

# Maine Climate Council Community Resilience Working Group (CRWG) Meeting Summary from February 9, 2024

## Welcome

- Goals of the meeting are to discuss cooperation between planners, emergency managers, and first responders, to learn more about the impacts of climate change on mental health and how to address them, and to begin conversations about getting out of harm's way regarding flooding and sea level rise.
- Co-chair Sam Roy's last day with MEMA is today. He is taking a new position with the USGS. Anne Fuchs from MEMA will be taking Sam's place as a CRWG co-chair. She was previously a co-chair of this WG's predecessor during the creation of Maine Won't Wait in 2020.

## Integrating Resilience with Emergency Management, Response, and Recovery Planning

- Michael Durkin, Director of the Cumberland County Emergency Management Agency (EMA), presented the impacts of recent storms and discussed the importance of cooperation between town, county, and state governments in disaster planning, response, and recovery.
- It is important to define which communities, resources, and assets are in greatest need during disaster recovery. This can vary from one disaster to another.
  - For example, recent storms caused significant infrastructure damage, while the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant social and public health impacts.
- Sharing information, data, and resources between agencies is critical at all stages of planning, response, and recovery.
  - For example, environmental agencies can share information about damaged natural resources with EMAs to help fully account for impacts from a disaster.
  - Different agencies have different formal and informal communications networks; utilizing these networks and trusted partners is critical for reaching the public.

## Psychological Resilience for Those Impacted by Climate Change

- Dennis Kiley of the EcoPsychology Initiative presented potential impacts of climate change on those with mental health issues and ways to better communicate, support, and reach people when engaging in difficult conversations about climate change and natural disasters.
- At least one in five Americans are affected by a mental health challenge, and the impacts of climate change can exacerbate this. It can cause new difficulties in those who might otherwise be healthy, and it can cause additional strain on those already affected by mental health issues.
- Communities that are healthy and well-prepared and have thought through what they would do in the face of a disaster are those most likely to recover well afterward. Focusing on mental health prior to disasters can be just as important as making resources available afterward.

- Mental health resources are extremely limited in many parts of the state; they are in need of additional funding, staffing, and training of existing local staff and volunteers. Focusing on mental well-being and resilience should be more prioritized in the MWW 2024 update.

### Getting Out of Harm's Way

- Jessica Brunacini of Maine Sea Grant presented on potential options for getting out of harm's way (i.e., voluntary or coordinated movement of people and infrastructure out of areas subject to repeated flooding or coastal storms).
- Using appropriate language in these discussions is key; terms like "managed retreat" can imply defeat or government coercion if not carefully defined and explained.
- Buyout programs have had varying degrees of success across the U.S.; sometimes they are government initiated but resisted by a community, or vice versa. With buyouts, willing sellers are paid pre-storm fair market value for their properties, which are then demolished and permanently preserved as greenspace. This can take years to implement.
- If programs like these are to be pursued in Maine, they should be initiated by community members or non-governmental organizations. Increasing public discussion of these topics by the state and Maine Climate Council may help to prime communities for when they feel ready to initiate these conversations.
- Buyouts or other programs may be more difficult or less effective in addressing threats to working waterfront infrastructure, which must be located on or near the shore. Additional work is needed to determine how to best address repeated loss of working waterfront infrastructure.

### Next Steps:

- Interested WG members have agreed to assist with developing and refining metrics in three subject areas and to lead discussions of each subject at the next meeting. These subject areas include:
  - Integrating resilience and emergency management response/recovery planning
  - Psychological resilience
  - Getting out of harm's way
- Upcoming meetings will be from 9 am to 12 pm (unless otherwise noted) on the following days:
  - 10 am to 12 pm on Thursday, February 29, 2024: virtual, [Register Here](#)
  - Friday, March 22, 2024: virtual, [Register Here](#)
  - Friday, April 26, 2024: in person with virtual option. Location to be determined.

### Shared Resources:

- Psychological resilience notes: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/19R4lpHwYla2XDacljmYMTtkZWUDeItibpp5sTwqRTTc/edit>
- Climigration network (which CBI convenes): <https://www.climigration.org/>
  - Climigration guidebook: <https://www.climigration.org/guidebook>
- Cornell – A Northeast Safe and Thriving for All (NEST): <https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/733>

- Spring courses on psychological impacts of climate change – Contact Nancy Hathaway [Hathaway.n@gmail.com](mailto:Hathaway.n@gmail.com)
  - Psychological Impact of Climate Change and Cultivating Resilience USM June 24th when Integrating Mindfulness, Social & Emotional Skills in Education open to anyone;  
Cultivating Resilience using Mindfulness 6 week course (2 hours/wk) starts April 30th;  
Cultivating Resilience for Counselors CEUs April 4th 9-12
- [Congressional Research Service report on flood buyouts](#)
- [Climigration Network's Innovations in Buyouts Workshop overviews and reports](#)
- [Climate Ready Coast Southern Maine Regional Coastal Resilience Plan](#)
- Considering a Buyout Program in Maine: A Potential Opportunity to Build Resilience. *Interested parties may email Melanie Gárate at [mgarate@cbi.org](mailto:mgarate@cbi.org) to request a copy.*