

Statement of Representative Suzan K. DelBene
House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing on H.R. 7003
Wednesday, January 31, 2024

I want to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for holding this important hearing and inviting me to provide testimony on H.R. 7003, my legislation to reauthorize the National Landslide Preparedness Act.

Landslides kill 20 to 50 people and cause between \$1.6 and \$3.2 billion in damage each year. Unfortunately, this is a reality that folks back in my district know all too well.

Nearly 10 years ago, Washington experienced one of its worst natural disasters. In a matter of seconds, a tragic landslide near Oso, Washington killed 43 people, destroyed over 40 homes, and severely damaged public infrastructure and private property. That day forever changed the people of Oso, Darrington, Arlington, and the Stillaguamish and Sauk-Suiattle Tribes, and they are still living with its scars today.

I remember going to Oso right after the disaster to support families who had lost loved ones and their homes. Our first responders were the true heroes that day. They spent days trying to save lives and recover loved ones. These were some of the most heartbreaking days of my time in Congress – to see so much devastation in this close-knit community.

Following that landslide and that tragedy, I introduced in 2016 the National Landslide Preparedness Act. As the Oso landslide demonstrated, simply sending aid after a tragic natural disaster is insufficient. We need to do more to invest in programs and research efforts to prevent future natural disasters from becoming national tragedies. I worked tirelessly to get the National Landslide Preparedness Act signed into law in 2021 with the support of many of you in the room today.

This law established a National Landslide Hazards Reduction Program through the U.S. Geological Survey to better identify and understand landslide risks, protect communities, save lives and property, and help improve emergency preparedness. It also authorized the 3D Elevation Program, which in the past few years has made incredible strides to update and coordinate the collection of enhanced, high-resolution topographical data across the country.

In addition to helping communities plan for and respond to natural hazards, this data is being used to improve public safety, national security, infrastructure, agriculture, and natural resource management. Through this law, significant progress has been made in landslide science, allowing communities to be better prepared for when landslides do occur.

In recent years, we have seen dramatic increases in extreme weather events. We need to do everything in our power to make sure that communities across the country continue to have the tools at their disposal to be prepared.

Currently, the programs authorized by the National Landslide Preparedness Act will expire on September 30 of this year. In the three years since the enactment, USGS and their partners have made incredible strides, and we must keep building on their progress.

I introduced H.R. 7003 along with Representatives Schrier, Gluesenkamp Perez, and most of the Washington delegation to reauthorize these programs through 2028. This bill has bipartisan and bicameral support. Senators Cantwell and Murkowski will be leading the effort in the Senate.

Every state across the country faces landslide risks, which is why we must reauthorize these critical programs. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on the need to reauthorize the National Landslide Preparedness Act.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to enter written testimony from Washington's State Geologist Casey Hanell, and Snohomish County's Senior Advisor on Resilience, Jason Bierrmann, and the Cowlitz County commissioners into the record.