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Officials Tour East Coast Beaches

Earlier this month, officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and FEMA joined Representative Jeff Van Drew in touring South Jersey's eroded beaches following the Irish Weekend storm. Senator Kim made two stops in North Wildwood and Cape May, where he was welcomed by their mayors. Farther south in Delaware, officials from DNREC joined Governor Meyer in visiting several beaches where coastal funding has been delayed. From New York to North Carolina, the overall takeaway was that the dunes worked to protect life and property, but neither state has made a request for assistance from FEMA or USACE. Federal resources are available; will the states ask for them? We think so.

Congress Has a Packed Agenda When It Returns

Both the House and the Senate are on recess and won't return until after Election Day. When they come back into session, their workload over a brief 24-day period before the end of the year will be significant. Topping the list is the passage of government funding bills. The deadline to do that is December 11th, but chances are strong that lawmakers will push that date as close to the end of the year as possible.

In fact, the worst-case scenario would involve passing the responsibility for government funding to the next Congress, which begins on January 3rd. All legislation dies at the end of a Congress, so it would mean starting fresh next January to begin passing bills that were supposed to have been enacted into law the previous October 1st. Hopefully, that won't happen.

There are also major farm and surface transportation bills to be acted on before the end of the year, in addition to a college sports bill. What gets done and what gets left until next year will depend on the outcome of the elections, with control of both the House and Senate up for grabs.

Beach Projects Get a New Focus from Corps Headquarters

There's a new Mission Lead for Coastal Storm Risk Management at Corps Headquarters. It's a new position that will hopefully give more focus to beach nourishment projects at the Corps' top decision-making level. Taking that position is a veteran Corps employee, Patrick E. O'Donnell. He'll be the first to admit that not all details of his new role have been decided yet, but it gives beach projects a dedicated advocate at Corps HQ.

That's not to say beach projects haven't had any advocates, but beach and other coastal storm risk management (CSRM) projects are part of a much larger flood risk management business line that focuses primarily on dams and levees. O'Donnell started out at the District level in Charleston dealing with beach projects and has maintained that focus as he moved up to Division and Headquarters responsibilities.

His experience will be critical as key positions in the Corps change hands. Corps Chief of Planning Eric Bush is retiring before the end of this year, as is Joe Vietri, the head of the Corps' Coastal Center of Planning Expertise (PCX). Meanwhile, the position of the Administration official in charge of the Corps is vacant, with no one sure if its previous occupant, Adam Telle, is returning from his temporary assignment as Acting Secretary of the Army.

Kelvin Waves Amplify Flooding from California's El Niño-Fueled Storms

Hurricane and tropical storm activity has set a new record in the Pacific. Powerful and long-lasting storms, wind, and wave activity are battering the West Coast, fueled by ongoing El Niño conditions and warmer-than-average ocean temperatures. Hurricane damage is also being compounded by the presence of Kelvin waves—large masses of warm water that can become trapped along coastal regions in California, raising sea levels by 6–12 inches for months at a time and magnifying damage from coastal flooding, storms, erosion, and king tide events.

Long Beach and Newport have taken an especially heavy beating. The Long Beach boardwalk and several beachfront homes are severely damaged, with eight red-tagged buildings displacing 13 residences. Newport's inundated streets saw tides 20 inches higher than predicted.

Unfortunately, this isn't the end of the damage to Southern California's coastlines. Scientists warn this winter could worsen conditions with heavy precipitation and intense storms. The State of California's recently declared state of emergency will support communities recovering from previous storms while bolstering emergency preparedness and flood risk reduction.

Coastal Legislative Update

We're tracking a record 289 bills introduced this Congress that impact coastal communities. At the top of the pile and awaiting House action is the Senate-passed Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act (S. 1564; Murray, D-WA), which introduces provisions to support ecosystem restoration projects by defining them as projects aimed at restoring or enhancing the natural functions of aquatic resources or floodplains. It also exempts these projects from fees associated with flood insurance rate map changes. We're also expecting a revised Senate-House version of the Water Resources Development Act (S. 4949 and H.R. 9497) by the time Congress finishes its work for the year. For more details on the full list of coastal bills, go [here](#).

Thanks for reading *WaterLog*!

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