

Enactment of the National Landslide Preparedness Act (P.L. 116-323)

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The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) estimates landslides kill an average of [25-50](#) people each year in the United States and account for [\\$1 billion-\\$2 billion](#) annually in damages. The National Landslide Preparedness Act (P.L. 116-323), signed into law on January 5, 2021, authorized a national landslide hazards reduction program and a complementary 3D elevation program within the [USGS](#). The USGS already operated, under its Organic Act of 1879 and other authorities, a [Landslide Hazards Program](#) (funding level of \$8.0 million in FY2021) within its [Natural Hazards Program](#) and a [3D Elevation Program](#) (funding level of \$46.0 million in FY2021) within its [National Geospatial Program](#). The new act broadens the USGS's current activities and requires coordination with other federal agencies.

Authorizing a Landslide Hazards Reduction Program

P.L. 116-323 directs the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary), acting through the Director of the USGS, to establish a program to identify risks and hazards from landslides, reduce losses, protect communities at risk, and improve communication and emergency preparedness. The act requires the program to map and assess landslide hazards; respond to landslide events; coordinate with nonfederal entities to identify regional and local priorities; and develop and implement landslide hazard guidelines for geologists, engineers, emergency managers, and land-use decisionmakers.

Prior to enactment of P.L. 116-323 (H.R. 8810), the 116th Congress considered legislation with the same title: the House passed H.R. 1261 on June 3, 2019, and the Senate passed S. 529 on July 30, 2020. These bills differed from each other and from H.R. 8810 on various provisions, such as those related to reporting, authorization of appropriations, and technical terminology.

Managing the Program

Section 3 of the act structures the program with elements roughly parallel to the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program ([NEHRP](#); P.L. 115-307). An interagency committee chaired by the Department of the Interior (DOI) is to oversee and coordinate the landslide program and to support the development and execution of a national strategy for landslide hazards and risk reduction. The national strategy is to include an interagency plan for carrying out the national strategy.

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Advisory Committee

The act establishes an advisory committee on landslides to provide advice and recommendations to the interagency committee on implementing the program. The committee is to include members from states, territories, Indian tribes, research and academic institutions, industry standards development organizations, and emergency management agencies.

Data, Early Warning, and Emergency Response

Pursuant to the act, the program is to develop a publicly accessible national landslide hazards database. It also is to develop planning and risk-reduction guidance, maps, tools, and training materials for nonfederal governments and decisionmakers to assist their efforts in reducing landslide risks. The act directs the Secretary, in coordination with the Secretaries of Commerce and of Homeland Security, to expand the early warning system for flash floods and debris flows, particularly for increased risk following wildfires. In addition, the program is to establish emergency response procedures for rapid deployment of federal assets to areas affected by a landslide event.

Cooperative Grants and Authorization of Appropriations

Section 3 authorizes landslide-related grant programs. DOI, acting through the USGS, is to administer a cooperative grant program, available to nonfederal governments for landslide research, mapping, assessment, and data collection. The cooperative grant program is to prioritize projects that would achieve the greatest hazard-risk reduction, reflect goals of the national strategy, and have a minimum 50% nonfederal cost share. The National Science Foundation is to administer a separate research grant program to fund studies reflecting the goals and priorities of the national strategy.

The act authorizes \$37 million annually from FY2021 through FY2024 for the landslide hazards reduction program.

Authorizing a 3D Elevation Program

Section 5 of the act authorizes a three-dimensional (3D) elevation program that could be viewed as complementary to, and providing data that would be important for, the landslide hazards reduction program authorized in Section 3. The act defines 3D elevation data as “3D, high-resolution data obtained using [LiDAR](#), [IfSAR](#), or other methods over the United States.” Section 5 authorizes what is currently an [initiative](#) at the USGS. High-quality, precise, and accurate elevation data generally are considered important to better understand landslide hazards, flood hazards, and changes to the Earth’s land surface, such as land subsidence from groundwater pumping.

The act establishes a program with three broad goals:

1. Provide 3D elevation data coverage for the United States
2. Coordinate and facilitate the collection, dissemination, and use of 3D elevation data among federal agencies and nonfederal entities
3. Produce standard, publicly accessible 3D elevation products

To achieve these goals, the act enables the use of cooperative agreements and promotes the development and maintenance of spatial data infrastructure; the development of standards and guidelines; and the identification, assessment, and adoption of emerging technology.

Managing and Advising the Program

Similar to the landslide program and NEHRP, the act authorizes an interagency coordinating committee, chaired by the Secretary. The coordinating committee is to develop a strategic plan and a management plan to implement the strategic plan.

Section 5 creates a subcommittee of the [National Geospatial Advisory Committee](#), an entity authorized under the [National Geospatial Data Act of 2018](#) (P.L. 115-307), to advise the 3D elevation program interagency coordinating committee. The advisory committee is to assess trends in 3D data collection and in science and technology and to assess management, implementation, and activities of the 3D elevation program.

Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Authorization of Appropriations

The act authorizes the 3D elevation program to make grants and enter into cooperative agreements with other federal agencies, as well as with nonfederal governments, institutions of higher education, nonprofit research organizations, and other organizations. The objective is to improve nationwide coverage of 3D elevation data, and the agreements are to require making data publicly available and interoperable with other federal datasets, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior.

The act authorizes \$40 million annually from FY2021 through FY2024 for the 3D elevation program.

Author Information

Anna E. Normand
Analyst in Natural Resources Policy

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