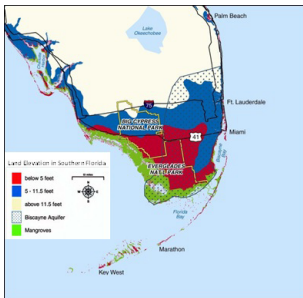


The *NY Times* has run a series of articles in the past few days dealing with disaster issues. Taken together, they highlight the urgency of government action to protect populations in harm's way.



Elevations and Aquifer Locations

[One article](#) dealt generally with the threat posed by sea level rise. Miami is something of a poster-child for these problems, given its low elevation, proximity to the sea, and exposure to hurricane threats. But it's far from the only place in the world facing serious problems.

Sometimes the threat isn't the obvious one of coastal incursion. For instance, in Miami, the flood threat comes as much from below as above, because the city is built on highly porous limestone:

"You're not necessarily getting water pouring up over a barrier — instead, it's seeping through the limestone and coming up through drains," said Leonard Berry, co-director of the Climate Change Initiative at Florida Atlantic University. "It's already happening. And it's not very pleasant."



Richard Epstein

That seems to be an unusual situation, but there are many places where a key threat involves salt water intrusion into groundwater, threatening agricultural and drinking water

sources.

A [second article](#) dealt with the clash between government protection and property rights in high risk zones. It's easy to complain that the government should have kept people out of harm's way. But when it tries to do so, it is often met by claims that it has violated the Constitution. Those claims should have their limits. One of the most notable parts of the article involved Richard Epstein, the intellectual father of the property rights movement. Speaking of the recent Omo landslide, Epstein said:

The case is a no-brainer in favor of extensive government regulation in order to protect against imminent perils to life and health. I'm a property guy, but I'm not a madman.

Although not mentioned in the article, it's also noteworthy that Epstein is a supporter of the public trust doctrine. His views are more complex than many people (probably including many of his would-be followers) realize.



A Women Standing on the Former Site of Her House (NY Times)

The [third article](#) was about Bangladesh, with its 160 million people packed into an area the size of New York State. Bangladesh is at the top of the list of countries with major populations in peril from sea level rise. Much of the country is close to sea level. The *Times* reports that "'Scientists expect rising sea levels to submerge 17 percent of Bangladesh's land and displace 18 million people in the next 40 years.'"