



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Using an "OWL" to Glimpse Marin's Future

Engaging the community in adaptation planning for sea level rise

San Rafael, CA – For twelve weeks, beginning Thursday, May 21st, Marin residents will be able to use an innovative tool to learn about the possible impacts of sea level rise along our bay shoreline, as well as possible adaptation solutions. Viewers are invited to join a County-wide conversation about what our communities value and how we might respond to the challenge of higher water levels.

The OWLs, conceived by start-up firm Owlized, were inspired by the old-fashioned, coin-operated art deco binoculars often found at scenic viewpoints – but are uniquely designed for the 21st century. When participants look inside the OWLs, they will be able to experience the area around them in real time, just like a traditional viewer, but also see other possible scenarios of what the place could look like in the future. This is made possible via 3D visualizations authored on Autodesk design tools and displayed by Owlized's custom software. The visualizations are based on a 3D model of the project site created in part with laser-scanning data known as "point cloud". The pilot project, dubbed "Here-Now-Us", is a novel approach to understanding the localized impacts of sea level rise.

Visitors will also see some possible solutions to the challenges of flooding. They will have the opportunity to share their thoughts about what they see, and respond to survey questions via interactive software in the OWL. The project encourages viewers to join the conversation with community members, business leaders and elected officials to determine the best pathways forward for Marin County.

Sea level rise projections, expected to exceed 3 feet in the coming decades, will cause long-term impacts to Marin's coastal communities. One of the challenges to planning is that those impacts are generally gradual, making the potential threats seem vague. The County completed its [Climate Action Plan](#)

and is evaluating best practices to prepare for sea-level rise and other ramifications of climate change. In collaboration with the eight towns and cities along the bay shoreline, the County of Marin is about to embark on a Countywide Vulnerability Assessment of sea level rise, and sees community awareness and engagement as essential to a successful outcome.

The two OWL units, one kid-sized and also accessible to people with disabilities, are located in Mill Valley along the Mill Valley-Sausalito Multi-Use Path at Almonte Boulevard, and will remain in place until August 10, 2015. There will be a facilitated community workshop at the Mill Valley Community Center in late September.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is interested in strategies that encourage community engagement and planning, and provided major funding for this project with a \$150,000 grant. This collaborative public-private pilot project includes the County of Marin, the non-profit Climate Access, Autodesk, and San Leandro-based technology company Owlized.

The 3D visualizations and interactive software will capture viewers' response to the experience and link to a website where they can learn more about climate change, flood risks, adaptation possibilities and how to become involved locally. Viewers' feedback will be monitored by Dr. Susanne Moser, social science research fellow at Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University. A world-renowned social scientist, Dr. Moser shares FEMA's interest in exploring the OWL's potential as an educational tool that encourages community engagement.

Supervisor Kathrin Sears, who represents southern Marin, has focused on finding ways to bring community members into the necessary discussions about adaptation planning for sea level rise. "This is such an exciting way to learn about future sea level rise", said Supervisor Sears, "and I'm very curious to see how the community interacts with it, especially kids – they're the generation that will live with the effects of climate change. I hope that the OWL will intrigue people and inspire them to become community partners as we engage in the essential conversations about how to plan for sea level rise."

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Partner Organization Contacts:

County of Marin

Supervisor Kathrin Sears

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Climate Access

Cara Pike, Executive Director

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"One of the biggest challenges we face in engaging Americans in efforts to respond to climate disruption is that people tend to think the issue will impact plants and animals most followed by people in other countries, rather than themselves in the near term. With the Here-Now-Us climate visualization project, we are aiming to overcome that barrier by providing an opportunity for people to see from a first person perspective through the Owlized viewer how climate change is impacting a location vulnerable to sea level rise currently, in the near future, and what possible responses could be adopted."

Owlized

Aaron Selverston, Founder and CEO

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"People tend to have a hard time envisioning the future. With the impacts of sea level rise growing more acute by the day, we obviously need to adapt and mitigate those impacts. It's the responsible thing to do. But as a taxpayer, I need to be able to see those impacts firsthand before I'm going to support an adaptation plan. That's what the OWLs are for. By seeing the impacts for myself, I'll no longer have to rely on my imagination, and I certainly won't be able to ignore the problem."

Nate Kauffman, Resiliency Strategist and Founder, LEAP

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"What I find so compelling about this project is the visceral reaction people have to the OWL. Visualizing the environment in a state of flux is a powerful experience--it really hits you. Yet this is anything but a scare tactic: it's about helping connect people to the places we live, to one another and to possibilities for a future that we are active agents in shaping. In any social justice issue, public awareness is both a fundamental underpinning and a major stumbling block. If we can help catalyze a conversation about societal change across generations I will consider this project a great success. It has been a challenge and a pleasure to work on."

Susanne Moser Research and Consulting

Susanne Moser, Principal

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"The OWL removes one of the big barriers to public engagement with climate change: it allows us to see, right here and now, what the future could look like in our back yards. That could change the local conversation!"

FEMA

Mary Simms, FEMA Region IX Lead Public Affairs Officer

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"FEMA, through a Cooperating Technical Partnership (CTP) Agreement, partnered with Marin County, private and non-profit sectors as well as other state and federal agencies to increase community awareness of current and future flood risk."

Autodesk

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Marin County Countywide Vulnerability Assessment

Jack Liebster, Planning Manager

Marin County Community Development Agency

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"This ingenious, ground-breaking project will really have its payoff when people who experience it sign up to become part of the County-wide planning for responding to Sea Level Rise. It will take all of us working together to be prepared for the changes that are already happening, and will be increasing with every passing year. The "OWL" is really a time machine that shows us different possible futures. It is up to us to choose which one we want for ourselves, our children, and our children's children and generations to come."