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Suisun workshop planned to discuss sea rise threat, possible solutions

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Sustainable Solano leads a flood walk in Suisun City. The flood walk is a way for locals to learn about Suisun City's flood risks and possible solutions. (Sustainable Solano/Courtesy photo)

SUISUN CITY — Four years ago, almost to the day, a marsh fire – started from a makeshift grill – claimed three homes and killed seven animals and damaged buildings at the Suisun Wildlife Rescue Center.

It was the fourth fire – and most devastating – at the center since its dedication in 1987.

But another danger looms in the south Kellogg Street area, warns officials with Sustainable Solano and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

That risk is sea rise.

The groups, along with a host of others, are holding a workshop, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, at the Suisun City City Hall, 701 Civic Center Blvd.

"We'll be engaging the participants in an interactive Suisun Climate Adaptation and Nature-Based Solutions Workshop on how Suisun will meet statewide climate adaptation standards, using community voices to help shape the planning of flood-mitigation infrastructure in Suisun City," Allison Nagel, co-executive director of Sustainable Solano, said in an email to the Daily Republic.

"These community-based organization workshops are building local participation for BCDC's Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan, a region-wide plan for the Bay shoreline that guides the creation of coordinated, locally planned sea level rise adaptation actions that work together to meet regional goals. It will also be an opportunity to engage residents around how they interact with the waterfront and nature-based solutions they would like to see in Suisun to address sea level rise," Nagel stated.

Among the topics to be discussed will be the possibility of constructing a massive levee as part of what is called the Kellogg Reliance Project – a structure that is potentially 11.5 feet high with a base between 40 and 50 feet to meet sloping standards.

"So we are in the design (phase) ... with construction hopefully starting by 2025," Emily Corwin, a senior engineer for the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District and Solano Stormwater Alliance manager.

"It will be some kind of levee structure," said Corwin, adding it would take five to 10 years to complete. At full height, it would be about 5 feet above the ground surface at the proposed site south of Kellogg Street.

"We want to build it in such a way that it (can be raised) in the future," she added.

Corwin said alternatives are being explored because of the potential cost.

While the June 4, 2020, fire was not a wildfire fire, per se, climate change has resulted in more fires, often bigger and more devastating than prior blazes. That area of Suisun City is vulnerable to such fires, so a fire road to protect the area is also in the project plans.

The agenda for the workshop begins with a social greet-and-meet, followed at 6:20 with introductions. The various presentations start soon after, including "Introduction to Flooding in Suisun and Adapting to Rising Tides."

A summary of statewide adaptation guidelines is next, then a presentation on nature-based solutions to flooding and sea level rise. Those will be followed by breakout discussions, then everyone will be reassembled to share their thoughts and findings. The workshop concludes with a discussion on what's next.

This is one of five workshops the BCDC is holding, with the first held Friday in East Palo Alto, and others scheduled for East Oakland, North Richmond and San Rafael. These cities were targeted because each has already started work on sea rise issues, Jaclyn Perrin-Martinez, a senior climate adaptation planner for the BCDC, said.

For Solano County that work began with the Solano Bayshore Resiliency Roundtable, a coalition of a number of government agencies and other organizations working on climate change adaptation initiatives.

But at the core of the work, now, is the state-driven Senate Bill 272, which mandates that local jurisdictions within California's coastal zones prepare, by 2034, a rising sea level adaptation plan. For Solano County, that includes Suisun City, Benicia, Vallejo and possibly Fairfield. The county also will be involved.

Solano's cost to complete a plan is uncertain, but to complete ongoing projects and those that will be needed in the future has an estimated price tag of \$7 billion, or about 6% of the total for the Bay Area.

The estimated cost is \$110 billion, of which only \$5 billion is funded. But officials note that the cost to do nothing could be as much as \$230 billion due to sea-rise damages.

"I think ultimately what we want to see are plans that cover the entire shoreline and address the vulnerability and the risks," Perrin-Martinez said.

She admits, however, the BCDC will only be developing guidelines, and the policy push has little in the way of teeth to force compliance.

However, those jurisdictions that do develop plans that are approved by the BCDC will be eligible to receive state funding for implementation of those plans.

Dana Brechwald, assistant planning director for Climate Adaptation with the BCDC, said it is actually important to the agency not to dictate what the local jurisdictions do next, but instead encourage cooperation with neighboring jurisdictions.

Solano has four cities that front a coastal bay, and others impacted by tidal push.

River cities such as Rio Vista, the Delta areas, and even inland centers also will feel the effects, as damage to transportation thoroughfares, freight centers, communications and other assets could have a rippling effect across the state and the nation.

There are three categories of concern when discussing sea rise: sea level, shallow groundwater areas and stormwater runoff from the cities.

Standards are being set for threat assessments in those areas, and project for the short-term – by 2050; mid-term – by 2100; and long-term – by 2150.

All of that is part of the workshop.

If interested in attending, go to www.eventbrite.com/e/suisun-climate-adaptation-and-nature-based-solutions-workshop-tickets-876311580527

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