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SUFFOLK CLOSEUP

Time To Take Heed

BY KARL GROSSMAN

As the federal government moves to spend \$700 million in an attempt to shore up the coastline between Fire Island Inlet and Montauk Point, and Sagaponack and Bridgehampton are set to spend millions more to try to bolster their respective beaches, the Concerned Citizens of Quogue—a community group focused on protecting village beaches—could not have invited a more knowledgeable scientist to visit Suffolk County to discuss this very topic.

"Alternatives For Protecting Our Dunes and Beaches" was the title of the talk given last month by Dr. Robert Young, director of the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines at Western Carolina University.

A geologist, Dr. Young is a protégé of the program's founder, Dr. Orrin Pilkey, a pioneer in the study of beach dynamics. Dr. Pilkey is now its director emeritus. The two co-authored the 2011 book "The Rising Sea."

U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said of the book: "A must read for all Americans. The authors are among our most eminent coastal scientists. They deliver, in clear and measured prose, an urgent message explaining how rising sea levels will affect New York, Miami, Houston, Los Angeles and every coastal community in our country."

As readers of this space are familiar, I've written about coastal issues for a long time as a journalist; indeed, I go back more than 50 years in writing about that U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Fire Island to Montauk Point plan, long-stalled, mainly by objections, and now, in a modified form after Hurricane Sandy, to be implemented.

Meanwhile, what's new on the subject—also the theme of "The Rising Sea" and how Dr. Young began his talk in Quogue—is an awareness of global warming and how it is causing a rise in sea levels. It's scary and sad, but a reality. And as Publishers Weekly stated in its review of the book, which it called "a rational approach to inevitably rising sea levels," even with "a significant reduction in carbon emissions, sea levels will continue to rise and, combined with increasingly severe storms, force a retreat from the shore."

Dr. Young told the 120 people who packed into the Quogue Community Hall on August 17 that "the planet is clearly warming, the sea level is clearly rising ... It's an indisputable fact ... The Earth is talking to us."

He continued: "Every single alpine glacier on the plan-

et, with few exceptions, is receding. If you want to see the snows of Kilimanjaro, they'll be here for 10 more years. Glacier National Park will not have any more glaciers by mid-century." The rise in sea level is due to glacier melt and also because water expands when it warms.

Where does that leave the shoreline? It's becoming increasingly impacted by the rising sea.

What's to be done? Dr. Young emphasized what Dr. Pilkey decades ago documented before rising sea levels exacerbated the situation. He said "hard structures" such as stone jetties, called groins, when they are built to try to deal with erosion only hold the shore where they're located. At the same time (as we on Long Island

have learned) they cause serious erosion along the coast "down-drift" of them. He read passages from the Army Corps' "Shore Protection Manual" showing even it acknowledges this now.

"Preferable to hard structures,"

Dr. Young said, is "beach nourishment"—the term used for dumping sand on the shore. But he also warned that "you never do beach nourishment once," explaining that it is a "long-term commitment."

One of the problems of the program, once the sand is dumped and a beach purportedly reinforced, is how some people are using beach nourishment as "a guise to increase development." Also, there is also the possibility that another powerful storm can hit a nourished area and "your project disappears in a year. That's the risk." Further, Dr. Young noted that "sand is getting more expensive" and the sand taken from a "borrow area" out to sea might be of poor beach quality.

He then went through other alternatives, with his first choice being offering incentives to those who agree to relocate and move further inland. Dr. Young added: "I don't say 'retreat' anymore." That's because Americans don't like the sound of that word. "No, we say 'relocate.'"

Moreover, it needs to be understood that "coastal erosion does not destroy beaches," according to Dr. Young. He explained that the beaches are simply being reshaped by Mother Nature. The issue, he said, is the "infrastructure" along the coast that is threatened more and more by a rising sea. Therefore, relocation is key.

The Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, accessible at www.psdswcu.org, offers excellent science that takes an independent view on these coastal issues. Its analyses should be heeded.



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