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Contact: Tina Haisman, ASBPA media relations – (239) 292-2882 or media@asbpa.org
Steve Aceti, J.D., CalCoast – (760) 612-3564 or steveaceti@calcoast.org

California seeks to expand federal role in coastal management

FORT MYERS, FL – More than one-eighth of the nation’s population lives in California -- and two-thirds of them live in the southern portion of the state and within 50 miles of the coast. Despite this, California struggles to win its fair share of federal support for its coastline -- a situation many groups and government are working to change.

Managing and maintaining California’s shorelines can be challenging. California is hammered by frequent El Niño conditions that impact the entire 1,067-mile coastline through elevated sea levels, as well as winter storms that cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damages to public and private property and the natural coastal resources.

Currently, experts estimate that more than 85 percent of the state’s shorelines are eroding. In recent years this has become deadly as it has contributed to bluff instability along the coast. The most recent death occurred on August 20, when a bluff collapsed on a tourist at Torrey Pines State Beach.

Several state agencies work to improve, maintain and govern the beaches in California, including the Department of Boating and Waterways, the Department of Park and Recreation, the State Lands Commission, the Department of Fish and Game and the California Coastal Commission.

On the federal level, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is another important agency for coastal management. However, the Corps doesn't have the same presence in California as it typically has in other coastal states...yet.

“As much coastline as California has, we only have one active federal beach nourishment program. Another project was just authorized by Congress last year and is now awaiting the appropriation of construction funds by Congress. Several others are going through the Corps’ lengthy study process,” says Steve Aceti, J.D., a lawyer, lobbyist and executive director of the California Coastal Coalition ([CalCoast](http://CalCoast.org)). “Unfortunately, it is very difficult to get federal funding.”

He continued: “Federal funding is such a challenge because the last two administrations have placed a very low priority on all of the nation’s shorelines. We have to work hard to get Congress to add funding for new California beach restoration projects when most beach projects on the East Coast were constructed many years ago.”

Between 1995 and 2005 the state received \$72.4 million from the federal government for beach renourishment projects, while states with less coastline and population that got into the federal beach nourishment program decades ago received far more funding from Washington. (For example, New Jersey secured \$322.6 million in federal coastal funding during the same time period.)

California beach advocates know they need a strong show of support from the local and state level to increase chances for federal funding. As a result, many local communities have passed ballot measures to raise dedicated funds for projects on their own, and the state is working to do its part.

In 1999, the California Legislature passed AB 64, the Public Beach Restoration Act, to create a state beach maintenance program similar to programs that exist in states like Florida and New Jersey. This is helping state and regionally funded projects get completed. Aceti says the state's two senators and coastal representatives have also been helpful in keeping federal projects on track that have run into challenges.

California relies heavily on coastal beaches to provide outdoor water recreation opportunities, because of its arid climate, the scarcity of natural lakes and rivers, and the long-term cultural connection between California's lifestyle and its coastline. Despite some funding challenges, the state continues to make forward progress in its efforts to provide healthy beaches for its residents and tourists.

For more information about your state's coastal policy, visit www.asbpa.org.

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ABOUT ASBPA

Founded in 1926, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) represents the scientific, technical and political interests along the coast in an effort to shape national research and policy concerning shore and beach management and restoration. ASBPA strives to engage in a factual debate on coastal issues and economics that will foster sound, far-sighted and economical development and preservation of our beaches; thereby aiding in placing their beliefs within the reach of the largest possible number of people in accordance with the ideals of a democratic nation. For additional information about ASBPA, please visit www.asbpa.org/about_us/about_us_history.htm.

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