The Eastern Shore of Virginia (ESVA) Climate Equity Project, a five-year partnership between the University of Virginia and local community, aims to co-create decision tools that will enable the ESVA community to advance their long-term climate equity. At this second workshop, the project invited over 300 residents to attend on February 7, 2024. A summary of community participation, key findings, and the project’s next steps are listed as follows:

**PARTICIPANTS**

Over 80 participants from 35 towns along the Eastern Shore joined the workshop! Participants actively shared their ideas to support the Shore through the impacts of changing climate. Over 20 participants had attended the 2023 workshop. Educational services and non-profit organizations were the most represented stakeholders. Of the attendees who participated, 38 were from Accomack and 28 were from Northampton counties. Some of the most represented communities were Cape Charles, Onancock, Painter, Machipongo, Wachapreague, Melfa and Exmore.

**HOW WILL CHANGING WATER AND FLOODING IMPACT EASTERN SHORE COMMUNITIES DIFFERENTLY?**

This station focused on impacts on land surface, particularly stemming from storm surge events. Flash presentations showcased simulated flooding patterns from Hurricane Isabel, correlating well with local water level measurements. Findings revealed consistent trends: 1) Elevated storm surge typically impacts coastal areas, especially the southern end of the peninsula, during hurricanes and Nor’easters; 2) Flood severity correlates with land elevation, notably affecting low-lying regions near Saxis and Wallops Island. Workshop participants were queried about their past flood experiences and the adequacy of Station 1 maps. Concerns expressed by bay side residents included erosion of bluffs and heightened storm surge frequency. Responses also highlighted worries about future storm-related issues such as street flooding, septic system failure, transportation disruptions, and displacement. Combined impacts of storm surge channeling up tidal creeks and inland flooding from intense rain on road washouts were also of concern, particularly when sole road access to neighborhoods is lost.

**WHAT ARE THE THREATS TO SEPTIC SYSTEMS, SOIL SALTINESS, AND GROUNDWATER ON THE EASTERN SHORE?**

The primary water resource issues and concerns addressed at this station were the projections of future climate extremes, particularly inland flooding, roadway wash-outs, septic system impacts, saltwater reaching wells and groundwater scarcity. The interaction between coastal surge flooding, inland flooding, and infiltration of salt water into soils and groundwater on the Shore were presented and discussed with workshop participants. The overarching goal was to provide science-based evidence supporting informed decision-making to manage weather-related extreme events in the coming years. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences with historical extreme events and changing environmental conditions, while also providing insights into their perceptions and coping mechanisms. Through this engagement, valuable feedback was gathered to refine future research efforts and better support community decision-making processes.

**WHO ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE CHANGING CLIMATE?**

This station offered an example of how a Climate Equity Atlas can show people on the Eastern Shore of Virginia experience the effects of a changing climate differently based on where they live and a variety of population characteristics. Participants were asked to share who they are worried about in their communities, that may be disproportionately impacted by environmental changes. Through conversation and surveys, it was discovered that many participants are concerned about low-wage workers, older residents, communities of color, renters, and those living in older homes. Additionally, the station introduced an ongoing historic timeline project inviting participants to contribute events related to extreme weather, agriculture and food, and economic and transportation history.
HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO PLANNING FOR EQUITABLE CLIMATE ADAPTATION ON THE EASTERN SHORE?

This station visualized how community input informs actions and decisions to promote climate equity on the Eastern Shore. First, participants were invited to update a stakeholder network to enhance understanding of current climate equity efforts. Second, feedback was gathered on the role of participatory mapping and community science in supporting resilience actions. Workshop attendees prioritized collecting data on physical elements impacting quality of life, health and safety challenges, and critical infrastructure. These efforts aimed to empower communities by involving them in decision-making processes and gathering essential information to inform resilience strategies.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE ALREADY HERE?

The goal of this station was to share information about resources currently available on the Eastern Shore that help to support resilience efforts. Participants were asked to mingle around the table displays and were encouraged to ask questions of staff from the RAFT (Resilience Adaptation Feasibility Tool) project, the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, and the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation’s Resilience Planning Program. Participants were not asked a specific list of questions; rather, the discussion evolved around each attendee’s questions and interests. There frequently was concern expressed about flooding and both responding to and planning for it.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO CONTINUE PARTICIPATING?

This station collected workshop feedback through an interactive poster and anonymous feedback slips. More than half of the respondents praised the opportunity for engagement with the project team and experts, highlighting the value of hands-on activities and discussions, and would like to come to future workshops. Suggestions for improvement include providing more information on local initiatives, increasing resources for participants, and enhancing representation from various community groups. Some logistical concerns were raised regarding noise and space constraints, alongside suggestions for more structured introductions to workshop components prior to the workshop. The feedback indicates a positive reception to continue participating and seek updates from the website, Facebook and Surveys.

NEXT STEPS

Insights collected from the community will inform the Eastern Shore Climate Equity Project over the following years. Here are ways you can reach out and engage:

• Mark the date! The next workshop will be on Wednesday, August 21. Location and time will be confirmed soon.
• Join focus groups and interviews to provide insight on climate equity on Eastern Shore.
• Learn more about the project at info booths during upcoming community events.
• Outcomes from this workshop will be available in the comprehensive workshop report.

If you would like to participate, contact: ESVClimateEquity@virginia.edu

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