

TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
May 31, 2018

Let's Talk About Puerto Rico

In contrast to last week's edition, this time, we'll provide the [cute pictures](#) up front. Everyone good?

Okay. Let's crack into it. Puerto Rico, an island inhabited by [hardworking Americans](#), is still not where it needs to be almost a year after the territory was lambasted by Hurricane Maria, and we are still learning more every day about the scope of the destruction on the island. A recent [study](#) from Harvard has found that upwards of 4,600 people have died as a direct result of the hurricane. To put that in perspective, that is twice the number of people who died in Hurricane Katrina. And, the storm caused mass destruction to the rainforest ([which is bouncing back a little easier](#)). A scholar who visited the island and met with the officials handling the response [raised the question](#) better than we ever could: "So who gets the credit now, in post-Maria Puerto Rico, for the longest blackout in U.S. history, for the unfathomable pain and suffering experienced by 3.4 million U.S. citizens for weeks and months on end, for the families left with a daily challenge of finding safe drinking water, for the uncountable loss of life, and hope?"

Many on the island ([and elsewhere](#)) [point to FEMA](#) for not making the inroads needed. Others [blame the President](#) for prioritizing Texas' recovery from Harvey over Puerto Rico. Some point to Puerto Rico's pre-existing lack of infrastructure and debt crisis. Frankly, however, fault doesn't really matter at this point. As we cruise into what is expected to be a [busy hurricane season](#) starting this week, it is clear that the investments into Puerto Rico's infrastructure [may not cut it](#) when they are hit by the next storm. Further, the storm has resulted in substantial resettlement by Puerto Ricans, with [14% of the island's population](#) anticipated to relocate by 2019. Needless to say, this will only exacerbate their financial difficulties, and make rebuilding and resisting extreme weather events even more difficult. While Congress took steps last week to [close a legal loophole](#) that was a big reason that Puerto Rico's financial situation is so bad, and island emergency management is prepping as though there will be "[a catastrophic event](#)", there is definitely more that we can, and should, be doing to help our fellow Americans. This includes offering donations to the non-profit organizations that support disaster relief and are (still) working tirelessly in Puerto Rico to rebuild, supporting the economy by making [trips to the island](#) (seriously, it's worth it for the food and the beaches alone), and keeping a close eye on how the federal government is preparing its agencies to help not only the 48 contiguous states, but our off-coast citizens, as well.

The **Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy** is a program of the Tulane University Law School.

The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and stewardship of water.

Coming up:

[World Water Week](#)

August 26-31, 2018

Stockholm, Sweden

Water jobs:

[Senior Program Officer, Corporate Water Stewardship](#)

WWF

Washington, DC

[Associate Staff Attorney](#)

Riverkeeper

Ossining, NY

[Director – Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed](#)

New Jersey Audubon

Trenton, NJ

[Associate General Counsel](#)

Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority

San Antonio, TX

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We Get By With a [Little Help From Our Friends](#) - Scientists!

Recently, [scientists](#) have discovered how to [separate](#) out the two different forms of water, and that they behave quite differently. They also [found out](#) that these particles actually [coordinate their movements](#), performing together in a [little dance](#). And, a scientist from LSU created a mobile ion contaminant sensor, called [MoboSens](#), which could help alleviate the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico by allowing for better tracking of water quality throughout the Mississippi River Basin. To all our scientist friends: thanks, we couldn't do it without you!

Water Woes and WRDA Goes

You've all heard us go on about the [conflict](#) over shared water among Georgia, Florida, and Alabama, which came before a special master at the Supreme Court this past January. But, you've probably forgotten about another Southern battle over water – the one between Mississippi and Tennessee. Originally filed in 2005, Mississippi claims that Memphis is stealing groundwater from them; however, Tennessee disagrees. Now, the states are [going before](#) their own special master hearing before the Supremes themselves hear their woes. Stay tuned and have the [battered popcorn](#) ready – January 2019 is when the special master's hearing goes down.

In other news, the Water Resources Development Act, or WRDA, has [passed](#) through both the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure and Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works. WRDA is the bill that supports all water related infrastructure – ports, levees, waterways, dams, you name it. If passed when moved to a vote on the floors of both houses, it would support the next two years of water resource management across the country. We've not yet taken a deep dive into either the House or Senate version here at Chateau D'Eau, but if there's something in either bill we should be on the [lookout](#) for, we'd love a [heads up](#).