

National Flood Insurance Program Borrowing Authority

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This Insight evaluates the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) borrowing authority to receive loans from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, particularly in the context of major floods, and discusses the current financial situation of the NFIP as it pays claims from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

NFIP Funding

[Funding for the NFIP](#) is primarily maintained in an authorized account called the [National Flood Insurance Fund](#) (NFIF). Generally, the NFIP has been funded from receipts from the premiums of flood insurance policies, including fees and surcharges; [direct annual appropriations for specific costs of the NFIP](#) (currently only flood mapping); and borrowing from the Treasury when the balance of the NFIF has been insufficient to pay the NFIP's obligations (e.g., insurance claims). [Key provisions](#) of the NFIP were extended from September 30, 2017, through until December 8, 2017 (Section 130 of [P.L. 115-56](#)), extended again until December 22, 2017 ([P.L. 115-90](#)), and again until January 19, 2018 ([P.L. 115-96](#)). The NFIP lapsed between January 20 and January 22, 2018, and received a fourth short-term reauthorization until February 8, 2018 ([P.L. 115-120](#)). The NFIP lapsed again for approximately eight hours during a brief government shut-down in the early morning of February 9, 2018, and was then reauthorized until March 23, 2018 ([P.L. 115-123](#)). However, these extensions did not increase the NFIP's borrowing limit or provide additional funds to the NFIP.

NFIP Borrowing Authority

The NFIP was not designed to retain funding to cover claims for truly extreme events; instead, the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 allows the program to [borrow money from the Treasury](#) for such events. For most of the NFIP's history, the program has generally been able to cover its costs, borrowing relatively small amounts from the Treasury to pay claims, and then repaying the loans with interest. [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#) show NFIP borrowing, repayments, and debt from 1981 to 2017. Comparable figures are not available before 1980. When the NFIP was first established, the [borrowing limit was \\$250 million](#). In 1973, the borrowing limit was [increased to \\$500 million, or \\$1 billion with the approval of the President](#). The borrowing limit was [increased to \\$1.5 billion](#) in 1996; however, borrowing at that level was not required prior to 2005. The largest debt was \$917 million in 1997, which was steadily reduced to zero by the end of FY2003. However, Congress increased the level of borrowing to pay claims in the aftermath of the [2005 hurricane season](#) (particularly Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma). Congress [increased the borrowing limit to \\$18.5 billion](#) in November 2005, and further [increased the borrowing limit to \\$20.775 billion](#) in March 2006. In July 2010, the borrowing limit was [decreased to \\$20.725 billion](#). In 2013, following Hurricane Sandy, Congress [increased the borrowing limit to the current \\$30.425 billion](#). The [Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012](#) established a reserve fund to cover future expenses, especially those from catastrophic disasters. Since the 2005 hurricane season, the NFIP has made six principal repayments totaling \$2.82 billion and has paid \$3.83 billion in interest. The program is currently paying [nearly \\$400 million annually in interest](#). In January 2017, the NFIP [borrowed \\$1.6 billion](#) due to losses in 2016 (the Louisiana floods and Hurricane Matthew) and anticipated programmatic activities, including debt repayments.

Table 1. NFIP Borrowing FY1980 to FY1998

(Nominal dollars)

Fiscal Year	Amount Borrowed	Amount Repaid	Cumulative Debt
1980	917,406,008	0	917,406,008
1981	164,614,526	624,970,099	457,050,435
1982	13,915,000	470,965,435	0
1983	50,000,000	0	50,000,000
1984	200,000,000	36,879,123	213,120,877
1985	0	213,120,877	0

1986	0	0	0
1987	0	0	0
1988	0	0	0
1989	0	0	0
1990	0	0	0
1991	0	0	0
1992	0	0	0
1993	0	0	0
1994	100,000,000	100,000,000	0
1995	265,000,000	265,000,000	0
1996	423,600,000	62,000,000	626,600,000
1997	530,000,000	239,600,000	917,000,000
1998	0	395,000,000	522,000,000

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by FEMA Congressional Affairs, November 20, 2017.

Table 2. NFIP Borrowing FY1999 to FY2017

(Nominal dollars)

Fiscal Year	Amount Borrowed	Amount Repaid	Cumulative Debt
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1999	400,000,000	381,000,000	541,000,000
2000	345,000,000	541,000,000	600,000,000
2001	600,000,000	345,000,000	600,000,000
2002	50,000,000	640,000,000	10,000,000
2003	0	10,000,000	0
2004	0	0	0
2005	300,000,000	75,000,000	225,000,000
2006	16,600,000,000	0	16,885,000,000
2007	650,000,000	0	17,735,000,000
2008	50,000,000	225,000,000	17,360,000,000
2009	1,987,988,421	347,988,421	19,000,000,000
2010	0	500,000,000	18,500,000,000
2011	0	750,000,000	17,750,000,000
2012	0	0	17,750,000,000
2013	6,250,000,000	0	24,000,000,000
2014	0	1,000,000,000	23,000,000,000
2015	0	0	23,000,000,000

2016	0	0	23,000,000,000
2017	13,525,000,000	16,000,000,000 ^a	20,525,000,000

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by FEMA Congressional Affairs, November 20, 2017.

a. The \$16 billion of debt was cancelled rather than repaid ([P.L. 115-72](#), Title III, §308).

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria

On September 22, 2017, FEMA borrowed the remaining \$5.825 billion from the Treasury, reaching the NFIP's authorized borrowing limit of \$30.425 billion. On October 26, 2017, [\\$16 billion of NFIP debt was cancelled](#) to make it possible for the program to pay claims for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. This represents the first time that NFIP debt has been cancelled, although Congress appropriated funds between 1980 and 1985 to repay NFIP debt. FEMA borrowed another \$6.1 billion on November 9, 2017, to fund estimated 2017 losses, including those incurred by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria and anticipated programmatic activities, bringing the debt up to \$20.525 billion. The NFIP currently has \$9.9 billion of remaining borrowing authority.

The funds currently available to the NFIP do not include additional resources that a recent [reinsurance contract](#) will provide. FEMA paid a \$150 million premium to purchase \$1.042 billion of reinsurance. The contract is structured to pay 26% of the losses between \$4 billion and \$8 billion arising from a single flooding event. Although it is too early to estimate the total costs associated with Hurricane Harvey or Hurricane Irma, FEMA has already paid over \$8.2 billion in claims for Hurricane Harvey, triggering the 2017 reinsurance.