

September 19, 2019

Bulletins

- Resources: [Legislative Update](#), [NFIP Risk Rating 2.0](#), and [10 Misconceptions About the NFIP](#)
- New Sediment Management Workgroup on [LinkedIn](#)
- Its Hurricane Season - Keep Up with the Tropics [Here](#)
- Donate to [Hurricane Dorian Relief](#)
- Looking for Assistance in [Implementing Coastal Resilience?](#)

Corps Funding Bill Hits 'The Wall' in Senate Committee

If we're lucky, really lucky, we will avoid a stopgap measure this year. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a 55% increase in the President's request for the Corps' annual budget. That total, \$7.75 billion, is just over \$750 million more than the current year's budget for that agency. The Senate committee's total is even higher than the figure that has already been approved by the House: \$7.36 billion. The Corps' funding is part of the Energy & Water Development Appropriations Bill whose tradition of bipartisan support is reflected in the committee's unanimous approval.

Out of the \$7.36 billion Senate committee's total, \$135 million is for what Congress calls shore protection. These are beach nourishment studies, projects and programs. The House has already passed its Corps funding bill, with just over \$142 million for shore protection. The current year's number is \$175.4 million. Don't compare these numbers until Congress passes its final bill, since the final number could be even higher than either of House or Senate bills. See what's funded [here](#). You'll notice only three individual projects listed because that's all the President earmarked. Since Congress stripped itself of earmarking, look to the additional funding lines at the bottom of the chart. That money gets allocated to projects by the not-so-friendly folks at the Office of Management and Budget. For more information about OMB and the funding process, see <https://www.waterlog.net/corps-of-engineers/>.

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The E&W funding bill was to be a part of a package of appropriations bills that includes funding for the Defense Department. Efforts by Democrats on the committee to prohibit the President from transferring any Defense funds to build more of the border wall as he did during the current fiscal year failed today. When the full Senate debates the Defense funding bill, it may get stalled by continued Democratic insistence on adding that prohibition. In addition, Committee Democrats unanimously objected to the allocation of \$5 billion for the wall. In fact, the E&W bill is on the Senate calendar now, but Dems may object to it moving on its own. They insist that most of the wall funding be provided for non-defense spending on health, education, and infrastructure. That objection will likely hold up full Senate consideration of any of the bills that the leaders of both parties had hoped to pass before the end of this month, which marks the end of the Federal fiscal year. The differences on these two bills in committee today endanger that goal.

On the Numbers – Senate E&W Bill

Army Corps of Engineers – \$7.75 billion, \$751.5 million above the FY2019 enacted level and \$2.786 billion above the budget request.

- For the sixth consecutive year, the bill meets the spending targets in the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 for appropriations from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for the Corps of Engineers.
- For the sixth consecutive year, the bill makes full use of the estimated annual revenues from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund to advance American competitiveness and export capabilities.
- + 6 new study starts, + 6 new construction starts

EV Tax for Highway Bill? Not Likely.

Legislators are searching for the perfect fix to solve the funding problem for the new highway infrastructure bill. Declining gas tax revenue has caused problems as Members of Congress search for revenue streams to fund new infrastructure. Some want to pose a registration tax or annual fee on EV users since those vehicles don't generate gas tax revenues. Some critics say that now is not the time to penalize EV buyers. The best alternative is one we just don't have the technology for, yet. While the EZ-Pass type technology exists, not everyone has it, nor is it required and scaling that technology to a pay-for-distance-travelled type approach would take years to implement. Though that is certainly where we are heading. Increasing the gas tax alone may seem like a plausible idea but would strain our economy too much since our current energy consumption is 'baked in' to our US economy.



Tired of Tesla? Check out [Polestar Cars](#)

Photo: The Verge

US Fish & Wildlife →
Nominee

USFWS Nominee - Some Opposition

Aurelia Skipwith, Nominee for the Secretary for Fish Wildlife and Parks says she is “committed to leading the agency with the highest ethical standards and to ensuring that professional ethics are maintained throughout the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,” but we’ve heard just as nice things before that have no practical basis. While it sounds good, twenty-seven former Fish and Wildlife employees have urged the senate panel to reject Skipwith. According to those individuals, Skipwith “lacks the training and experience necessary for this position” because “her background consists largely of serving as a consultant or attorney dealing with non-wildlife and non-conservation issues.”

As a former Monsanto employee, it’s tough to envision a position where she would effectively serve the public’s interests. The same confusion results when one considers to how a fossil fuel lobbyist could be head of the EPA.

A Barge Full of Cocaine?

The title is just in reference to what one Corps employee said back in the 80’s when a hopper dredge full of pristine white Florida sand was chugging by him. *Fun Fact: The sand in Siesta Key is almost 100% crystalline quartz, giving it its pure white color and the ability to disperse heat from the sun. It eroded from the Appalachian Mountains and flowed through rivers until it was deposited into the Gulf of Mexico along beaches. Most beach sand is made from crushed coral.*

The title is also not in reference to any of the \$1 million dollars worth of cocaine that [washed up in Florida](#) as a result of Hurricane Dorian. Instead, a new bill, [S 2460](#), will allow greater flexibility for the Corps in evaluating and acquiring non-domestic sand for beach nourishment. The legislative change is minor, but the impacts could be widespread. If passed, the bill will allow the US to search for competitively priced sand as an alternative to domestic sources available. Prior to the bill, the law stated that unless environmental conditions or economics were prohibitive, domestic sand must be used.

Funds for Beach Nourishment Could Come from Leasing of Oil & Gas

According to a new bill, [HR 4294](#), funds from the sale of oil & gas leases can be contributed toward a number of coastal enhancements, specifically water conservation efforts along shorelines, beach nourishment, dredging and port infrastructure development, grants, protection of wildlife etc.

For more bills: Check out our [Coastal Bill Tracker](#)

New Book on Coastal Risk: *The Geography of Risk* →

New Book on Coastal Risk: *The Geography of Risk*

Democrats and Republicans can disagree endlessly, and the same goes for sports fans, but history often forgets egos and instead remembers real facts. When the conversation involves beach nourishment and the NFIP, the same endless arguments often occur over one subject: taxpayer dollars. While critics of the NFIP and beach nourishment claim its purpose is to subsidize the rich and wealthy, we must look at the facts of history – the NFIP was designed as a partnership between the public and private sectors as a direct result of the series of inland Mid-West floods that took place between 1927 and 1968. The idea was shared-risk. Coastal storms that occurred during that time period were looked at as an unusual series of devastating storms, but homeowners and the federal government agreed that the advantages could outweigh the risks ([HUD, 1966](#)). In places like New Jersey, the advantages often far outweigh the costs.

The NFIP, nor the Corps Beach Nourishment Program are subsidies for the rich and wealthy, however that is often debated as seen in *The Geography of Risk*, by Gilbert Gaul. The NFIP encourages inland and coastal communities to reduce flood risk through the [Community Rating System](#). Beach nourishment works by absorbing the force of storm waves to reduce damages. The last [analysis](#) was post-Sandy which found it saved \$1.9 billion of damages that would otherwise have to be paid by taxpayers. Gaul also tries once again to pit coastal residents against inland taxpayers who have to foot the bill for post-storm damages. In making that specious argument, the serious storm and flooding damages that have occurred in the Middle West are ignored. The issue is far more widespread than coastal, it is global.

It is no surprise that those who can afford beach-views would spend their money on it, but the government didn't sell those houses, capitalism did. American capitalism has dominated the US coast, vastly different from the [Netherlands](#). Our capitalism-driven, lightly-regulated real estate market has placed this peril upon us. The problem will only be solved when the country's highest leaders accept we all have a problem and proposes how the Federal government can help state and local governments adapt to a changing climate.



Jacksonville Beach 1970's (before beach nourishment): Where to sit?

Photo: Metro Jacksonville

Continued; Book Review: *The Geography of Risk* → 

The allure of the sun, the sand, the waves and the salt air continue to bring millions of visitors to the beach in the US every year, racking up billions in federal and state tax dollars. The return on investment is huge. The beach is a true case of ‘if you build it, they will come.’ Each summer, millions of visitors just like you come to New Jersey’s iconic *public* beaches. The attraction brought [\\$5 billion](#) to the state of New Jersey in 2018, up 7% from the previous year. Each and every one of those visitors also collectively contributed to the billions in federal taxes collected from New Jersey alone. We came, we stayed, and we paid, and that is what is all about.

Some have made the Jersey Shore a way of life. In fact, many had already decided the beach was home long before beach nourishment was a thing. A newspaper article from New Jersey after the devastating storm of ‘62 reads, ‘Storm Or Not, Shore Is Home.’ Given all the bad rap beach nourishment gets for being a ‘waste,’ it saves our economy billions when storms come. Where big beaches and dunes weren’t built, those areas were destroyed, entirely, by Hurricane Sandy. Only a few miles to the south where big beaches and dunes were constructed by the Corps of Engineers, minor damages occurred. If you dislike ‘all’ of the tax dollars, all 0.0035% of the federal budget that goes toward beach nourishment, your concerns are misplaced as there are true examples of [federal waste](#) occurring elsewhere in the federal government. The big problem here has nothing to do with beaches, but everything to do with climate change. Is our country handling climate change properly? No.

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A Coastal Strategies Publication


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