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Fisherman explores global warming from sea level

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South Carolina has the largest amount of tidally influenced shore, coastal and inland, on the East Coast.

And as a walk on any local beach will prove, much of the shore is covered with homes.

This is just one reason why Dan Kipnis of Miami Beach, Fla., feels it is his moral responsibility to share his knowledge about global climate change and the consequences it brings to coastal inhabitants, human and animal alike.

Sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation and the South Carolina Wildlife Federation, Kipnis travels to coastal communities to give presentations.

He was in Georgetown on Aug. 20 speaking on "Global Climate Change: A Fishing Forecast for South Carolina."

Although Kipnis has been

an angler and boat captain for more years than he can remember, he is quick to offer a disclaimer.

"I'm not a scientist, I'm a captain," he said, "and I'm definitely not Al Gore."

Kipnis' background on the water, however, is how he began to see the effects of a warming climate.

"I've lived on water my whole life and that's what got me going," he said. "I saw changes and wanted to know, what's making these changes?"

His presentation is full of data explaining the increased amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in recent years and how this affects climate. He focuses especially on how increased CO2 is affecting oceans.

He cites ocean acidification and warming as the two largest problems brought on by high levels of CO2.

When ocean water contains too much CO2, it becomes acidic, Kipnis ex-

plained. The acid eats away at the carbon in shells of crabs, shrimp and plankton, the tiny organisms that serve as the food supply to most marine life.

"If plankton die, we lose fish from the bottom of the food chain up," said Kipnis.

Warming of the ocean means melting of ocean ice, which leads to sea-level rise.

This hits a personal note for Kipnis.

"If sea level rises, the new house I just built is gone," he said.

He wants people who live on "ground zero," where sea level is likely to rise, to be aware of the risk and to do something about it.

He said sea level rise threatens drinking water and ground water because salt water may take over fresh water areas close to shore. If salt water begins to take over fresh water, species that require a mixture of both, such as shrimp,

crabs or oysters, are in danger.

Other likely problems are the inability of wetlands to migrate landward as fast as the sea level rises, disappearance of barrier islands which would leave the coast vulnerable to hurricanes, and the introduction of invasive species.

Kipnis said many species have already migrated from Florida to South Carolina because South Carolina waters are getting warmer. Manatees are one example.

While Kipnis knows it is important to recognize problems caused by climate change, he prefers to focus on solutions.

"The most important thing is getting the government to realize this is a pressing issue and to make the hard decisions to mitigate and turn it around," he said. "We have to make the government work for us."

People are another solution, he said.

"It starts with people. If you get your neighbor to agree you have two people. If they get their neighbor to agree you have three people, and so on."

Although he doesn't like marine protected areas, Kipnis thinks they are another way to help.

"It's the best way to perform fish stock and habitat assessments," he said. "I don't like excluding people, but they would be useful. We can see what changes are happening without the influence of humans. If you don't have a base line it's hard to make decisions."

Kipnis also recommended following the suggestions found on www.targetglobalwarming.org. This site gives advice for boaters, outdoorsmen and women, and the general population as to how to stop global warming.

He says global climate change is the most important issue facing mankind ever.

"You can't deny it, its occurring," he said. "We need to prepare for global climate change."

Ben Gregg of the South Carolina Wildlife Federation agreed.

"This is important for South Carolina," he said. "We have a proud heritage for our out-of-doors. Even if you don't fish or hunt, all of South Carolina likes to canoe, bike, hike, etc. Everyone will be impacted. We'll lose our heritage."

Kipnis holds nine International Game Fish Association world records. He has been commissioner for the Florida Marine Fisheries Commission and has helped make fishery laws for the state. He also served as president of the Miami Beach Rod and Reel Club.