

Testimony of Robert S. Young, PhD, PG

In regards to H.R. 1885, “Town of North Topsail Beach Coastal Barrier Resources System Map Amendment Act of 2025”

Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries

May 20, 2025, Room 1334 Longworth House Office Building

(b) The Congress declares that it is the purpose of this chapter to minimize the loss of human life, wasteful expenditure of Federal revenues, and the damage to fish, wildlife, and other natural resources associated with the coastal barriers along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and along the shore areas of the Great Lakes by restricting future Federal expenditures and financial assistance which have the effect of encouraging development of coastal barriers, by establishing the John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System, and by considering the means and measures by which the long-term conservation of these fish, wildlife, and other natural resources may be achieved.

Coastal Barrier Resources Act, 1982

The 1982 Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) included a solid combination of science-based policy making with a conservative, free-market approach to risk reduction and environmental conservation. It was strongly bi-partisan, and continues to receive broad, bi-partisan support when reauthorized or amended. Just last year, H.R. 5490 the "Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm (BEACH) Act," expanded the Coastal Barrier Resource System and reauthorized CBRA for another seven years. It passed both the House and Senate by voice vote.

In addition, the Coastal Barrier Resources Act fits well with President Trump's March 19, 2025 Executive Order "Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness." This order extends the Trump administration's goal of shifting the responsibility for many programs back to state and local government and away from the federal bureaucracy. The order proclaims: *"It is the policy of the United States that State and local governments and individuals play a more active and significant role in national resilience and preparedness, thereby saving American lives, securing American livelihoods, reducing taxpayer burdens....."* CBRA does exactly that and has been doing that for more than four decades.

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act did not, and does not, restrict the development of privately held barrier island properties. The law simply limits federal spending in those places. Our analysis shows that CBRA saved \$9.5 billion in federal disaster aid between 1989 and 2013, with an additional savings of up to \$108 billion by 2068 forecasted ([Coburn and Whitehead, 2019](#)). If you develop, you must incorporate the cost of managing your own hazards risk into the local economy.

The science behind CBRA is clear. Barrier islands are predictably hazardous locations on which to develop, invest, or maintain infrastructure. They are subject to long-term shoreline erosion, significant and devastating storm impacts, and rapid changes along inlet shorelines. Many of this nation's barrier islands have been completely inundated by storm waters multiple times over the last three decades. Coastal hazards on these low-lying, sandy shorelines are different than other hazards like tornadoes or wildfires in that they have a significantly higher recurrence interval and we can, from a scientific perspective, precisely identify the areas that will experience repeat impacts.

The geologic setting of North Topsail Beach (NTB) makes it particularly vulnerable to storms and long-term erosion. Our [Beach Nourishment Database](#) indicates that NTB has received almost 5 million cubic yards of sand for beach nourishment in 21 episodes since 1997. This is at a cost of approximately \$56 million (adjusted for inflation). The need for beach nourishment sand will only increase with time as will the cost. It is understandable that any municipality would prefer to pass this burden on to federal taxpayers.

At the moment, this desire is in conflict with the stated goals of the Trump administration to shift that responsibility to states and localities and with the clearly expressed desire of Congress in passing the BEACH Act without these kinds of carve outs just a few months ago.

There are many communities outside of the Coastal Barrier Resources System that do receive federal funding for beach nourishment and other federal projects. There are also many communities outside of the CBRS that fund their own beach nourishment projects. I have tracked national, coastal protection projects for more than 30 years. I believe that we are about to see a pendulum swing for all projects away from federal dependence to local and state funding. The goal at the moment should be to assist localities with the development of creative funding mechanisms and long-term planning to reduce their own risk without the need for massive federal expenditure. The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association has produced just such a [guide](#).

My greatest concern regarding H.R. 1885 is that it would open the door to all municipalities within the CBRS to request removal of all lands not zoned conservation or some other broad criteria. Local zoning designations are not interchangeable with CBRA. Removing land from CBRA based on any local criteria would gut the Coastal Barrier Resources Act and add substantially to the federal burden in funding the protection of coastal resort towns.