



Climate Displacement Forum

Bonus Questions and Answers

Part 1: Climate Displacement & Anti-Displacement Strategies

Input from Kirsten Cook, Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE)

1. Are any of the presenters' organizations thinking about displacement caused by incoming displaced residents from neighboring areas? Especially Atlanta taking in folks from other disasters and thus displacing existing residents. They may be flush with cash from FEMA and other assistance and have an unfair advantage in tight housing markets. thanks!

Yes. This is a major concern in Atlanta, as the city is already seeing incredible population growth for reasons beyond climate displacement (some projections forecast that the Atlanta metro will add 3 million people over the next 3 decades). The same policies and strategies that we encourage local governments to consider ahead of gentrification pressures also apply in this instance. See answer to question #5 below.

2. I have a question concerning using eminent domain. Do other cities use eminent domain to displace people out of their homes without just cause to take their property to use for other purposes?

Yes, and there are powerful stories of communities in Atlanta fighting back. –

- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/10/atlanta-super-gentrification-eminant-domain>
- <https://patch.com/georgia/atlanta/eminant-domain-lawsuits-could-be-dropped-against-peopletown>

3. A lot of recommendations thus far have focused on building resilience in place to prevent the need to leave one's home due to climate-related threats. However, these efforts can lead to "green gentrification." What recommendations (e.g., specific policies, codes) do panelists have to prevent lower-income and vulnerable populations from being pushed out of the resilient communities they have built?

- Inclusionary Housing policies - affordable unit set-asides for new development
- Community Benefits Agreements
- Establish land trusts in areas vulnerable to significant investment from "green gentrification"

- Right of First Refusal policies - provide developers willing to meet affordability requirements the right to purchase a property before other potential developers are offered the opportunity
- Comprehensive community wealth-building initiatives in historically low-income communities that are now facing significant investment: entrepreneurship, financial literacy, homeownership, increased job opportunities (hyper-local first source hiring for green infrastructure jobs).

4. The responses to barriers to dealing with displacement display the exact same pattern as barriers to adaptation more generally. Why do you think this is true - is displacement just another adaptation or is there anything more profound about Displacement?

Although climate change often impacts communities indiscriminately (i.e. a hurricane will hit both wealthy and poor residents of a city), the overall impacts to communities of color and low-income always end up being worse. In Atlanta, the lowest-lying land and the neighborhoods with flooding issues are occupied by communities of color and low-income, which is not coincidental - this happened because of historical redlining and de jure segregation. Hurricane Zeta that just hit the South several days ago left millions of customers across Atlanta without power. Power was restored within a day for many neighborhoods of wealth, but lower-income neighborhoods (and predominantly Black neighborhoods) still did not have power for days after the storm passed.

Historical injustices have exacerbated the impacts of climate for these communities and therefore made adaptation much more difficult to address, especially because - as discussed in the forum - the very adaptation solutions for some of these climate issues (i.e. green infrastructure) can be a double-edged sword by actually leading to displacement if not carefully planned in advance.

Displacement, therefore, is a crucial and nuanced issue that has to be addressed alongside legacy community residents because it can exist in the form of climate displacement and cultural displacement (gentrification).

5. How do you deal with a government that has information about all the higher risk areas and choose to develop these high-risk areas instead of promoting public safety? Where is the accountability process for those that are supposed to defend and protect the people ABOVE real estate and intentional risk transfer from real state interest?

PSE has found that one way to address this issue is by working with local governments to adjust zoning and land-use policies that have often been used to harm communities of color and low-income but that have the potential to correct many of these issues.

For instance, zoning codes for residential areas in floodplains can be re-written to require higher percentages of perviousness and green infrastructure alongside new development. In other states, areas that are particularly risky because of wildfires, sea level rise, or otherwise may need to be re-evaluated to determine whether or not any

development should be allowed. All of these potential solutions can and should be considered in collaboration with legacy residents.

6. How would one get connected to help with these types of activities, Kirsten?

Those in the metro Atlanta area who are interested in PSE's work can get involved on a regular basis by joining one of the four Circles (Just Growth, Just Opportunity, Just Energy, or Just Health), which meet monthly or every other month. PSE also hosts Summits that attract people from all over the region and even the country. In October 2020, we held a virtual Just Energy Summit. The next one is yet to be determined, but PSE has a different Summit almost every year that provides excellent opportunities to learn more about the work of each of its four portfolios. For anyone who's interested in PSE's activities but lives outside Georgia or is otherwise unable to be involved in these ways, I'd be happy to discuss specific projects that you'd like to be a part of (my email address is kcook@psequity.org).

Part 2- Household-level Retreat

Input from Anna Weber and Rob Moore, Natural Resources Defense Council and Olga McKissic, H.L. Neblett Community Center, Inc.

7. For the 10,000 homes without flood insurance, did they choose to drop flood insurance, or were they dropped/ it became unavailable? In the Tar Creek OK area, the entire town was bought out because of the risk of old underground mines collapsing and causing homes to fall in. But it was house by house buyout, "community" not kept intact. Different from here in Alaska where entire communities are trying to move to higher ground together.

The FEMA dataset doesn't tell us why those [Severe Repetitive Loss Properties](#) no longer have insurance. It's likely that the residents [stopped buying flood insurance](#) because it was too expensive. Overall, only about [one-third of homes](#) in the FEMA-designated floodplain have flood insurance. And, yes—most existing home buyout programs operate on a household-by-household level. Neighborhood- or community-scale efforts (such as the one ongoing in [New Roads, LA](#), are much rarer).

8. Has anyone on any of these teams been working on rolling easements as an additional incentive to encourage wealthier residents of coastal communities to accept buyouts? It involves the public trust doctrine, where the public's right to access to the beach is added to the understanding of sea-level rise, such that the government gains ownership of more and more of the beach as the sea rises, to manage it for the public. I think as sea level rises, it states implementing rolling easements would help beachfront property owners to want to recoup their investment by accepting a buyout as the sea rises nearer and nearer to their property (coupled with disallowing private sea walls).

Wetlands Watch (based in Norfolk, VA) is exploring rolling easements as a managed retreat solution. You can find more information on their website: <http://wetlandswatch.org/rolling-easement>.

9. Of all the homes that are candidates for buyouts (repeat flooding, sea-level rise, etc), how many homes have been successfully bought out?

Unfortunately, we can only guess at this number. Anecdotally, we have heard that some buyout programs have as high as a 50% attrition rate; at the same time, there are often more interested applicants than can be served by available funding (in other words, even when prospective participants drop out of the process, there may still be more demand than can be met). Overall, FEMA grant programs have funded about 45,000 buyouts since the 1980s.

10. Could someone speak to relocation benefits available for homeowners. Are homeowners provided with comparable replacement housing and do the Uniform Act benefits apply to those situations?

For buyout programs funded by FEMA or HUD, homeowners are generally not eligible for additional relocation assistance under the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act (URA). States or local governments implementing buyout programs might offer relocation benefits or incentives (beyond the purchase price of the home), but that is currently a gap in the federal funding programs.

11. How does the learning from processes that use eminent domain (e.g, highway expansion) help the buyout process for floodplains? Is eminent domain used in this process? I also thought that Land Trusts were leading the charge (not local governments) to buy and protect lands at risk of flood or tidal storm surge, is that not the case?

Eminent domain is generally not used for home buyouts in the United States—they are voluntary in the sense that participants may always refuse a buyout offer. (Canada takes a different approach and uses mandatory buyouts, and there may be lessons there to apply to U.S. programs.) One exception is projects funded by the Army Corps of Engineers, which requires local governments to guarantee any buyouts planned for a particular project, even if that requires using eminent domain. However, it is unclear to what extent this will actually be put into practice. The primary effect of the policy so far seems to be that local governments decline to use Army Corps funding for projects that involve buyouts.

Regarding land trusts, these groups do play a very important role in acquiring and protecting land for conservation and community development purposes, and some do partner with local governments on buyout projects. (Local governments are generally the recipients of federal buyout funding, though, and in most cases, they are the ones ultimately holding the land.) There is a lot of potential for land trusts to contribute further to managed retreat and other climate strategies.

12. Was the developer of Olga's neighborhood at fault at all for building in this floodplain?

They were not at blame. The city granted permission to build in the floodplain, and they were responsible for building permits for bi-level homes and homes with basements with a major creek flowing behind the property. Major developments around the

subdivision caused the increase in flooding in the lower levels of the neighborhood due to excessive water having no place to go.

13. Does the FEMA buyout program also apply to repetitive loss from fire?

The vast majority of FEMA-funded buyouts have been in response to flooding/storms. However, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) grants have also been used to acquire and demolish properties to address risks from fire, earthquakes, landslides, and other hazards. I suspect we will see more and more fire-related buyouts as fire impacts get worse.

Part 3: Community-wide Protection, Relocation & Expansion

Input from Twyla Thurmond, Native Village of Shishmaref and Kelsey Moldenke, Quinault Indian Nation

14. In view of erosion and displacement, how sure are the communities that erosion/tidal surge/tsunami will not be greater than expected, or do you calculate a buffer into your planning?

Twyla: In the planning stages erosion history is factored into the projection. Aerial photos and measurements that are taken after storms. The engineers then do a projected medium based on the results they receive. Data collection and dissemination is left to the engineers and experts and reviewed by local governing bodies to adjust and approve as needed.

Kelsey: The Taholah Relocation Area is well above the anticipated depths of the tsunami and 60 feet above projected sea-level rise.

15. Community engagement: were there any tools/approaches that worked better than others? How did you sustain the support of the community during long planning processes?

Twyla: Being as transparent as possible with the community as knowing about each project in detail. It is important to have communication with helpers in the field who guide and offer assistance. Grantors, deadlines, and funds. Document one on one visits, share with your community meeting notes, or minutes as well as both drivers and obstacles you face as their facilitator so they understand what you face day to day.

Kelsey: In the case of Taholah, we had community dinners and published articles in the newspaper. The best way was just to talk with people if they came to the planning office or answer questions if they saw you around the village. That was one advantage of having grant-funded staff hired as employees rather than just hiring consultants from elsewhere. The staff could interact frequently with community members and leadership for more feedback. We had hoped to have a block party or two to get more people involved, but could never arrange for one.

16. What are the mental health supports that are being provided to your community members / are needed for your community members to deal with the climate-related (forced) migration and relocation?

Twyla: Our people most utilize traditional healing by way of song and dance. Eskimo dancing is enjoyed by both viewers and participants. Involvement ties the community with the ability to story-tell through dance and song. Some utilize a village-based counselor.

17. Has the disaster planning for Quinault included a financial estimate of the cost of anticipated damages? This may help justify a funding proposal since forward planning is often much less costly than reactive management.

Kelsey: We haven't looked at damages per se. We have looked at the costs of relocating - at least the basic infrastructure. There was a study done about ten years ago that appraised the value of the buildings in the lower village.

18. For the Taholah Village relocation - will the upper village ever be susceptible to the same climate impacts that the lower village is experiencing? Or is the elevation high enough that it is low risk even in the long term?

Kelsey: The Relocation Area is well above the tsunami zone and doesn't face threats from sea level rise other than the highway and powerlines serving the village.

19. Question to Kelsey: what relocation case studies and precedents did you look to? Which ones - if any - seemed to resonate with the community?

Kelsey: We didn't really find any analogous efforts from the past. We got together with the Isle de Jean Charles tribe in Louisiana and talked about our processes and through them met with a leader from Newtok, Alaska. We saw that many of the things that we were doing were the same, but no one really had a magic formula to relocate.

20. How can policies/practices help keep communities together if or when they decide to move?

Twyla: As far as we are aware there are no policies or practices fine-tuned enough to be inclusive or sensitive to rural Alaskan communities and their people. There is unfortunately a hit and miss situation and we learn as we go. A co-written Article written by Deanna Marie Kingston and Elizabeth Marino goes into detail on a displaced community in the Bering Straits Region. (hyperlink to the article below)

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/#search/Elizabeth.Marino%40osucascades.edu/QgrclHsbgXzPXxDVzWkCdDrtxvFbITQJTB?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

21. What does Traditional Ecological Knowledge look like to you?

Twyla: Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) emphasizes different components and interactions of the environment and Indigenous peoples. It is considered a field of study in anthropology. Indigenous people who have lived on traditional native lands naturally utilize local resources. It is the knowledge, belief, and practice, evolving by

accumulation of knowledge of the environment passed on multi-generationally. It is essentially the mutual understanding of the land, weather, and changes in weather and the environment. A collective of different animals, mammals, or birds that occupy the sea, land, and air that differ in each community. We know when to expect certain animals and what time of year we expect to subsist off of the land. Our people also notify the National Park Service and provide samples for overall health tracking when the animals we hunt become sick or unhealthy. The data collected provides understanding-correlations can be made and documented. In turn it gives scientists and the world advantages at grasping the ecological effects more holistically. Our Elders also teach traditional songs, stories, and beliefs. They teach the younger generation how to hunt and gather; what to be mindful of both environmentally and spiritually. How weather can change as well as how to construct shelters with hardscape materials like snow, ice or trees, and the land if one becomes stranded out in the wilderness. TEK has proved critical for understanding the impacts of those changes within our ecosystems.

22. How do we advance migration/retreat/etc. while being mindful of historic injustice tied to racist forced migration policies?

Twyla: In my perspective, I would have to say transparency is always the best way. Do your research. When speaking to people of color or historic injustice be mindful and express your knowledge of what our people have been through. Presentations should queue into the awareness of the history so that it does not pop up as an issue later. Being mindful of land sovereignty, rights of indigenous people, and sharing all the options available while choosing those people who inhabit the traditional land and way of life. Share how forced migration has changed over time and is more inclusive to the thoughts and needs of all parties. Understand that in most cases a retreat to larger communities in rural AK is not a viable option when cultural preservation is a top priority. In many cases expansion further inland is a way for our people to adapt to changing climate but remain culturally sound. We need support, and policy changes to alter to all lands the US serves and advocacy to make it happen.

Kelsey: The government or entity leading the efforts needs to defer to the Tribe or community and have the effort to be a bottom-up effort, rather than a top-down. The Quinault, as well as the other Federally-recognized tribes on the Washington Coast, have all made the determination to move on their own and control the process.

Part 5 - Policy Considerations at Multiple Scales

Input from Joseph Thompson and Micah McMillan, U.S. Government Accountability Office

23. To U.S. GAO - Who received your report and has there been any formal response to your recommendations?

[GAO-20-488](#) was addressed to The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety, Committee on Environment and Public Works, United States Senate; The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, United States Senate;

The Honorable Edward Markey, United States Senate; The Honorable Jeff Alan Merkley, United States Senate; and The Honorable Elizabeth Warren, United States Senate. GAO issued what we call a “Matter for Congressional Consideration” that calls for legislation to establish a pilot program to identify and provide assistance to climate migration projects for communities that express affirmative interest in relocation as a resilience strategy. As of November 12, 2020, no action had been taken to establish a pilot program to identify and provide assistance to climate migration projects.

24. What non-FEMA financing options are available to local governments AND to individuals to retreat from sea level rise?

[GAO-20-488](#) discusses federal programs that may provide climate migration assistance and notes generally that they are not designed to serve this function. Hence, the need to establish a climate migration pilot program.