

Contact: Cindy Sabato

401-272-3540, x129; 401-533-6574 (cell)

csabato@savebay.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Save The Bay calls Coastal Storm Risk Management study flawed**

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Nov. 22, 2016 – Save The Bay says an Army Corps of Engineers draft plan to raise 341 residences along Rhode Island’s south coast is deeply flawed. According to Jonathan Stone, Save The Bay executive director, the Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (DIFREA) is based on outdated information, does not adequately capture the consequences and costs of elevating the private homes in Washington County and fails to fully investigate alternatives or address commercial properties. The organization calls for a more complete study and assessment of the costs, alternatives, and environmental impacts.

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration predicts sea levels in southern New England will rise two feet in the next 32 years and seven feet by 2100. By contrast, the DIFREA uses a much lower rate of sea level rise, just 4.4 inches over the next 50 years, based on historic predictions that do not reflect the anticipated rate of sea level rise.

“Frankly, by underestimating sea level rise, the study also underestimates everything else – the potential harm to coastal homeowners, the number of structures impacted, and the costs of raising and maintaining roads and septic systems and providing other services to these communities. This project would represent a significant investment of public funds, and it is irresponsible not to utilize the most current data available,” said Save The Bay Executive Director Jonathan Stone.

In a November 21, 2016 letter to the Army Corps of Engineers, Save The Bay points out that the DIFREA does not consider: 1) that many roads in the study area are already plagued by flooding waters during high tides and will also need to be elevated and maintained in order to provide even the most basic services and emergency response to the elevated homes; 2) that as sea levels continue to rise, such residential infrastructure as utilities and water lines will be increasingly vulnerable and negatively impacted; and 3) whether or not existing wastewater disposal systems will continue to function as sea levels rise.

(more)

“It makes no sense to use public funds to elevate homes without also considering the access, emergency services and utilities needed to make them habitable. The cost of raising and maintaining roadways, upgrading and maintaining septic systems, and relocating water mains, electrical lines and other infrastructure must be included for even the most rudimentary cost-benefit analysis,” Stone said.

The DIFREA also fails to adequately explore and describe the alternative of retreat, which includes acquisition and relocation of private properties. The DIFREA itself states, “... As sea level continues to rise and perhaps accelerate, relocation may become more cost effective and necessary as the number of areas requiring storm damage reduction measures rise...” The Army Corps of Engineers established precedent for retreat in Rhode Island in the 1980’s by acquiring and relocating 61 private homes on about 38 acres of residential land in Warwick along the Pawtuxet River floodplain (Belmont Park). The Army Corp found that buying out vulnerable land in Belmont Park furthered “the interest of the general public and future generations.” Save The Bay submits that the alternative of retreat must be fully developed and considered.

Finally, the DIFREA largely ignores the 46 commercial structures in the study area, leaving hotels, restaurants, small businesses and others vulnerable to flooding, storm surge, sea level rise, and erosion. Any flood mitigation plan for the study area is not complete without addressing both residential and commercial properties and infrastructure needed to serve them.

“By using outdated data, failing to adequately consider retreat, and omitting the entire commercial presence in the study area, the tentative plan recommended by the Army Corps grossly underestimates the vulnerability and costs of protecting these coastal areas, sets up our coastal communities for ongoing problems, and imposes unnecessary costs on future generations by encouraging private homeowners to remain in harm’s way,” Stone said. “This is unacceptable given the magnitude of public dollars under consideration and the lives at stake.”

“Climate change is real and imminent, and as a recognized leader in coastal planning, Rhode Island must set the example for adapting to these changes in order to preserve our coastal communities and the character of our beautiful coastline. That means using the best data available, taking a long view, and investing public money in a way that protects the vibrancy, safety and health of our coastal communities for the long term,” Stone said.

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About Save The Bay: Founded in 1970, Save The Bay works to protect and improve Narragansett Bay and its watershed through advocacy, education, and restoration efforts. It envisions a fully swimmable, fishable, healthy Narragansett Bay, accessible to everyone and globally recognized as an environmental treasure.