

Calendar No. 481

116TH CONGRESS }
2d Session }

SENATE

{ REPORT
116-234 }

DIGITAL COAST ACT

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

ON

S. 1069



JUNE 18, 2020.—Ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

99-010

WASHINGTON : 2020

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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DIGITAL COAST ACT

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Mr. WICKER, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 1069]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the bill (S. 1069) to require the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to establish a constituent-driven program to provide a digital information platform capable of efficiently integrating coastal data with decision-support tools, training, and best practices and to support collection of priority coastal geospatial data to inform and improve local, State, regional, and Federal capacities to manage the coastal region, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

This bill would require the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to establish a constituent-driven program that provides a digital information portal to efficiently integrate coastal data with decision-support tools, training, and best practices and to encourage the collection of geospatial data to inform and improve local, State, and Federal management of coastal regions.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

Over 40 percent of all Americans currently live in coastal regions, and these regions account for nearly half of total economic

productivity in the United States.¹ Recent extreme weather events have highlighted the vulnerability of these regions to the devastating and costly effects of natural disasters, particularly coastal storms and flooding.² In order to ensure that these communities remain safe and prosperous, local planners and emergency managers in coastal regions need access to high-quality, accurate data and spatial planning tools, like Geographic Information Services (GIS).³ While some coastal counties and cities have high-quality data and multiple local planners and coastal managers, many areas do not have the staff or resources to meet their coastal management needs.⁴

The Digital Coast web-based information platform helps coastal communities better prepare for storms, plan for changing water levels, and strengthen coastal economic development planning efforts.⁵ The Digital Coast program is a web-based, flexible collection of data, tools, trainings, and case studies designed to help coastal managers and technicians across the United States. While the Digital Coast was developed and is currently maintained by NOAA's Office for Coastal Management, hundreds of organizations and Federal, State, and local agencies have contributed valuable content. Currently there are over 2,100 contributed datasets, including GIS layers for topography, bathymetry, and land use cover, as well as economic data, hazard exposure, and water quality data, to name a few.⁶ The partnership also seeks to unify groups that might not otherwise work together, and supports events for the community like conferences, webinars, workshops, and meetings. The partner organizations also meet regularly with their stakeholders to provide feedback about tools, resources, and trainings to NOAA. This resource is intended to be the proverbial one-stop-shop for the Nation's coastal management community, making it an important resource for both the public and private sectors,⁷ and providing coordination between organizations but also environmental and economic understanding.

¹NOAA Digital Coast, "Socioeconomic Data Summary" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/socioeconomic-data-summary.pdf>).

²NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information, "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Overview" (<https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>).

³See American Planning Association, "NOAA Digital Coast" (<https://www.planning.org/research/digitalcoast/project/>).

⁴Paul Barnes, prepared statement submitted to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for a June 5, 2018, hearing entitled "A Decade of the Digital Coast Partnership Program: Successes and Opportunities" (<https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/29f9b5a9-8efe-4512-98fb-a6ca6c556048>).

⁵Tyson Fettes, prepared statement submitted to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for a June 5, 2018, hearing entitled "A Decade of the Digital Coast Partnership Program: Successes and Opportunities" (<https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/e7590c43-e103-4689-98f2-625274e09ad1>).

⁶NOAA Digital Coast, "Data" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/data/>).

⁷NOAA Digital Coast, "Frequently Asked Questions" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/faq.pdf>).

The Digital Coast provides numerous tools for coastal communities to decipher and use highly detailed mapping data to make improved decisions and smart investments in their coastlines. One tool that the program provides is a coastal flood exposure mapper, which supports communities that are assessing their coastal hazard risks and vulnerabilities (Figure 1). This tool also provides guidance for using the maps to engage community members and stakeholders, which can often support communities' efforts to implement safer zoning and development plans to mitigate coastal risks.

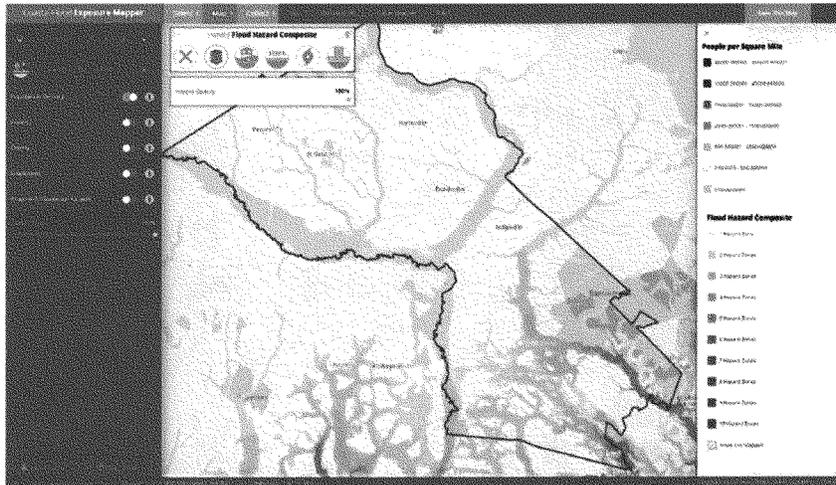


Figure 1. Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper Screenshot, NOAA Digital Coast.⁸

⁸NOAA Digital Coast, "Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/flood-exposure.html>).

Another tool is the coastal county snapshots, which provide local citizens, coastal managers, and elected officials with easy-to-understand charts and graphs that describe complex coastal and economic data (Figures 2 and 3).

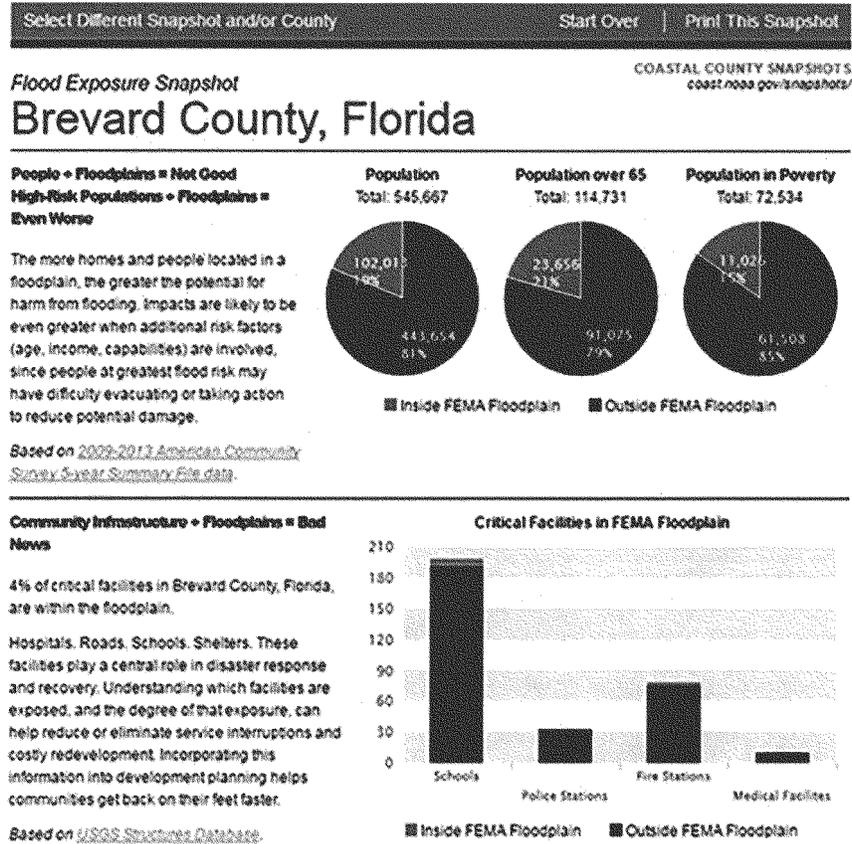


Figure 2. Coastal County Snapshots Screenshot, NOAA Digital Coast.⁹

⁹NOAA Digital Coast, "Coastal County Snapshots" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/snapshots.html>).

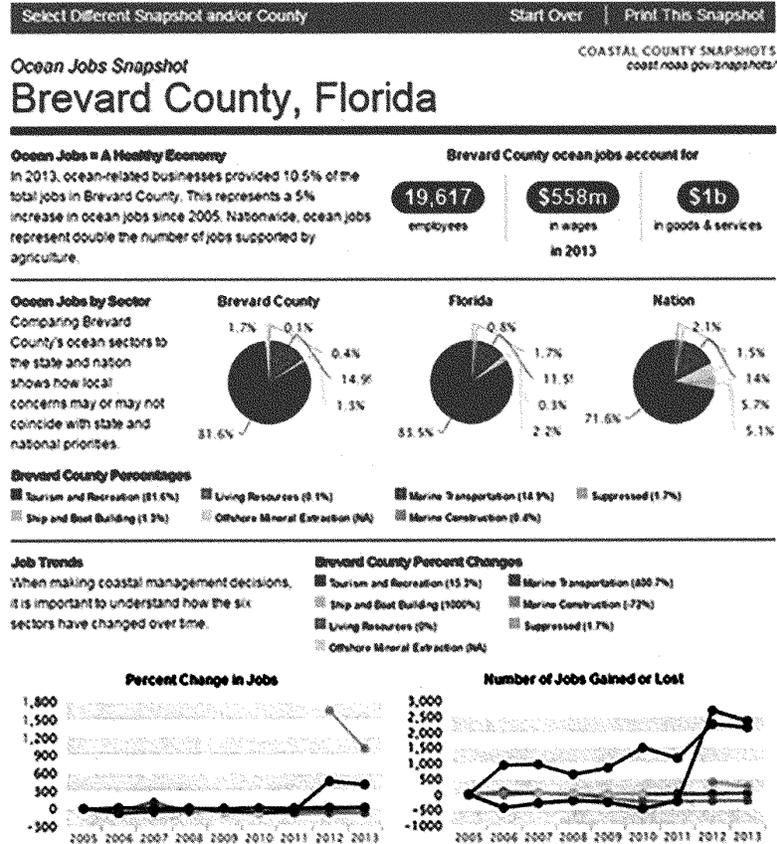


Figure 3. Coastal County Snapshots Screenshot, NOAA Digital Coast.¹⁰

For the snapshots, Digital Coast users can select a county of interest and the website automatically produces the content, creating a helpful education tool that includes clear graphics, like the number of critical facilities within the floodplain. Current snapshot topics include flood exposure, wetland benefits, and ocean and Great Lakes jobs. This tool helps planners, managers, and local citizens plan for development and community expansion into the future, continue ocean-based economic growth, and explore how to protect areas at risk, including wetlands and ecosystem services.

The Digital Coast also includes over 25 training courses, which help to build participants' technical skills for working with the data and tools provided, and to build capacity for integrating natural and social science into projects and decision making.¹¹ NOAA is continuing to incorporate more data and is working with different constituent groups, including the partner organizations, to understand additional information needs and skill gaps, as well as share additional examples of how existing information is being used

¹⁰NOAA Digital Coast, "Coastal County Snapshots" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/snapshots.html>).

¹¹NOAA Digital Coast, "Strategic Plan for the Digital Coast 2016 to 2021" (<https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/digitalcoast-strategic-plan.pdf>).

across the United States. NOAA is also working closely with many of the private contractors who supply data to the Digital Coast in order to identify deficiencies in the data and tools in order to meet the needs of the partnership.

SUMMARY OF PROVISION

This bill would establish a digital informational portal through the Secretary of Commerce and the Administrator of NOAA encouraging the integration of the collection of geospatial and remote sensing data.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 1069, the Digital Coast Act, was introduced on April 9, 2019, by Senator Baldwin (for herself and Senators Cantwell, Murkowski, and Sullivan) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On November 13, 2019, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 1069 reported favorably without amendment.

ESTIMATED COSTS

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

S. 1069, Digital Coast Act			
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on November 13, 2019			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2020	2020-2024	2020-2029
Direct Spending (Outlays)	*	*	*
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	*	*	*
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	1	16	18
Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	Yes	Mandate Effects	
Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2030?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No
* = between -\$500,000 and zero.			

S. 1069 would direct the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to continue implementing the agency's Digital Coast Program. Under that program, NOAA makes geospatial data, decision-support tools, and best practices regarding the management of coastal areas available on a public website. The bill also would direct NOAA to focus additional data collection efforts on underserved coastal areas, such as in the Arctic.

The bill would authorize the appropriation \$4 million annually over the 2020–2024 period for NOAA to implement the program. In 2019, NOAA used \$2 million of appropriated funds to carry out the

program. Because CBO scores continuing resolutions on an annualized basis, in 2020, CBO assumes that the NOAA will allocate the same amount from funds made available under the current continuing resolution (Public Law 116–59). As a result, CBO estimates that S. 1069 would authorize an increase in spending subject to appropriation in 2020 of \$2 million, the difference between the authorized amount and the annualized amount under the continuing resolution. Based on historical spending patterns for the affected grants, CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost \$16 million over the 2020–2024 period and \$2 million after 2024 (see Table 1).

S. 1069 also would authorize NOAA to collect and spend fees, without further appropriation, for training, workshops and conferences related to the Digital Coast program. Any such collection and spending would be classified as direct spending. CBO estimates that the net effect of such collections and spending would be negligible because the spending would probably occur soon after any receipt.

The costs of the legislation, detailed in Table 1, fall within budget function 300 (natural resources and environment).

TABLE 1.—ESTIMATED INCREASES IN SPENDING SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATION UNDER S. 1069

	By fiscal year, millions of dollars—					
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2020– 2024
Estimated Authorization	2	4	4	4	4	18
Estimated Outlays	1	3	4	4	4	16

^aS. 1069 would authorize the appropriation of \$4 million in 2020 for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to implement the Digital Coast Program. However, using information from NOAA, CBO estimates that \$2 million has been allocated on an annualized basis from funds made available under the current continuing resolution (Public Law 116–59), which provided appropriations through November 21, 2019. Thus, the estimated authorization for 2020 (\$2 million) is equal to the specified amount (\$4 million) minus the annualized amount from the continuing resolution (\$2 million).

On October 10, 2019, CBO transmitted a cost estimate for H.R. 2189, the Digital Coast Act, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources on September 18, 2019. The two pieces of legislation are similar. CBO’s estimates of the cost to implement those bills differ because of differences in the authorization of appropriations in each bill.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Robert Reese. The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

Because S. 1069 does not create any new programs, the legislation will have no additional regulatory impact, and will result in no additional reporting requirements. The legislation will have no further effect on the number or types of individuals and businesses regulated, the economic impact of such regulation, the personal privacy of affected individuals, or the paperwork required from such individuals and businesses.

CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

In compliance with paragraph 4(b) of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides that no provisions

contained in the bill, as reported, meet the definition of congressionally directed spending items under the rule.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title.

This section would provide that the bill may be cited as the “Digital Coast Act”.

Section 2. Findings.

This section would provide congressional findings regarding the following:

- The Digital Coast is an effective means of Federal partnerships with State, local, and nongovernmental organizations.
- Access to advanced geospatial information surrounding coastal regions is critical for development within the United States.
- More than half of the U.S. population currently lives on or near a coast and many more are expected to move to these areas in the next 10 years.
- U.S. coastal counties average triple the national average of people per square mile.
- Coastal counties issue more construction permits of various types per day than similar non-coastal counties.
- More than half the U.S. economic productivity is located in coastal areas.
- Highly advanced geospatial and remote sensing data play a large role in various areas of the decision making and management in coastal zones.

Section 3. Definitions.

This section would define the terms “coastal region”, “coastal State”, “Federal Geographic Data Committee”, “remote sensing and other geospatial”, and “Secretary”.

Section 4. Establishment of the Digital Coast.

This section would establish a program that utilizes geospatial data, decision support, and best practices to address coastal management issues. The Secretary would ensure that the program provides data integration, development tools, training, and documentation archived on the Digital Coast website through NOAA and that this information is readily available to and in compliance with Federal Geographic Data Committees.

The Secretary shall coordinate with Federal, State, and local coastal managers and decision makers, including various Federal agencies and committees regarding various coastal activities and issues. As the Secretary considers it necessary to establish standards and protocols, the Secretary shall assure the interoperability of remote sensing and geospatial data to all users of the information within specified groups. The Secretary shall also coordinate and provide assistance to the Federal Geographic Data Committee and develop and maintain best practices documents to be shared with the U.S. Geological Survey, Corps of Engineers, and other various Federal agencies.

In order to maximize the use of remote sensing and geospatial data, the Secretary shall prioritize mitigating the gaps and needs

in data filing for underserved coastal areas, support the continued efforts to coordinate the acquisition and integration of crucial data sets needed for coastal management including specified areas, and integrate this data with other data in order to benefit the broadest range of individuals impacted.

The Secretary shall engage in specified financial agreements for the operation and growth of the program and assess and collect fees for designated activities that advance the purpose of the program. The fees may not exceed the sum of the total cost of the specified activity including designated expenses and shall be used for only those explicit activities and expenses.

The Secretary may establish publicly available tools for specified tracking and data collection. There shall be authorized \$4 million per year for fiscal year 2020–2024.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee states that the bill as reported would make no change to existing law.

