

Climate change a concern, not a priority to coastal leaders, survey finds

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Many Oregon coast public officials and community leaders believe their local climate is changing and that the change will affect their communities. But overall, they say, addressing the changing climate is not an urgent concern.

These are among the findings of a survey by Oregon Sea Grant at Oregon State University.

During 2012, Sea Grant surveyed coastal professionals such as city managers and planners, elected officials such as city council members and county commissioners, and other leaders including those with nongovernmental organizations. Approximately 60 percent of the 140 survey respondents believe the local climate is changing. By contrast, 18 percent think it is not, and 22 percent don't know.

While most believe that their professional efforts toward addressing climate change would benefit the community, both elected officials and other coastal professionals also believe that a combination of governments and other organizations should initiate a local response to the likely [effects of climate change](#).

Overall, actions appear to be lagging behind beliefs and concerns, according to the research leader, Joseph Cone, the Sea Grant assistant director.

"As of last May, many coastal professionals – about 44 percent of the

survey respondents—were not currently involved in planning to adapt to its effects," said Cone.

The survey results placed climate change effects next to the bottom on a list of seven significant "potential stressors on your community during the next 10 years." Coastal professionals scored climate change effects considerably lower (46 percent of respondents said they were moderately to extremely concerned) than the top-ranked stressors – a weak economy, and the impacts of a tsunami or earthquake (approximately 70 percent moderately to extremely concerned for each).

The hurdles to planning most often encountered were a lack of agreement over the importance of climate change effects and a lack of urgency regarding them. Where planning for effects has begun, it has mainly been in an early fact-finding stage, the survey showed. Anticipating this, questions asked what specific information needs coastal professionals had. Most needed was information about diverse environmental and social considerations.

Highly rated needs included information about flooding or saltwater intrusion, species and habitat vulnerability, and predictions of ecosystem impacts; and also social and economic vulnerabilities, the cost of climate adaptation, and how to communicate climate risks rated as important information needs.

The survey was administered online to 348 individuals. Some coastal participants for the survey came from a list of respondents from a similar climate change study conducted by Oregon Sea Grant in 2008, which sampled Oregon coastal managers and practitioners.

Not all coastal communities or officials in them could be, or were, included in the 2012 study. The sample is what statisticians call a "purposive sample" rather than a random sample of all coastal

professionals, and provided timely and targeted insights that can help guide further climate planning and assistance, said Cone.

A report of the findings, "Coastal Climate Change: Survey Results for Oregon 2012," prepared by OSU doctoral candidate Kirsten Winters, is available for download at [climate-change-survey-results](https://seagrant.oregonstate.edu/sgpub/57a9543e69ba-climate-change-survey-results)"
target="_blank">seagrant.oregonstate.edu/sgpub ... 57a9543e69ba-
results

Provided by Oregon State University

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