

Case Study: The Importance of Regional Network Collaboration for Coastal Resiliency with CALM and CHAOS

The Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM) Coastal Resilience Network and The Coastal Hazards Of Superior (CHAOS) Community of Practice are two regional networks putting in the work when it comes to coastal resiliency. CHAOS was founded in 2020, and CALM in 2021. Both of these networks connect diverse non-governmental and governmental organizations, leaders, managers, researchers, community members, among others across jurisdictional boundaries. They do this through sharing information related to hazards and impacts that affect their respective coastline communities.

Why is it important to work across boundaries and state lines? The simple answer is that hazards do not care about property or municipal lines. Communities on Lake Michigan and Lake Superior experience similar coastal hazards including fluctuating water levels, coastal erosion, flooding, and storms. These hazards can impact coastal bluffs and beaches, damage coastal properties, and threaten infrastructure. Both Lake Superior and Lake Michigan are experiencing an increase in surface water temperatures and reduction of winter lake ice. These issues can cause additional threats to coastlines like algal blooms and flooding and erosion.

Internal organization

Both CALM and CHAOS have internal steering committees, which even have some of the same members. Each steering committee meets regularly to share updates, and needs. This guides how and when information is shared. CALM coordinator, Lydia Salus, says, “Now that both networks are established in their regions and with their membership, we are hoping to find meaningful ways to increase collaboration between the groups.” CALM and CHAOS also make it a priority to continue collaboration with local communities.

Regional Networking

In 2022, CHAOS Coordinator Sarah Brown conducted a series of interviews to understand CHAOS member needs. Several themes emerged which indicated that knowledge sharing and networking are valuable outcomes of CHAOS. One theme suggested that by making the CHAOS newsletter and presentation recordings easily accessible, members can share them with their professional networks. Additionally, online meetings and newsletters provide a platform for members to share information and projects with other CHAOS members. Interviewees also said that they have learned about new coastal management methods through these sources.

Communities in the CALM network also benefit from this type of knowledge sharing and opportunities to network both online and in person. During a field trip to project sites in Racine and Mequon, participants were able to see the impacts of coastal hazards first-hand and learn about solutions that these communities are employing. The importance of participating in a formal network keeps coastal resiliency at the forefront of their work. It also helps to develop regional resiliency with an understanding that others are experiencing similar issues and may have resources and information to share.

Challenges

As with any hard work, there are challenges. First, for CHAOS, while working across borders has been a success, it has been difficult operating over a broad geography and with a broad mission. It is difficult to

tease out the common challenges, applicable knowledge, and practices that can be used to address those issues. Second, both groups are now led by a steering committee instead of a dedicated coordinator. This is especially relevant for CALM where capacity is one of the main challenges. Without a dedicated coordinator, the leading organizations have to balance competing priorities and share tasks between team members which impacts the types of activities and frequency of communication the group can achieve.

Successes

However, CALM and CHAOS also have many success stories. CALM has established a formal space for agencies, organizations, and communities to work together on coastal resilience issues. They have engaged over 160 members through 5 virtual network meetings featuring resources, funding opportunities, and on-the-ground projects and 2 in-person field tours. Since its inception in 2020, CHAOS has brought together over 750 individuals through 11 virtual meetings, 2 field tours, and 2 in-person events. Through its newsletter, the group has also shared new data, resources, opportunities, and events with hundreds of individuals representing local and tribal governments, state and federal agencies, academic institutions and nonprofit organizations in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Both CALM and CHAOS have helped communities collaborate, share information, and work across boundaries to mitigate coastal hazards. CALM is an example of a regional network that has been able to evolve over time by responding to the needs of its members and demonstrate successful coastal mitigation strategies. CHAOS is an example of a unique and successful bi-state initiative that has adapted to fill gaps along the coast of a broad geographic area. Both of these groups are doing critical work to increase regional coastal resiliency!

More information about [CHAOS](#) and [CALM](#) can be found at their websites.