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Living Shorelines

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Just what is a living shoreline? This question was the focus of an all day workshop held at UConn Avery Point on Living Shorelines organized by the Climate Adaptation Academy last January. Almost 100 participants braved the first major snowfall of the year to hear from more than 15 speakers on the topic. Simply, a living shoreline is a shoreline erosion control practice that incorporates natural habitat and the functions and processes of natural systems. While the term “Living Shoreline” is relatively new (developed by David Burke 2006), the concept has been around since the 1970s when it was referred to as marsh fringe creation (Hardaway 2013). Since the 70s numerous living shoreline projects have been installed along shorelines with relatively quiet waters such as the Chesapeake Bay and Gulf of Mexico with a goal of reducing erosion caused by boat wakes. The State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is working to promote living shorelines, where appropriate, as an alternative to hard structures such as sea walls which often end up causing erosion while providing no ecosystem services. NOAA scientists spoke at the workshop detailing their work with living shorelines and resources for coastal managers. While this workshop focused on site conditions for living shorelines and issues and concerns surrounding implementation, a second workshop focused on examples is planned for June 24, 2015.

by Juliana Barrett

“A shoreline management practice that provides erosion control benefits; protects, restores or enhances natural shoreline habitat; and maintains coastal processes through the strategic placement of plants, stone, sand fill, and other structural organic materials (e.g., biologs, oyster reefs, etc.).”

- NOAA Shoreline Glossary