

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina Office of the Governor

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GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES NEW LANDSLIDE HAZARD MAPS FOR WESTERN N.C.

RALEIGH – Gov. Mike Easley today announced the first in a series of county maps to enable communities to evaluate and reduce the risks of building homes and other structures in landslide-prone areas of the North Carolina mountains. The Geological Survey section of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources developed the landslide hazard maps for Macon County and will complete maps for five other mountain counties during the next two years.

“These maps will show which areas are prone to landslides and that will help developers, county officials and residents decide where to safely build homes, roads and other structures,” said Easley. “The natural beauty of the western area of our state is attracting more people and businesses and we want to make sure that growth is compatible with the protection of our priceless natural heritage, the environment and public safety.”

The Macon County maps show where landslides have occurred, where they might start and where they might go once they start. Landslide hazard maps will be available for Buncombe and Watauga counties by next summer. Maps for Haywood, Henderson and Jackson counties are expected to be available in 2008.

The three-year Landslide Hazard Mapping Program was funded with \$1.3 million from the Hurricane Recovery Act of 2005. In February 2005 Easley signed the Hurricane Recovery Act to provide disaster assistance to people, businesses and public agencies that suffered damage from one or more of the six hurricanes that struck North Carolina in 2004.

There are six geologists assigned to work on the project. They have mapped the locations of both recent and old landslides recognized by deposits of rock, sand and clay. The geologists used several state-of-the-art technologies, including topographic data from a system called “Light Detecting and Ranging” that uses laser beams to more accurately calculate distances. They also used computer modeling, satellite and aerial photography, and data from geographic information and global positioning systems.

On Sept. 16, 2004, heavy rains from Hurricane Ivan triggered a landslide that carried massive amounts of debris more than two miles, killing five people and destroying 16 homes in the Peeks Creek community of Macon County. Ivan, and Hurricane Frances a week earlier, started more than 140 other landslides throughout western North Carolina.

Geologists also are compiling a database of modern and prehistoric landslides for the western part of the state. So far, geologists have put together a list of more than 2,000 landslides that have occurred in mountain and Piedmont counties.

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Geologists are providing their data to county officials, planners, developers, residents and people who work with emergency management agencies. As a part of their work, a 23-page booklet titled “When the Ground Moves: A Citizen’s Guide To Geologic Hazards in North Carolina,” provides information about landslides, abandoned mines, sinkholes, flooding and other developments.

To offset costs of production, there is a fee for the maps and booklet. Copies of the Macon County 3-map series for \$28 and the booklet for \$5 are, available by calling the N.C. Geological Survey sales office at (919) 715-9718. For additional information, go online to www.geology.enr.state.nc.us.

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