



Government Affairs: 2019 Year in Review

In a year that started with the longest government shutdown in U.S. history and is ending with impeachment proceedings, the lack of major federal policy initiatives is not surprising. However, coastal issues have mostly flown under the radar: federal agencies continue to do their work and congressional committees are planning for legislation that will have bipartisan support when/if allowed to come up for a “clean” vote. ASBPA’s Government Affairs work in 2020 did not have many legislative or policy outcomes, but built support for our coastal vision, which we expect will lead to measurable policy results in the future – hopefully as soon as 2020!

WRDA – In 2019, ASBPA had the great privilege and honor of being asked to testify at the opening hearings on the Water Resources Development Act for both the House of Representative (Transportation & Infrastructure [T&I] Committee in July) and the Senate (Environment & Public Works [EPW] Committee in September). ASBPA presented written and oral testimony that spoke about the principles of Regional Sediment Management (RSM) and the need to value sediment as a resource and expand the beneficial use of dredged material (BUDM). We also spoke on the need to reform U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) benefit cost ratio (BCR) calculation to include the full range of benefits provided by coastal storm damage risk reduction projects. We believe these reforms will improve and increase the use of “natural infrastructure” – beaches, dunes and wetlands – as flood risk reduction along the coast. The value of presenting at a hearing is getting your message directly in front of Members of Congress, but also in establishing organizational credibility on particular issues. Following the hearings we have been approached by numerous congressional offices to provide our input on sediment management and BUDM policies that they are considering.



ASBPA Executive Director, Derek Brockbank, speaking about WRDA to the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee, September 2019.

USACE Implementing Disaster Supplemental – In 2019, Congress passed a disaster supplemental appropriations bill to address (among other things) 2018 hurricanes Michael and Florence; this was the third year in a row with major funding for coastal projects coming in a disaster supplemental. Many of ASBPA’s priorities – from a South Atlantic Coastal Study to shore protection construction and investigation – are being funded through supplementals, so we are engaging with USACE on how the funds get spent, and suggesting ways that USACE can be more efficient and effective. One way we’re doing this is by providing USACE input on how to better work with and contract private coastal planning, engineering and design firms. We have met with Jacksonville district and South Atlantic division staff, and developed a survey of coastal firms that can provide input to USACE on better ways to contract and inform firms of upcoming opportunities.

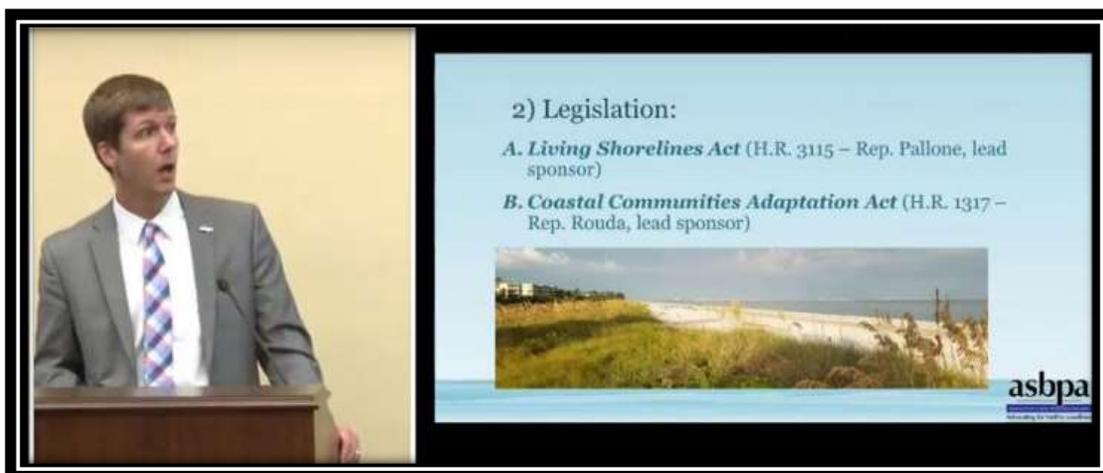
CBRA – One significant victory this year was securing a new interpretation of a section of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) that will allow projects *not* in the CBRA-zone to use federal funds to access sand in CBRA-marked areas. This had previously not been allowed and impacted federal USACE projects and projects that use FEMA disaster funds to rebuild after a storm. About half a dozen federal beach projects on the East and Gulf coasts (and potentially more in the near future) were made more expensive because they had to go offshore for sand rather than to nearby sources, or were left unrestored, negatively impacting community resilience and habitat. ASBPA was the *only* NGO speaking out against this, and have been at odds with a couple conservation organizations we normally align with. We were thrilled by a ruling by the Secretary of Interior that the 1995 guidance that caused this was no longer applicable and new guidance would be issued.

ASBPA hosted a CBRA briefing on CBRA on Capitol Hill, FSBPA, and ASBPA's National Conference

Federal Funding – Appropriations in 2019 were a mixed bag. For FY19, Army Corps of Engineers funding passed on time, and so was unaffected by the January government shutdown. However the shutdown had significant impact to coastal management and research by stopping work at numerous coastal agencies, and delaying projects that were waiting on permits. However, once a budget deal was agreed to, many coastal programs did see slight increases in funding. For FY20 federal funds, the House moved forward with appropriations bills that saw many coastal programs increase in funding, while a few programs that had received funding in the 2019 disaster supplemental received decreases. Unfortunately, congress couldn't agree to a budget deal on time, and so the FY20 budget has operated on a series of continuing resolutions since the start of the fiscal year in October. As of writing, no final budget agreement had been worked out but we are optimistic that it will by the time you read this!



Presenting our "Friend of the Coast" award to Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, for her work on the Energy & Water Appropriations sub-committee



ASBPA Executive Director, Derek Brockbank, speaking at a Hill Briefing about policies that advance "Nature-Based Resilience"
