



Government Affairs: 2017 Year in Review

ASBPA's 2017 Government Affairs agenda continued to focus on three main areas: 1) **Federal Funding**, including advocating for funding for coastal projects and coastal research; and changing policies to allow coastal projects to include their full range of benefits in benefit-cost-ratios and thereby compete better for federal funding. 2) **Improved permitting and regulatory**, including expediting Endangered Species Act (and other regulatory) permitting through more efficient implementation; and establishing pilot projects to allow for easier beneficial use of dredged material. 3) **Regional coordination and planning** on coastal projects, focusing on implementing and funding the South Atlantic Coast Study (SACS).

Our federal funding advocacy was primarily focused on three bills: 1) an infrastructure package (which has yet to materialize), 2) the FY18 federal budget and, most recently, 3) a disaster response supplemental appropriations bill following the 2017 hurricane season. In early 2017, ASBPA's president, Tony Pratt, testified at a Senate roundtable about a) the value of natural coastal infrastructure (beaches, dunes and wetlands) to the nation and b) the need for a minimum of \$5 billion federal investment in coastal infrastructure. ASBPA has carried these messages throughout the year: at our Summit, at a summer lobby day, as well as in dozens of Capitol Hill meetings, letters, and phone calls. Unfortunately, the administration and Congress has yet to put forward any infrastructure package, but ASBPA continues to advocate that beaches, dunes and wetlands are critical coastal infrastructure and should be included in an infrastructure funding bill, expecting that when a bill develops it may move quickly.



The FY18 budget has been an even bigger roller coaster than usual. The administration's proposed budget was, to be blunt, devastating to coastal programs. Long-standing coastal programs, such as Sea Grant, Coastal Zone Management, BEACH Grants, and more were eliminated; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Shore Protection was again unfunded; funding for regulatory agencies were cut (without regulations being cut). ASBPA partnered with a number of coastal-related organizations, ranging from American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) to Ocean Conservancy, to build support for coastal programs.



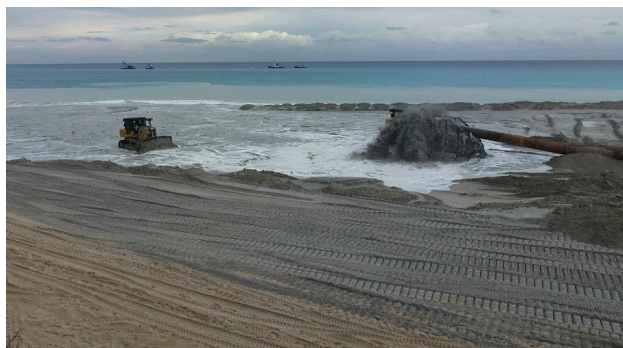
We also focused on the need for USACE Shore Protection funding. ASBPA Executive Director, Derek Brockbank, testified before the House Energy & Water Sub-committee for Shore Protection funding; we circulated a "dear colleague" letter and met with congressional offices, and as a result "Shore Protection" received a proposed increase of \$30 million in the House (to \$75 million) and \$5 million in the Senate (to \$50 million). Other coastal programs have not seen increases in House and Senate budgets, but have largely been spared the devastating cuts proposed by the

administration. However Congress has yet to pass an FY18 budget and we are currently in the *third* short-term continuing resolution (CR) since the fiscal year started in October. This month to month budgeting makes the basic functioning of government difficult and any planning nearly impossible.

Responding to a hurricane was not specifically in our plans at the start of 2017, but we had been talking about what should be included in a supplemental bill if one came up. Within two weeks of Hurricane Maria's landfall, ASBPA generated and distributed a detailed letter of requests. This included requests for funding coastal projects, language to clarify and improve how Flood Control and Coastal Emergency (FCCE) funding is used, funding for the South Atlantic Coastal Study, and coastal research funding. The letter was shared with members of Congress and we continue to advocate for its contents. Congress passed two immediate relief bills, but we still await a response that includes any coastal resilience measures. The House of Representatives has proposed an \$81 billion disaster response bill (ignoring the administration's paltry \$44 billion request), which includes funding for coastal projects, language allowing some local cost-share to be waived, and some data acquisition funding, but Congress has yet to pass this comprehensive package.

Our advocacy on **expediting regulatory permitting** includes a number of agencies. In 2017 we focused on National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Endangered Species Act consultations. We identified nearly a dozen reasons why permits were delayed and backlogged, ranging from underfunded/understaffed offices to excessively bureaucratic processes.

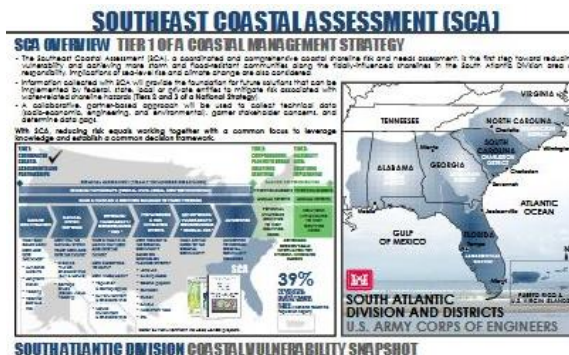
After many conversations with NMFS, facilitating dialogue between state and federal agencies, and partnering with organizations like Defenders of Wildlife on letters to Congress, we believe we have made significant strides on two major hurdles: a) the southeast regional office of NMFS has developed a programmatic consultation with the Jacksonville office of the USACE, which should cut down on the



number and complexity of permits in that region; b) a pilot project on letters of concurrence that do not require departmental legal review has been expanded nationally, which could cut at least a couple weeks off the review process. These are just small steps to fixing a complex problem but we are pleased we're making progress. We continue to look for effects of the Administration's Executive Order 13807 (signed August 15) titled "Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure Projects."

Another ASBPA priority has been the implementation of Section 1122 "Beneficial Use of Dredge Material" from the 2016 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). ASBPA led the effort to get this included in WRDA; in 2017 we led efforts to get it implemented. Unfortunately, USACE Headquarters has stalled and still has not issued the necessary guidance to USACE Districts. ASBPA's advocacy has been robust, ranging from meetings with USACE and the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) to letters to USACE leadership to engaging Congress to demand action from the USACE. ASBPA is also leading a coalition of a dozen conservation groups working for the beneficial use of dredge material. Even while we work to implement 2016 WRDA, we are advocating for WRDA 2018 through testimony at a House Committee roundtable on WRDA and regular meetings with House and Senate committees that drafting WRDA 2018.

Our efforts on **regional planning** in 2017 focused on the Southeast after focusing on the Northeast (following Hurricane Sandy) and the Gulf (following the BP oil spill) in previous years. In 2016 WRDA, we helped get a "South Atlantic Coastal Study (SACS)" authorized to examine coastal vulnerability to storms and sea level rise and that will result in proposed coordinated solutions across the region of USACE South Atlantic Division – NC to MS, including Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Through letters and meetings with congressional staff we advocated



for the regional study to be funded at full federal expense. While full funding is still elusive, USACE has provided ~\$2 million over two years for a Southeast Coastal Assessment – a precursor element of the SACS. ASBPA will be leading efforts to develop a regional coastal coalition or, perhaps, individual state coalitions across the Southeast as part of this effort.

In addition to the above priorities, ASBPA has fought back against threats to cut funding for coastal projects in the Gulf, advocated for a regional sediment management program in California, and supported the House of Representatives' Coastal Communities Caucus and the newly created Estuaries Caucus. We are also planning to engage federal flood policy impacts on coastal communities and support communities' efforts nationwide on developing local funding initiatives for coastal projects. Overall, it's been a busy 2017 for ASBPA's Government Affairs, with some successes and some setbacks. ASBPA remains a prominent force on the national stage of federal policy; we're proud of what we've accomplished (and prevented) in 2017, and look to do even more in 2018.