

April 3, 2020

asbpa

American Shore & Beach Preservation Association

Advocating for healthy coastlines

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The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
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The Honorable Chuck Schumer
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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, United States Capitol
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
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Since 1926, American Shore & Beach Preservation Association has advocated for healthy beaches and coastlines that support local economies, provide recreation, protect communities from coastal hazards, and have ecological value. Our members *are* the coastal community: coastal towns and counties, coastal restoration businesses, local elected officials, coastal scientists and engineers. And right now, the U.S. coastal community is hurting.

America's beaches and coasts are the nation's leading tourism driver. More than twice as many people visit America's coasts as visit state and national parks combined; consequently 85%¹ of all tourism-related revenue in the U.S. is generated in coastal states — where beaches are the leading tourist attraction. Beach tourism

supports 2.5 million jobs, \$285 billion in direct spending, and generates \$45 billion in taxes annually.²

With coronavirus shutting beaches and restricting travel, the coastal tourism and service economy is disintegrating. On top of the immediate economic impacts of coronavirus, coastal communities are facing long term economic challenges from coastal erosion, rising seas and intensifying coastal storms.

As Congress considers an infrastructure stimulus bill in response to the coronavirus pandemic, we ask you to prioritize funding for coastal infrastructure whose purpose is to **help tourism and increase the resilience** of communities to future economic challenges from the inevitable challenges posed by sea level rise and coastal storms.

In short, **we're asking the federal government to put people to work restoring and rebuilding beaches and coastlines: the natural infrastructure that drives U.S. tourism AND keeps communities safe from storms and sea level rise.**

¹ Houston, J., 2013. "The economic value of beaches — a 2013 update." *Shore & Beach*, 81(1), 3-11.

² Houston, J., 2018. "The economic value of beaches — a 2018 update." *Shore & Beach*, 86(2), 3-13.

In the infrastructure stimulus, Congress should fund the following programs (many of these programs support multi-year projects, but projects can be done more efficiently and faster if the full budget is available at the start of the project, so funding should be made available for FY21, FY22 and FY23):

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) -

1) Coastal Storm Risk Management Projects with added resilience features. (*\$200 million or full construction backlog*)

For the past 30 years, the federal interest in beaches has been their ability to reduce community damage and economic losses from storms – exemplified best in Hurricane Sandy, when federally authorized beaches were estimated to have reduced damages by \$1.9 billion.³ The USACE benefit-cost analysis limits the recreation value of beaches to no more 50% of their total economic benefit. However, many beaches have a far greater value in regional and even international tourism. Investing in rebuilding US beaches will drive tourism along economically hard-hit coastlines once the pandemic is over. Ensuring all federally restored beaches have resilience elements – such as vegetated dunes – to withstand future storms and sea level rise, will help coastal communities be better prepared for future conditions.

2) Beneficial Use of Dredge Material pilot projects. (*\$100 Million, and authorization of at least 30 projects*)

The 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act authorized ten pilot projects to beneficially reuse sediment from federal navigation projects. In 2018, over 80 projects were submitted for consideration, with the ten that were chosen having an estimated price tag of \$40 million. The 2018 WRDA authorized an additional 10 project (which have not been selected), and the FY20 Omnibus Appropriations provided \$7.5 million for this program. Congress should fund the remaining ~\$32 million and provide an additional \$68 million for at least 20 additional projects with instructions to select the projects by the end of 2020. These projects all use uncontaminated dredge materials to restore coastal, estuarine or riverine habitats that support wildlife-based tourism and provide flood protection.

3) Coastal Aquatic Ecosystem restoration (*\$500 million – \$1 billion*)

There are significant coastal infrastructure needs under the Corps’ ecosystem restoration mission, including projects in the Everglades, Great Lakes and the Mississippi River Delta. Many of these projects are “shovel ready” and their associated economic benefits could advance quickly with an influx of additional funding. These ecological projects bolster local tourism in everything from swamp tours, to fishing charters, to supporting commercial fisheries and the hard-hit restaurant industry, all while providing critical protection to coastal communities. Everglades restoration alone is estimated to produce a \$4 return on investment for every \$1 spent and create more than 440,000 jobs ranging from the construction industry to the service sector.⁴

4) Continuing Authorities Programs (*Full funding for FY21 and FY22: CAP 204, 103, and 106*)

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<http://www.nad.usace.army.mil/Portals/40/docs/ComprehensiveStudy/Estimate%20of%20Sandy%20damages%20avoided.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.evergladesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Report-Measuring-Economic-Benefits-Exec-Summary.pdf>

The Beneficial Use of Dredged Material, Shore Protection and Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Continuing Authorities Programs fund projects that are smaller than federally authorized projects with their own budget line-item. Nevertheless, coastal communities rely on these projects to support their flood risk management and ecological restoration efforts, making them incredibly valuable at the community level for both resilience and coastal tourism.

NOAA

1) National Coastal Resilience Grants (\$100 million)

The National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF) provides important funding for natural infrastructure – such as marshes, wetlands, dunes, and reefs – that enhance the resilience of coastal communities and drive eco-tourism activities and reduce flood risks. Funding the NCRF, will allow NOAA and the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to quickly advance “shovel-ready” projects that will bolster local and regional tourist-dependent economies, which will be hardest hit by the current economic crisis. In FY20, NFWF received 170 pre-proposals requesting almost \$100 million in funding, but only had budget to provide \$33 million in grants.

2) Community-based Marine Debris Removal Grants (\$5 million)

A recent study showed that the varying amounts of marine debris on beaches can have an impact on the number of days visitors spend on those beaches, resulting in changes to the amount of tourism dollars spent, the number of local jobs, and the value of beach recreation. One in depth case study showed that eliminating marine debris in coastal Ohio, would increase the annual tourism spending by \$217 million and support 3,700 jobs,⁵ similar numbers were found in case studies of California, Delaware and Maryland, and Alabama. Providing \$5 million in grants would help fund hard-hit coastal non-profit organizations and coastal agencies, while helping improve coastal tourism around the country.

FEMA

1) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) (\$500 million)

The BRIC program is designed to support states and local communities doing projects to reduce risks they face from disasters and natural hazards. Funding this program will get forward thinking infrastructure projects into construction. Congress provided FEMA \$250 million for its existing Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant program in FY19; providing that amount to the BRIC program in both FY21 and FY22 will create jobs and prepare communities for coming challenges.

EPA

1) BEACH Act grants (\$40 Million)

BEACH Act Grants fund local beach water quality testing effort around the country. Authorized at \$30 million annually, in recent years this grant program has been funded at just under \$10 million, distributed to states based on a formula. However, the need for water quality testing greatly exceeds \$10 million. Doubling the

⁵ <https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/research/economic-impacts-marine-debris-tourism-dependent-communities>

amount of BEACH Act grants for the next 2 years would give more coastal communities the ability to hire staff to do water quality testing and would help more beaches demonstrate their water's cleanliness thereby supporting the local tourism economy.

2) Trash Free Waters (\$5 million)

EPA's Trash Free Waters programs supports local projects to reduce trash in waterways that ends up on beaches and coastlines. Trash on coastlines and coastal waters has been consistently demonstrated to reduce tourism and hurt local economies.⁶ Providing \$5 million in grants would help fund hard-hit coastal non-profit organizations and coastal agencies, while helping improve coastal tourism around the country.

3) National Estuary Programs and Geographic restoration priorities. (varies)

ASBPA also supports funding to benefit the National Estuary Programs and coastal geographic programs such as Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, projects to restore the Chesapeake Bay, Lake Pontchartrain Basin, Puget Sound, Long Island Sound, the San Francisco Bay, and the Columbia River Basin. These coastlines and watersheds provide important ecosystem services, including flood risk reduction, creating habitats for wildlife, supporting economically important fisheries, and generating billions of dollars in tourism revenues for the country.

Finally, as an organization whose members are coastal businesses and coastal cities and counties, ASBPA understands the financial impacts facing businesses temporarily closed to the public and how the loss of tax revenue can devastate local government operations. We encourage efforts that help businesses and local governments recover from these unprecedented and uncertain impacts.

By prioritizing the above investments, Congress can help coastal communities and states recover from the economic devastation created by the coronavirus pandemic by creating jobs for the 21st century economy while enhancing tourism opportunities and improving resilience. These types of investments will provide multiple benefits at the federal, state, and local levels, including investing in economic drivers that generate local, state and federal taxes, saving taxpayer dollars by avoiding future disaster-related expenditures, and providing environmental benefits.

We ask for your consideration of these priorities as you work to craft an infrastructure package that stimulates the economy with particular attention to the devastated coastal tourism and service sectors.

Regards,



Derek Brockbank, Executive Director

American Shore & Beach Preservation Association

⁶ <https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/research/economic-impacts-marine-debris-tourism-dependent-communities>