South Florida counties form environmental coalition

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FORT LAUDERDALE

With a flourish of the pen, leaders from South Florida's four counties on Friday created a regional force that they hope will obtain federal funding to protect drinking water, enhance mass transit and encourage the use of alternative fuels.

"The theme today is unity," said Broward County Commissioner Kristin Jacobs, who stood with co-signers Palm Beach County Commissioner Shelley Vana, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Katy Sorenson and Monroe County Mayor George Neugent. "Climate change will continue to impact us unless we come together."

The compact represents 5.5 million residents, more than the population of 30 states, organizers said.

About 300 people from Key West to Boynton Beach who work for city and county governments, insurers, utilities, alternative energy businesses and conservation organizations attended the first Regional Climate Leadership Summit at the Broward County Convention Center.

It was part rally, part environmental seminar and part civics lesson.

A retired brigadier general said that climate change would be a threat to national security if impoverished states were destabilized by natural disasters, resulting in refugees and prompting terrorist grabs for natural resources like fuel and water.

Sea levels off Key West have risen nearly 9 inches since 1913, officials said. The city is spending $350,000 to elevate 400 feet of North Side Drive because it floods 40 days a year.

"That increase over 100 years, to me that's proof of climate change," said Annalise Mannix, the city's environmental programs manager. "It doesn't change with the moon."

Broward County officials project a 3- to 9-inch rise in sea levels in 20 years and a 10- to 20-inch rise by 2060, endangering eastern parts of the four counties, and western suburbs that border the Everglades.
Hurricane data predict fewer but more intense storms with increased rainfall, municipal and insurance experts said.

"The reality is not very good," said Vana. "I'd invest in snorkels if I were you. But we have to keep moving forward."

The compact will be presented to Washington, D.C., lawmakers from Nov. 16-18, as climate change legislation is considered.

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