

**Falmouth's Future:
Avoiding Another Hurricane Bob?**

An Examination of Storm Hazard Mitigation and Coastal Protection

by Catherine Bristol

**Center for Environmental Studies
Brown University**

ABSTRACT

Historically, people have flocked to coastal areas and developed these sensitive ecosystems. In recent years, this trend has continued; populations along the United States coast have increased at rates far higher than that which the rest of the country has experienced. Efforts to control development in the coastal zone must be made in order to limit human-induced erosion, protect the public from storm hazards, and reduce both the amount of property damage and expenditures of taxpayers' dollars for disaster relief.

How can policymakers at national, state, and local levels manage coastal development in ways that will minimize adverse effects on the coast and limit property damage in the event of a severe storm? In general, any construction that is allowed should be set back from the coast as far as possible and strong enough to withstand severe storms. After examining current coastal federal and state programs, this document investigates storm hazard mitigation in the town of Falmouth, Massachusetts, which is located on Cape Cod.

At the federal level, Congress should pass the proposed Flood Insurance, Mitigation, and Erosion Management Act, which would require the Federal Emergency Management Agency to calculate erosion zones, in which development would be limited. Even if this bill does not pass, the state of Massachusetts should encourage communities to include erosion considerations in their zoning bylaws. The state should also create a single agency to administer regulations regarding storm hazard mitigation. Currently, there are over fifteen agencies which do so, and consolidation of these would lead to a higher degree of accountability.

Falmouth officials must take advantage of events like Hurricane Bob, which occurred in August, 1991. Storms often provide the public with a desire to implement responsible hazard mitigation techniques in order to limit future damage. In Falmouth, this should translate into careful enforcement of reconstruction requirements which should result in reductions in property damage and harm to both people and the environment. Hazard areas which have been developed should be acquired by the town if possible. Finally, Falmouth officials should teach residents how to retrofit their structures to minimize storm damage in the future.