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Warming puts local shores at risk

By **ROB SPAHR**

Published: **Saturday, December 15, 2007**

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LITTLE EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP - Two years ago, [Rutgers University Professor Ken Able](#) made a surprising discovery as he emptied traps used to monitor fish at the university's Marine Field Station. Most of the fish inside the traps were gag groupers - a species of fish that typically lives in coral reefs - which was odd, considering that the nearest coral reef is hundreds of miles south of [New Jersey](#).

For Able, this was a glaring indication that global warming is altering New Jersey's waterways and the marine life that calls them home.

"Generally, some southern species always show up in the fall when water temperatures are the warmest, but since about 2000 we've seen an obvious increase in the amount of these species in our waterways," Able said.

Able is one of a handful of [Rutgers](#) scientists who, as part of their daily duties, chronicle the effects of global warming on the New Jersey coast from field stations across the state.

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The Little Egg Harbor Township field station is one of the most important in that group.

"We've been sampling larval fish once a week for 18 years from right inside the Little Egg inlet, so we have one of the best data sets on the East Coast of the [United States](#)," Able said, adding that scientists at the station are currently tracking 71 southern species, including Atlantic croaker and silver perch.

"This estuary is really well protected and undisturbed. That kind of landscape benefits us, because the area we collect data from is so close to the station it enables us to collect the data easier and more often."

The field station's staff also has recorded water temperatures since 1976; Able says the information shows the average annual temperature of the region's waterways has become "clearly much warmer" over time.

According to this data, the region's average water temperature has increased by two degrees Celsius just since 1994.

Even though two degrees may not seem significant, [Michael Kennish](#), the research coordinator for [Rutgers' Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences](#), said that if temperatures were to increase five degrees, it would melt all of the world's glaciers.

While warmer temperatures play a large role in the types of marine life found in the waterways, Kennish said the warmer climate also will change the face of the state's coastline.

As temperatures increase, Kennish said, water levels rise and threaten the coast.

"In the past 100 years, the sea level in New Jersey has risen about seven inches because of warming, but the sea level actually rose a total of 15 or 16 inches because the shoreline in our area is sinking due to the sediment beneath it compacting," Kennish said. "In the next 50 to 100 years, we project global warming will cause the sea level to rise at a much faster rate, somewhere between 25 to 40

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inches. It could be even greater, but in our area I expect the level will be closer to 36 inches."

If the sea level increases 36 inches, Kennish said, it would remove an area the length of a football field from New Jersey's beaches, which would put many of the state's popular vacation destinations in harm's way.

"We're looking at big-time trouble in New Jersey because we're actually moving people to the shore instead of away from it. Our shore is almost completely developed, and yet people are still moving to it," Kennish said, adding that coastal communities would experience increased flooding and would be more susceptible to major storms, which he said would become more frequent as temperatures increase.

There are two possible, but flawed, ways to protect communities situated on or near beaches, Kennish said.

The first is a "soft" approach that requires the replenishment of beaches and construction of dunes, similar to this year's beach-replenishment project on [Long Beach](#) Island.

However, Kennish said, usable sand is becoming harder to find, and the cost to do these projects is often extremely high - eventually it may no longer be cost-effective to do them, he said.

The second possibility is a "hard" approach, which would entail building permanent structures, such as sea walls, along the coast. Municipalities in [Monmouth County](#), including Sea Bright and [Monmouth Beach](#), already have implemented this approach.

But while this could protect the properties next to the sea walls, Kennish said, homes on the bay side of the barrier islands and the salt marshes that line the bays would still be at risk.

"Currently the salt marshes are growing at a faster rate than the sea level, but when that changes, the water will drown the marshes. This would be disastrous for bayfront communities like [Tuckerton](#), Little Egg Harbor and Barnegat," said Kennish, who said salt marshes along the [Delaware Bay](#) in [Cumberland](#) and [Salem](#) counties are eroding at a rate of 10 feet per year.

Kennish said the peninsula where these scientists do their research could be one of the first areas to go because of the salt marsh it is built on.

This year, the field station had to demolish a 40-year-old radio tower because water eroded the salt marsh beneath it and damaged the tower's concrete base.

"New Jersey is a very flat state. If the water rises three feet, there is really nothing in place to stop it from going inland," said Kennish, who also works out of the [Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) in Little Egg Harbor Township.

Kennish said Rutgers scientists will be "huge players" in finding ways to decrease the impact global warming has on New Jersey's coast.


"The front line will be our beaches. That is where most of the effort, and money, will likely go," Kennish said. "But it would be a mistake to neglect the salt marshes on the bay side, because that is where the biggest problem will be."

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Come on everyone. Didn't you hear about the new scientific term Consensus. Now a Scientific Consensus has proven that global warming is happening. The fact that there are proven ice ages and then followed by warming over and over again is no proof that there is an natural swing from one side to the other. It is humans and humans are bad. All hail Al Gore, our fearless leader. Let's all walk in lock step. How come he consumes some much energy in his own life? How can anyone take him seriously while he is such a huge hypocrite?

Posted by: [Officegig](#) on Tue Dec 18, 2007, 9:34 AM [Report Abuse](#)

What is all this nonsense about "socialism"? And why would anyone listen to a science fiction writer, instead of scientists? Scientists are concerned with data, not politics, and the data is abundantly clear that humans are contributing to global warming. The reason some scientists prefer to call it global climate change rather than global warming is simple: the effects are not consistent everywhere. So while

average global temperatures are climbing and will continue to do so, there are a few regions where they may stay the same or decline slightly.

Most climate scientists are quite bright and could probably be making a better living doing something else. They're not in it for the money. This isn't a political issue, it's science, plain and simple. The only ones with an agenda are the right wing nut jobs who would say anything rather than admit they've been wrong on this one.

Posted by: John on Mon Dec 17, 2007, 11:16 PM [Report Abuse](#)

This fake science is supported by tenured university folks and government sponsored agencies that need to keep the fear level high in order to keep that research revenue stream flowing. The whole dogma of global warming was exposed pretty well by Michael Crichton in "State of Fear" which is the state that the socialist governmentarians have to keep us in to make us willing to fork over tax money to them. Funny how this fearmongering is always a rising tide when an election approaches - if a liberal socialist gets in office you won't see a peep on the news about any of these so-called crisis.

Posted by: Barbara on Sun Dec 16, 2007, 4:44 PM [Report Abuse](#)

Why care about global warming, when foreign wars and increasing pollution will always protect us financially while keeping taxes down at the same time? Just look at how well all the tax payers were protected from improbable natural disaster by the "hard" approach in New Orleans. Don't fall for that old hoax, just keep on fighting wars and polluting and everyone will live happily ever after.

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sea levels have increased 300 feet since last ice age. whats another foot or two?. Who cares except the people who want more of your tax money to continue the hoax.

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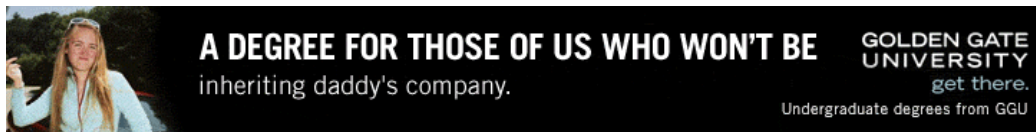
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