

Lawmakers reintroduce bill to protect communities from landslides

February 14, 2019

Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Ron Wyden (R-CO), and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) reintroduced bipartisan legislation to improve the research and coordination needed to help communities prepare for and respond to landslides.

The bill, called the National Landslide Preparedness Act (S. 529), would create a unified national program run by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to better understand the risks and reduce losses from landslide hazards, targeting key gaps in current scientific knowledge and mapping data, in an effort to help save lives and property and improve natural disaster preparedness. USGS established a Landslides Hazard Program in the 1970's to monitor potential landslide risks and produce landslide hazard maps through a dedicated research program. This program still operates today, but the existing level of support is insufficient for the program to take advantage of developments in technology that could substantially improve its maps.

S. 529 would also officially establish the 3D Elevation Program (3DEP), a program managed by USGS in coordination with other federal agencies and nonfederal entities. 3DEP has been operational for several years but requires additional support to fulfill its aim of producing high-resolution elevation data for the entire United States—a key input for landslide maps.

Additionally, the bill would direct USGS to develop and publish a national strategy for landslide hazards and risk reduction every five years, distribute landslide planning and risk reduction guidance for communities, expand the early warning system for post-fire flash floods and debris flows, and establish emergency response procedures for the rapid deployment of federal scientists, equipment, and services to areas impacted by a major landslide event.

Representative Suzan DelBene (D-WA-1) led a parallel effort by introducing a companion bill in the House (H.R. 1261) with Representatives Derek Kilmer (D-WA-6), Matt Cartwright (D-PA-8), Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-1), Denny Heck (D-WA-10), and Adam Smith (D-WA-9) signed on as original co-sponsors.

S. 529 has since been referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for further consideration. H.R. 1261 was referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources and the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

Sources: Library of Congress; U.S. House of Representatives, Congresswoman Suzan DelBene; U.S. Senate, Senator Maria Cantwell.
