

Summary Notes from Maine Climate Council

January 23, 2024

Overview

The Maine Climate Council held a Special Meeting on Resilience from 2pm - 4:30pm on January 23 at the University of Maine at Augusta to discuss the recent storm impacts and how to build Maine's resilience in the face of future extreme weather events. Governor Janet Mills and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree both attended the meeting. Roughly 100 participants gathered in person for the meeting, along with another 500 viewers online via Zoom. Agenda Items included:

- Roundtable discussion with Governor Mills on storm experience, impacts and response
- The path ahead - learning from Vermont and Maine scientists
- Maine Climate Council discussion

See full meeting video here: <https://youtu.be/ewGGy5WsCIU?si=qkSzUgsZY47VWHV4>

See slides here: <https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/2024-01/January%20Resilience%20MCC%20Meeting%20Slides.pdf>

Below are high-level summary notes from the meeting.

Welcome

Maine Climate Council Co-Chair Hannah Pingree, Director of the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, welcomed Governor Janet Mills, Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, councilors and virtual participants. Governor Mills opened the meeting, addressing the recent storms and the need to build resilience in infrastructure and in communities across the state. Governor Mills also welcomed and extended thanks to representatives of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources for attending the meeting and sharing their experience with resilience planning.

Roundtable Discussion with Governor Mills

Co-Chair Hannah Pingree introduced the first panel discussion. This panel focused on community members' experience of the recent storms in Maine, their impact and local response. Panelists included: Kathleen Billings, Town of Stonington; Dan Burgess, Governor's Energy Office; Commissioner Heather Johnson, Department of Economic and Community Development; Gary Lamb, City of Hallowell; Commissioner Melanie Loyzim, Department of Environmental Protection; Meredith Mendelson, Department of Marine Resources; Jessie Perkins, Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce; Pete Rogers, Maine Emergency Management Agency; Joyce Taylor, Department of Transportation; and Dr. Puthieri Va, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Each panelist highlighted the impact of the storm, their response, and the support they need for recovery and ongoing resilience planning.

Details of the panel can be found via the recorded presentation:

<https://youtu.be/ewGGy5WsCIU?si=qkSzUgsZY47VWHV4>

The Path Ahead - Learning from Vermont and Maine Scientists

Secretary Julie Moore, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, shared a presentation about Vermont's approach to floodplain restoration and infrastructure hardening. This approach was established and implemented after Tropical Storm Irene caused significant flooding in the state in 2011 and has been

very successful. Vermont's work can offer ideas and paths forward as Maine embarks on a similar resilience planning exercise.

Dr. Susie Arnold, Senior Ocean Scientist, Island Institute, made a short presentation about data showing changing weather patterns in Maine, and how the state can prepare for future extreme weather events. She noted that while the region has typically experienced northeasterly storm winds, the past few years have seen an increased trend of southeasterly storms. It is not yet clear why this change has occurred.

Maine Climate Council Discussion

Secretary Julie Moore and Dr. Susie Arnold expanded on their earlier presentations, offering more specifics for a detailed discussion with the Maine Climate Council.

Secretary Moore outlined Vermont's approach to adaptation and increasing resilience. She highlighted key tools including alignment of state programs, funding and incentives, mitigation and conservation planning, land use planning and regulation, and evaluation of vulnerabilities. Vermont also developed a Resilience Implementation Strategy and ensured adequate resources and funding for the program.

Dr. Arnold discussed new storm trends, noting that heavy precipitation and accompanying wind storms with gusts over 58 miles per hour are becoming more common. She spoke about key points of vulnerability, including accessibility, infrastructure, natural systems and mental health, and noted that Maine Won't Wait has the potential to both create hope and offer solutions to the challenges we face.

Council members talked about how the Council can organize its work to ensure effective response both in the short and long term. Topics discussed are summarized below:

- Seize the moment. Maine must rapidly learn from recent events and marry emergency response and resilience planning.
- Disasters are hitting coastal and inland communities alike.
- Seek ways to bring diverse communities to agreement on standardized plans for response and rebuilding, and seek their input on design.
- Communication must come early, come often, and be accurate.
- The plan must address building resilience in existing homes.
- Fishing communities need support to build back after the storms. There is a heightened risk of losing working waterfront.
- There is a need for speedy permitting to rebuild. Yet changes should balance speed with protection.
- Challenge – designing a better attachment for piers to limit destruction in extreme weather.
- Create space and provide guidance for communities to host hard conversations about rebuilding, relocating and redesigning.
- Recognition of the severe mental health toll of extreme weather events, and the psychological resilience of Maine residents.

Next Steps and Adjourn

The next meeting of the Maine Climate Council will be held virtually on March 14, 2024. Registration and agendas will be available closer to the date on the Maine Won't Wait website:

<https://www.maine.gov/future/meeting-calendar>.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.

Annex 1: Comments from Participants and the Public

The Special Meeting on Resilience was held in person and virtually. Due to limited capacity at the venue, members of the public attended virtually. There was robust participation online during the meeting, and many participants sent email comments afterward. These comments and questions are sorted by theme and summarized below.

Comments received online during the meeting

- **Planning for extreme weather events:** As weather patterns shift, will historical data be removed from the decision making process for predicting future extreme weather events? These changes are not currently reflected in government policy, impacting accurate planning.
- **Enable rapid recovery**
 - Prioritize local businesses, fishermen and women for funding.
 - Offer support to individuals not covered by insurance, as damage may push them to sell their homes.
 - **Expedite permitting:** For many, the will and ability to make remediation and preparedness plans is bounded by permits. If possible, aim to authorize long-temporary permits that have a "safe harbor" provision that won't penalize property owners and other enterprises for making good-faith efforts to obtain permits before executing on projects.
 - **Explore parametric insurance:** This may be a good option for the fishing community, restaurants/businesses or anyone in need of quick recovery. The challenge would be exploring solutions that would be fit for purpose for users.
 - **Organize volunteers for climate resilience work:** Some nonprofits and community groups wish to directly organize and engage volunteers in climate resilience projects. They could provide skilled and unskilled labor and support - for example, supporting dune restoration, non-hazmat cleanups of outdoor recreation hotspots and homes, wharf stabilization, trail maintenance etc. Are there donors/organizations that could provide operational funding to organizations organizing these volunteers?
- **Infrastructure resilience:**
 - With regards to the damaged pier that had been previously strengthened, there is a need to take care when "strengthening" infrastructure, allowing flexibility over rigidity. Make sure to build in a failure point that can be easily repaired, for example, a shear pin in rototillers.
 - Compare the cost of undergrounding power lines instead of on aboveground poles. How does this compare, given the costs of repairing existing distribution lines, lost wages, losses from disruptions to business and productivity, etc.? Results of a comparison over a 10-year period could be interesting data.
 - Require that any "natural disaster" destroyed property be relocated following a disaster
- **Build a case for financing resilience:**
 - Research and document cases where upfront investment in resilience paid off. Case studies will help build more scope for investment.
- **Comments on Equity**
 - The Council must address heat hazards for vulnerable communities
 - How can we integrate our work on climate change with equity and community solidarity locally, nationally and internationally?

- **Additional funding for social support programs:** There is concern that chronically underfunded and under-staffed social support agencies (e.g., LIHEAP, SNAP etc.) will be unable to address the needs of people experiencing new economic hardship in the next couple of months, especially as fishing families hit hard times and file for help.
- **Blue carbon capture:** According to a Harvard study, seaweed captures 20x more carbon than trees. ~109k square miles can capture as much carbon as the Amazon Rainforest. Maine has 3478 miles along its coast and should explore opportunities for blue carbon capture and seaweed export.
- **Long term planning for resilience**
 - **Explore strategies** implemented in other regions to:
 - Bring in resources from FEMA.
 - Mitigate the vulnerability of residents / households to extended power outages.
 - Develop **detailed flood maps** for areas that do not currently have them, especially rural, low population density areas in Maine
 - Strategies for incorporating **environmental literacy** into our education system (birth through grade 12) need to be created, funded and implemented. Solutions to climate change must focus decades ahead of where we are today.
 - **Visualize all the moving parts.** Use tools to show the full range of implications, how they might conjoin in new ways, and how the existing regulations, bureaucracy, and legislative response can address what can be done in some kind of responsible, but transformational order.
- **Act with urgency:** Our pace must increase and we should avoid the dangers of conventional thinking and structures. Vermont has great examples of ways to respond. Nature, however, has tested the validity and adequacy of those analyses in a matter of weeks. For example, the irony of DOT three year plans being announced a few days after the event, already inadequate, as witnessed by residents and actual events.
- **Other Questions, Comments and Concerns**
 - Encouraging to hear the idea of making resilience more robustly cross-cutting.
 - Maine does not have unlimited resources, and should consider moving to 95% rather than 100% renewables. This would allow the last 5% to be used for resilience.
 - We know sea levels will be rising for centuries. How do we begin the process of laying the foundation so our communities are resilient not only now and over the next few years, but over many decades?
 - “I hope we don’t respond to these events “in kind”. They have been devastating, BUT they are just the beginning of the impacts that we WILL see until the climate re-stabilizes. So I hope we on the MCC will “rise to the NEXT challenge”, not just the one we have seen in the last month!”
 - “Thanks so much for an excellent meeting! I feel honored to be able to attend and ‘up’ my awareness of what’s happening with “Maine Won’t Wait”. Keep calm and carry on.”