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From Planning to Action: Mainstreaming Adaptation Strategies in Nags Head, NC

The Town of Nags Head, North Carolina, is moving to mainstream adaptive actions for sea level rise and climate change across Town plans and policies. The Town began its process by partnering with North Carolina Sea Grant (NCSG) to become the first small community in Northeastern North Carolina to document and adopt initial adaptive practices and policy for sea level rise and climate change. To coproduce this knowledge and lead to usable information, the team led a Vulnerability, Consequences, and Adaptation Planning Scenario (VCAPS) process to help the community and decision-makers develop a shared understanding of the consequences coastal hazards may have for Nags Head in the future and helped a subcommittee prioritize the initial list of response options. NCSG adapted VCAPS to be deployed as an open public meeting, eliciting potential adaptive actions from both public and private sector actors in a process grounded in shared public understanding of local values and priorities, which prevented the conversations from being derailed by participants' questions on the accuracy of weather and climate information and the scale of available scientific information for local decision-making. As a result of participating in the VCAPS exercise, the town formed a Climate Adaptation and Sea Level Rise Committee to further refine public input into prioritized, manageable, implementable strategies. Both the Committee VCAPS report and the FOCUS Nags Head Comprehensive Plan, including a section on sea level rise, were approved by the Nags Head Board of Commissioners in 2017. Adoption of the town's Comprehensive Plan made Nags Head the first municipality in the northeastern North Carolina and the second known statewide (behind Wilmington) to include sea level rise in its comprehensive plan. The town also utilized several VCAPS actions with co-benefits for hurricane recovery and hazard mitigation, to inform input to the Hurricane Matthew Resilient Recovery Plan. Work with Sea Grant is continuing to develop a coordinated education strategy on sea level rise in the town. The Town is also mainstreaming adaptive management practices across all Town plans and policies via targeted guidance on weather and climate risks as their preferred method of progress to increase climate resilience going forward. In particular, the Town is determining how to issue requests for proposals which will guide consultants to use climate information in planning. Some of these decision needs will require future coproduced research. For example, the combined stressors of sea level rise, heavy rainfall events, and importing

drinking water from mainland Dare County are increasing the groundwater table level, interfering with septic function, and may eventually degrade water quality. As the Town plans to manage decentralized wastewater, it will need to determine how best to help homeowners become more resilient – and determine the risk that a tipping point is reached beyond which the Town must consider alternative wastewater management strategies. Regardless of the path to increased resilience, the town is committed to continued engagement and co-production with the scientific community to ensure the wise use of weather and climate information for policy and decision-making.