

The Digital Coast Act

Introduced by Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) to Deliver the Next Generation of Coastal Information for Shoreline Management, Planning, and Disaster Response in Coastal Communities

Challenge

Coastal communities and researchers need access to up-to-date mapping information to address critical coastal issues such as storm preparation, flood management, ecosystem restoration, and coastal development. Mapping information can be complex, expensive to gather, and difficult to use without in-house expertise.

Solution: Digital Coast

The Digital Coast project, based at NOAA, has begun addressing this challenge and making up-to-date coastal data readily available to non-experts in the public and private sectors. NOAA pulls together complicated datasets, makes them available on their website for easy and free public access, and provides the tools and training that coastal communities need to turn that data into useful information for their decision making. The project works with partners in other federal agencies to coordinate efficient collection of critical data and. The project also partners with state, county, and local governments and the private and non-profit sectors to increase access to and use of data resources.

Why is this bill needed?

This bill authorizes the next phase in coastal mapping and information sharing at NOAA. Ocean and shoreline advocates including the U.S. Oceans Commission and the Pew Commission have highlighted the need for modern coastal data, and the 2009 Omnibus Public Land Management Act made investments in data infrastructure. As part of implementation, NOAA launched the Digital Coast project to develop partnerships with coastal entities across the country. The Digital Coast Act would officially authorize the Digital Coast as a program at NOAA and support the next phase in delivering accurate and relevant data to our coastal communities.

Who uses the program?

The Digital Coast Partnership includes the National Association of Counties, American Planning Association, Association of State Floodplain Managers, Coastal States Organization, National Estuarine Research Reserves Association, National States Geographic Information Council, The Nature Conservancy, Urban Land Institute, and NOAA.

What kind of information does the Digital Coast provide and why is it important?

Coastal managers have to ask critical questions every day. How much is a shoreline likely to erode after a big storm? What are water level trends at the marina where a dock is being installed? What is the storm surge threat in an area? Digital Coast provides the high tech mapping information—geospatial data—that allows planners and coastal managers to make accurate decisions and smart investments.