

ANOTHER VIEW

Activists claim Florida's fate tied to Paris Climate Accord

Editor's note: We present this story from the Palm Beach Post as an example of concerns about sea level rise from another coastal community, in this case, one where President Donald Trump owns a home.

By **KIMBERLY MILLER**
Palm Beach Post

PALM BEACH, FLA. — President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord sends a clear message to Florida that it's on its own to save 8,400 miles of vulnerable coastline, conservationists said this week.

Rising sea levels means fish already swim in South Florida streets during king tide season, but removing the U.S. from the landmark agreement condemns the state to waterlogged communities in retreat from the sea, said Rafe Pomerance, a former deputy assistant secretary of state and founder of the Climate Policy Center.

"The Arctic is unraveling and the king tides are just early precursors of what is to come," Pomerance said. "We say the fate of Greenland is the fate of Miami. If Greenland melts, Miami is underwater."

Although Trump threatened during his campaign to remove the U.S. from the 195-country agreement to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), it wasn't until this week that some type of departure from the plan seemed inevitable.

While Trump was clear that he is pulling out, he said Thursday he was open to "negotiate our way back in under terms that are fair to the U.S."

U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., said on Twitter after the announcement that if the U.S. stops fighting climate change, the rest of the world will also.

"The future of Florida is tied to the ability of the world to shift energy systems," Pomerance said.

In the 20th century, sea levels rose 5.5 inches globally. Current rates have accelerated to about a foot — 12 inches — per 100 years, according to a 2016 study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. That's compared with pre-industrialization times, when the seas rose only about 1 to 1.5 inches per century.

An October 2015 refresh of sea-level rise numbers by the Southeast Regional Compact on Climate Change found that while South Florida measurements have been similar to what's happening globally, they are "anticipated to outpace the global average due to ongoing variations in the Florida Currents and Gulf Stream."

Between 2015 and 2060, South Florida seas could swell between 11 and 22 inches, based on estimates from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. By 2100, they could rise from 28 inches to 57 inches — between 2.3 feet and 4.7 feet.

"It's ironic that Trump would ignore the threat of sea level rise since he owns so much property that would eventually be underwater," Pomerance said.

His iconic Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach is threatened by encroaching water. If the worst-case scenario holds true, nearly half of Mar-a-Lago's 20-acre site would be underwater in 84 years, with the brackish Intracoastal Waterway invading from the west.

The blush-colored mansion itself, built in 1927 by Marjorie Merriweather Post, doesn't succumb until 6 feet of sea level rise occurs, according to a NOAA tool that visualizes sea-level rise.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross' Palm Beach mansion is also threatened by rising seas. It sits about 4.3 feet above sea level on the Intracoastal. Ross told Sen. Nelson in a Jan. 23 letter that he is well aware of sea-level rise concerns.

"As a resident of Florida who lives along the coast, I certainly share your interest and concern about the impact of these changes on coastal areas," Ross wrote. "Let me preface the following by suggesting that we put aside for now the question of what is causing these changes, and agree to focus on addressing the impacts of those changes."

As commerce secretary, Ross oversees the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Weather Service.

Florida lawmakers were already denouncing the purported climate pact withdrawal Wednesday with U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch, D-Boca Raton, saying it will damage international relationships, weaken the global standing of the U.S., and cede "leadership of this issue so vital to our future to China, Russia, and Europe."

"Retreating glaciers will cause retreating coastal populations closer to the equator, and Florida is ground zero," said Keren Bolter, a professor of geosciences at Florida Atlantic University. "But the good news is if we start acting now we can at least slow it down."

Palm Beach County's experience with rising sea levels is most apparent in the fall when several months of high-tide flooding, in conjunction with lunar cycles, inundates coastal streets. Brackish water bubbles up through storm grates and overtakes aging sea walls that were once able to contain the higher tides.

In Delray Beach and Boca Raton, residents are forced to find other places to park their cars and watch as their front yards turn to fish ponds. But areas in Miami-Dade and Broward counties have it worse.

Former Coral Gables Mayor Jim Cason was outspoken about his city's struggles with sea-level rise.

"We have \$15 billion worth of property in our community where elevations are from zero to 4 feet," Cason said during a December media call on a report about how local, state and federal governments can help cities become more resilient to climate change. "Our most affluent communities are along the water, and at some point, they may have to make a decision on whether they are going to move out, and we will have to decide whether we are going to continue to provide services."

Leonard Berry, a professor emeritus at FAU and the former director of the Florida Center for Environmental Studies, said that as much as he's concerned about a U.S. withdrawal from the climate accord, he also fears dwindling government support to continue climate change monitoring.

"Understanding the problem is based on national and federal data that is critically important," Berry said. "If we are deprived of that, we'll lose a key part of our ability to respond."



THE OTHER SIDE

Rising deaths show dangers on the water

By **MARK ALLEN**

Just last week a kayaker from Villas died after falling out of his kayak into Delaware Bay. Although the particulars have yet to be determined, this incident follows a trend that has seen paddle craft fatalities skyrocket in the Northeast with 28 paddler deaths in 2016.

Because of this trend, the U.S. Coast Guard will make paddle craft safety a priority in 2017. Locally, we tend to see kayaking as the most benign of watercraft sports. So how do these things happen? Consider this true story out of Cape Cod, Mass.

A woman named Karla grew up enjoying summer vacations on Cape Cod with her family where they would happily romp with younger sisters and brothers on the beaches, in the waves and on the sand dunes. Never could she have imagined the hardship she would one day face while at this popular shoreline destination.

As years passed, she continued the special summer tradition with her own daughters, and eventually grandsons, sharing time with them on the same beaches she traditionally relied on for a certain escape from everyday life — until that day, nearly a decade ago, when she almost lost her life. Looking back, Karla clearly recalls how beautiful and calm the water and weather were that fateful day when she and a long-time friend climbed into their kayaks from the beach and paddled out onto Cape Cod Bay.

"We took our life jackets, but we were not wearing them — stupid," she now confesses.

Both women were in single-person kayaks. They planned to paddle out to Wood End Light House, at the tip of the cape, and then head back to spend the rest of the day with family and

friends.

"My parents and brother saw us off. We were not expecting to be out long, so we tossed our lifejackets up in the bows and took along some water to drink. We did not bother to check the weather because it was obviously a gorgeous day," Karla said.

Since it was less than 2 miles, they left at noon and expected to be gone for about two hours. At that time, she would have considered herself an intermediate kayaker, familiar and confident with the bay, but it was her friend's first time out in a single-person kayak.

About 45 minutes into the trip, she felt and saw that the water was getting choppy, so she told her friend that she was nervous and suggested turning back, but her friend laughed and said, "Oh, let's throw caution to the wind."

Being the more experienced person, she felt that if a novice kayaker was not afraid, then she shouldn't be either, so they kept going. The pair arrived safely on shore, dragged their kayaks out of the water and rested on the sand. Their ensuing conversation alluded to the peril they would soon both face.

"We were both single moms and agreed that if something bad was going to happen, we would be OK because our kids were grown, so we sat there laughing and reminiscing for about half an hour."

As they talked, they watched the white caps growing in size, along with their anxiety about the trip back. The two finally climbed back into their kayaks in hopes of staying ahead of the worsening weather. Karla left her lifejacket tucked into the kayak's bow but her friend decided to wear hers. The two began to paddle back toward Truro, but sacrificing safety for speed, they decided not to stay

along the shore but cut across the bay in hopes of getting back sooner. The shore seemed to be closer than it actually was and it soon occurred to both women that they were in serious danger.

The waves continued to build as the pair fought to paddle through them, but each swell filled their boats with more sloshing seawater. The strong currents eventually pried the two kayaks apart, leaving each woman alone on the water. Both women began to panic as the distance between them grew.

"I could hear my friend's voice fading as she called my name, but when I tried to turn and look for her my kayak would start to tip. Then she was gone," Karla said.

Her kayak was designed for lakes and ponds — not the ocean — so as the surf increased, the boat became less steady. Every time she tried to reach down for her lifejacket to put it on, the kayak became even more off balance and took on even more water.

Karla recalls feeling immense guilt and shaking in fear with feelings of deep regret because she should have known better. She was the one who was supposed to know what they were doing and her friend had trusted her. After almost three hours on the water, she forced herself to keep pushing through in order to save herself and her friend, whom she desperately hoped was still hanging on.

When she was just about 50 feet from safety, she could see people on the beach, so she started screaming for help. Frantically, she waved one of her hands while keeping the other hand firmly wrapped around her paddle. Her anticipation and excitement for rescue caused her already unstable kayak to

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WAVES FROM THE PAST

Congress Hall prepares to add new wing

The Cape May Star and Wave is the nation's oldest weekly resort newspaper, published since 1854. Each week we revisit stories from our 163-year publishing history. This week we return to Oct. 27, 1868, when Congress Hall was beginning construction of a new wing.

"Congress Hall — The addition of a new wing to this justly-celebrated boarding establishment is now a settled fact. It had actually become a matter of necessity, for during the past two seasons it was utterly out of the question to entertain all the visitors who came to make it their home and very many of those who took their meals at the hall found it necessary to secure lodgings somewhere else.

Not quite two weeks ago, preparations for the erection of the new 'Ocean Wing' were inaugurated, by the removal of the old string of buildings which for many years were honored with that title. Ground was immediately broken, and a schooner's cargo or two, of Delaware stone is being converted into deep and solid foundations, running in four distinct walls the entire length of the wing. This portion of the work will be completed in the course of a few days, when the frame will be at once raised, almost every timber of it hav-

ing been previously fitted and prepared for its position in the immense structure. The wing runs along Perry Street towards the bluff 253 feet, exclusive of a smaller building of some 70 or 100 feet which is intended for a billiard room. It has a uniform width of 50 feet, three stories high, the same as the main building, but with a porch 25 feet wide running along the ocean front. This porch is to form a grand feature in itself, and will be the most extensive if not the most imposing on the continent.

There will be on the first floor two splendidly furnished ladies' reception rooms, occupying about 40 feet of the wing and separated by the hall-way which runs the entire length of the building. This hall will be handsomely proportioned, making it a delightful in-door promenade. Besides the reception parlors, lofty and superbly furnished sleeping apartments will occupy the remainder of this floor. Ascending to the second story, a magnificent proportioned drawing room will occupy the end of the building next to the office. This apartment is to be 40 feet by 50 with a balcony on the ocean front. The rest of this story is to be partitioned into bed-rooms, those fronting on the lawn opening on balconies over the immense porch men-

tioned above, each balcony being separate and distinct from that of the adjoining apartment. The third story is also divided into desirable sleeping apartments. Extensive alterations and improvements in that part of the main building devoted to the office, rotunda and restaurant are in contemplation. It is the intention of the proprietor to tear away the second story of this part of Congress Hall and give it a front on Perry Street uniform with the new wing.

This improvement has long been needed, and will add immensely to the beauty and prestige of this attractive resort. Other changes not yet fully developed, are spoken of, which we hall from time to time refer to.

We must not omit mentioning in the connection that the management of the undertaking is in the hands of our worthy fellow-citizen and former State Senator, Hon. W.W. Ware, who is ably assisted in the various details by Mr. Samuel R. Ludlam and Mr. Philip Hand, Jr.

Waves from the Past is researched and prepared by the Museum of Cape May County, 504 Route 9 North in Cape May Court House. The museum is open for tours at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Call (609) 465-3535.

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