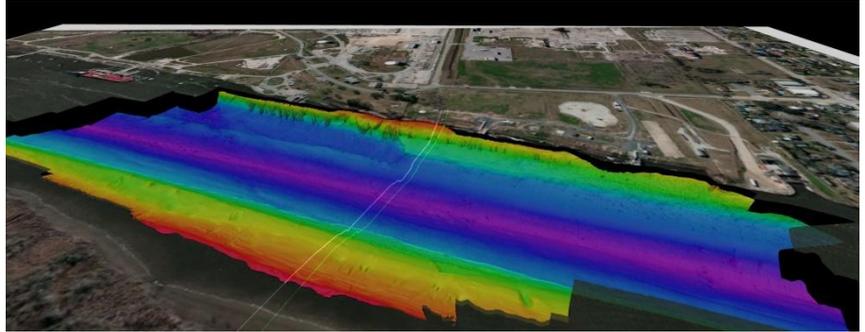


Digital Coast Act: Authorizing a Constituent-Driven Program to Collect, Integrate, and Distribute Coastal Resource Management Data and Information

Coastal watershed counties were home to 163.8 million Americans in 2010, approximately 52% of the United States population. This number is expected to increase by more than 15 million by 2020. Of the supporting national infrastructure, significant percentages of interstates, arterials, airports, and rail lines are vulnerable to storm surge from extreme events. Over half of the Nation's economic productivity is located within coastal zones. Balancing economic development with ecological management requires accurate data and integrated information that enable coastal communities to address many coastal and emergency management issues.

NOAA's Digital Coast project is designed to meet this need. The Digital Coast is providing a constituent-driven, information resource that enables access to critical data, decision support tools, training, and best practices for integrating geospatial information in support of policy priorities. These priorities are set by such stakeholder groups as the American Planning Association, the National Association of Counties, the Association of State Floodplain Managers, the National Estuarine Research



Reserve Association, the National States Geographic Information Council, The Nature Conservancy, the Urban Land Institute, and the Coastal States Organization. NOAA leads this consortium on a mission to improve coastal economies and ecological wealth by helping communities address their challenges with just, cost-effective, and participatory solutions.

In 2009, Congress enacted Public Law 111-11 creating an integrated oceans and coastal mapping (IOCM) program. This language required NOAA to develop a plan to acquire, disseminate, establish standards and provide services in connection with various types of geospatial data. Although this language is a step in the right direction, further legislation is needed to truly satisfy the robust concept of a "Digital Coast." The Digital Coast provides an opportunity to help America's fragile oceans, coasts and shorelines by addressing issues raised by the U.S. Oceans Commission, the Pew Commission, as well as several NAS reports, all of which have highlighted the needed geospatial data for America's coasts, harbors and ports, shoreline and ocean resources critical to our nation's most basic activities. The Digital Coast project is a critical mechanism to meet many of these goals by fostering coordination of multiple agencies (federal, state, and local) and other stakeholders; thus, reducing taxpayer waste while maximizing the return on investment.

Representatives Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD) and Don Young (R-AK) introduced H.R. 1382, the "Digital Coast Act" to authorize the Secretary of Commerce, through NOAA, to establish a constituent-driven program that collects priority coastal geospatial data and supports an information platform capable of efficiently integrating coastal data with decision support tools, training, and best practices to inform and improve local, state, regional, and federal capacities to manage coastal regions.

MAPPS strongly believes H.R. 1382 will elevate a successful Digital Coast project to an authorized program. It will: 1) work with stakeholders to identify geospatial priorities; 2) improve coordination of coastal mapping and management activities; 3) use standards and standardized methods for data acquisition, processing, and distribution to ensure broadest utility of data; 4) promote best practices when applying geospatial data for coastal decision making; and 5) contract for the collection and creation of non-navigation feature data sets to include: shoreline change, satellite and aerial imagery, land use and land cover maps, benthic habitat mapping, terrestrial topography, shallow water bathymetry, and submerged aquatic vegetation. Contracting out with the private sector is fully consistent with NOAA's stated goal that "A vibrant private sector participating in the development and delivery of weather; water; and climate data, products, and services to the public is of value to the U.S. economy and environmental awareness. Through expanded partnerships with private sector and other enterprise partners, the potential exists to develop and market enhanced products and services to the Nation. NOAA is looking for partners to incite creative uses and innovative approaches that will tap the full potential of its data, spur economic growth, help more entrepreneurs launch businesses, and to create new jobs."

ACTION REQUESTED: MAPPS respectfully urges Representatives to cosponsor the Digital Coast Act with Representatives Ruppersberger and Young. To become a cosponsor, contact Walter Gonzales in Representative Ruppersberger's office at 5-3061, or Erik Elam in Representative Young's office at 5-5765. MAPPS respectfully urges a Senator to sponsor companion legislation in the Senate. For more information, contact John Byrd, MAPPS Government Affairs Manager, at jbyrd@mapps.org or (703) 787-6996.