During Peak King Tide Season, FAU Researchers Talk About Sea-Level Rise Resiliency

By CAITIE SWITALSKI & ANDREW QUINTANA • OCT 8, 2018

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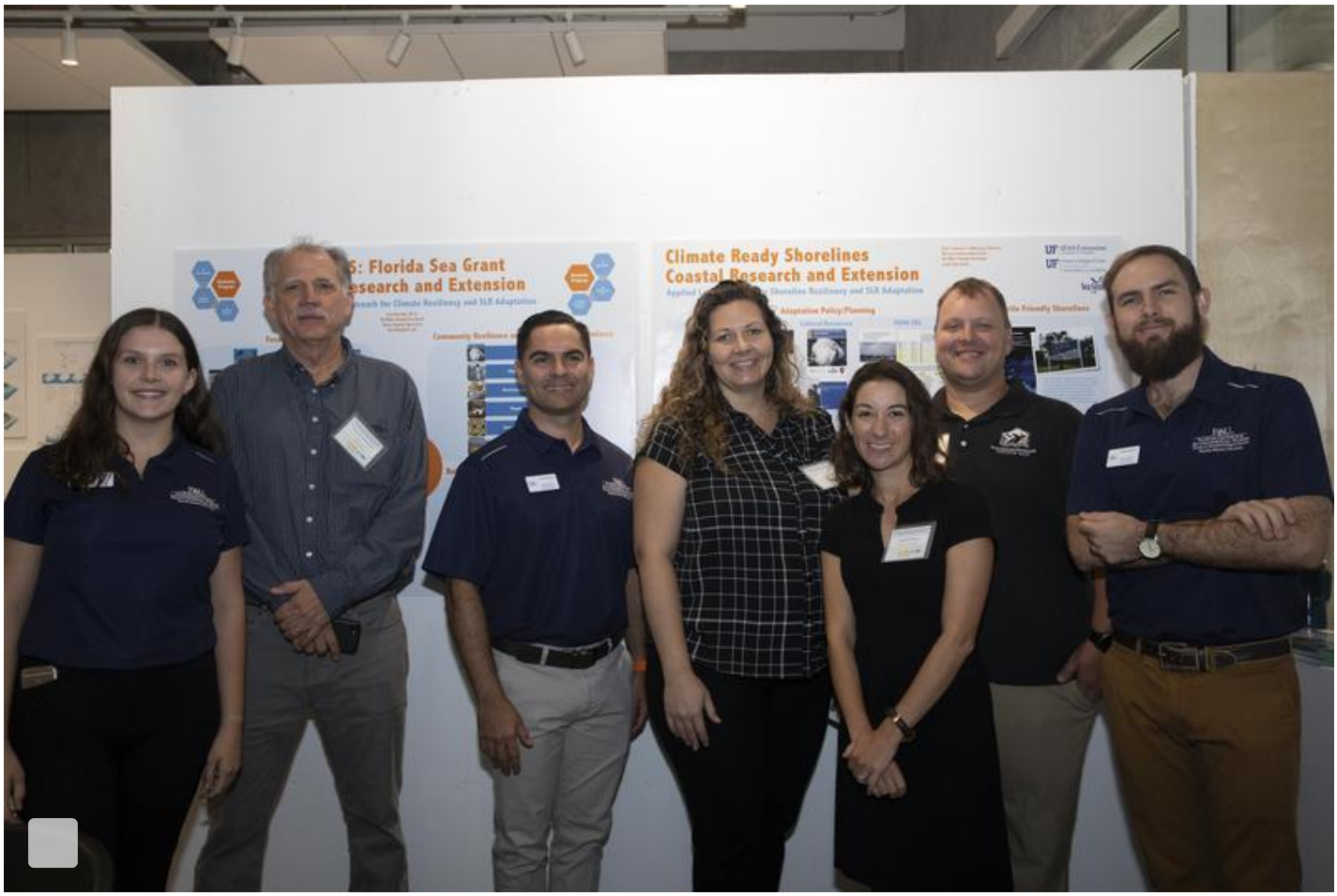

Masters students like Bridget Huston, left, presented with representatives from Nova Soutehastern University, Broward County, and the University of Florida about impacts of future flooding.

ALEX DOLCE, FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY /WLRN

Florida Atlantic University student Bridget Huston is collecting stories from people in her community about flooding.

With a team at the university's Florida Center For Environmental Studies, she's looking at flood maps, or projections for how high water is estimated to rise during floods. Then she's comparing them to people's accounts of what flooding looks like in their own neighborhoods. She said she hopes the personal accounts make flood maps even more accurate.

"A long-term goal would be to kind of 'ground-truth' these flood maps with what's actually happening, not just what the projection based on a number in inches is," Huston said.

This week is the peak of King Tide season across South Florida, when higher tides will contribute to more street flooding, especially for coastal areas. FAU research students used the timing to host a presentation about Sea-Level Rise in Fort Lauderdale, called "Transforming A Wetter Florida Into A Better Florida."

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1:04

Huston's project partly works by encouraging people to use smartphone apps for climate reporting, like one called 'I See Change.' It's a climate journaling app, where people can post pictures and descriptions of flooding in their communities, and document change over time.

Colin Polsky, who directs the FAU center, said Huston's project fills a gap that scientific data can't: qualitative information. The descriptions can help the team hone in on what areas need more attention when it comes to resiliency.

"What excites me is that it's not just research for research sake. It's research that is instrumental to help identify where we are currently resilient, and where we're not," Polsky said.

Other projects are focused on resilient architecture, how to monitor water table flooding in the western parts of Broward County, and even how plants can act as natural seawalls.

Members of the business community who attended the presentations were encouraged to get involved in Broward County and Fort Lauderdale resiliency efforts, if they weren't already, and help push for proactive change.

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As the presentations were going on, some neighborhoods of Fort Lauderdale were experiencing King Tide flooding just blocks away.

Ted Deutch, congressman for parts of Broward and Palm Beach County, opened the presentations at the FAU MetroLab. But then he went to visit residents at flood sites.

"Raising roads or installing pumps ... are the kinds of things that will help in the short term," Deutch said. "But, beyond that, we have to look at the impact this is going to have on loans and flood insurance, and work to ensure we're not gonna price people out of living in South Florida."

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