

Boynton Beach joins American Flood Coalition: What does it mean for residents and businesses?



Jeffrey Skipper and Audra Stepp ride through flood waters on Gateway Boulevard last November on their way home from the gym. (File photo)



By **Austen Erblat**
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Flooding and sea-level rise are presenting an increased risk to people and businesses in coastal cities, and the city of **Boynton Beach** is trying to do something about it.

At its **Nov. 7 meeting**, the Boynton Beach City Commission passed a resolution that makes the city the latest member of the **American Flood Coalition**, previously known as the Seawall Coalition.

The organization describes itself as “a nonpartisan coalition advocating for national solutions to flooding and sea level rise

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installations.”

The city said joining the coalition comes at no cost to taxpayers and that focusing on preventing and combating flooding and sea-level rise will provide multiple benefits to Boynton Beach’s economy, environment and residents.

Rebecca Harvey, the city’s sustainability and resilience coordinator, recently talked about how it will affect Boynton Beach.

“The benefits for joining, from our point of view is threefold,” she said. “One is the big picture, that they provide a forum for networking and connecting to other coastal cities, not just in Florida, but eventually nationwide and to learn about best practices for addressing flooding and sea-level rise and the impacts of climate change. They provide communication tools and messaging [...] so we can all be on the same page in addressing these challenges. And then eventually, the hope is that they will open up funding, and I know that that’s what they’re working on, to advocate for federal funding, so we can fund our resilience efforts.”

Harvey said the combined expertise of the coalition’s representatives compile guides to help municipalities do their own flood vulnerability assessments.

“The city is now redeveloping our Climate Action Plan, and that includes both greenhouse gas mitigation and the adaptation part of it, which is adapting to these changing impacts of sea-level rise, storm surge, stronger storms,” she said. “The city needs to be proactive and planning for our infrastructure challenges, things like sea walls, things like stormwater infrastructure, roads, buildings.”

Sea levels have been rising for over a century and the rate has been rapidly increasing, presenting a number of hazards and costs to coastal communities, according to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#).

Harvey said Palm Beach County has the benefit of additional time to address these issues and the ability to learn from the successes and failures of communities in Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

“The [Unified Regional Sea Level Rise Projection for Southeast Florida](#) presents a sea level rise of 6 to 10 inches by 2030 and 14 to 26 inches by 2060, above the 1992 baseline, as well as a higher curve for long-term, risk-intolerant investments,” according to the city’s agenda item. “Sea level rise of just 4 inches in the last 10 years has increased flooding statewide in Florida by 400 percent.”

Harvey said individuals and businesses can begin to invest in measures that will reduce the community’s role in climate change, with the city offering energy efficiency rebates for individuals, families and businesses that take steps to reduce non-renewable energy use.

“Things individuals can do is invest in solar in their homes and energy efficiency, use alternative transportation; ty, we can advocate for solutions on the city, state business program, which we will be rolling out in the

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coming months [...] we're encouraging a lot of the same actions — energy efficiency, renewable energy, alternative transportation, water conservation, waste reduction — there's many things that they can do.”

Melissa Roberts, executive director of the American Flood Coalition, works from Washington, D.C. to connect federal governments, cities, elected officials, businesses, military leaders and civic groups to develop solutions to these issues.

"We're thrilled to have Boynton Beach join the American Flood Coalition as we grow to over 100 members across the country who have come together to take action locally and work together for national solutions to sea-level rise and flooding," she said. "As Boynton Beach leads on issues of resilience and sea-level rise, we're glad to be able to support them in their efforts and share what they've learned with others."

For information about Boynton Beach's efforts to combat the effects of flooding, sea-level rise and climate change, visit GoGreenBoyntonBeach.com. For information about the American Flood Coalition, visit FloodCoalition.org.

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North Florida Congressmen Join the American Flood Coalition to Find Solutions to Rising Seas

By **KEVIN DERBY** - 03.27.19



The **American Flood Coalition** expanded its congressional membership this week with three congressmen from North Florida joining its efforts to “address the growing threat of flooding and sea level rise.”

U.S. Reps. Al Lawson, D-Fla., **John Rutherford**, R-Fla., and **Mike Waltz**, R-Fla., joined the American Flood Coalition as the group rose to include a dozen members of Congress as they “work across party lines to draw federal attention and drive solutions to increased flooding and rising seas.”

The coalition showcased how rising sea levels threaten the First Coast and Northeast Florida.

“**Florida’s Fourth District**, represented by Rep. Rutherford, is home to both **Naval Air Station Jacksonville** and **Naval Station Mayport**, where over 25,000 active duty personnel and 66,000 family members live,” the coalition noted. “Sea level rise is expected to increase the risk of flooding faced by the bases, in addition to other locations in Jacksonville. Naval Air Station Jacksonville and Naval Station Mayport are critical to the local economy, with spending by the **Department of Defense** driving more than \$11 billion of gross regional product and providing more than 100,000 jobs in the state. By joining the Coalition, Rep. Rutherford has indicated the importance of protecting valuable military assets in his district and the jobs they provide.”

“Sea level rise impacts our many coastal communities and military installations in Northeast Florida,” said Rutherford on Tuesday. “The flooding we have experienced in recent years threatens individual property, national security, and our local economy. I am proud to join the American Flood Coalition and work in a bipartisan way to find solutions to sea level rise.”

The American Flood Coalition also showcased Lawson’s district which stretches from Jacksonville to the Big Bend.

“Within the counties of **Florida’s Fifth District**, represented by Congressman Lawson, there are 85 schools located within a ‘100-year’ floodplain,” the coalition noted. “Also in this district are Duval and Leon counties, which have over \$1 billion in public facilities located in floodplains. Rep. Lawson’s membership in the Coalition will raise awareness and help further efforts to protect the neighborhoods, schools, and important infrastructure in his district.”

“The devastation of **Hurricane Irma** impacted citizens of 48 counties across the state of Florida, including areas in the Fifth District,” said Lawson. “Jacksonville was severely affected by the record flooding, and many hardworking residents were left with injuries, flooded homes and nowhere to turn for refuge. I worked to secure disaster relief funding to assist with the recovery efforts. Although we’ve made progress, there is still much work to be done to address the rising sea levels. As we keep moving forward, I will work proactively with the American Flood Coalition to ensure we protect all citizens regarding this critical issue.”

The coalition also looked at Waltz’s district which stretches along the Atlantic coast from St. Johns County to the Daytona Beach area.

“In **Florida’s Sixth District**, represented by Rep. Waltz, both business owners and homeowners are increasingly concerned over the severe threat of flooding and sea level rise. Within the district, there is \$1.6 billion (~3,600 residential properties) in home value at risk of yearly coastal flooding by 2050. In Volusia County, 26 percent of business owners noted that their business had flooded due to natural causes, and almost 13 percent of homeowners recalled their homes flooding. In Flagler County, one third of the land area is located within a flood zone. By joining the Coalition, Rep. Waltz signals his commitment to helping reduce the flood risk for property owners in his district,” the coalition noted.

“Floridians know the sea is rising – our beaches are smaller and eroding, flooding is more frequent and threats to our fresh water are increasing,” said Waltz. “It’s a threat to our economy, our national security, and our environment. I’m proud to be a part of the American Flood Coalition and look forward to encouraging more colleagues to put our differences aside and work on realistic, bipartisan solutions to protect and strengthen our communities.”

“It’s rare and encouraging to see our Congressional leaders take proactive action to address the challenges of flooding and sea level rise in a regional and bipartisan manner,” said **Melissa Roberts**, the executive director of the American Flood Coalition. “We’re grateful for the leadership of Congressmen Rutherford, Lawson, and Waltz and look forward to advancing practical national solutions that support flood-affected communities and protect the nation’s residents, economy, and military installations”

Two other Republicans in the Florida delegation—**U.S. Reps. Brian Mast** and **Francis Rooney**—are also members of the American Flood Coalition as are a host of elected officials in the Florida Legislature and holding local office across the state.

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3 in Congress from First Coast join sea-level group

By Steve Patterson

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Three Northeast Florida members of Congress have signed onto a campaign to prepare for sea-level rise by increasing spending on resilience and flood-mitigation projects.

Republicans John Rutherford and Michael Waltz and Democrat Al Lawson each said the American Flood Coalition's campaign could help people in their districts, which stretch along the coast from the Georgia border to Volusia County and west to the Apalachicola River.

"The flooding we have experienced in recent years threatens individual property, national security, and our local economy," Rutherford said in an announcement about the men's decision. "I am proud to join the American Flood Coalition and work in a bipartisan way to find solutions to sea-level rise."

The year-old organization wants dedicated federal cash to promote resilience projects and tax breaks and loan programs to help state and local governments pay for projects that reduce flood damage.

Originally known as the Seawall Coalition, the group includes nine other members of Congress as well as dozens of city and county governments in Florida, South Carolina and Virginia.

Atlantic Beach joined the organization this week, said Melissa Roberts, the group's executive director.

A series of civic groups and businesses, including chambers of commerce, Realtor associations and a Virginia group representing port industries also count themselves as members.

The coalition had a small win in its first year by getting federal rules changed so Defense Department money could be used to rebuild flood-plagued access roads to military bases.

Its aims now, Roberts said, include getting Washington to launch a revolving loan fund where communities could borrow money to help address flooding problems, similar to a system used now to finance clean-water projects.

Flooding tied to Hurricane Irma in 2017 spotlighted vulnerabilities across Florida, Lawson said.

“Jacksonville was severely affected by the record flooding, and many hardworking residents were left with injuries, flooded homes and nowhere to turn,” he said. “... Although we’ve made progress, there is still much work to be done to address the rising sea levels.”

Waltz, elected in November from the district formerly held by Gov. Ron DeSantis, said owners of homes and businesses in coastal Florida are increasingly worried about both floods and sea-level rise.

“Floridians know the sea is rising — our beaches are smaller and eroding, flooding is more frequent and threats to our fresh water are increasing,” said Waltz.

He said in a statement that he’s looking forward to “encouraging more colleagues to put our differences aside and work on realistic, bipartisan solutions to protect and strengthen our communities.”

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