

Global Warming May Take 240 Feet of Coastline

By JACK FICHTER

CAPE MAY — If projections are correct, by the year 2100, this county's beaches will lose up to 240 feet due to rising sea levels and marshes between the mainland and islands will become open water from global warming and erosion.

Susan Kurkowski, a graduate of New York University School of Law, where she concentrated on environmental law and authored two papers on global warming, gave a PowerPoint presentation to Cape May's Energy Committee April 26.

She said global warming could increase the intensity of hurricanes and move the high tide line destroying dunes here. Kurkowski showed slides of Cape Hatteras, N.C. that lost its dunes from a combination of erosion from storms and sea level rise.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) projects sea level rise could lead to flooding of low lying property, loss of coastal wetlands, erosion of beaches, saltwater contamination of drinking water, and shortening the useful life of causeways and bridges. It notes the state's sea level is already rising by 15 inches per century and is likely to rise another 27 inches by the year 2100.

Rising seas would inundate many acres of coastal salt marshes and tidal flats that provide flood protection and habitat for marsh plants. The rising ocean could inflict extensive damage to valuable real



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Susan Kurkowski shows projected effects of global warming on county's coastline by 2100.

estate and beaches, according to the EPA.

Kurkowski said the EPA cites a cost of \$100 million to \$500 million to protect a barrier island town like Long Beach Island with seawalls and additional sand.

According to the EPA, rising global temperatures have added about two to five inches to sea level in the last century, but they could raise the sea level another one to three feet in the next century.

Kurkowski quoted from a Princeton University report by Michael Oppenheimer on sea level rise on our coast that predicts a two to four feet rise in sea level.

"Two feet may not sound like much, but that is calculated on vertical rise," said Kurkowski.

She said that translates to a loss about of 240 feet of shoreline in a worse case scenario.

The state would lose 90 miles of wetlands that are

home to 24 endangered and threatened species, according to the Oppenheimer Report, said Kurkowski.

She said, while Cape May's residents cannot control what the rest of the world is doing in relation to global warming, it can reduce its pollution levels that hasten climate change.

Cape May Environmental Commission Chairwoman Charlotte Todd suggested Cape May become the "greenest city in the state."

"Some say global warming is a global emergency," she said. "I think we are up to that emergency, we are a very energetic people and town, and I think we deal with crisis's very well."

Todd said when four drinking water wells became salty in the city; a

desalination plant was built to address the issue.

Kurkowski offered suggestions for the city to lessen global warming: sign a mayor's agreement to reduce the city's emission levels 7 percent below 1990 levels, adopt land use policies that preserve open space, promote bicycle usage, and parking and traffic initiatives to cut down time of engines idling in town, and mandate the city use at least 20 percent renewable energy such as solar, wind, and wave power.

Other goals include: the use of insulated windows, doors, energy efficient appliances and lights in all city-owned buildings, enacting green building codes on all new construction, replacing city vehicles with hybrids as cars wear out, increase recycling, promote tree planting and raise public awareness of conservation and global warming.

During public comment, Pastor Jeff Elliot of Cape May Lutheran Church, suggested that windmills to generate electricity be placed offshore of the city. He said waterfront property owners in other towns objected to windmills that would be visible from the beach.

Elliot, who is a former military chaplain and a Marine, said windmills would be located far enough offshore they would appear no larger than the mast of a sailing ship.

"We have Marines bleeding and dying in places for oil," he said. "Every time I see a windmill, it looks so beautiful to me because that means less Marines bleeding and dying in places we are fighting for fossil fuels."

Middle Township resident Robert Jackson, former mayor of West Cape May, suggested windmills could be placed behind barrier islands.

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