

Congress introduces legislation to enhance flood mapping

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Following the historic 2017 hurricane season, members of Congress seem to be focusing more of their attention on updating and improving flood mapping efforts nationwide. Currently, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) produces flood hazard maps for the nation, which can be used to determine the vulnerability of a specific community or area to flooding and flood-related impacts.

On April 18, congressional members from Illinois, Florida, Maryland, and Texas introduced a bipartisan, bicameral initiative to enhance the mapping of urban flood hazard zones. Urban flooding frequently occurs outside the regulatory floodplain defined by FEMA flood maps, as demonstrated in Texas, Florida, and other cities during the 2017 hurricane season. The Flood Mapping Modernization and Homeowner Empowerment Pilot Program Act of 2018 (S.2701/H.R.5569), introduced by Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) in the Senate and Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL-5) in the House, would direct FEMA to offer grants for a series of pilot projects to enhance the mapping of urban flooding and associated property damage through new technologies, and make flood map information more widely available to stakeholders. The bill would authorize a total of \$5.5 million for the pilot program for fiscal years (FY) 2019 and 2020. Any lessons learned from these pilot projects would then be used by FEMA to develop best practices nationwide for flood mapping.

Presenting a much more sweeping legislative move, Representative Rick Crawford (R-AR-1) introduced the Scientific Flood Mapping Act (H.R.5559) on April 18, which would transfer functions related to the preparation of flood maps from FEMA to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) due to concerns regarding FEMA's flood map oversight and management. The USGS Flood Inundation Mapping Program currently provides tools and information to help communities understand their local flood risk and make mitigation decisions, and the USGS 3D Elevation Program (3DEP) gathers geospatial data that can be used to strengthen flood maps. However, transferring the authority and functions from the Department of Homeland Security over to the Department of the Interior, particularly from a regulatory agency such as FEMA to the USGS, a non-regulatory agency, may prove controversial.

Sources: E&E News, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate
