

FEMA Holds its First Water Summit

Release Date: April 25, 2023

During the event, solutions to address water access throughout the island will be presented

San Juan, Puerto Rico –Among the most critical impacts of Hurricane Maria was damage related to water resources. Likewise, landslides caused or aggravated some of that damage, something that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will address during its first Water Symposium scheduled for Thursday, April 27.

The main topic of the event, entitled Recovery Strategies for Community Access to Drinking Water and Landslide Mitigation Strategies after Hurricane Maria, will focus on the sedimentation caused by landslides and the risk this poses to thousands of communities. This first virtual session will be from 1:00-3:30 p.m. and is open to the general public through the following link: <https://bit.ly/3MTf959>.

The symposium is divided into two sessions: problem description and existing and proposed remediation solutions. The order of the topics is designed to provide participants with a resilient approach to water issues according to the watershed cycle, that is, from the top of the mountain to the ocean or from the downspout to the source.

“For FEMA, it is a priority to incorporate strategies that consider equity and climate change impacts throughout the recovery process. As an island, our communities are increasingly threatened by the effects of global warming, with rising sea levels, increased flooding, droughts and more intense weather events. The agency already has recovery projects and strategies that incorporate climate adaptation with a community-wide focus. Our goal is to share information on how these strategies will strengthen long-term resilience,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator Jose G. Baquero.

During the conference, FEMA will present recovery projects that promote water access for communities and how they incorporate nature-based solutions to reduce landslides and long-term maintenance costs. One of the examples the



FEMA

Page 1 of 3

agency will showcase is the community aqueduct in the Los Diaz Sector in San Lorenzo. The focus will be on how the aqueduct was rebuilt with community participation and bioengineering techniques to ensure access to the main water source. Today, the aqueduct provides this essential resource to over 80 families.

In addition to FEMA's participation, one of the speakers at this session will be University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez Campus (RUM) Geology Professor Stephen Hughes. The professor - and director of the SLIDES-PR project - will present the landslide problems that worsened after Hurricane Maria and how SLIDES-PR has collaborated with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop an island-wide landslide monitoring network. Hughes will also present strategies to address these challenges in communities to reduce the amount of sediment that reaches reservoirs and shorelines.

The SLIDES-PR project involves about 15 undergraduate and graduate students and created a digital catalog of over 70,000 landslides that occurred after Hurricane Maria. With this information, they developed a modern, high-resolution map to illustrate the susceptibility to future landslides due to heavy rains throughout the island. This information is available to the public [here](#).

Part of the project's mission is to share these results to help determine the short- and long-term effects of sedimentation from landslides. They also seek to help understand and forecast how future extreme events could impact the environment and society.

For Anishka M. Ruiz Perea and Tania Figueroa Colón, students participating in the project, the most rewarding aspect has been sharing the information with the public. "That work of taking the message to the people and communicating directly with them - because not everyone has social networks - is something that the SLIDES PR outreach team has been achieving little by little," said Figueroa Colón.

The Symposium comprises a series of virtual and in-person events to promote a community discussion on resilient recovery in the face of climate change. The next two virtual sessions will take place on June 30 and August 21. Pending topics include sedimentation and flooding; and flooding, water quality, and loss of natural coastal barriers. The symposium will conclude with the topic of water resource management in the face of climate change at an event to be held on October 20, 2023.



For more information about Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 y recovery.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and [Twitter @COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).



FEMA