

SINKHOLE MAPPING ACT OF 2019

—
JUNE 4, 2020.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of
the Union and ordered to be printed
—

Mr. GRIJALVA, from the Committee on Natural Resources,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 496]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Natural Resources, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 496) to direct the Director of the United States Geological Survey to establish a program to map zones that are at greater risk of sinkhole formation, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of H.R. 496 is to direct the Director of the United States Geological Survey to establish a program to map zones that are at greater risk of sinkhole formation, and for other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

Sinkholes are a natural hazard common in areas underlain by limestone, a type of rock easily dissolved by water, and frequently occur in Florida, Texas, Alabama, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.¹ The United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimates that sinkhole damages cost on average at least \$300 million annually.² However, because there is no comprehensive database for sinkholes in the United States, there is no reliable data on how many occur each year.

¹ See generally Compiled by James Hercher, *Sinkhole Science Is Actually Quite Simple*, PBS NEWSHOUR: EXTRA (Apr. 8, 2013), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/2013/04/sinkhole-science-is-actually-quite-simple/>.

² *How Much Does Sinkhole Damage Cost Each Year in the United States?*, U.S.G.S., <https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/how-much-does-sinkhole-damage-cost-each-year-united-states> (last visited May 7, 2020).

USGS runs a number of Natural Hazard programs that coordinate long-term planning, disaster response, and emergency management for coastal and marine hazards, earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes, and floods. No program currently exists for sinkholes.³

In June of 2019, the House of Representatives passed the National Landslide Preparedness Act (H.R. 1261), which bolsters USGS’s current Landslide Hazards Program and authorizes the existing national 3D elevation program (3DEP) to update and produce standard, publicly accessible 3D elevation data for the United States. The 3DEP program would help identify geologic and environmental hazards like sinkholes, in addition to assessing landslide hazards, but that bill does not create a specific sinkholes hazard program.⁴

H.R. 496 creates a program within USGS to study the mechanisms that cause sinkholes, map the zones at highest risk of sinkhole formation, and build a website displaying the maps developed in order to better inform community planners and emergency managers.

COMMITTEE ACTION

H.R. 496 was introduced on January 11, 2019, by Representative Darren Soto (D–FL). The bill was referred solely to the Committee on Natural Resources, and within the Committee to the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources. On September 19, 2019, the Subcommittee held a hearing on the bill. On January 15, 2020, the Natural Resources Committee met to consider the bill. The Subcommittee was discharged by unanimous consent. No amendments were offered, and the bill was adopted and ordered favorably reported to the House of Representatives by unanimous consent.

HEARINGS

For the purposes of section 103(i) of H. Res. 6 of the 116th Congress—the following hearing was used to develop or consider H.R. 496: legislative hearing by the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held on September 19, 2019.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

This section provides the short title of the bill, the “Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2019.”

Section 2. Sinkhole Hazard Identification

This section directs USGS to establish a program to study the short-term and long-term mechanisms that cause sinkholes, including extreme weather events, prolonged droughts causing shifts in water management practices, aquifer depletion, and other major changes in water use; and develop maps depicting zones at greater risk of sinkhole formation. This section requires the USGS Direc-

³*Natural Hazards Programs*, U.S.G.S., <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/natural-hazards/programs> (last visited May 7, 2020).

⁴*See generally* H.R. REP. NO. 116–99 (2019), <https://www.congress.gov/116/crpt/hrpt99/CRPT-116hrpt99.pdf>.

tor, at least once in each five-year period, to assess the need to revise and update these maps.

This section also directs USGS to establish a public website that displays these maps and other relevant information for use by community planners and emergency managers.

The Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2019 does not provide USGS additional funding to establish this program.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Natural Resources' oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ACT

1. *Cost of Legislation and the Congressional Budget Act.* With respect to the requirements of clause 3(c)(2) and (3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and sections 308(a) and 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has received the following estimate for the bill from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, March 10, 2020.

Hon. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA,
*Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for H.R. 496, the Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2019.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Robert Reese.

Sincerely,

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director.

Enclosure.

H.R. 496, Sinkhole Mapping Act of 2019			
As ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources on January 15, 2020			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2020	2020-2025	2020-2030
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	0
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	*	4	not estimated
Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	No	Mandate Effects	
Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2031?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No
* = between zero and \$500,000.			

H.R. 496 would direct the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to study the causes of sinkholes and to develop maps depicting the areas most at risk of developing sinkholes. The bill also would require the USGS to review those maps every five years, update them as necessary, and publish them online.

Using information from USGS about the cost of completing similar mapping activities and accounting for additional costs associated with creating and maintaining a public website and database for those maps and other information, CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 496 would cost \$4 million over the 2020–2025 period. Such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

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

2. *General Performance Goals and Objectives.* As required by clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII, the general performance goals and objectives of this bill are to direct the Director of the United States Geological Survey to establish a program to map zones that are at greater risk of sinkhole formation.

EARMARK STATEMENT

This bill does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined under clause 9(e), 9(f), and 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

UNFUNDED MANDATES REFORM ACT STATEMENT

This bill contains no unfunded mandates.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

This bill does not establish or reauthorize a program of the federal government known to be duplicative of another program.

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

PREEMPTION OF STATE, LOCAL, OR TRIBAL LAW

Any preemptive effect of this bill over state, local, or tribal law is intended to be consistent with the bill's purposes and text and the Supremacy Clause of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

If enacted, this bill would make no changes to existing law.

SUPPLEMENTAL, MINORITY, ADDITIONAL, OR DISSENTING VIEWS

None.