



Framework for Implementing Sustainable Shorelines

Summary of Social Science Investigations: The Role of Marine Contractors and Agents in Shoreline Decision Making

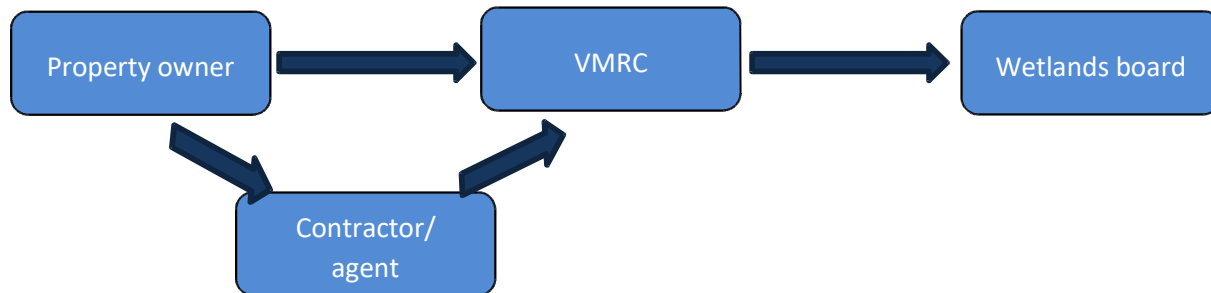
Project Activity: Analyzing The Roles of Different Actors and Sectors in Shoreline Decision-making and Permitting

Objective: To better understand the role of marine contractors and agents in the shoreline management decision making process including their relationships with property owners, their perspectives on the relative values of different shoreline management methods and the permitting process.

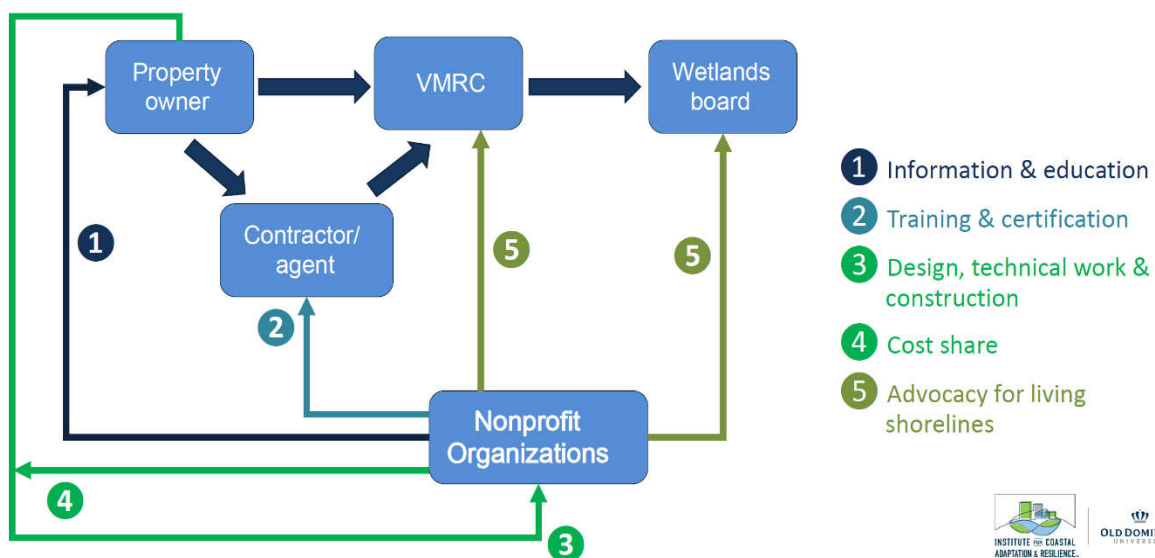
Methods: interviews and qualitative analysis

Progress to date: Interviews with 6 Wetlands Board chairs, 6 local staff supporting Wetlands Boards, 4 VMRC staff, 9 contractors and agents, 11 staff of environmental nonprofits, from across both rural and urban areas of coastal Virginia. Integrative analysis of roles and interactions across groups of actors and sectors.

Visuals:



Example: Roles of environmental nonprofits



Preliminary findings: The goal of the integrative analysis is to explain and better understand factors contributing to non-optimal outcomes by trace actors, their roles, and factors along decision points in the permit process. We contextualized our analysis within the human and shoreline systems, involving multiple actors and multiple decision points, that contribute to non-optimal outcomes in shoreline management and wetlands protection, specifically to understand why permit decisions are inconsistent with guidance or policy goals.

Interviews with wetlands board members had several key findings: (1) Wetlands boards do consider mitigation and long-term impacts; try to follow Wetlands Guidelines, ordinances and codes; conduct and rely on site visits; and want to be fair and considerate to neighboring properties. (2) But, permit applications reviewed by wetlands boards are mostly for hard structures (not consistent with guidelines), and, as a property rights board, primarily side with property owners. These findings are consistent with those out of the Fidelity Report, where the majority of projects approved as submitted. However, regulatory fidelity is dependent upon the fidelity of the project being submitted.

Interviews with board members, local and VMRC staff, contractors and agents, and nonprofit staff offer insights into how property owners approach shoreline projects: (1) Property owners generally lack knowledge/awareness of living shorelines as an option. (2) They have general preference for armoring in a “culture” ingrained toward hard solutions. (3) Property owners have concerns regarding living shoreline, including costs, technical effectiveness, aesthetics, loss of yard or reduced access to water. Some contractors and most environmental nonprofits recommend living shorelines.

Contractors and nonprofits are intermediaries that influence what projects are pursued by property owners. There is not a lot of competition for contractors; few contractors do shoreline work and not all contractors do living shoreline projects. There is some training and certification for contractors (e.g., Chesapeake Bay Landscaping Professionals). Contractors do try to design to guidelines and permit requirements, but also cater to demands of some property owners who already know what they want. Some nonprofits serve in contractor capacities, providing design, technical work, and construction.

Nonprofit organizations serve additional purposes: (1) educating residents about living shorelines, (2) creating shoreline demonstration projects, (3) offering recognition programs, and (4) working with local governments to provide cost share program for living shoreline projects.

Summary: Policy goals (no net loss) not achieved because non-optimal projects (ie, armored, non-living shoreline) are being submitted for permitting and approved by wetlands boards. Need to look at more than just the permitting process, to examine upstream decision points before property owners apply for permits.