



Lisa Miller & Associates

Business Development, Government Consulting, Public Relations

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Rising Sea Levels a Fact in Florida for Now

The Florida Legislature's [SB 158](#) by Senator Jeff Brandes certainly reflects the growing threats of flooding in Florida. Whether you believe in global warming or not, scientists have now confirmed by direct device measurement that sea levels around Florida are back on the upswing – and it could mean more frequent and severe flooding if the trend continues. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that sea levels along portions of our coast are rising by about a third of an inch every year now. While it doesn't sound like much and is certainly invisible to the naked eye, the various gauges around the state's 2,276 miles of tidal coastline show the waters, they are arisin'. The impacts are already being felt.

NOAA's report "[Global and Regional Sea Level Rise Scenarios for the United States.](#)" was done in conjunction with the South Florida Water Management District and other agencies. While it acknowledges that seas have always risen and fallen throughout the centuries and in fact vary from decade to decade, that we are now in a period of steady and measurable rise that started in 2006. The cause and whether it will continue remain unknown.

Scientists at the University of Florida think they know why the rapid increase is happening: Two naturally occurring large-scale atmospheric patterns had intersected to push up the water off the Southeast coast, causing a "hot spot" of sea-level rise. The area extends from North Carolina's outer banks south to Miami. The UF report "[East Coast's rapidly rising seas explained](#)" shows that from 2011 to 2015, the sea level along the southeastern American coastline rose six times higher than the average global increase. Regardless of the cause – natural or otherwise – both the scientists at UF and NOAA say if sea level rise doesn't level out, Florida's coastal communities will be in for some trouble.

The NOAA report's mid-range projections estimate that by 2030, Florida sea levels will be up to 17 inches higher than they are today. There are low-lying communities in parts of Miami Beach and New Smyrna Beach that are already impacted with minor street flooding occurring on perfectly sunny days. Officials in Miami Beach are spending nearly half a billion dollars to put check valves on storm drains and elevate certain roads and sidewalks susceptible to flooding. Building code changes are also in the works. Some lunar high tides and storms are now strong enough to reverse the flow of drainage canals, flooding neighborhoods.

For now, the NOAA report should raise awareness and provide data that can be used in future planning decisions, from residential & commercial development, to mitigation, to emergency management. The greater Tampa Bay area was cited in this recent [Washington Post article](#) as one of the most vulnerable in the United States to flooding and damage if a major hurricane ever scores a direct hit.