



THE COASTAL BARRIER RESOURCES ACT:

SAVING TAX DOLLARS, PROTECTING LIVES AND CONSERVING THE COASTAL ENVIRONMENT

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1982, who described it as meeting “a national problem with less Federal involvement, not more,” noting that the CBRA “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 restricting federal agency expenditures in sensitive coastal areas, which helps promote public safety and conserve economically important fisheries and wildlife habitat. The CBRA continues to have strong bipartisan support. In December 2018, President Trump signed into law bipartisan legislation that added 17,000 acres to the CBRA System, following on its expansion in 1990 by President Bush.

The CBRA System includes 3.5 million acres of undeveloped land and associated aquatic habitat along the Atlantic Coast, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands. Barrier islands, beaches, wetlands, nearshore waters and estuaries are included in the protective program.

The CBRA System has two categories of areas: 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 1.4 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat are full System units, while about 2.1 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat are Otherwise Protected Areas.

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act has three objectives:

1. Promote coastal resiliency by minimizing the loss of human life from destructive storms and hurricanes.
2. Reduce unwise federal expenditures.
3. Protect fish, wildlife and other natural resources.



THE CBRA SYSTEM SAVES LIVES, MONEY AND COASTAL RESOURCES

The CBRA System saves lives. Since CBRA was enacted, more than 50 hurricanes, including 17 major hurricanes, have struck the U.S., causing thousands of deaths. Nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population 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. With some exceptions, CBRA prohibits federal expenditures or financial assistance for new development on areas included in the CBRA System, which has saved the taxpayer roughly \$9.5 billion from 1989-2013, according to a 2019 economic study in the *Journal of Coastal Research*. The study examined just four federal programs, so the actual savings from CBRA are likely higher. The program is projected to save an additional \$11.4-\$108.6 billion over the next 50 years.

The CBRA System protects economically important coastal resources and vital habitat. Coastal wetlands and estuaries included in the CBRA System contribute to the nation's economically important commercial and recreational fisheries. In 2017, commercial and rec-

reational fishing in marine waters and the Great Lakes supported 1.74 million jobs, pumping \$244 billion into the economy from fishing-related sales. Coastal wetlands also help protect coastal communities from catastrophic storm damages. It is estimated that nationwide, coastal wetlands provide more than \$23 billion per year in storm protection services. CBRA-protected areas also provide vital and irreplaceable habitat for wildlife, including federally protected shorebirds like Piping Plover, Red Knot, and other threatened and endangered species, like sea turtles.

The CBRA System protects birds that are valued by the National Audubon Society's more than 1.9 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 coasts of the Atlantic, Great Lakes, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

NEXT STEPS:

Support the addition of 277,000 acres to the CBRA System. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified another 277,000 acres that could be added to the CBRA System in 9 Atlantic Coast states that were impacted by Hurricane Sandy. The FWS will deliver maps with proposed additions to Congress for action by Summer 2021. Congress should act quickly to strengthen coastal resiliency, increase protected habitat and save federal tax dollars by enacting the maps.

Expand and modernize the CBRA. The House Natural Resources Committee has proposed legislation that would strengthen and expand the CBRA. It would direct the Fish and Wildlife Service to identify migration corridors where CBRA protection could be expanded to enable coastal barrier resources to naturally adapt to rising sea levels. It would also direct FWS to conduct an inventory of Pacific Coast coastal barriers that could be added to the CBRA System to finally bring Pacific coastal barrier resources under the protections of the CBRA. These and other provisions in the Ocean Based Climate Solutions Act and other legislation would ensure that our valuable coastal resources are protected in the face of increasing threats from climate change from coast to coast, and should be enacted by Congress.

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