

April 15, 2023

Re.District Council Oral Argument Hearing/Review of DSP 21001

ATTN: Donna Brown, Clerk of the Council

Dear Council Chair Dernoga and County Council Members:

Please include this letter in the official record for the April 24, 2023 Oral Argument Hearing for Detailed Site Plan 21001, for which I am registered as a person of Record.

I am a Person of Record with respect to the DSP-21001, also known as Suffrage Point in Hyattsville, and ask you to consider the information submitted here. I am strongly opposed to the construction of townhouses on the lower lot of the proposed Suffrage Point (Suffrage Point South). I live adjacent to the site and have paid close attention to Werrlein's activities and plans for the site since the project was first proposed. In addition, I am trained and employed as a climate scientist (PhD, Soil Science and Climate Change, University of Maryland 2011). The proposed construction will have severe and worsening negative consequences for the adjacent public parklands, roads, waterways, and infrastructure, and I urge the Council not to allow it. Werrlein knew that the site was zoned as Open Space when they bought it, and had no reason to believe that zoning would change. Simply purchasing property zoned as Open Space does not give them the right to expect to develop it, and that argument is specious.

The site in question lies in a floodplain adjacent to both Driskell Park, a highly utilized local public resource, and a forested wetland that filters runoff from the neighborhood before releasing it to the Anacostia River and Chesapeake Bay. Because of this direct drainage to the Park and Bay, **the lower lot is not an appropriate area for such construction**, for the following reasons:

- I. Werrlein has stated that they plan to elevate the entire lower lot to enable their construction. Because the site is a floodplain, with no lower-lying land area anywhere in the watershed, this action will by nature displace stormwater runoff to the only other available route to the Northwest branch--Driskell Park. Increasing amounts of both moving and standing water will impact highly used public infrastructure, including a local Voting location, public bathrooms, and basketball, tennis, and pickleball courts (see Figure 1). This **constitutes an abuse of public lands and the environment**. This runoff will increasingly impact local roads and infrastructure, creating an **undue burden on taxpayers and compromising the Park**.
- II. It is widely established that **both precipitation and tidal and storm-related flooding events are becoming more frequent, severe, and intense** as the climate warms and carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere rise¹. Therefore, drainage problems already evident in and near the site (e.g. long-term standing water in parts of Driskell Park) represent a baseline level, which will be greatly exacerbated if this land is developed:

“There is extensive evidence that climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events around the world...”¹

III. Current areas of flooding at the lower lot, where DSP 21001 is proposed, are particularly likely to expand. Please refer to the satellite map/image “HighTideFlooding” (Figure 1)². This map shows that the lower lot of Suffrage Point drains directly into public areas *already subject* to regular tidal flooding of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River. This type of tidal flooding, often called “recurrent or nuisance flooding”, is known to be worsening. There is simply nowhere else for the water to go.

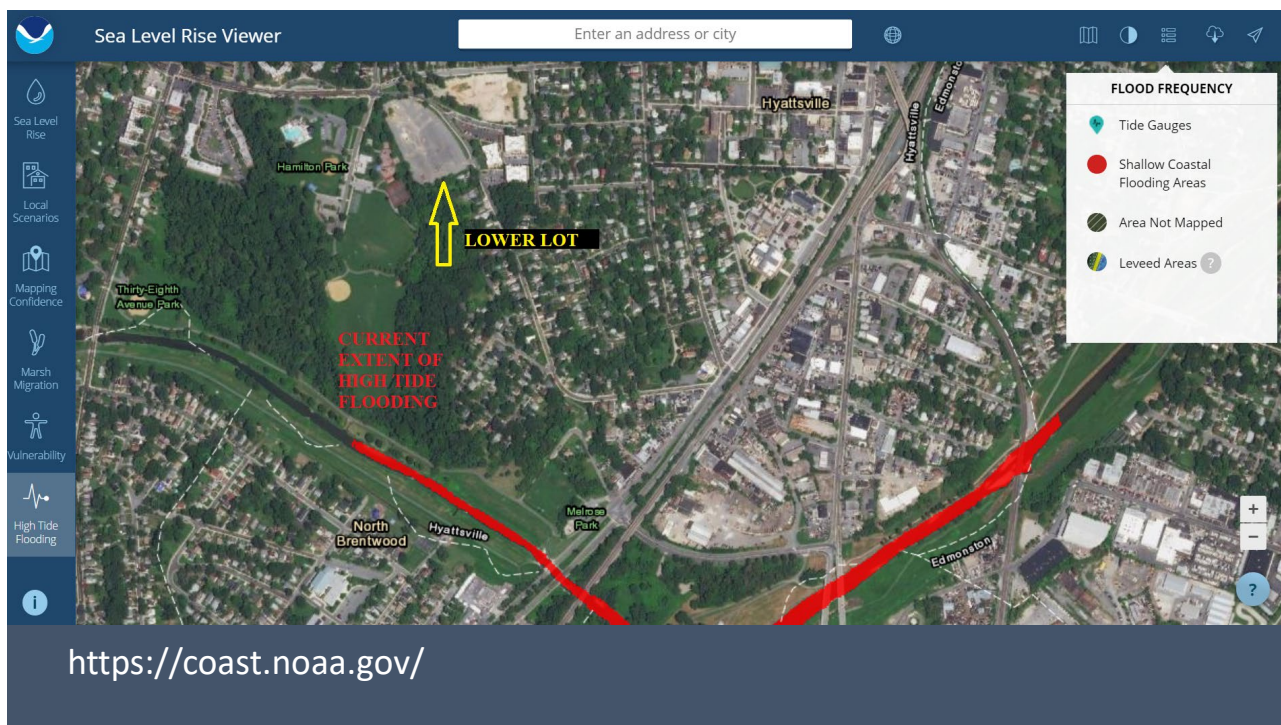


Figure 1 Locations of the lower lot (above the yellow arrow), Driskell Park (with public bathrooms, teen center, basketball/tennis/pickleball courts, vehicular access, and splash park immediately South and West of the lower lot, as well as baseball diamond and fields further south) and the Trumbule wetland (the wooded area underneath the yellow outlined arrow). The Park and Wetland are the only routes for neighborhood stormwater to reach the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, which is subject to tidal flooding where the lot, Park, and Wetland drain into it (as shown in red). Image created on April 25, 2022 from NOAA’s Sea Level Rise Viewer².

IV. In the following broad (Figure 2, black circle) and closer-in (Figure 3, blue circle) views of the neighborhood, visualized with NOAA’s Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper² notice that the lower lot, the adjacent section of Gallatin Street, and all of Driskell Park are vulnerable to multiple hydrological risks (as indicated by yellow/orange/red shading).

Gallatin Street is in the 500-year floodplain; the lower lot and park are in 100- and 500-year floodplain, and the park is also subject to storm surge, sea level rise encroachment, and high tide flooding hazards.

The most highly used parts of the park and park infrastructure, including playground equipment, a gazebo with picnic tables, a permanent building with public restrooms which serves as one of Hyattsville's Polling Places, brand new Tennis and Pickleball courts, and a Basketball court, are immediately adjacent to the proposed lower lot elevation. The highly used baseball and soccer fields and parking lot between this infrastructure and the river will also be impacted.

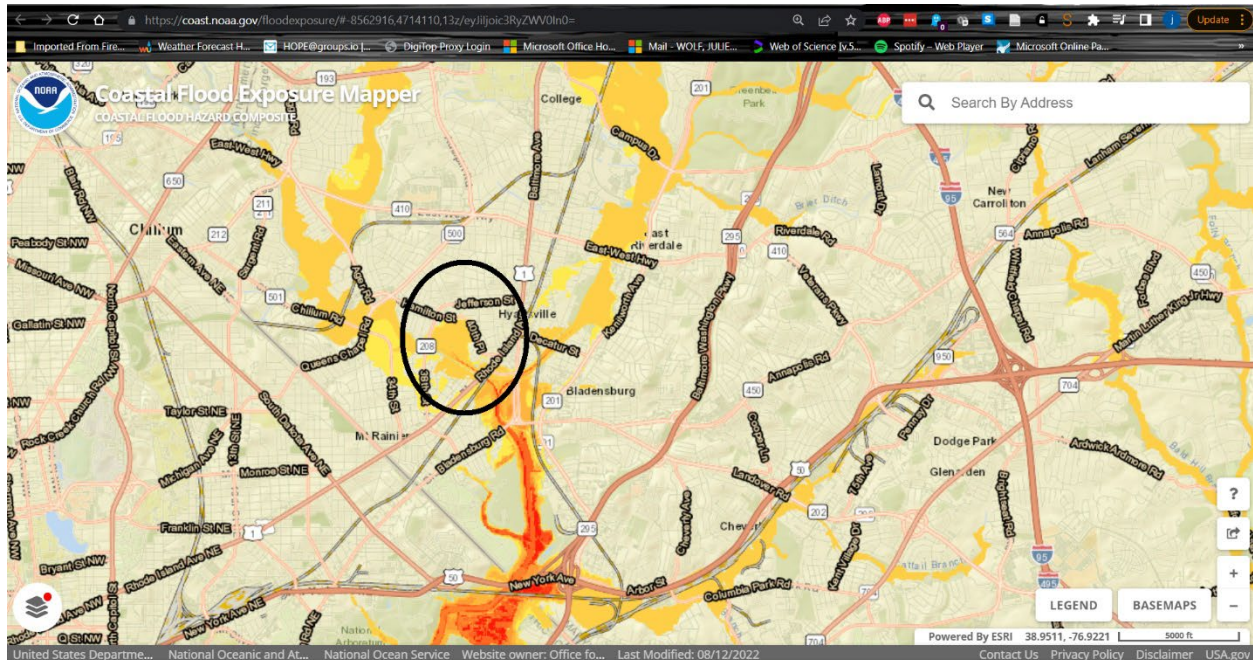


Figure 2 General location of the Lower Lot, Driskell Park, Trumbule wetland, and surrounding neighborhood (in the black circle), showing the site's position in the floodplain of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River. This position is the exact reason that the lower lot has been zoned as Open Space. Image created on January 23, 2023 from NOAA's Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper³.

Allowing Werrlein to alter the floodplain in this manner will constitute a direct infringement on public parkland, infrastructure, wetland, sidewalk, and road space, for private profit.

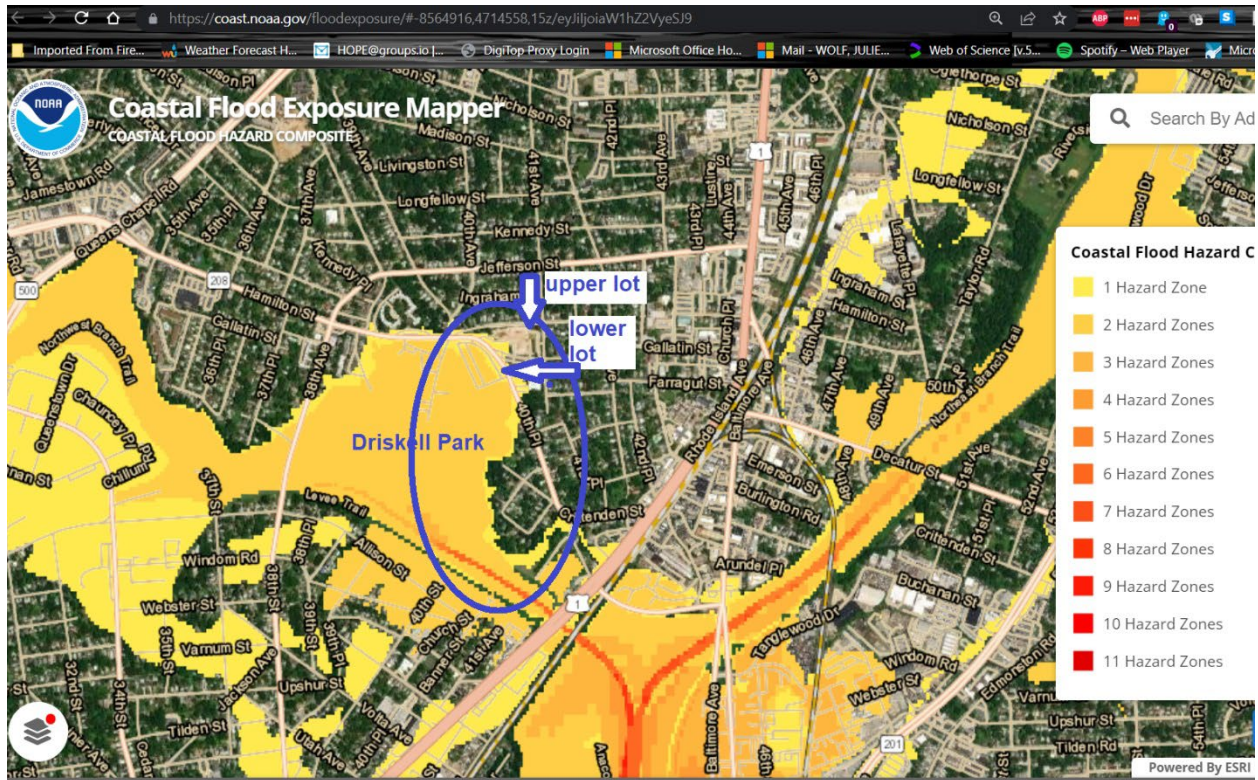


Figure 3 Closer view of the Lower Lot, Driskell Park, Trumbule wetland, and surrounding neighborhood (in the blue circle), with number of hazards indicated by yellow to red map colors overlaying satellite imagery. Image created on January 23, 2023 from NOAA's Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper³.

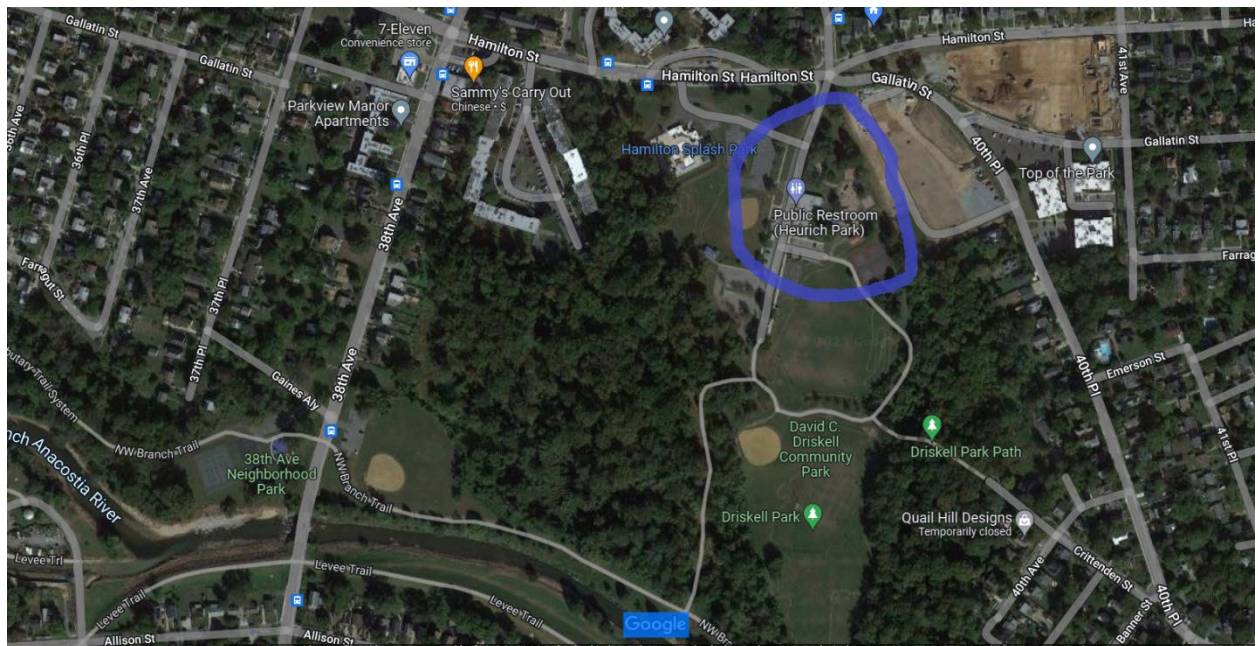


Figure 4 Closer view of Driskell Park (misnamed in Google Earth View) infrastructure next to the lower lot.

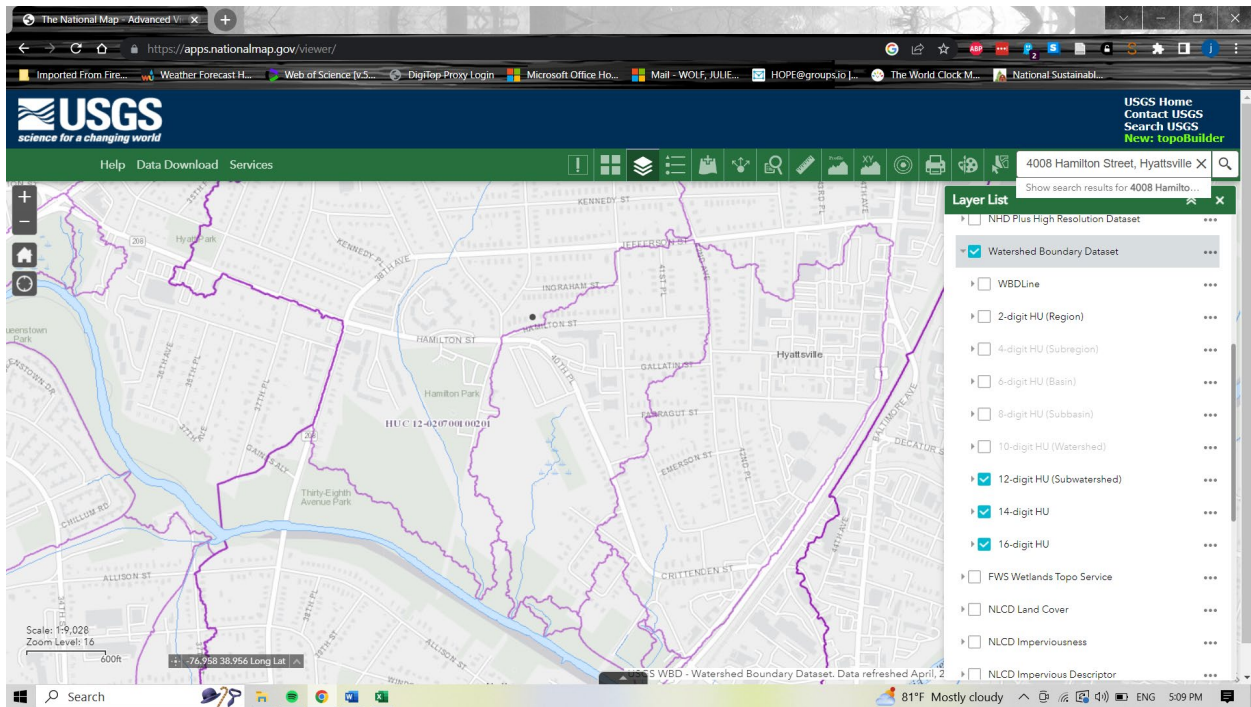


Figure 5 The purple lines show sub-watershed delineations. The lower lot is at the center. Disruptions to the flow of water through the lower lot will impact the park to the south and west. Image created from the USGS National Map Viewer⁴, April 15, 2023.

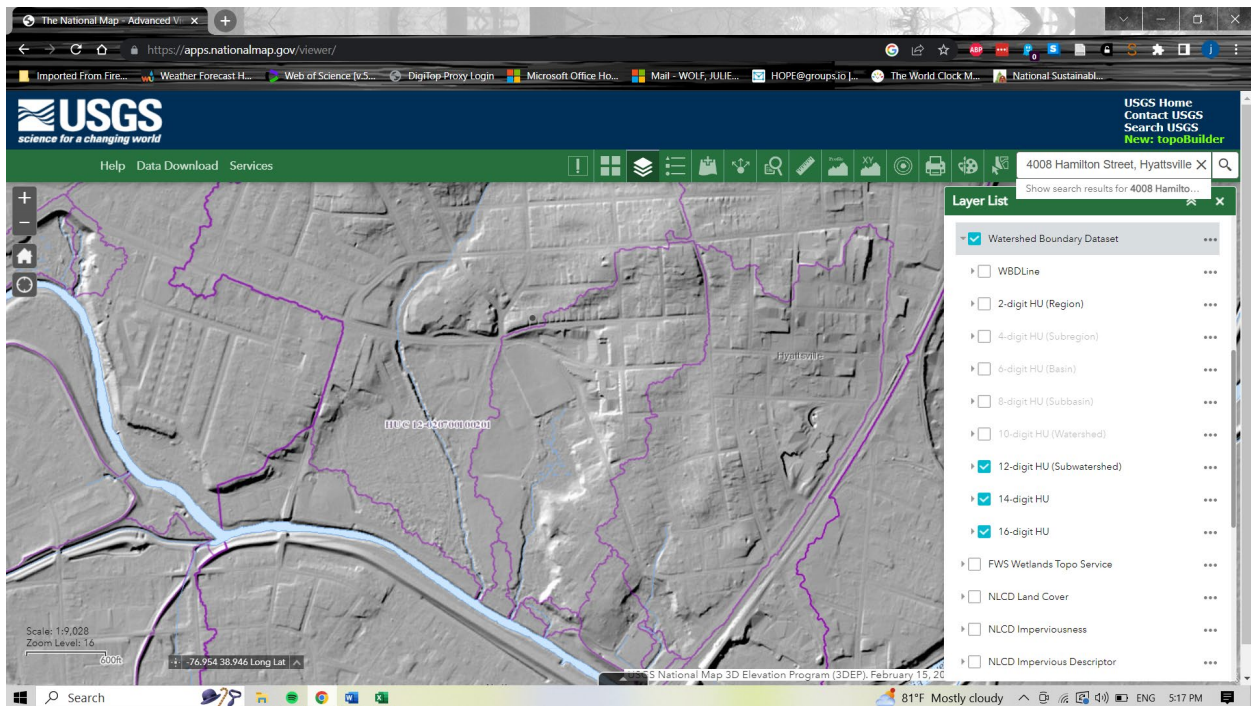


Figure 6 As Figure 5, but showing 'hillshade' topographic contours. The lower lot can be seen at the center. The land contour clearly shows that elevating the lower lot will send all the subwatershed's stormwater to/through the park and Gallatin Street.

- V. Therefore, to protect the already existing neighborhood and park now and in the future, **this site must be remediated, not developed.** Ongoing climate change will exacerbate any increases in impervious cover (such as have already occurred at the upper lot of the site), increasing the likelihood of severe flood events.

“The report also projected higher storm surges from climatic weather events, which have potential to inundate areas along the Anacostia and Potomac.”⁴

Regreening the lower parcel, in contrast, would benefit the community and the local and regional environment in myriad ways, including local cooling, increased stormwater storage capacity, decreased flood risk to Driskell Park and Gallatin Street, protection of water quality in the Anacostia River and Chesapeake Bay, carbon sequestration, and more, as described in the most recent US National Climate Assessment⁵:

“Changes in land cover continue to impact local- to global-scale weather and climate by altering the flow of energy, water, and greenhouse gases between the land and the atmosphere... the permanent loss of natural and working lands ... can result in localized changes in weather patterns, temperature, and precipitation...[but] reforestation in the temperate forest region would promote cooling [and] is an effective climate mitigation and adaptation strategy.”

Because of these facts, I oppose the construction of any townhouses or other structures on the lower lot of the proposed Magruder Pointe-Suffrage Point South. While I am by no means an expert, I have sufficient knowledge of the impacts of climate change on the environment to feel confident in my interpretation of the NOAA and USGS maps, and in my conclusion that the lower lot is not suitable for this or any development. I do not believe that these facts have been appropriately considered by the relevant County or State agencies, that this has resulted in an erroneous approval of this DSP, which should in fact be reversed.

I hope that you will consider the long-term impacts to the community and the environment. The owners of Werrlein are not residents of Hyattsville and they will not have to live with the consequences of their proposed construction. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

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<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=VXB78igAAAAJ&hl=en>



References:

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(2021).
2. Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding Impacts. <https://coast.noaa.gov/slr/#>.
3. Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper. <https://coast.noaa.gov/floodexposure/#-10575352,4439107,5z>
4. US Geological Service National Map Viewer. <https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/>
4. Sea Level Rise in the DC Area (U.S. National Park Service). <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/sea-level-rise-in-the-dc-area.htm>
5. USGCRP, 2018: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II [Reidmiller, D.R., et al.(eds.)]. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, 1515 pp. doi: 10.7930/NCA4.2018.*GlobalChange.gov*
<https://www.globalchange.gov/nca4>.