

## Testimony to the CGA Shoreline Presentation Task Force Monday, July 9, 2012

Comments by Louis W. Burch, CT Program Coordinator  
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Representative Albis, Senator Meyer, distinguished members of the Shoreline Preservation Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Louis Burch, program coordinator for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). CCE is an 80,000 member non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization that works to protect public health and the natural environment. CCE is pleased to provide testimony to the Shoreline Preservation Task Force on this important issue.

As a coastal state, Connecticut must acknowledge and be well prepared for the impacts of global climate change and sea level rise. The science is clear and urgent action is needed in order to meet the challenges that these crises hold for Connecticut. Drastic changes in weather patterns are happening all over the world, including an increase in the intensity of severe storms like the one that devastated Connecticut's coastline in August 2011.

Connecticut is highly susceptible to the impacts of sea level rise, perhaps more so than some of its other neighbor states in New England. **The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that a 1-foot rise in sea level could occur along the Atlantic Coast as early as 2025. The direct impacts of sea level rise can include moderate to severe beach erosion, increased flooding, the loss of ecologically important wetlands, and saltwater contamination of drinking water resources.** All of these impacts can have disastrous consequences for public health, the environment, and the quality of life in coastal communities.

It is time for the State of Connecticut to address this problem, as other New England states have already done. Currently, Connecticut's Coastal Zone Management policies do not reference sea level rise the way that the Federal Coastal Zone Management statutes do. **In order to prevent future losses of life and property from extreme storms and rising tides, the State must recognize sea level rise as a legitimate problem, develop a model of anticipated sea level rise, and revise development codes and standards in coastal regions to account for extreme weather events to come.**

When Tropical Storm Irene hit the Connecticut shoreline, it caused upwards of \$885 million dollars in property damage, claimed the lives of Connecticut residents, and destroyed the homes of at least 25 families in the shoreline area. To make matters worse, over 800,000 Connecticut

residents were left without power after the storm passed, with over 200,000 of them left in the dark as long as a week after the storm was over. Elsewhere, equipment failures led to the overflow of millions of gallons of raw or partially treated sewage throughout the state, causing a significant public health and safety hazard for Connecticut residents.

We know that it's not a question of *if* Connecticut will be hit by another extreme storm system, but a question of *when*. It is also clear that a higher level of accountability for utility companies in Connecticut will be necessary in order to ensure proper service and rapid response in the event of new natural disasters. Energy utilities must take preemptive steps to minimize the number of power outages that can occur as a result of an extreme storm, whether through burying power lines or other measures. Additionally, power companies must be held to a higher standard regarding emergency response time, so that residents, businesses and critical infrastructure like hospitals and sewage treatment plants are not left without power for extended periods of time.

Issues with outdated wastewater treatment infrastructure create another major concern when talking about sea level rise and climate change in Connecticut's coastal areas. Over 180 million gallons of raw or partially treated sewage were discharged in Connecticut as a direct result of Tropical Storm Irene, including a 44 million gallon spill at the Middletown STP that contaminated the Connecticut River for five days straight. **Sewage overflows are a serious human health hazard for swimmers, boaters and recreational fishermen, and can lead to adverse health impacts from pathogens, viruses, and bacteria including: short-term gastrointestinal problems, infections, fevers, liver and kidney failure and even certain types of cancer.**

Sewage overflows can have even more dangerous implications in coastal areas that are increasingly susceptible to flooding due to rising tides. Many of the overflows that occurred as a result of Irene happened at manhole covers and storm drains in neighborhoods all along the coast. **The State must work quickly to implement stronger standards for wastewater infrastructure to ensure that equipment is kept in good working order, and that backup energy generators are reliable and ready to deal with emergency situations.**

In closing, there is no debate about whether sea level rise and extreme weather should play a role in how coastal communities plan and develop their shoreline areas. The devastation we witnessed as a result of Tropical Storm Irene is only the tip of the iceberg with respect to what we can expect to see happening on Connecticut's coast in the years to come. Connecticut's residents are counting on their elected officials to act swiftly in making important policy decisions that will protect Connecticut's residents, safeguard their environment and preserve their valuable coastal resources.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

Respectfully submitted,

Louis W. Burch  
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