**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WELLS RESERVE TO HELP BEACH BUSINESSES PREP FOR STORMS**

WELLS, Maine, May 2, 2016 — Ten years ago, New England was pummeled by strong winds and heavy rains as the “Mother’s Day Storm” of 2006 washed out bridges, flooded homes, and damaged businesses, especially along the coast of York County. Less than a year later, the Patriots’ Day Storm added insult to injury and, too soon after that, Superstorm Sandy struck southern Maine a glancing blow.

From Kittery to Cape Elizabeth, a low and relatively flat coastline places communities at risk during extreme weather events. And due to the changing climate, it’s likely that stronger storms will hit more often. Along the coast, their impact will only be worsened by the continuing rise of the sea.

Beach-based businesses, a powerful economic engine for Maine, are generally little prepared for storm surge and coastal flooding. Yet lessons learned from previous disasters underscore how important the recovery of businesses is to the overall recovery of a region’s economy.

For several years, the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve has been working with local municipalities to help them plan for resilience in the face of climate change and sea level rise. Now the reserve’s Coastal Training Program will take its expertise to the business community.

With a $42,996 grant from the National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative, the Wells Reserve at Laudholm will help business owners assess their vulnerability to the impacts of storm surge and sea level rise. The reserve will collaborate with the Kennebunk-Kennebunkport-Arundel Chamber of Commerce and the Town of Kennebunkport for the 2-year project, which begins this summer.

The reserve selected Kennebunkport in part because it is the coastal York County town most at risk to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise. Nearly half of Kennebunkport’s businesses are threatened during major floods.

The Wells Reserve will adapt the Tourism Resilience Index, an assessment tool developed for the Gulf of Mexico region, to the southern Maine business community. The reserve’s Coastal Training staff will assist up to 50 Kennebunkport businesses in completing self-assessments. Through the process, hotels, restaurants, retailers, and other establishments will identify steps they can take to become more resilient.

The Tourism Resilience Index also will be available to other beach communities along the Gulf of Maine. Each business’s responses and planning will remain confidential, but collective data will be shared for the benefit of other planners.

This work is sponsored by the National Estuarine Research Reserve System Science Collaborative, which supports collaborative research that addresses coastal management problems important to the reserves. The Science Collaborative is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and managed by the University of Michigan Water Center.

For more information on the project, please call Annie Cox, coastal training coordinator, at 646-1555 ext 157.

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The Wells Reserve at Laudholm is a place to discover. This National Estuarine Research Reserve is open to the public every day, protecting more than 2,000 acres for science, education, and public enjoyment. More than 25,000 people visit the Wells Reserve each year to walk miles of trails, learn about coastal systems, and gain inspiration.

The Wells Reserve’s nonprofit partner, Laudholm Trust, provides vital monetary and in-kind support for programs and capital improvements. This local support enables the Wells Reserve to receive additional funds from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Wells Reserve is just minutes from the Maine Turnpike and U.S. Route 1 near the Wells-Kennebunk line.

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Wells Reserve at Laudholm

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