



## Federal Agencies and Locals Work Together to Save Dam

DOI | October 6, 2017

Interior employees were on a mission. John Parks and Dennis Rivera of the U.S. Geological Survey, along with John Holmes of the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and two U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees were on their way to the Lago Guajataca Dam in northwestern Puerto Rico to mount a camera to track the dam's condition.

The tremendous volume of rainfall from Hurricane Maria severely damaged the spillway of the earthen dam. A failure could put over 70,000 people in danger. The U.S. Geological Survey, the US Army Corp of Engineers, and the National Weather Service developed the plan together for the dam.

After a long drive, the team arrived at the west bank of the dam but couldn't find a good location for the camera near the spillway. Expanding their search, they spotted a private home on the opposite bank with a perfect view of the dam and spillway. A washed out road forced the team to drive another two hours around the lake to get to the house.



Upon arrival to the home, the homeowner, Mr. Juan Antonio (Tony) Nieves and his wife Maria welcomed the team and were extremely accommodating while they mounted the equipment. "Juan Antonio and his wife Maria were wonderful," said Holmes. "In typical Puerto Rican form, they offered us food and drink and opened the house for us to use"

The USGS crew set up the camera on a porch overlooking the dam. As work proceeded, U.S. Marine Corps heavy lift helicopters thundered overhead to drop concrete barriers at the base of the failing spillway in an attempt to slow erosion from an uncontrolled flow of water.

The team returned the following day to complete the setup, bringing some gas and food for the family. In addition, USGS personnel shared information on resources from Salvation Army for the Nieves' newborn child.

A second camera will be installed in the coming days with cooperation from Jim McGettigan of the National Park Service and [EarthCam, Inc.](#), who donated the camera and services in support of the team's efforts. The BLM is contributing equipment to increase network speed so partners can view the dam as close to real time as possible.

This is truly a combined effort of many agencies and organizations to provide enhanced situational awareness of the status of the Lago Guajataca dam and give as much warning as possible to downstream residents should the worst happen.

The camera now provides round-the-clock monitoring as the effort to save the dam continues. Parks, Rivera, Holmes and McGettigan, along with over 500 other Department of the Interior employees, are responding to the disaster of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.