

***SENATOR BALDWIN'S BILL S. 1069, the DIGITAL COAST ACT
PASSES HOUSE and SENATE***

*December 2, 2020
Stakeholder Statements*

“Just a day after it was reported that the risk of coastal floods damaging or destroying low-income homes will triple over the next 30 years due to rising tides and storm surges, we are reminded again why the Digital Coast Act is so important. It’s focus on collecting, consolidating and making coastal data transparent and publically available will help all of our coastal communities, including those in our home state of Wisconsin, better plan for more frequent and severe storms, flooding and natural disasters. We thank Senator Baldwin for her leadership and perseverance in helping the Digital Coast Act become a reality,” **said Chad Berginnis, Executive Director, Association of State Floodplain Managers.**

"Quantum Spatial is grateful for Senator Baldwin's leadership on this bill. The Digital Coast program employs state of the art technology to provide vital information to those local officials responsible for public safety in coastal communities all along the Great Lakes and elsewhere," **said Kurt Allen, Vice President at Quantum Spatial, Inc.**

“NSPS commends the leadership of Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), and Maria Cantwell (D-WA), as well as Representatives Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD) and Don Young (R-AK) in successfully shepherding the Digital Coast Act through Congressional passage. The provisions of the Digital Coast Act will significantly enhance the Digital Coast project through the creation of a sustainable program to utilize geospatial technologies to map and monitor the coastal waterways of the United States, providing an invaluable benefit to the public, and to the professionals whose charge is to protect their health, safety, and welfare,” **said Curtis W. Sumner, Executive Director of National Society of Professional Surveyors.**

“The nation’s coastal communities face critical and growing challenges in planning for recovery, reinvention, and resiliency. Passage of the Digital Coast Act expands understanding of coastal conditions and provides an invaluable tool for local residents and decision-makers. The American Planning Association applauds passage of this legislation. Digital Coast is a proven, successful federal-local partnership that makes communities safer and stronger through good planning,” **said Kurt Christiansen, President, American Planning Association.**

"The Coastal States Organization congratulates Congress and the bill sponsors on the passage in both the House and Senate of the Digital Coast Act, a bill that formalizes NOAA's Digital Coast as an important resource for coastal zone managers around the country. The Digital Coast provides the nation's coastal zone management programs with valuable data, tools, and trainings which assist in informing critical long-term planning to balance demands along the nation's coasts and to strengthen the resilience of coastal communities," **said Bradley Watson, Executive Director of the Coastal States Organization.**

"We commend Senator Baldwin and her colleagues and cosponsors for their leadership in passing this important legislation. The Digital Coast Act will enable NOAA to partner with other government entities and the private sector to help protect and promote America's coasts and shorelines. This legislation creates a program to utilize the extensive capabilities, competence, and qualifications of private sector geospatial professionals to provide the surveying, charting, remote sensing, and geospatial data of America's coasts, harbors, ports, shorelines and ocean resources for economic growth, recreational activities, conservation, and resilience of our fragile coastal environment," **said John M. Palatiello, Founder and President, U.S. Geospatial Executives Organization (U.S. GEO).**

"As stewards of the environment with significant public safety and infrastructure responsibilities, counties applaud the passage of the Digital Coast Act," **said National Association of Counties Executive Director Matthew Chase.** "NOAA's Digital Coast program provides data, tools and training that help counties, parishes and boroughs make smart decisions for the future. This legislation will help strengthen community resiliency with improved coastal mapping, information sharing and other useful resources."

The Digital Coast Partnership is government done right, and NERRA thanks Senators Baldwin (D-WI), Murkowski (R-AK), Sullivan (R-AK) and Cantwell (D-WA) for their leadership in S. 1069 that provides statutory authority for the Digital Coast program. Through access to data, planning tools and training, Digital Coast directly addresses constituent needs through improved capacity and skills of coastal decision-makers charged with enhancing coastal community resilience and better management of our estuaries," **said Rebecca K. Roth, Executive Director National Estuarine Research Reserve Association.**

"The National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) commends Senator Baldwin's leadership on this critical legislation. Senator Baldwin has been an important partner to NSGIC, Wisconsin, and other coastal states as we work with NOAA to provide improved data, tools, and training to federal, state, and local coastal managers to improve management practices and coastal resiliency," **said Molly Schar, Executive Director of the National States Geographic Information Council.**

"As an original partner with NOAA in the Digital Coast project, we're thrilled to see Congress authorize the program by passing the Digital Coast Act," **said Sarah Murdock, Director of Resilience and Water Policy at The Nature Conservancy.** "The project has long provided invaluable data, planning support and technical assistance to coastal communities in the Great Lakes region and around the nation that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This legislation will help strengthen these critical services at a time when such services are sorely needed. We look forward to continuing to partner with NOAA in this effort, and greatly appreciate the hard work of supporters in the House and champions like Sen. Baldwin who have made this progress possible."

Article referenced in quote from the Association of State Flood Plain Managers:

CLIMATE IMPACTS

Low-income homes to face triple flood risks by 2050 — study

Daniel Cusick, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, December 1, 2020



An abandoned house in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Flood risk to the nation's affordable housing stock is expected to spike within 30 years. Bart Everyone/Flickr

The risk of coastal floods damaging or destroying low-income homes will triple over the next 30 years as rising tides and storm surges encroach on low-lying developed areas, according to new findings from the nonprofits Climate Central and National Housing Trust.

By 2050, researchers say, more than 25,000 affordable housing units are expected to see coastal flooding at least once in a typical year — up from 7,700 just 20 years ago, with the largest number of at-risk housing units in three states: New Jersey, New York and Massachusetts.

Among the study's more striking findings are that nearly half of New Jersey's "large stock of exposed affordable housing units could flood at least four times per year" by 2050. Four New Jersey cities — Atlantic City, Camden, Penns Grove and Salem — are of particular concern, researchers found, as they are among the poorest in the country, with an average median household income of under \$29,000 per year.

Pacific and Gulf Coast regions — including low-lying parts of Louisiana, Texas, California and Washington — will also see elevated risk of coastal flooding among affordable housing units, the study found.

"These impacts may increase maintenance costs, threaten public health, and cause profound disruptions to families already struggling to make ends meet," researchers Maya Buchanan and Ben Strauss of Climate Central wrote. The problem is compounded by the fact that affordable housing is "frequently in poor repair to begin with, [and] additional damage from flooding may be particularly challenging — and expensive — to remedy."

The [study](#), published in *Environmental Research Letters*, is described as the first nationwide assessment of coastal flood risks facing affordable housing, and it adds to a growing body of research showing the

disproportionate impacts climate change is having on low-income, disadvantaged and minority communities across the country.

"To me the core point here is not the sheer numbers" of homes facing elevated risk, Strauss said in an interview. "It's the vulnerability of the people who are threatened. They don't have any easy recourse or remedy to deal with this problem."

Experts say the challenges of reducing climate risk for middle- and low-income residents are complex. In older cities, like New York and Boston, affordable housing can be concentrated in urban waterfront areas where residents are attached socially and economically to their homes and neighborhoods. They have little means or incentive to move. In other places, affordable housing — both privately and publicly owned — were purposefully constructed in floodplains because property was cheap and considered unsuitable for other types of development.

Rob Moore, a senior policy analyst at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said such factors leave low-income families — many of whom are renters — trapped in properties with rising disaster risk, plummeting real estate values, deteriorating environmental conditions and little or no investment by property owners who see no long-term future for their properties.

Yet government housing security programs tend to overlook renters, Moore added, "adding to this problem of climate displacement for people who can ill afford to be out of their homes." The most effective solutions are focused on adaptation and resilience, either by helping people move out of harm's way or providing public investment in elevating or flood-proofing homes.

"It's the communities that recognize these problems now and are being proactive about it that are going to be the most successful," Moore said. "A lack of affordable housing doesn't fix itself. The same is true of sea-level rise. If you wait for the problem to come in your front door, then you've waited too long."

According to the Climate Central study, the cities with the largest number of affordable housing units at risk of flooding induced by rising sea levels are New York City (4,774 units), Atlantic City (3,167 units) and Boston (3,042 units). By percentage increase, the highest-risk cities are Norfolk, Va., and Charleston, S.C., each of which is expected to see a more than fivefold jump in at-risk affordable housing units by 2050.