



# CLIMATE CHANGE KNOWS NO BORDERS

## A REGIONAL VISION FOR RESILIENCE ACROSS NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

### Background

Climate change is not abstract for our region. More than one million people across New York and New Jersey live at risk of flooding today. Yet, eight years after Hurricane Sandy, we are still unprepared. What is at stake? Your home, your business, your school, your park, your neighborhood, and your way of life. Delaying action is not an option. Now is the time to address the greatest threat to our region's future.

The Rise to Resilience campaign is today's roadmap for a more resilient tomorrow. Together we can build resilience, support our communities and economy and create a more equitable and just region.

Please join us at [rise2resilience.org](http://rise2resilience.org).

### Issue overview

The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)'s mission priorities is to conduct studies to inform flood control projects across the nation. In the New York-New Jersey Region, up until February 2020, the **New York-New Jersey Harbor and Tributaries Study (NYNJHATS)** was evaluating six alternatives for addressing storm surge in the New York-New Jersey Harbor region. While there were significant omissions in the study scope, such a study funded through the USACE is among one of the few large scale federal funding mechanisms for implementing resilience projects. A study of our future coastal risks and what can be done is critically needed. This study was recently defunded by our Federal Government, leaving us with no comprehensive regional plan and no proposed solutions for our growing flood risk.

## **ACTION:** **Restore funding to the US Army Corps of Engineers**

Through authorization of the Water Resources Development Act or other infrastructure legislation, Congress should restore funding for executing a comprehensive coastal risk study and plan and significantly expand public engagement. Congress should also direct the USACE to draft an implementation plan to operationalize the 2013 updated Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies.

### **Such a plan should meet seven critical elements called for by many advocates and communities:**

- > **The primary purpose of the study must address vulnerability and risk from sea-level rise and riverine flooding as well as storm surge**, using the moderate or high projections developed by Rutgers and the New York City Panel on Climate Change.
- > **Empower community decision-making through a robust and funded engagement process led by local and state partners.** As part of this process, community members and local elected officials should be part of the decision-making, in which the lenses of population density and infrastructure, cultural and environmental resources and social vulnerability are disaggregated and discussed to better determine community values. Include strong social vulnerability and equity metrics to ensure an understanding of potential displacement, existing inequities and the impact of various measures (positive or negative) on these existing vulnerabilities.
- > **Thoroughly evaluate the role of non-structural measures in the context of planned and built resilience projects.** Many years are likely to pass before any large-scale structural solutions are built. A thorough analysis of the impacts of funded planned projects, as well as the potential impacts of policy, programmatic and regulatory changes, should be conducted to gain a full picture of the benefits of various measures in context, with an eye toward developing a multi-layered approach.
- > **Thoroughly evaluate the ecosystem impacts** associated with different options. Environmental impacts and benefits should be a priority when comparing projects early in the process, given the multiple co-benefits provided by natural resources as well as their innate value.
- > **Account for co-benefits** provided by natural and nature-based features and ability to reflect community value/priorities in final decision-making.
- > **Build flexibility into the process, to allow for limited modifications over time and the ability to seek matching funds over a longer time period.**<sup>1</sup> Include near-mid- and long-term options. Further, certain aspects of design and implementation (particularly design of shore-based measures) are best executed by state, local and community, rather than federal entities. The ultimate authorization of a plan should include specifics for how projects will be managed, including leadership roles and authorities at the local level from design to implementation and the flexibility and resources to support sound grassroots engagement. Given the uncertainty in planning horizons beyond 2080 and the need to adapt strategies over time, the USACE should also seek an approach to authorization that provides flexibility over different time scales and scenarios.

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<sup>1</sup> Boyd, J and L Shabman. 2019. Environmental Projects in Urban Areas: Analysis to Support Project Planning and Budgeting for the US Army Corps of Engineers. Resources for the Future.

**ACTION:**  
**Support a federal coastal risk study with state and local complements**

**The states of New York and New Jersey and New York City, through the act of legislation and/or bi-state resilience council and compact, State and City partners should:**

- > **Work together with the USACE to execute a study and project and thoroughly** evaluate and ensure integration of policy and programmatic measures (e.g. zoning, land use, retrofits, buyout programs).
- > **Dedicate resources to public engagement** to empower the public to be part of the decision-making process. State and city partners must play an important role to better inform the public, increase awareness, drive public participation, gauge public values and inform the decision-making process. Local knowledge and expertise is critical to determining equitable and sound resilience solutions that may not be captured without robust community engagement.