

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Do You Know the Status of America's Coasts?
Cosponsor the "Digital Coast Act" to Provide for an Accurate Geospatial Shoreline

Dear Colleague:

More than half of all Americans, 153 million people, currently live on or near a coast and an additional 12 million are expected to move to the coasts over the next decade. Coastal counties average 300 persons per square mile, compared with the national average of 98. In recent years, more than 1,540 permits for construction of single-family homes were issued in coastal counties on a daily basis, combined with other commercial, retail and institutional development to support this population. Yet despite this population density and economic development, much of the 95,000 miles of U.S. shoreline does not have current, accurate maps and geospatial information; moreover, much of what does exist pre-dates the 1970s. Of America's major ports, harbors and shipping areas, there is a 26,000 square nautical mile backlog that will take some 15 years to accurately update with current maps. Given the feverish pace of coastal growth and development, as well as natural and man-made phenomena that continually alter the characterization of the shoreline, the accuracy, consistency and currency of these coastal areas cannot be assured. Moreover, as Hurricane Katrina and the Asian tsunami demonstrated, the need for spatial data on our coasts is critical to emergency preparedness and emergency response.

The "Digital Coast Act" is needed to truly satisfy the robust concept of a "Digital Coast" as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). 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 surveying, charting, remote sensing and geospatial data for America's coasts, harbors and ports, shoreline and ocean resources critical to our nation's most basic activities.

This Digital Coast program within NOAA will also coordinate the pooling of resources from multiple agencies (Federal, state, and local) and other stakeholders to map the various needs once, and then utilize and apply the high-quality data and products numerous times, thus reducing taxpayer waste while maximizing the return on investment for all stakeholders.

This geospatially enabled program will work with stakeholders to identify geospatial priorities; improve coordination of coastal mapping and management activities; use standards and standardized methods for data acquisition, processing, and distribution to ensure broadest utility of data; and, promote best practices when applying geospatial data for coastal decision making; and 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.

To cosponsor or to obtain more information, contact Walter Gonzales in Rep. Ruppertsberger's office, walter.gonzales@mail.house.gov, 5-3061 or Erik Elam in Rep. Young's (AK) office, erik.elam@mail.house.gov, 5-5765.

Sincerely,

C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
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