

Sea-level rise: Adapt or retreat | Opinion

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Today's news is full of gloom and doom tied to sea-level rise projections. The magnitude of the issue is hard to digest for many who have homes in coastal America. When I resided in Coral Ridge, it was an oddity to see water on the streets, an occurrence that has now become all too commonplace.

According to flood inundation maps released by Climate Central and the real estate website, Zillow, close to \$1 trillion in real estate will be lost if seas rise six feet. Ft. Lauderdale figures substantially in these calculations. The enormity of the challenge is breathtaking.



Communities, cultures, and ways of life stand to be disrupted and lost. In all of the political hand wringing over climate change, we seem to have lost sight of the way to untangle this mess.

Retreat does not have to be the answer. Instead, solutions to addressing this global challenge lie in learning to adapt to a “new normal.” Living with water and building with nature represents a

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formula for sustaining coastal communities and environments. In Southeast Florida, adaptation is the way forward.

Priceless natural assets have been devalued over time and strengthening our ecosystems holds the key to restoring nature's defenses. The new way is to allow environmental services to do their job. Wetlands and native plants restoration, beach nourishment, tree canopy expansion, water capture and storage, and home alignments with elevations, solar and storm assets are the beginning of a process that can lead to communities being designated as "sea safe."

For those who decide to just take their chances, the odds are not on their side. Communities that fail to act and adapt to sea-level rise, face the growing threat of reaching a tipping point, where the perception of risk turns home values upside down. If real estate values decline and investments diminish, the tax base for basic services becomes depleted and what follows is obvious.

America's WETLAND Foundation has developed the *Sea Safe Community Certification* program to encourage a new era of innovation and environmental design. Ideas to match the challenge will flourish with ways to prevent retreat from the communities we love and the homes that hold our investments. But in places with a very diverse population and equity ladder, like we see along Federal Highway, adaptation helps everyone; those who can't afford to lose their home values and those who depend of government services to provide security and protection along with education and health care.

The "new normal" will require a belief system that respects the power of nature to carry us into future prosperity and equity for society, our economy and the environment. It's not a bad proposition to, in return, be able to salvage one's home value, community and culture for enhancing the environment that has allowed America her greatness.



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