

Policy News & Monthly Review

AGI policy news briefs summarize geoscience policy activities and related events in Washington, D.C. as part of an effort to keep AGI member societies and other audiences informed about relevant federal policy and legislative updates.

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Please note that as of April 2019, the publication of news briefs and the monthly review has been suspended. Policy news from April 2019 back to 2010 is available below; to browse Monthly Reviews from 1996 through 2010, please visit the [Monthly Review Archive](#).

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Lawmakers reauthorize NOAA Marine Debris Program

Date: Thursday, October 11, 2018

President Trump signed the Save Our Seas Act of 2018 (S. 3508) into law on October 11. The Act reauthorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program through fiscal year 2022. It also strengthens certain Coast Guard requirements to promote safety in the maritime industry and promotes awareness and implementation of marine technology within the Coast Guard.



USGS briefing and report highlight expanded rollout of earthquake early warning system

Date: Wednesday, October 10, 2018

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) held a briefing on October 2 to discuss the ongoing rollout of the ShakeAlert Earthquake Early Warning System. The briefing was held in conjunction with the release of a new USGS report on the status of and implementation plan for ShakeAlert. Effective implementation of the ShakeAlert System can reduce the impact of earthquakes, save lives, and protect property in earthquake-prone areas.



FAA reauthorization bill passes with riders for disaster policy reform, Hurricane Florence funding, and geospatial data

Date: Friday, October 5, 2018

President Trump signed a long-sought reauthorization for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) into law on October 5, which included a major set of reforms to address the rising costs of natural disasters in the U.S. and help communities improve their pre-disaster mitigation and recovery practices. The FAA reauthorization also contained supplemental appropriations for victims of Hurricane Florence and provisions of the Geospatial Data Act.



Representative Johnson introduces bill to combat sexual harassment in STEM

Date: Friday, October 5, 2018

Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30) introduced H.R. 7031, the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act of 2018, on October 5. H.R. 7031 would expand research efforts to better understand the causes and consequences of sexual harassment affecting individuals in the scientific workforce, including students and trainees, and coordinate federal science agency efforts to reduce the prevalence and negative impacts of sexual harassment. Independent from Representative Johnson's legislative proposal, several science agencies and organizations have announced new initiatives to combat sexual harassment in science in the last month.



Federal Register Summary: September 2018

Date: Sunday, September 30, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



President signs bill authorizing DOE Office of Science

Date: Friday, September 28, 2018

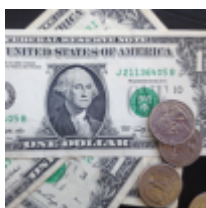
On September 28, President Donald Trump signed the Department of Energy Research and Innovation Act (H.R. 589) into law after the House passed the bill by voice vote on September 13. Originally sponsored by Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, H.R. 589 establishes the Department of Energy's policies for science and energy research and development programs.



Bill encouraging private-public nuclear energy collaboration signed into law

Date: Friday, September 28, 2018

On September 28, President Donald Trump signed NEICA, the Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (S. 97), into law after the House passed the bill by voice vote on September 13. The bill, sponsored by Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), encourages partnerships between the Department of Energy (DOE) and private companies to develop new nuclear energy technologies.



President approves two minibuss appropriations bills, continuing resolution for FY 2019

Date: Friday, September 28, 2018

President Donald Trump signed two spending bill packages into law this month, allocating funding for parts of the federal

government through fiscal year (FY) 2019 and providing short-term funding for other agencies at FY 2018 levels until December 7, giving Congress more time to agree upon the final FY 2019 appropriations for those remaining agencies while avoiding a government shutdown before the start of the fiscal year on October 1.



House passes bipartisan legislation to lease unused space in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve

Date: Wednesday, September 26, 2018

The House passed the Strategic Petroleum Reserve Reform Act (H.R. 6511) on September 25, which would create a pilot program to lease underutilized storage facilities in the reserve to private entities. Under current policy, the Department of Energy (DOE) may only lease those facilities to foreign governments.



House and Senate committees hold hearings on PFAS chemical exposure

Date: Wednesday, September 26, 2018

Both the House and Senate held separate subcommittee hearings this month to address the emerging health and environmental impacts of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a group of manufactured chemicals used in a variety of applications such as firefighting foam and many household products. Prior to the two hearings, Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), the senior senator from Michigan, introduced two bills that seek to address the PFAS crisis.



House passes bill to establish Every Kid Outdoors program

Date: Wednesday, September 12, 2018

On September 12, 2018, the House passed the Every Kid Outdoors Act (H.R. 3186) to provide fourth grade students and accompanying individuals with free access to federally managed public lands and waters, including historic sites such as national parks. Introduced by Representative Niki Tsongas (D-MA-3), H.R. 3186 codifies the already-existing “Every Kid in a Park” initiative launched in 2015 by President Barack Obama under the Department of the Interior.



Federal Register Summary: August 2018

Date: Friday, August 31, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,

National Science Foundation, and more.



Congress moves forward on appropriations bills including Interior and Environment

Date: Friday, August 31, 2018

By the end of August, the Senate passed nine of their 12 appropriations bills, while the House – on recess in August – passed six. The bills passed by both chambers include funding for the Department of the Interior, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Energy, but only the Senate voted on spending for the Department of Agriculture. The two chambers must conference to negotiate mutually agreeable final language, then pass reconciled versions of the appropriations packages. Neither chamber has yet passed their Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bills.



Department of the Interior releases revised reorganization proposal

Date: Wednesday, August 29, 2018

On August 29, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke released a revised reorganization proposal to establish twelve unified regional boundaries for agencies and bureaus in the Department of the Interior (DOI). Discussed at a round table with Representative Rob Bishop (R-UT-1) in Utah on August 28, the plan is modified from the original restructuring proposal released in February, which was based solely on watershed boundaries.



House Natural Resources Committee field hearing discusses nexus of energy and education

Date: Wednesday, August 29, 2018

The House Committee on Natural Resources held a field hearing, entitled “Energy and Education: What’s the Connection,” on August 29, 2018, in Roosevelt, Utah. Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT-1) led the hearing, which considered testimony from two panels of local stakeholders and aimed to explore energy development on federal lands as a potential revenue source for public education.



Senate subcommittee holds hearing on algal bloom monitoring and impacts

Date: Tuesday, August 28, 2018

On August 28, the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard held a hearing on U.S. Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) events and the status of the algal-bloom research, technology, and monitoring techniques. During opening remarks, senators highlighted the health, economic, and cultural impact impacts from HABs in Wisconsin, Alaska, and

Florida.



Senate Committees consider White House CEQ and OSTP nominees

Date: Friday, August 24, 2018

On August 24, the nominees for director of the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and deputy administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) appeared before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Technology for a nomination hearing. Earlier in the month, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works approved the nominee to Chair the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).



EPA releases revamped regulations on emissions from coal power plants and passenger vehicles

Date: Friday, August 24, 2018

On August 21, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a new rule to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from existing coal-fired electric utility generating units and power plants across the country. The Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) Rule would replace the 2015 Clean Power Plan (CPP) Rule. On August 24, the EPA and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) issued a notice of proposed rulemaking to amend Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) and tailpipe carbon dioxide emissions standards for passenger cars and light trucks and establish new standards for model years 2021 through 2026.



BLM releases management plans for lands associated with reduced national monuments in Utah

Date: Friday, August 17, 2018

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released draft management plans on August 17 for the revised Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments that aim to provide more flexibility for the use and management of these public lands. Developed following President Donald Trump's removal of more than 2 million acres from the two Utah monuments in December 2017, the draft plans generally focus on maximizing resource development, recreation, and other uses, while still providing for resource protection. BLM is accepting public comments on the Bears Ears plans through November 15 and the Grand Staircase-Escalante plans through November 30.



South Carolina District Court reinstates the Clean Water Act WOTUS rule in twenty-six states

Date: Thursday, August 16, 2018

On August 16, the South Carolina District Court ruled that President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13778 to suspend the Obama Administration's Clean Water Rule was in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act. Finalized in 2015, the Clean Water Rule—also called the Waters of the United States or WOTUS rule—clarified the scope of federal water protected under the Clean Water Act. The nationwide halt of the applicability date rule effectively reinstates the WOTUS rule in twenty-six states.



House introduces a NEHRP reauthorization bill as a companion to the Senate bill

Date: Friday, August 3, 2018

On August 3, Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA-48) introduced the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) Reauthorization Act of 2018 (H.R. 6650). NEHRP is a program that provides coordination and leadership in monitoring seismic activity, studying impacts, and improving earthquake resilience in communities nationwide.



Senate Committee advances space and coastal community bills

Date: Wednesday, August 1, 2018

On August 1, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation amended and advanced several bills including the Space Frontier Act (S. 3277), the Waterfront Community Revitalization and Resiliency Act (S. 3265), and the COASTAL Implementation Act (S.2242).



EPA Acting Administrator testifies before Senate committee on agency operations

Date: Wednesday, August 1, 2018

Andrew Wheeler, the acting administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), appeared before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on August 1 to discuss the EPA's priorities going forward under this administration. Wheeler assumed his current position after Scott Pruitt resigned on July 6. During the hearing, Wheeler emphasized the EPA's focus on certainty and transparency, specifically in risk communication, enforcement and regulation, and communications with state and local governments.



White House directs research and development priorities for FY 2020 agency budget

Date: Tuesday, July 31, 2018

The Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Mick Mulvaney sent a memorandum on July 31 to heads of

executive departments and agencies highlighting the administration's research and development (R&D) priorities and providing guidance to agencies as they formulate their fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget submissions. The memorandum defined eight R&D priority areas and five R&D priority practices. Agency R&D budgets will be incorporated into the President's annual budget submission to Congress in early February.



President Trump establishes workforce council and signs career and technical education bill into law

Date: Tuesday, July 31, 2018

On July 19, President Donald Trump issued an Executive Order (E.O. 13845) establishing the President's National Council for the American Worker. The council will develop recommendations for a national strategy to empower American workers. In late July, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (H.R. 2353). The act amends and reauthorizes the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 until fiscal year 2023.



EPA Administrator resigns while other natural resources and energy nominations progress

Date: Tuesday, July 31, 2018

Following numerous ethics investigations, President Donald Trump announced the resignation of Scott Pruitt as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on July 5, with Deputy Administrator Andrew Wheeler now as acting administrator. On July 18, President Trump nominated Lane Genatowski for Director of Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy (ARPA-E) in the Department of Energy (DOE), and Dr. Scott for Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics in the Department of Agriculture.



Federal Register Summary: July 2018

Date: Tuesday, July 31, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



Lawmakers address \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog at national parks

Date: Wednesday, July 25, 2018

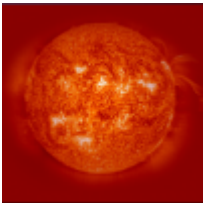
In late June, Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) and Representatives Rob Bishop (R-UT-1) and Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-3) introduced bills in each chamber to address the backlog of maintenance at U.S. national parks via a new funding program. S. 3172 and H.R. 6510 are nearly identical to address the \$11.6 billion backlog.



Senate Commerce Subcommittee considers NOAA Blue Economy Initiative

Date: Tuesday, July 24, 2018

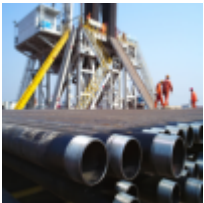
The acting administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Rear Admiral Tim Gallaudet, appeared before the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard on July 24 to answer questions about NOAA's Blue Economy Initiative. At the hearing, Gallaudet also vowed that NOAA is committed to the climate and conservation elements of its mission.



House Science Committee moves forward with the Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act

Date: Tuesday, July 24, 2018

The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held a full committee markup on July 24 to consider the Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act (S. 141), which passed the Senate by unanimous consent in May 2017. During the House markup, committee members offered three amendments to the space weather bill—two of which were agreed upon by a voice vote.



Florida Representative Carlos Curbelo introduces controversial carbon tax bill

Date: Tuesday, July 24, 2018

Representative Carlos Curbelo (R-FL-26) introduced the first Republican carbon pricing bill in nearly a decade on July 23. The proposal, called the MARKET CHOICE Act (H.R. 6463), seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by imposing a federal tax on carbon, and to use the revenue to fund infrastructure modernization. It would also impose a rolling, performance-based moratorium on federal regulation of greenhouse gas emissions from sources covered by the carbon tax, and eliminate the excise taxes on gasoline and diesel fuels.



Senate committee discusses U.S. foreign dependence on critical minerals

Date: Thursday, July 19, 2018

On July 19, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources convened a hearing on critical minerals. The hearing was

held to review the Department of the Interior's (DOI) recently published final list of critical minerals, which are minerals required for basic civilian and/or military manufacturing and with a supply chain vulnerable to disruption.



EPA holds public hearing for proposed rule on Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science

Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2018

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held a twelve-hour public hearing on July 17 to hear oral comments on the proposed rule entitled "Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science." More than one hundred preregistered individuals presented testimony to a panel of EPA representatives. The comment period for the proposed rule ends on August 16, 2018.



House subcommittees hold joint hearing to discuss fossil energy technology developments

Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2018

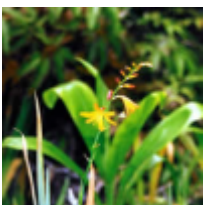
On July 17, two subcommittees of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee – the Subcommittee on Energy and the Subcommittee on the Environment – held a joint hearing to discuss the future of fossil fuel as a primary energy source. The hearing also focused on the Department of Energy's (DOE) partnerships with industry groups to develop technology that aids in the management of carbon dioxide.



Federal Register Summary: June 2018

Date: Saturday, June 30, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



House and Senate pass versions of the 2018 Farm Bill

Date: Thursday, June 28, 2018

Following the House passage of the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) by party line vote on June 21, the Senate amended H.R. 2 with text from S. 3042, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and an amendment providing a one-year extension of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The Senate passed the bill on June 28 before breaking for July recess.



House and Senate pass appropriations legislation funding FY 2019 Energy and Water Development

Date: Thursday, June 28, 2018

In June 2018, the House and Senate consecutively passed the Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019 (H.R. 5895) to make progress on the appropriations process before the fiscal year (FY) 2019 deadline of September 30, 2018. More FY 2019 appropriations bills are slated to be considered in July, with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell vowing to shorten the Senate's August recess to proceed with appropriations legislation and nominee confirmation.



House Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee discusses oil and gas operations legislation

Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2018

On June 6, the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources considered four draft bills aimed at streamlining oil and gas production on federal lands. These bills support President Donald Trump's executive order (EO 13783), "Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth," to reduce regulations and processes that may hinder domestic energy development. On June 27, the committee approved three of these bills – H.R. 6087, H.R. 6107, and H.R. 6088 – on party line votes.



White House releases plan to reform and reorganize executive branch agencies

Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2018

On June 21, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released a plan to reform and reorganize executive branch departments and agencies of the federal government, following President Donald Trump's March 13, 2017, executive order (E.O. 13781) intended to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the executive branch. The plan outlines over eighty recommendations for structural realignment across the executive branch, including changes to geoscience-related federal agencies.



White House Office of Science and Technology Policy hosts a State-Federal STEM Education Summit

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2018

On June 25 and 26, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) hosted the 2018 State-Federal STEM Education Summit, bringing together education and science leaders from eighteen federal agencies along with more than two STEM leaders. Throughout the summit, stakeholder groups provided input for development of the upcoming Federal STEM Education Strategic Plan, which is required by the America COMPETES Act of 2010 (PL 11-358) to be updated every five years.



Senate hearings consider EPA and DOE nominees; President Trump nominates head of CEQ

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2018

At the end of June, Senate committees held hearings to consider nominees for the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Christopher Fall, the nominee for director of DOE's Office of Science; Daniel Simmons, the nominee for assistant secretary of DOE's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; and Peter Wright, the nominee for assistant administrator of EPA's Office of Land and Emergency Management. On June 12, President Donald Trump announced his intent to nominate Mary Neumayr to be the Chairwoman of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), which oversees the implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) across federal agencies. To track the confirmation process of key geoscience presidential nominations from the Trump Administration, visit AGI's Federal Nominations page.

House chamber

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House subcommittee reviews three wind energy bills

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2018

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources discussed three bills that would boost offshore wind projects on June 26. One of the draft bills would amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to include a leasing program for offshore renewable energy. Another draft bill would expand the Act to pertain to U.S. territories, such as Guam. The third bill would create a federal grant program to train workers who want to transition to offshore wind from other industries.



House subcommittee discusses federal land protections and designations in Montana and Utah

Date: Thursday, June 21, 2018

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing to consider several pieces of public lands legislation with potential impacts in Montana and Utah. Two of the bills would remove Wilderness Studies Area (WSA) designations from various lands in Montana managed by the Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), respectively. The Emery County Public Land Management Act of 2018 would establish a National Conservation Area, a National Monument, and wilderness areas in Utah, potentially affecting almost one million acres of land.



President Trump signs executive order implementing a new national ocean policy

Date: Tuesday, June 19, 2018

On June 19, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13840, "Ocean Policy to Advance Economic, Security, and

Environmental Interests of the United States,” revoking and replacing much of the previous administration’s ocean policy. E.O. 13840 seeks to improve interagency coordination on ocean-related matters, public access to data, and engagement with marine industries, the science and technology community, and other stakeholders.



House and Senate committees approve FY 2019 Interior-Environment appropriations bills

Date: Thursday, June 14, 2018

Both the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies approved their fiscal year (FY) 2019 appropriations bills to fund the Department of the Interior (DOI), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and other agencies. The House bill (H.R. 6147) directs \$1.23 billion to DOI, an increase of \$64.5 million compared to FY 2018 enacted levels, and the Senate bill (S. 3073) provides an increase of \$30 million to DOI for a total of \$1.20 billion.



Senate Appropriations Committee approves NSF, NOAA, NASA, NIST, and OSTP funding

Date: Thursday, June 14, 2018

The Senate Committee on Appropriations approved their Commerce, Justice, and Science fiscal year (FY) 2019 appropriations bill. Similar to the House bill, the Senate Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2019 (S. 3072) would increase funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) compared to FY 2018 levels, but decrease funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).



FERC commissioners recommend against subsidizing coal and nuclear power plants in oversight hearing

Date: Tuesday, June 12, 2018

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a formal oversight hearing for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on June 12, 2018, with all five commissioners present for the first time in a decade. FERC is responsible for regulating the interstate transmission of electricity, oil, and natural gas, and plays an integral role in reviewing proposals to build natural gas pipelines and liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and providing licenses for hydroelectric power projects.



Sexual harassment report released by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine

Date: Tuesday, June 12, 2018

The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) released a report on the prevalence, nature, and

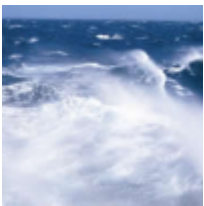
impacts of sexual harassment of women in academic science, engineering, and medicine. The report concluded that organizational climate, including the degree of male-domination and tolerance for harassment, was the single most influential factor in the likelihood of sexual harassment occurring in an organization.



Lawmakers discuss the future of the International Space Station

Date: Wednesday, June 6, 2018

In response to President Donald Trump's request to terminate direct federal funding to the International Space Station (ISS) by 2025, lawmakers in the House and Senate held several hearings beginning in May and June 2018 to discuss the future of the ISS. The Senate Subcommittee on Space, Science, and Competitiveness held the first in a series of two hearings on May 16, and the second on June 6. The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology also held a hearing to discuss the ISS on May 17.



Senate Oceans Subcommittee reviews the first decade of the NOAA Digital Coast Program

Date: Tuesday, June 5, 2018

The Senate Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard held a hearing on June 5 to review the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Digital Coast program. The program provides a free online database to help meet the unique needs of the coastal management community.