coastal Program
Rebecca	Brown	
Matt	Cannon	Sierra Club
Haiso-Yun	Chang	University of Maine
Louise	Chaplin	University of Maine
Matt	Davis	Department of Marine Resources
Pat	Keliher	Commissioner DMR/Maine Climate Council
Maggie	Kelly-Boyd	GOPIF
Catherine	Mardosa	University of Maine
Meredith	Mendelson	Department of Marine Resources
Caroline	Noblet	University of Maine
Laura	Singer	Consensus Building Institute
Helena	Tatgenhorst	The Nature Conservancy
Stephanie	Watson	Governor’s Energy Office