

The Honorable Jen Kiggans  
The Honorable Cliff Bentz  
The Honorable Jared Huffman  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

November 7, 2023

Dear Chairman Bentz, Vice-Chair Kiggans, and Ranking Member Huffman,

Our organizations represent fiscal conservatives, taxpayers, insurance industry leaders, state officials, environmentalists, scientific institutions, and outdoor recreationists. We are writing to urge you to add two key provisions to H.R. 5490, the Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm Act (BEACH Act.) These provisions would help save taxpayer dollars, safeguard important economies, protect coastal communities from flooding and hurricane damage, and conserve habitat that is vital to fish, shellfish, and other wildlife.

H.R. 5490 would take important steps to expand the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA). Our organizations strongly support the CBRA, which is a bipartisan success story. CBRA was enthusiastically signed into law by President Reagan in 1982 and reauthorized by President Clinton in 2000, strengthened by Republican- and Democrat-led Congresses, and expanded by legislation signed by President Trump in 2018. The CBRA uses a free market approach to achieve public safety, conservation, and fiscal goals by removing the taxpayer from the role of funding coastal construction. By prohibiting most federal expenditures in areas included in the CBRA System, the CBRA program has saved the federal taxpayer roughly \$9.5 billion and is on track to save billions more.

The CBRA System includes 3.5 million acres of barrier islands, beaches, and wetlands along the Gulf of Mexico, Atlantic Ocean, Great Lakes, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These areas provide important habitat for wildlife, including fish and shellfish that support the nation's multi-billion-dollar fishing industry. Undeveloped coastal areas also act like nature's "speed bumps," absorbing impacts from storms and hurricanes and helping shield upland communities from damage. Undeveloped coastal areas along the mid-Atlantic coast helped to prevent more than \$625 million worth of additional damage from the 2012 Hurricane Sandy.

H.R. 5490 would enlarge the CBRA System by adding more than 290,000 acres to it. This would save taxpayer dollars, help ensure flood protections for today's coastal communities, and conserve important habitat. These areas were mapped by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in nine states impacted by Hurricane Sandy (NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, and VA) and in south Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico states. All of the maps were subject to public review and comment. We strongly support the enactment of these maps.

While adding the mapped areas to the System would help protect today's vulnerable coastal areas, we urge that H.R. 5490 be strengthened to help plan for tomorrow's challenges.

We urge you to adopt language included in S. 2958, bipartisan legislation by Sens. Carper (D-DE) and Graham (R-SC) that the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works passed unanimously on September 27. The bill draws on innovative state programs to authorize a federal Coastal Hazards Pilot Project. This two-year pilot project would be conducted by the Department of the Interior, in cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and state governors. The pilot project would develop criteria for mapping coastal hazard areas and areas to which habitat can migrate as sea levels rise. The result of the project would be reported to Congress, and it would be up to Congress to act upon it. Congress has authorized several pilot projects over the course of the CBRA's 40+ year history, and they have resulted in useful reports that have helped inform Congressional action.

Witnesses at the Subcommittee's September 28 hearing on H.R. 5490 supported actions such as those included in the pilot project. Dr. Christopher Hein, a professor at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, testified that sea level rise and increases in storm frequency and intensity are "widespread threats" to coastal areas, already resulting in "sunny day" flooding in Norfolk and other areas. He noted that undeveloped coastal areas will need areas to move into in response to rising seas. Mr. William Stiles, senior advisor to Wetlands Watch, discussed programs that Virginia and other states are implementing that identify and protect areas that habitats could migrate into, and recommended that the pilot project draw from Virginia's and other state examples. Mr. Matt Strickler, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Department of the Interior, also supported including the pilot project in H.R. 5490, noting that it will help federal and state agencies better address coastal hazards while helping the nation enhance coastal resilience for the longer term.

In addition to adding the pilot project, we urge you to expand the definition of a coastal barrier to include areas that are and will be vulnerable to coastal hazards, such as flooding, storm surge, wind, erosion and sea level rise. Tax dollars should not be spent to develop them. This stronger definition is included in the bipartisan S. 2958.

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act has a proven track record of saving money, protecting important habitat, and shielding upland communities from deadly storms. We urge that the CBRA be expanded to include the additional 292,000 mapped acres, and that H.R. 5490 be strengthened to address tomorrow's challenges by updating the definition of a coastal barrier and authorizing a coastal hazards pilot project.

Sincerely,

Steve Ellis, President  
Taxpayers for Common Sense

Franklin Nutter, President  
Reinsurance Association of America

Marla Stelk, Executive Director  
National Association of Wetland Managers

Josiah Neeley, Director, Texas;  
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William Stiles, Senior Advisor  
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Maggie Ostdahl, Senior Conservation Policy  
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Manley Fuller, Vice President of  
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Brian Moore, Vice President of Coastal Policy  
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Stefanie Sekich, Senior Manager, Coasts and  
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Rob Young, Director, Program for the Study of  
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Mike Burger, Executive Director  
Audubon Connecticut and New York

Sherri Fields, Director of Conservation  
Audubon South Carolina

Hugh Simmons, President  
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Bob Lukinic, Conservation Chair  
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Jared Brandwein, Executive Director  
Back Bay (VA) Restoration Foundation

Christy Plumer, Chief Conservation Officer  
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Jessie Ritter, Director, Water Resources  
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