

**Alliance for a Living Ocean • American Littoral Society • Assn. of NJ Environmental Commissions
Clean Ocean Action • Environment New Jersey • Hackensack Riverkeeper • New Jersey Audubon
New Jersey Conservation Foundation • New Jersey Environmental Federation
New Jersey Environmental Lobby • New Jersey League of Conservation Voters
New Jersey Sierra Club • NY/NJ Baykeeper • Pinelands Preservation Alliance
Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association • Surfers' Environmental Alliance**

New Jersey: Better, Smarter Future

Guiding Principles to Recover, Rebuild, and Protect from Extreme Weather

December 2012

INTRODUCTION

By so many measures, Sandy was devastating. It wasn't the first extreme weather event and it certainly won't be the last. There is consensus among scientific experts that the severity and frequency of extreme weather events is increasing due to climate change (driven by our energy, economic, and environmental choices), and that our land use decisions - what we build where and how – can exacerbate damage done.

Clearly, we have made mistakes. Mistakes in the form of regulations which fail to consider an ever-changing environment; studies and assessments that look to only short-term impacts and risks; policies to promote reckless development in vulnerable areas; and plans which ignore economic common sense and environmental value.

Moving forward as we recover, we must do so in ways that put our State in a better position than we are in today. The following principles must guide us as we recover, building better so that our communities are stronger.

PRINCIPLES

- LEADERSHIP** The State has the responsibility, obligation and power to protect life and property. Every community (human and ecological) is different, but every community operates as a part of a whole; the State must use its power – of planning, regulation and finances – to make our people safe, communities resilient, and environment protected.
- KNOWLEDGE** The State must ensure that the recovery process engages in a rigorous and transparent assessment and understanding of risks and vulnerabilities that led to our Hurricane-devastated coastline and which leaves us vulnerable to future disaster. Meaningful, informed, and transparent public participation is vital for this assessment. For this process to work, both the public and our elected decision-makers must have access to the most accurate data, up-to-date science, and informed experts.
- RESILIENCY** Public and private actions within the recovery must lead to resilient communities; communities which, through restoration of the natural coastal environment and rebuilding informed by observed and future risks, take steps to minimize risks from all hazards, including storms and sea level rise. The State, as well as local governments, must assess the impact of the storm and, when rebuilding, must take into account storm hazard history and reasonably foreseeable future change.
- PUBLIC HEALTH** Recovery actions must address the immediate need for public health protection from water and air degradation. Raw sewage, chemical and oil spills, hazardous materials and mold, and debris removal, and untreated effluent and emissions have created a significant public health

emergency state-wide. Clean-up and remediation, especially in vulnerable communities, must be accompanied by clear, and easily-accessible communication of health risks and safety resources. The immediate notification to the public of threats to public health and welfare must become the norm, state-wide.

IMPROVEMENTS Recovery and rebuilding provides an opportunity to fix chronic development-related problems such as inadequate stormwater management, substandard sewage infrastructure and treatment, degraded natural habitats, and publicly inaccessible waterfronts. Improvements must be to the infrastructure which has held back the state’s overall environmental quality and the economies dependent thereupon.

FUNDING Funds must be directed to restoring, enhancing and protecting the environment. “Green” requirements will lead to greater resiliency and more steadfast economic and environmental recovery. When disbursing public funds, creating incentives for private funds, or constructing development-inducing infrastructure, decision-makers should:

- Promote natural resource dependent economies;
- Require softening the shorelines, and the restoration of wetlands, oyster reefs, floodplains, stream corridors, and other habitat and barrier islands;
- Incorporate green infrastructure and low impact development approaches throughout the State;
- Be public in nature, conditioned and coordinated for the public’s benefit; and
- Enhance public access under the principles of the Public Trust Doctrine.

LOCAL SUPPORT Require community-based climate change planning strategies based on outreach to local councils, civic organizations, and grass roots organizations to help communities plan for emergencies and to build support for infrastructure changes.

A NEW NORMAL Barrier beaches, dune systems and stream corridors are, by their nature, constantly changing. Such fluctuations should be taken into account when investment decisions are made for rebuilding businesses, homes, and infrastructure. Strategic retreat from high storm-surge and flooding risk areas, as well as conversion of these vulnerable areas to parkland through public acquisition, should be considered state-wide.

PLANNING State and regional collaboration and coordination is necessary to make recovery and resiliency cost-effective and efficient; rebuilding and restoring the State must be done according to well-balanced plans and programs.

CLIMATE CHANGE Smart design, green infrastructure, and promotion of ecosystem services will make communities more resilient, protecting people, economies and the environment; those same ideals can and should be used to reduce the State’s greenhouse gas pollution (caused primarily by burning fossil fuels) and carbon footprint as the exacerbation of climate change will lead to short- and long-term economic losses, statewide vulnerability, and less-resilient communities. Renewable energy, coupled with water and energy conservation and efficiency, will make resiliency affordable and achievable, as well as mitigate future risks.

SUPPORTED BY: *Alliance for a Living Ocean, American Littoral Society, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, Clean Ocean Action, Environment New Jersey, Hackensack Riverkeeper, New Jersey Audubon, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, New Jersey Environmental Federation, New Jersey Environmental Lobby, New Jersey League of Conservation Voters, New Jersey Sierra Club, NY/NJ Baykeeper, Pinelands Preservation Alliance, Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, and Surfers' Environmental Alliance.*