

Summary Notes from Maine Climate Council

March 14, 2024

Overview

The Maine Climate Council held its Quarterly Meeting from 9am - 12pm on March 14, 2024 to discuss research findings of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. The George Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions, University of Maine led a workshop for Councilors and Working Group members on the impact of climate change on vulnerable populations. The meeting was held virtually on Zoom, with 292 people attending. Agenda Items included:

- Highlights from the Maine Climate Council Scientific and Technical Subcommittee
- Climate Impacts Workshop

See full meeting video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xk5X4rQsn_o

See slides here:

- STS Presentation: <https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/2024-03/STS%20Highlights%20Slides%203.14.24.pdf>
- Climate Impacts Workshop: <https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/2024-03/Climate%20Impacts%20Workshop%203.14.24.pdf>

Below are high-level summary notes from the meeting.

Welcome

Maine Climate Council Co-Chairs Hannah Pingree, Director of the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, and Commissioner Melanie Loyzim, Department of Environmental Protection, opened the meeting. They welcomed Councilors, Working Group members and members of the public, and thanked members for their hard work over the past months.

Highlights from the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

Ivan Fernandez, Co-chair of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (STS) introduced the presentation. STS comprises over 40 scientists who are researching the effects of climate change in Maine. Speakers included: Sean Birkel, Climate Change Institute, University of Maine; Cindy Isenhour, University of Maine; Rebecca Lincoln, Maine Center for Disease Control; Peter Slovinsky, Maine Geological Survey; Nichole Price, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences; Glen Koehler, University of Maine; Kristen Puryear, Maine Natural Areas Program; Stephen Dickson, Maine Geological Survey; and Susie Arnold, Island Institute. Each speaker highlighted a different topic of research undertaken by STS, and highlighted findings relevant to the State of Maine. Topics included climate, human dimensions and human health, sea level rise and storm surge, marine impacts, agriculture and food, forests and biodiversity, information needs, and the science of hope.

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

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xk5X4rQsn_o

Slides from the presentation are available here:

<https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/2024-03/STS%20Highlights%20Slides%203.14.24.pdf>

Climate Impacts Workshop

Members of the Equity Subcommittee, Dr. Puthiery Va, Amara Ifeji, and Gabe McPhail introduced the workshop. They talked about the Equity Subcommittee's work, and noted that the state's climate action plan must benefit vulnerable populations. This workshop was planned to help participants understand how some people can be disproportionately impacted by climate events, and provided tools to recognize this difference in impact.

The workshop was led by Quixada Moore-Vissing and Moises Nuñez from the George Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions, University of Maine. They led participants through a series of interactive exercises that explored different scenarios, and compared impacts on different populations. They offered some guiding questions that working group members and Councilors can use when shaping their policy recommendations for Maine Won't Wait. A short discussion followed the workshop.

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

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Slides from the presentation are available here:

<https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/2024-03/Climate%20Impacts%20Workshop%203.14.24.pdf>

Next Steps and Adjourn

The next meeting of the Maine Climate Council will be held in person on June 18, 2024 in Augusta, ME. Details about the agenda and how to attend will be made available closer to the date on the Maine Won't Wait website: <https://www.maine.gov/future/meeting-calendar>.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00pm.

Annex 1: Comments from Participants

This meeting was held on Zoom, and workshop participants actively contributed to the discussion through the chat, responding to the science presentations as well as the climate impacts workshop. These comments have been summarized and organized by theme below.

Responses to the STS Presentation

- In an effort to get to the best outcome, we often forget simply getting to better. We must remain optimistic and keep trying, especially when working with municipalities who are responding directly to climate change and looking to us for potential solutions.
- Focus on how the data can support specific recommendations for action at both the state and local levels. This will help bridge the gap between the bad news and hopeful action in our messaging. Guidance on how to do this at the community level would be appreciated.
- Maine is very “dispersed”, i.e., we have the worst sprawl. This makes all these problems more expensive to address.

Responses to the Climate Impacts Workshop

- We heard from the STS committee how social capital and infrastructure is important for community resilience. I see a connection to what we heard in today's discussion - how can we create community infrastructure to make sure we are taking care of one another at a community level - at a policy, community, individual levels?
- How to better incorporate the voice of those most impacted in all aspects of our planning?
- Indexes, while useful, do not tell the whole story
 - Let us not forget low-income families who live in communities that are not identified as vulnerable at the community level.
 - The national indexes are at the county scale. They miss a lot of granularity and can lead to a false sense of security.
- Expanding the definition of vulnerable communities
 - I was amazed to see that older adults emerged as one of the most vulnerable populations again and again.
 - I am really now remembering women who are particularly vulnerable because of pregnancy, violence, limited housing and or language barriers. Some women can't leave a house without permission of a male and this is particularly scary when you have to make a quick decision
 - River communities are isolated - they often have only one road in and one road out.
- Dealing with multiple vulnerabilities
 - Having multiple vulnerabilities reduces agency and capacity, which are fundamental to hope.
 - Remember to ask people what kinds of barriers and impacts they face, because the whole picture is not always immediately visible.

- Retrofitting existing buildings cuts across many vulnerabilities. Health/costs/resilience/carbon reduction in emissions and embodied carbon in materials used. Agency for all.
- The importance of hope
 - This discussion about how much vulnerable populations have to lose made me emotional and feel a bit hopeless - how do we integrate hope and agency into this important equity work?
 - A lot of hope research is around children who bounce back despite adverse childhood experiences. The literature tells us that every child needs a positive adult in their life, whereas the hope literature tells us how to be that positive adult. Again, hope is all about action. It is the process and well-being is the outcome.
 - Centering and leading with equity in our work brings change. There is nothing for us without us.
 - I don't want to forget the definition of CONSTRUCTIVE HOPE! Thank you Susie!
- Policy design and effective implementation are critical
 - Costs are always an issue, and there will never be enough money in grants and programs. If we want to get serious, we could finance necessary, equitable, and urgent climate actions the same way we have financed other public goods like the electricity grid, roads and highways, etc.
 - One crucial consideration is that people can be impacted by climate change whether or not they believe in the reality of climate change or have climate considerations as a top priority. Efforts to help people avoid and adapt to those impacts can sidestep arguments over beliefs and priorities, and social science research shows that meeting people wherever they are actually helps to change attitudes and beliefs.
- Consider impacts to, and policy solutions for, the most vulnerable nonhuman populations.
- Building trust and connection as we move forward
 - We're in this together, show that we're interconnected, build trust and relationships across stakeholder and other groups
 - Building trust goes beyond our climate work. How are our actions everyday building trust?
 - Interconnectedness of communities. Change and human communities are part of nature.
 - Recognize the tension between agency and connectedness
 - Left with the importance of resisting the urge to simplify the work for the sake of efficiency. Complexity and nuance are critical, as is extensive listening.
- I'm left with how progressive this plan and group is on so many challenging issues.
- Thank you also to all the working group people digging in - you make being on the climate council even better and more effective!

Question: What populations are more vulnerable to impacts of flooding?

170 people responded.



Question: What populations are more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme heat?

196 people responded.

