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WELCOME TO SUMMER!

Although the summer season officially started last month, July 4th marks its unofficial kickoff. In Washington, DC we've had 90-degree days with humidity that drenches you after walking just a couple of blocks, and the few days around Independence Day were the hottest ever recorded on Earth. While this is the July edition of *WaterLog* and not a weather report, you will see how much weather plays a part in our coverage of the latest developments from the Nation's Capital.

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CONGRESS BEGINS ACTION ON CORPS FY24 FUNDING

The House Appropriations Committee has approved a \$9.57 billion FY24 budget for the Army Corps of Engineers, compared to the \$8.3 billion Congress provided for the current fiscal year. As big as that increase would be, assuming it was agreed to by the Senate and enacted into law, the Corps' coastal projects and programs would suffer a loss compared to FY23. For FY23, the House provided over \$136 million for coastal projects and programs but just over \$90 million this year. This year the House Appropriations Committee chair Granger has limited funding levels for this and other funding bills to amounts that are lower than the Debt Limit compromise (aka Fiscal Responsibility Act). Since the Energy & Water Appropriations Bill is normally one with strong bipartisan support, that drew a rare statement of "Minority Views" from the ranking Democrats on the full committee and subcommittee, who declared that the bill "has no chance to become law as it is written now." Nevertheless, we expect this bill to be approved by the full House by mid-July. It will take its place beside the Senate version of the same bill, which has yet to be developed by the Senate Appropriations Committee. Both the chair and ranking member of that committee put out a statement last month declaring they were "determined to continue working together in a bipartisan manner" and "committed to ensuring that the voice of the Senate is heard through the appropriations process." Sounds like trying to conference the two bills into one final proposal ought to be interesting, to say the least. Next month's *Waterlog* will have an update on the status of appropriations bills. Congress goes on recess for the month of August and will come back after Labor Day with not much time left to get all 12 appropriations bills passed and signed into law before the September 30th end of the federal fiscal year.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE

NFIP expires on September 30th. If it's not reauthorized, no new policies can be written or existing policies renewed after that date. Since 2017, Congress has provided a staggering 21 short term authorization extensions of this program because it can't agree on what needs to be done to get this program on firm footing. We're expecting another short-term extension given the lack of any reform proposal getting traction on Capitol Hill.

FOREST FIRES PREDICTED TO WORSEN

Air quality in much of the East and Midwest has been worse than we've seen in decades with smoke from the 639 wildfires in Canada causing air quality alerts primarily in the East, which is not used to being impacted by forest fires. In the U.S., there have been wildfires in southwest Washington and Northern California, but so far outbreaks have been smaller than in past years. A Boise State University study has predicted that forest fires will worsen, not only in Western states such as California, but in eastern states such as Maine with large, forested areas. All of this, of course, is due to higher temperatures and drier conditions. That provides the connection to the coast that's discussed in the following articles.

2023 HURRICANE PREDICTION UPDATED

Although we're already in hurricane season, predictions for the peak that usually starts in August had originally been for a calmer season than normal. Colorado State University, the source of that slice of optimism, has just revised its outlook to predict 18 named tropical storms (we've already had four), nine hurricanes (compared to the six originally predicted, and four major hurricanes (twice the original prediction). The forecast was updated because of higher-than-normal warmth in the Atlantic ocean

RETREAT WHERE?

The persistent drumbeat for coastal residents to retreat ignores one fundamental reality. Where is this retreat nirvana located? Rivers flood, forests catch fire, and our coasts flood. It costs the federal government almost \$3 billion annually to fight forest fires, in addition to tens of millions spent by states. Last year, the Biden administration announced a \$50 billion forest management effort to use controlled fires to thin forests around areas near where they can threaten communities. Since forest fires will always occur, the need to do more to reduce their impact on homes and businesses is increasing for the same reason that helping to make coastal communities more resilient is becoming more urgent. More people are moving to risky areas of the country on the coast or inland. While demographers and sociologists can explain the many reasons for this movement, the fact is that knowing the risk does not seem to stop people from building or buying in high-risk parts of the country. Smith Island, Maryland, devastated by hurricanes and sinking into Chesapeake Bay, was recently featured in an [article](#) in The Washington Post that noted that "home sales are surging" because those living there already do not want to leave and others are buying up available property so they can enjoy the island's lifestyle. Except for property investors, most people are attached to the communities they live in. Experience has shown so far that homeowners in high-risk inland and coastal areas will resist buyouts until they see no other alternative. If the Biden administration thinks that spending \$50 billion on better forest management will reduce

wildfire risks for nearby homeowners and businesses, why don't they put at least that much into a determined effort helping coastal communities become more resilient?

WHAT'S RESILIENCY?

Congress asked FEMA, in consultation with other federal agencies, to define "resilient" and "resiliency". Guess what? So far, FEMA hasn't proposed a definition of these terms despite the fact that the agency has a raft of resilience planning tools and fact sheets as well as a Risk Score for coastal flooding, landslides, heat waves, and wildfires. The Forest Service also has one for wildfires. Defining these broad terms is undoubtedly a difficult job but there is a need to assure that federal grants are going to purposes that are, for example, fire resistant or flood resistant just as we prohibit federal funds from being used to increase development in undeveloped coastal areas. (Coastal Barrier Resources Act).

WRDA22 IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

The following 10 sections of the Water Resources Development Act of 2022 have been selected to receive Implementation Guidance:

1. Section 8102. Emergency response to natural disasters.
2. Section 8106. Scope of feasibility studies.
3. Section 8108. Managed aquifer recharge study and working group.
4. Section 8114. Cost sharing provisions for the territories and Indian Tribes.
5. Section 8149. Use of other Federal funds.
6. Section 8151. Materials, services, and funds for repair, restoration, or rehabilitation for certain public recreation facilities.
7. Section 8154. Temporary relocation assistance pilot program.
8. Section 8155. Continuation of construction.
9. Section 8156. Federal interest determination.
10. Section 8160. Civil works research and development.

You can track when guidance will be issued on this Corps [website](#) and get the text of WRDA22 [here](#).

COASTAL LEGISLATION IN CONGRESS

We're tracking 50 bills affecting coastal communities that have been introduced in Congress so far this year. So far, other than the appropriations legislation discussed at the top of this issue, the only two bills moving have to do with disasters. The Federal Disaster Coordination Act ([H.R. 255](#)) has two objectives: (1) conduct a study and develop a plan under which the collection of information from disaster assistance applicants and grantees will be made less burdensome, duplicative, and time consuming for applicants and grantees; and (2) develop a plan for the regular collection and reporting of information on federal disaster assistance awarded. The bill has passed the House and is awaiting action in the Senate. The other bill is the Disaster Assistance Simplification Act ([S.1528](#)) that has been approved by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs. Its purpose is to streamline the sharing of information among Federal disaster assistance agencies, to expedite the delivery of life-saving assistance to disaster

survivors, to speed the recovery of communities from disasters, to protect the security and privacy of information provided by disaster survivors. A full list of the bills we are tracking can be found [here](#).

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