



Audubon

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 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 under President Bush.

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 roughly \$9.5 billion from 1989-2013, and CBRA is likely to save an additional \$11.4-\$108.6 billion over the next 50 years, according to a February 2019 economic study in the *Journal of Coastal Research*.

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 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.

Another 277,000 acres have been identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as potential additions to the CBRA System in 9 Atlantic coast states. The FWS will finalize its proposed additions in 2020 and send them to Congress for action.



A destroyed home in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew.

THE CBRA SYSTEM SAVES LIVES, MONEY AND COASTAL RESOURCES

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Inc 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 encourage

coastal development. By prohibiting taxpayer-funded expenditures for development on high risk storm damage coastal areas, the CBRA System saves the federal taxpayer billions of dollars. With the National Flood Insurance Program currently nearly \$20 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. It is estimated that nationwide, coastal wetlands provide more than \$23 billion per

year in storm protection services.

The CBRA System protects birds that are valued by the National Audubon Society's more than 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:

Support the addition of 277,000 acres to the CBRA System.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing additions to the CBRA System in 9 Atlantic coast states. The public comment period on 4 states closed in 2018, but the comment period on 5 states is open until April 17, 2019. Submitting supportive comments will send a strong message that the CBRA System should be expanded. See the proposal and comment on it at <http://www.regulations.gov> and search for FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0034.



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