



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Coastal Barrier Resources System Digital Mapping Pilot Project

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in November 2016, completed its *Final Report to Congress: John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System Digital Mapping Pilot Project* (pilot project), which includes a set of final recommended maps for 65 Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) units. The pilot project report fulfills the requirements of Section 3 of the 2006 Coastal Barrier Resources Reauthorization Act (Pub. L. 109-226). The report highlights the benefits of updating CBRS maps with more accurate and precise digital maps to better protect people, coastal areas, and natural resources. If the pilot project maps are adopted by Congress, they will help to preserve the long-term integrity of the CBRS by correcting legitimate mapping errors and adding eligible areas to the CBRS.

Program Summary

Coastal barriers, the narrow low lying landforms located at the interface of land and sea, buffer the bays and wetlands behind them that in turn support a great diversity of plants and animals and protect people and property on the mainland from the full impact of hurricane winds and storm surge. The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA; 16 U.S.C. 3501 et seq.), enacted in 1982, recognized that certain actions and programs of the Federal Government have historically subsidized and encouraged development on coastal barriers, resulting in the loss of natural resources, threats to human life, health and property, and the expenditure of millions of tax dollars each year. The CBRA established the CBRS, which is currently comprised of 862 geographic units totaling 3.4 million acres of relatively undeveloped coastal barriers along the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico coasts.

The CBRA seeks to save taxpayers' money, keep people out of harm's



North Topsail Beach, North Carolina after Hurricane Ophelia.

way, and conserve natural resources by restricting most new Federal expenditures and financial assistance (e.g., beach nourishment, disaster assistance, and flood insurance) for areas designated within the CBRS. The CBRA does not prohibit or regulate development; however, it removes the Federal incentives to build on these unstable and environmentally sensitive areas. Development can still occur provided that private developers or other non-Federal parties bear the full cost.

The geographic units of the CBRS are depicted on a set of maps that is maintained by the Service. Only Congress has the authority to modify the boundaries of CBRS units by adopting new maps through legislation (though there are minor exceptions for administrative revisions to the maps). The maps depicting the CBRS were last comprehensively revised in 1990 using now antiquated manual cartographic technologies and base maps that were already outdated at the time. Congress recognized the challenges associated with the CBRS

maps and, through the 2000 and 2006 CBRA reauthorizations, directed the Secretary of the Interior to modernize them.

Pilot Project Locations

The 65 pilot project units (comprising 274,363 total acres and about eight percent of the total CBRS acreage) are located in Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

History of the Pilot Project

In 2008, the Service completed its initial *Report to Congress: John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System Digital Mapping Pilot Project*, per a directive in Section 6 of the 2000 Coastal Barrier Resources Reauthorization Act (Pub. L. 106-514). The 2008 pilot project report contains draft maps and describes the feasibility of completing digital maps for the entire CBRS. The draft pilot project maps underwent public review in 2009, and were revised in 2016 to incorporate any appropriate changes based on updated aerial imagery, public input, CBRA criteria, objective

Jonathan Phinney/USFWS



A home in the surf on the Outer Banks, North Carolina.

mapping protocols, and the best available data.

Final Pilot Project Report

The final pilot project report contains: a summary of the benefits of CBRS map modernization and successes to date; a summary of the public review process; a summary of the comments received from government officials and the public regarding the draft pilot project maps and the Service's responses to those comments;

updates to significant CBRS mapping protocols; a summary of the pilot project results and recommended changes to each of the pilot project units (including acreage, shoreline, and structure changes); a set of guiding principles and criteria for assessing modifications to the CBRS; a recommendation to Congress for adoption of the final recommended maps; and the next steps and costs to comprehensively modernize the remainder of the CBRS.

Pilot Project Results

The final recommended maps for the 65 units would remove 396 total acres from the CBRS (236 acres of uplands and 160 acres of associated aquatic habitat) and add 24,510 acres to the CBRS (1,354 acres of uplands and 23,156 acres of associated aquatic habitat). The revised maps would remove about 325 structures from the CBRS and add about 35 structures (mostly park-related) to Otherwise Protected Areas (OPAs) within the CBRS. The CBRA's only prohibition on Federal expenditures within OPAs is on Federal flood insurance, and there is an exception for park-related structures. The Service is not aware of any existing private residential structures located within the areas recommended for addition to the CBRS.

Additional Information

The pilot project report and maps are available at: <https://www.fws.gov/ecological-services/habitat-conservation/cbra/Act/Pilot.html>.

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American White Pelicans.

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