

# RISE TO RESILIENCE

## OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR FUTURE

Shawn LaTourette  
Acting Commissioner  
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection  
401 E. State St.  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0402

**Cc:**

The Honorable Governor Philip Murphy  
Office of the Governor  
Trenton, NJ 08625

April 16, 2021

**Re: The State of New Jersey's forthcoming Climate Change Resilience Strategy**

Dear Acting Commissioner LaTourette,

More than half a million properties are already at risk of flooding in New Jersey, with every county having experienced a disaster declaration in the past ten years. The state is second in the nation for having already suffered losses in real estate value due to tidal flooding alone, at over \$4.5 billion, and is leading in the nation for affordable units at risk.<sup>12</sup> These numbers are rising. And we know that investing now and planning before disasters strike saves taxpayer dollars an average of sevenfold for reduced risk.<sup>3</sup>

In 2019 and 2020 respectively, Governor Murphy signed Executive Orders 89 and 100 recognizing the urgency of acting on climate and committing to the development of State

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<sup>1</sup> First Street Foundation. 2020. State by State Analysis: Property Value Loss from Sea Level Rise <https://firststreet.org/press/property-value-loss-from-sea-level-rise-state-by-state-analysis/>

<sup>2</sup> Buchanan, M; S Kulp; L Cushing; R Morello-Frosch; T Nedwick; B Strauss. 2020. Sea level rise and coastal flooding threaten affordable housing. Environmental Research Letters.

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Building Sciences. 2018. Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves. [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.nibs.org/resource/resmgr/mmc/NIBS\\_MSv2-2018\\_Interim-Repordf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.nibs.org/resource/resmgr/mmc/NIBS_MSv2-2018_Interim-Repordf)

Climate Change Resilience Strategy (Strategy) and new rules for land use through New Jersey Protecting Against Climate Threats (NJ PACT).

We, the Rise to Resilience coalition, support the development of these efforts to lead the state toward building resilience for our communities, our environments, and the infrastructure we depend on every day. We will also respond to the Strategy when it is released in early Spring. In preparation for the release, we urge the State to address and incorporate the following, organized by the areas of focus of the Climate Resilience strategy: 1) Start with the Science; 2) Plan & Design for the Future; 3) Promote Coordinated Governance; 4) Support Local & Regional Action; 5) Invest in Nature; and 6) Preparing the Coast.

We also recommend that **environmental justice** be integrated throughout the Coastal Resilience Strategy. The resulting products and engagement must center the needs, voices, and participation of people of color and people with lower incomes who are more likely to live in flood zones, lack flood insurance coverage, and are impacted most by climate threats. The Department of Environmental Protection should ensure that environmental justice and heavily impacted communities are particularly reached and empowered in the development and finalization of this statewide strategy.

## **Start with the Science**

- **Vulnerability assessments.** Establish and adopt state-endorsed flood and climate change vulnerability assessment protocols that can be applied in all municipalities to provide consistent guidance and a strong foundation for planning. The scope and content of the assessments should be linked to the resilience planning decision-making framework.
- **Measurable targets for adaptation.** Develop and include measurable targets in the forthcoming State Climate Resilience Strategy to provide direction and accountability. These targets must take into account the diversity of New Jersey's communities and contexts, from Hoboken to the Jersey shore to Camden. To strengthen the impact of the state's efforts and drive results, it is critical to have clear climate change adaptation goals and to associate measurable objectives and targets with each of these goals. Quantified objectives and targets will enable focused, coordinated, and efficient action, harnessing the power and synergies of the public and private sector and build in accountability.
- **A statewide sea-level rise standard.** Adopt an official state sea-level rise standard to guide all land use planning and investment decisions in tidal areas across state departments.

## **Plan & Design for the Future**

- **Land use rules.** Align NJPACT state land use and development rules to better adapt to climate change. The State has already committed to moving forward on this process through NJPACT, but they should be aligned with the Strategy, more carefully consider investments in high risk areas, and ensure equitable outcomes for people of color and with lower incomes.

- **Public engagement and input:** prior to the release of the proposed rules, provide the general details of the planned proposal and convene stakeholders through robust public engagement that will inform the officially proposed rules. This may include sector-based groups (environmental justice, municipalities, industry), virtual town halls, online polling, social media, and other strategies. Input should be compiled and shared and include a response process for communicating why the feedback was or was not incorporated and should be developed in a way that does not delay 2022 adoption.
- **Riverine and design storm guidance.** Revise the official design storm standard to account for increased inland flooding, ensuring appropriate stormwater and floodplain planning and management.
- **Combined Sewer Systems.** Incorporate climate projections (sea level rise, future precipitation) into Combined Sewer Outfall (CSO) planning for the next permit cycle.

## Promote Coordinated Governance

- **State interagency coordination.** Leverage the new Office of Climate Action and the Green Economy to lead 1) cross-agency implementation of the resilience strategy; 2) tracking and reporting on progress towards measurable goals and targets for resiliency; 3) solicitation of feedback from stakeholders; and 4) updates to the plan over time.

## Support Local & Regional Action

- **Local planning.** Develop and adopt a standardized resilience planning decision-making framework to support municipalities with incorporating a climate change related hazard vulnerability assessment into their development of municipal master plans. This framework would also help to consistently guide technical assistance provided by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to municipalities preparing these assessments.

## Invest in Nature

- **Restoration of vulnerable lands.** Support migration, conservation, and restoration of wetlands and other vulnerable habitats through a suite of strategies ranging from state-level protections for migration zones (acquisition, maximizing buffers) to guidance for municipalities to support vulnerable habitat protection through planning and zoning. Identify opportunities for revisioning the existing mission and resources associated with the Green and Blue Acres acquisition to support floodplain restoration and relocation and counseling services for homeowners.

## Preparing the Coast

- **Resilient infrastructure investments:** identify and commit to funding and financing strategies for resilient infrastructure and retrofits, prioritizing investments for those with the highest vulnerabilities to climate impacts, especially environmental justice communities.
- **Transition from high risk areas.** Develop the planning tools, guidance, and legal framework to allow development, redevelopment, and infrastructure decisions to transition away from high risk areas and toward safer, more sustainable locations.

Incentivize towns to restrict development in high hazard areas while reducing barriers for increased density in low risk areas. These policies must maintain or expand access to affordable housing and prevent displacement of low income communities and communities of color from upland communities.

- **Flood disclosure and transparency.** Incorporate disclosure into policy and rulemaking. Support and pass a comprehensive flood disclosure law because homebuyers, renters, and business owners have the right to make smart personal and economic decisions based on the flood risk they face.

We look forward to working with you to move this important agenda forward.

Decker Design  
ECONcrete Inc.  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Flood Mitigation Industry Association  
FM Global  
Future City Inc.  
Hackensack Riverkeeper  
Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership  
New Jersey Future

New Jersey League of Conservation Voters  
New Jersey VOAD  
Regional Ready Rockaway  
The Living City Project  
Sahara SP  
Stepping Stones Resources  
Surfrider Foundation Jersey Shore Chapter  
Waterfront Alliance

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The Rise to Resilience campaign is supported by the Waterfront Alliance. Rise to Resilience is a campaign and coalition of residents, leaders in business, labor community and justice, volunteer organizations, scientists, environmental advocates, and design professionals collectively calling on our federal, state, and local governments to make building climate resilience an urgent priority. For questions or further information, please contact Kate Boicourt: [kboicourt@waterfrontalliance.org](mailto:kboicourt@waterfrontalliance.org).