



## THE COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES ACT:

# SAVING TAX DOLLARS, PROTECTING LIVES AND CONSERVING THE COASTAL ENVIRONMENT

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) was enacted by Congress in 1982 with only four dissenting votes, and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, who described the program as meeting “a national problem with less Federal involvement, not more.” President Reagan observed that:

“The Coastal Barrier Resources Act will not prohibit a property owner from building on his property, and it will not impose federally mandated duties on State or local governments. Instead, it simply adopts the sensible approach that risk associated with new private development in these sensitive areas should be borne by the private sector, not underwritten by the American taxpayer... It will save American taxpayers millions of dollars while, at the same time, taking a major step forward in the conservation of our magnificent coastal resources.”

The CBRA saves federal tax dollars by protecting sensitive coastal areas from Federal agency expenditures, which helps promote public safety and conserve economically important fisheries and wildlife habitat. The CBRA was expanded to include additional areas in 1990 with strong bipartisan support, and was last reauthorized in 2006.

## The Coastal Barrier Resources Act and System

### **The Coastal Barrier Resources Act has three objectives:**

- Reduce unwise federal expenditures.
- Protect fish, wildlife and other natural resources.
- Minimize the loss of human life from destructive storms and hurricanes.

With some exceptions, CBRA prohibits federal expenditures or financial assistance for new development on areas included in the CBRA System. Preventing

unwise federal expenditures for development on coastal areas has saved the taxpayer more than \$1.3 billion in federal expenditures, according to a 2002 analysis conducted for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The CBRA System includes 3.5 million acres of undeveloped land and associated aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast, Gulf of Mexico and Great Lakes. Barrier islands, beaches, wetlands, nearshore waters and

estuaries are included in the System.

There are two categories of areas included in the CBRA System: full System units where all federal subsidies are prohibited, and “Otherwise Protected Areas” (parks, refuges, national seashores) where only federal flood insurance is prohibited. About 1.5 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat are full System units, while about 1.8 million acres of land

and associated aquatic habitat are Otherwise Protected Areas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service transmitted maps to Congress in November 2016 that propose revisions to the CBRA System that would add 24,510 acres to it and would remove 396 acres that were added to the CBRA System in error. These maps await Congressional action.



A destroyed home in the aftermath of hurricane Matthew.

## THE CBRA SYSTEM SAVES LIVES, MONEY AND COASTAL RESOURCES

**The CBRA System promotes public safety.** Since CBRA was enacted, more than 50 hurricanes, including 17 major hurricanes, have struck the U.S., causing thousands of deaths. Roughly 39 percent of the U.S. population now lives in coastal counties, placing more people at risk from deadly storms. By removing taxpayer-funded subsidies for development in hazardous coastal areas, the CBRA promotes public safety.

**The CBRA System saves federal tax dollars.** The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is just one of the dozens of federal development programs that fund

coastal development. By prohibiting taxpayer-funded expenditures for development on storm-prone coastal areas, the CBRA System saves the federal taxpayer billions of dollars. With the National Flood Insurance Program currently nearly \$25 billion in debt, it's clear that prohibiting federal subsidies in storm-prone areas is good policy.

**The CBRA System protects economically-important coastal resources.** Coastal wetlands and estuaries included in the CBRA System along the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Great Lakes contribute to the nation's economically vital commercial fisheries.

In 2015, commercial fish landings in Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico states netted more than \$2.8 billion, while commercial fish landings in Great Lakes states contributed more than \$22 million to the economy. Coastal wetlands also help protect coastal communities from catastrophic storm damages. More than \$625 million in property damages were prevented by coastal wetlands in New York and New Jersey that buffered Hurricane Sandy's waves and storm damage. CBRA has saved more than \$1.3 billion since its creation in avoided federal expenditures.

**The CBRA System protects birds that are valued by the National Audubon Society's nearly one million members.** The National Audubon Society is a bipartisan conservation organization with half of its membership self-identifying as conservative to moderate politically. Motivated by concern over birds and the habitat they share with humans, National Audubon Society supports the CBRA System because it provides vitally important habitat to shorebirds on the marine and Great Lakes coasts.

## NEXT STEPS:

**Enact Fish and Wildlife Service approved changes to the CBRA System.** In November 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service transmitted to Congress proposed additions to and deletions from the CBRA System. These changes would save tax dollars, foster improved public safety, and help conserve economically vital coastal resources. These maps should be approved, as a package, by Congress.



**For more information contact:** Karen Hyun, Director of Water and Coastal Policy, National Audubon Society: [khyun@audubon.org](mailto:khyun@audubon.org)

**National Audubon Society**  
**1200 18th Street, NW, Suite 500**  
**Washington, DC 20036**  
**202.861.2242**  
**[audubon.org](http://audubon.org)**

### Photo Credits

Front: David Moynahan/Audubon Photography Awards. Back: Andrea Hedblom/Audubon Photography Awards