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**FEMA to Rehire Fired Disaster Response Staff** – We assume most of our readers enjoy flip-flops (wearing them, that is), but the recent flip-flops at FEMA have real implications for coastal communities that rely on personnel and funding to address disaster response. Both FEMA funding and staffing have been at the center of Congress' debate focusing on the agency's reorganization. After the agency recently got a new head following the departure of Kristi Noem, news broke that the agency would be rehiring most of the staff it fired months ago to stabilize the workforce as hurricane season approaches. The agency was also finally funded for FY2026 after a record lapse in funding for the Department of Homeland Security that caused many people to wait hours in airport TSA lines. As it stands, FEMA is gearing back up to be very similar to what it was before Kristi Noem. A [FEMA Report](#) on reforms was published May 7<sup>th</sup> by the FEMA Review Council. See our full article on the FEMA Report below.

**President's Budget for the Corps Has Surprises** – In last month's edition we reported the President's proposed 36 percent cut in the Corps' budget and what we predict Congress will try to do to make up the difference. Under that number there is a major departure from budget practices in the past. It's the new Salaries, Overhead and Related Expenses account that the Administration wants to add to each study and construction budget item, known in shorthand as the District Salary & Expenses (or S&E) Account. This is an effort from the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works' (ASA-CW) office to provide more transparency about Corps finances as part of that office's efforts to provide "incentives to focus on building infrastructure on time and within budget." Separating S&E from the other costs of doing a study or implementing a project is supposed to provide Congress and the public with useful information on the assumption that S&E costs are controllable. What is more puzzling is how the ASA-CW came up with these costs.

*WaterLog* took two coastal studies and found that the S&E figures for each are quite different. For one, a study of part of the New Jersey coast the salary & overhead costs are 43.2% of the study's cost while the other study of the Texas coast the comparable figure is 73.9%. We did calculations for non-coastal studies and construction and found similar disparities. It's unclear whether the difference is based on study complexity, the miles covered, or some other factor. Congressional staff tell us they are trying to find out just how the S&E figures were derived and whether they are useful to Congress.

**FEMA to be Reformed, Not Abolished** – The President’s Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency has proposed that FEMA be transformed into an agency that emphasizes the first responder role of states and local governments post-disaster. It’s [final report](#), originally scheduled to be released this past December, finally came out May 7<sup>th</sup> and includes 150 recommendations. Among these is that states and local governments must be prepared to lead disaster response with the Federal government in only a supporting role that relies on FEMA to have a stronger coordinating role for the assistance that can be provided by various federal agencies.

Significantly, the report proposes that the [post-disaster hazard mitigation grant program](#) be replaced with a two-phased funding structure called the Refined Risk Reduction Program (R3P) where priorities are set nationally and environmental reviews are handles locally. Under this program, the federal government would provide 5% of its total contribution promptly within 30 days with the remaining 10% coming within six months. The panel said that the [NFIP](#) program is at a “crossroads” and the new goal should be to have a centralized platform where the federal government offers homeowners an opportunity to buy private flood insurance. In addition, the group recommended that states and local governments be “incentivized” to improve land use policies so that fewer properties are built in high risk areas. It remains to be seen how many of these recommendations the Administration pursues with legislative or regulatory initiatives.

**How To Restore a Beach, Naturally** – The Elwha and Glines Canyon dams have trapped 30 million tons of sediment since their construction. Removal of the dams began in 2011, and in the following 5 years, Washington’s Elwha River delivered 5.42 million tons of sediment to the nearshore and estuarine environments. This grew the shoreline of the Elwha River Delta by approximately 600,000 square meters. While this level of rapid sand deposition will eventually reach an equilibrium, the coastline will continue to receive sediment from the Elwha River. This poses the question: Can dam removal be a natural and already-occurring solution to our sand-starved coasts? Read the full story [here](#).

**Legislative Update** – We’re tracking 236 bills that have been introduced in this Congress affecting coastal communities. Several are waiting for floor consideration in the House or Senate. Among these are H.R. 5200 (Matsui, D-CA), the Emergency Reporting Act; S. 1378 (Schatz, D-HI), the TAME Extreme Weather and Wildfires Act; S. 1703 (Klobuchar, D-MN), the Rural Small Business Resilience Act; and S. 371 (Tim Scott, R-SC), the SBA Disaster Transparency Act. More information about any of these bills can be found at <https://congress.gov> and a full listing of all bills we’re tracking is found on <https://www.waterlog.net/coastal-resilience-policy/>.

Thanks for reading WaterLog!

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