

Sea-level legislation topic of symposium

By Cindy Beamon
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BARCO — Higher insurance rates and predictions that more of the Albemarle will be under water in 100 years will be discussed at a symposium Friday hosted by NC-20, a coalition of coastal counties raising questions about state policy for the region.

The symposium on coastal issues, including sea-level rise and higher insurance rates in eastern North Carolina, will be from 10:30-2 p.m. at the Currituck Cooperative Extension Building in Barco.

Rep. Pat McElraft, R-Carteret, will be speaking about new legislation aimed at forcing the state to take a second look at sea-level rise predictions.

Tom Thompson, executive director for N.C. 20, said House Bill 819 is a “huge victory” for coastal communities. The bill is still awaiting a signature from Gov. Bev Perdue, who is being pressed by environmentalists to veto it.

NC-20 has questioned methods used by a science panel for the Coastal Resources Commission in predicting a 39-inch rise in sea level over the next 88 years. The figure is based on an “unproven assumption” that sea level rise will accelerate in future years, NC-20 charges.

Had the prediction gained state approval, more than 2,000 square miles in the coastal region would be added to flood maps, said Thompson.

The new legislation would keep the state from making another sea-level rise prediction until 2016. The delay will keep the state from creating new laws that would restrict growth based on “faulty” data, said Thompson.

Another symposium topic will focus on homeowner insurance rates, five times higher for coastal counties than elsewhere in the state, according to NC-20.

Thompson said the rates are based on an assumption that the coastal counties are more susceptible to hurricane damage.

Historical data and insurance payoffs don't support that assumption, he said. He pointed to how much insurance companies are paying for claims throughout the state. In the east, insurance companies pay 6 cents in claims for every \$1 spent on protection.

In the rest of the state, insurance companies pay 21 cents for every \$1 in protection, Thompson said.

“It's absurd what the insurance industry is doing to us,” said Thompson.

NC-20 was formed to provide “regulatory defense for Northeastern North Carolina,” said Thompson. The symposium will be one of several NC-20 has planned in coming months to gather support for its efforts. Public support is need to make sure legislators listen to proposed changes, said Thompson.

NC-20 was formed two years ago after the state adopted new regulations for costly stormwater ponds in the northeast that were not effective in reducing bacteria levels, he said.

By uniting, the 20 counties have a better chance against stronger political clout in the state’s larger population centers, Thompson said.