

'Future Coast' to address flooding, sea level

By PAMELA WOOD Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, April 16, 2012 12:15 am

Maryland's land is sinking. The water is rising. What should be done?

That question is the focus of a day-long event in Severna Park later this month.

Academic researchers are using the event, called "Future Coast," to test how to best gather ideas from the public about protecting coastlines.

"We're trying to really get a sense of what people think," said Karen Akerlof of George Mason University, who is organizing Future Coast.

Akerlof's team sent invitations to 10,000 random Anne Arundel households to convince at least 100 people to give up their Saturday on April 28 to discuss coastal flooding and sea-level rise.

They're offering \$100 to participants.

Pre-workshop and post-workshop surveys will help the academics tell if the effort has been worthwhile.

And they'll forward the participants' suggestions to local and state governments.

"One of our objectives with this study is to reach out to Anne Arundel County public officials and Annapolis public officials and present this information to them," said the Naval Academy's Howard Ernst, who also works with Future Coast.

Ernst said residents have a keen understanding of the devastating effects of rising waters, especially those who lived through Tropical Storm Isabel's wrath in 2003.

Much of downtown Annapolis and many other communities were completely inundated.

Anne Arundel County was selected for Future Coast, in part, because the city of Annapolis, the county government and the state government already plan for how rising waters could affect the hundreds of miles of shoreline here.

"Maryland is doing such good work in trying to think ahead and the county itself has done a considerable amount of work" said Todd La Porte, another researcher with George Mason.

Future Coast is a collaboration among George Mason University, the Naval Academy and Arundel Community College. The money for it — \$135,000 — comes from the Mid-Atlantic Sea Grant.

Participation in Future Coast is by mail visitation only.

But the program's website, www.FutureCoast.info, will be available to the public.

Akerlof said schools, churches, community groups and governments are welcome to use the

information.

“This is a long-term problem and one that the ramifications will not be evident for some years and decades in the future,” Akerlof said. “But it’s an issue that people have to begin to think about now.”