

January 9th, 2014 » Clean Energy, Climate Action » Chris Carnevale »

Sea level rise is a critical issue for Florida residents to pay attention to. The magnitude of its impacts on the state seem overwhelming if considered all at once, however, with a proper understanding of the issue and the ability to proactively plan, there is a great deal we can do to mitigate worst-case scenarios. We recently ran a [blog series on sea level rise](#), which presented lots of helpful information, so I want to take the opportunity to distill some of the key concepts into a quick guide to sea level rise in Florida.

Let's start with a few facts to illustrate why it is so important to take this issue seriously:

- With just 9 inches of sea level rise, which is likely to happen by 2050, [Southeast Florida could lose up to 70% of its gravity-powered stormwater drainage capacity](#). That means when it rains, communities will flood, even many miles away from the coast.
- It is estimated that inundation of real estate and infrastructure from sea level rise may have an impact of [\\$3.5 trillion dollars in damages in Miami alone by 2070](#).
- According to [estimates](#) by city and county officials, with just 3 feet of sea level rise, 19 schools, 10 hospitals, 9 airports, 8 power plants, 2 ports, 8 water treatment plants, 4 landfills, and 6 emergency shelters would be inundated in just the four southeastern-most Florida counties.
- The issue of sea level rise has inspired artists to visually and [dramatically illustrate](#) what the impacts of rising seas will mean for coastal communities – particularly in vulnerable cities like Miami and New York City.

In addition to flooded real estate and other infrastructure, sea level rise poses risks of coastal erosion and loss of beaches, salinifying water wells used for drinking and irrigation, loss of property value, increased insurance premiums or inability to insure property, increased exposure to waterborne pathogens, and more.

Just how high sea levels will rise is tough to know exactly, but local experts in South Florida have [analyzed this question](#), and concluded that Florida will likely experience:

- 3 – 7 inches by 2030
- 7 – 17.5 inches by 2050
- 9 – 24 inches by 2060



This high tide floods the streets of Fort Lauderdale in September 2008. Photo courtesy Robert Giordano.

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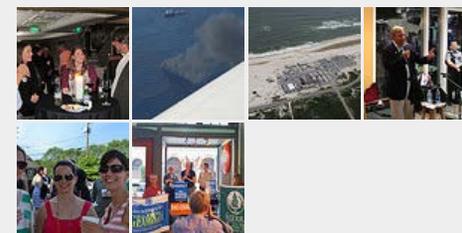
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[Wind energy](#) (93)

[Clean Fuel](#) (52)

[Climate Action](#) (221)

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19.5 – 57 inches by 2100

Given that 77% of Florida's population lives in coastal counties and 77% of the state's economic activity is generated [in coastal counties](#), these numbers are very concerning.

While the challenge ahead to confront sea level rise is great, Florida has excellent solutions available and [some Florida communities are emerging as global leaders](#) in preparing for sea level rise. Adaptive solutions that help alleviate negative impacts of sea level rise are [being built into the fabric of local and regional planning](#) by efforts such as those by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, and the Regional Community Institute of Northeast Florida.

These efforts must be supported in their implementation and replicated throughout the state. Mitigative solutions that help slow sea level rise at its source—which is global warming due to carbon pollution—are being deployed slowly but have immense upward potential. Most of our carbon emissions come from burning fossil fuel for energy, which means that effective mitigation means transitioning off of heavily polluting energy sources, such as coal, and using cleaner fuels such as solar and wind power. It only makes sense for the Sunshine State to generate more and more of its power from the sun.

2014 could be a big year for promoting Florida's prosperity in the face of sea level rise. With the gubernatorial election ahead, we must push to ensure Florida's next governor has a concrete plan to address sea level rise for the millions of Florida's coastal citizens. In the upcoming year, we also have the ability to open the free market for clean energy solutions by eliminating burdensome taxes for solar power and encouraging energy democracy by lowering barriers for citizens to become renewable energy producers, rather than passive consumers.

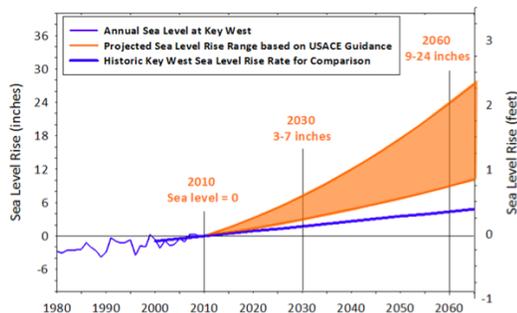
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[Stephen Smith](#) (118)  
[George Cavros](#) (2)  
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[Isabel Villalon](#) (1)  
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[Jennifer Rennicks](#) (100)  
[Jimmy Green](#) (10)  
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[John Bonitz](#) (19)  
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[Josh Galperin](#) (41)  
[Kacy Rohn](#) (4)  
[Mandy Hancock](#) (19)  
[Maria Hubert](#) (5)