

opinion

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Editorial board: Those at left, former Gen. Mgr. Bobby Martin, editorial writer Roger Brown and citizen members George Bateh, James Ewers, Sally Hague, Clayton Levins and Christopher Owens.

A VERSE FOR TODAY

So they went out and preached that people should repent.

Mark 6:12

Sea level rise must be taken seriously

Jacksonville is surrounded and intersected by water.

So sea level rise ought to be raising concerns here.

If tropical storms become stronger, the impacts could be severe.

If flooding becomes more frequent, if rivers rise, the entire topography of Northeast Florida would be dramatically affected.

Impacts of sea level rise can already be seen in Miami — tides backing up into the streets, salt water intrusion in the water supplies.

Of course, Miami, having been created out of low lying areas, is especially vulnerable to sea level rise.

Jacksonville has higher elevations and thus is not as vulnerable. Still, Jacksonville should be taking a realistic approach to these threats.

BUSINESS IMPACTS

What are the business impacts of sea level rise? What would it do to real estate, for instance, if prime areas are suddenly in flood plains?

The Northeast Florida Regional Council has a special committee looking into these issues, named Public/Private Regional Resiliency or P2R2 in short.

The regional council identified the dangers of sea level rise in its First Coast Vision report of 2011.

To quote the vision plan, "We are committed to determining the impact of climate change in the region, mitigating for impacts if we project them and adapting if required."

WHAT IT MEANS

Do the rest of Northeast Florida's leaders have the same commitment? The silence is deafening.

Yet, the potential impact of sea level rise is scary:

- A storm surge of 1 to 5 feet would endanger \$25.4 billion of property.
- A 1-foot sea level rise would impact \$1.6 billion in property.
- A 6-foot sea level rise would impact \$6.4 billion in property.

Brian Teeple, CEO of the regional council, listed a few examples.

"What you'll start to see as sea levels begin to rise is a lot more erosion during Northeasters, for instance due to naturally higher water levels. You're also going to see your wetland start to disappear because they'll become flooded, they'll become open water. You'll have more frequent riverine flooding during storms."

Specifically, a 3-foot sea level rise would inundate portions of St. Augustine's historic district, reports the Union of Concerned Scientists. Portions of downtown Jacksonville would be affected, too, Teeple said.

The impacts of sea level rise should inform all future development plans. Mitigating current development may be needed, as well.

At the very least, Northeast Florida must be aware of the dangers and make informed decisions with eyes wide open.

For instance, when the city of Green Cove Springs planned a new police station, it was moved away from the St. Johns River to higher ground and designed to resist a Category 5 hurricane.

Along the same lines, homes or busi-

nesses near flood plains may be endangered with severe new climate realities.

For instance, Nashville in 2010 experienced a 500-year flood that caused \$1 billion in damage to 11,000 properties. In response, Nashville is building a series of greenways that can serve as flood protection.

Miami-Dade County already sees the impact of sea level rise. Local flooding is occurring from what is called "king tides." Saltwater intrusion into the aquifer's drinking water supply from sea level rise is occurring.

A Sea Level Rise Task Force recently reported that trillions of property values in Miami-Dade are at risk, as are the environment, water supply, natural resources, agriculture and the economy. If left unaddressed, some developments may have to be rebuilt or abandoned.

Miami-Dade already requires all infrastructure projects to consider the impact of sea level rise and calls for an evaluation of existing infrastructure.

MILITARY IMPLICATIONS

Military installations already are seeing impacts of climate change, reports the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Defense.

GAO visited 15 installations and found evidence at 12 of rising temperatures, stronger and more frequent storms and changing precipitation.

At a coastal early warning installation in Alaska, there is evidence of rising sea levels, melting sea ice and thawing permafrost. Erosion has affected roads, sea walls, runaways and shoreline, restricting airplane flights.

CLIMATE CONSENSUS

Most leading scientific organizations agree that climate change is occurring and that human activities are the primary driver.

- U.S. National Academy of Science.
- American Association for the Advancement of Science.
- American Meteorological Society.
- American Chemical Society.
- American Geophysical Union.

CONSERVATIVES JOIN

In recent weeks, prominent conservatives have joined the climate change bandwagon such as four former EPA heads who served under Republican presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and both of the Bush presidents.

Henry Paulsen, a Republican and former Treasury secretary under President George W. Bush, noted that there is a conservative response to climate change that empowers private markets and uses risk management strategies in an insurance approach.

He proposes phasing out all subsidies for fuels, allowing carbon-based fuels to compete on an equal playing field with renewables.

For Jacksonville, once called the Hartford of the South, the business implications of sea level rise ought to resonate.

Failure to act — to mitigate against the impacts, to prepare for the worst — would be contrary to conservative principles.

We know sea levels are rising, we just don't know by how much. Only a fool would fail to prepare.