

**Testimony of
Karen Hyun, Ph.D., Vice President for Coastal Conservation
National Audubon Society**

**Regarding
H.R. 2947 (Rep. Neal Dunn), To replace certain Coastal Barrier Resources System
maps “Strengthening Coastal Communities Act of 2017.”, and
H.R. 4880 (Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester), To revise the boundaries of certain John H.
Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System Units in Delaware.**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives**

February 27, 2018

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing about the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA). My name is Karen Hyun and I am the Vice President for Coastal Conservation at the National Audubon Society. The National Audubon Society works to protect birds and the places they depend on now and in the future. We have 22 state offices, over 60 nature centers and sanctuaries, 462 chapters, and over a million members, who are nearly evenly split between progressives and moderates/conservatives.

I am here today to express Audubon’s strong support for H.R. 2947 and H.R. 4880. These revisions were made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which applied statutory criteria and sought public review and comment, to make appropriate changes to the CBRA System.

The National Audubon Society commends the Subcommittee for holding this hearing on these bills as needed steps toward improving and strengthening CBRA. We hope that the Committee will take further steps to move legislation that would add the remaining areas included in the Digital Mapping Pilot Project to the CBRA System.

Coastal Barrier Resources Act Background

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) was bi-partisan legislation enacted in 1982 and was signed into law by President Ronald Regan, who said:

The Coastal Barrier Resources Act meets a national problem with less federal involvement, not more. It adopts the sensible approach that risk associated with new private development should be borne by the private sector, not underwritten by the American taxpayer. It [saves] American

taxpayers millions of dollars while, at the same time, taking a major step forward in the conservation of our magnificent coastal resources.

The CBRA has three goals to:

- (1) reduce the flow of federal tax dollars into risky coastal development;
- (2) promote public safety by preventing taxpayer funds for development in hurricane and storm prone areas; and
- (3) protect fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.

Nationwide, roughly 3.3 million acres – about the size of the state of Connecticut - of undeveloped land and habitat along the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Great Lakes are protected through the CBRA System.

CBRA is a free-market conservation tool that prohibits federal expenditures or financial assistance for new development on areas mapped as undeveloped and included in the CBRA System. It does not regulate how people develop their land, but transfers the full cost from Federal taxpayers to the individuals who choose to build in these areas. According to a 2002 analysis conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CBRA saved the taxpayer more than \$1.3 billion in federal expenditures from 1983-2010. These savings are likely underestimated because not all Federal funding sources were incorporated in the original study. In addition, this study has not been updated and has not considered subsequent disaster relief spending.

CBRA promotes public safety. Since CBRA was enacted, more than 50 hurricanes, including 17 major hurricanes, have struck the U.S., causing thousands of deaths. Roughly 39 percent of the U.S. population now lives in coastal counties, placing more people at risk from deadly storms. By removing taxpayer-funded subsidies for development in hazardous coastal areas, the CBRA promotes public safety.

Finally, CBRA helps protect economically important coastal resources. Since the life histories of many fish and shellfish of commercial importance rely on coastal wetlands and estuaries, inclusion of these habitats in the CBRA System contributes to the nation's economically vital commercial fisheries. In 2015, commercial fish landings in Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico states netted more than \$2.8 billion, while commercial fish landings in Great Lakes states contributed more than \$22 million to the economy. Coastal wetlands also help protect coastal communities from catastrophic storm damages. More than \$625 million in property damages were prevented because coastal wetlands in New York and New Jersey buffered Hurricane Sandy's waves and storm damage. It is estimated that nationwide, coastal wetlands provide more than \$23 billion per year in storm protection services.

The National Audubon Society supports CBRA because it provides vitally important habitat for shorebirds and other birds and wildlife. Protected areas, including units in the CBRA System, are essential to bird conservation. For example, in the Coastal Carolinas, an impressive 55-99% of important bird species are found in the CBRA System and other protected areas. These include high percentages of nonbreeding (migrating and

overwintering) Red Knot (74%), breeding and non-breeding American Oystercatcher (90% and 79%), Piping Plover (97% and 88%), and breeding Least Terns (93%), found in particular on units of the CBRA System. These CBRA System units have greater acreages of habitat favored by many bird species, such as saltmarsh, mud and sand, than do other areas in the Coastal Carolinas.

Digital Mapping Pilot Project

In 2000, Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a Digital Mapping Pilot Project, and in 2006, to finalize the pilot project maps. This Digital Mapping Pilot Project was authorized to address challenges associated with administering the CBRA because of outdated maps that dated back to the 1990s. The draft pilot project maps underwent public review in 2009 and were revised in 2016. In November 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service transmitted to Congress a report with the final recommended pilot project maps, which would add 24,510 acres to and remove 396 acres from the CBRA System. We ask this Committee and Congress to act by adopting these maps through legislation. Enacting legislation adopting these pilot project maps as a complete package would save taxpayer dollars, improve public safety, and protect habitat that supports fish, wildlife, and coastal economies.

H.R. 4880 (Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester), To revise the boundaries of certain John H. Chafee Coastal Barrier Resources System Units in Delaware.

Delaware has 6,696 acres included in 4 CBRA System units, on which nearly all federal development subsidies are prohibited. Another 34,049 acres are included in 6 “Otherwise Protected Areas,” in which only federal flood insurance is prohibited. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended to Congress in November 2016 that another 897 acres be added to CBRA System units and Otherwise Protected Areas in Delaware, and 83 acres be removed to reflect mapping errors. H.R. 4880 would incorporate these revised pilot project maps into the CBRA System in Delaware.

The National Audubon Society commends Representative Blunt Rochester for her leadership on this issue, and continuing the bi-partisan support for CBRA. One of the original authors of CBRA in 1982 was Representative Thomas B. Evans (R-DE) who stated, “In passing the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, we in Congress said to developers, ‘if you’re going to develop in storm-prone, environmentally-sensitive areas, we can’t stop you; but do it on your own nickel and not the American Taxpayer’s.’”

Hurricanes, nor’easters and storms periodically hit the Delaware coast, resulting in the loss of human life and the destruction of property. For example, a 1962 nor’easter battered Dewey Beach for 2 ½ days, causing 20 foot waves that crashed against homes and businesses and inundated the town. Coastal storms imperil coastal residents and visitors alike. By removing taxpayer subsidies for coastal construction, the CBRA removes incentives for people to build in highly hazardous areas.

In 2015, the commercial fish and shell fishing industry in Delaware landed more than 3.5 million pounds of marine fish and shellfish that were worth \$6.8 million. Recreational fishing is important to Delaware's economy, too. More than 138,000 saltwater anglers fished along Delaware's coast in 2011, contributing more than \$94 million in retail sales in the state. Habitat like wetlands and clean coastal water is the lifeblood for saltwater fisheries, and CBRA protects more than 34,000 acres of coastal wetlands and nearshore habitat in Delaware.

H.R. 2947 (Rep. Neal Dunn), To replace certain Coastal Barrier Resources System maps "Strengthening Coastal Communities Act of 2017."

Through a process separate from the Digital Mapping Pilot Project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also transmitted to Congress recommended maps for the St. Andrew Complex (P31/P31P) located in Bay County, Florida, dated October 7, 2016. These maps were prepared following a 45-day public review period of proposed maps dated May 16, 2016. H.R. 2947 would enact these maps and are supported by National Audubon.

Florida currently has a total of 767,187 acres in the protective CBRA System: 303,243 acres are included in 68 CBRA System units, on which nearly all federal development subsidies are prohibited, while another 463,944 acres are included in 63 Otherwise Protected Areas, in which only federal flood insurance is prohibited. In the Digital Mapping Pilot Project, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended to Congress that another 13,554 acres be added to the CBRA in Florida, and 234 acres be removed to reflect mapping errors.

Florida is the number one most hurricane-prone state in the United States. From 1851 to 2015, 114 hurricanes hit Florida. As many hurricanes hit Florida as hit Louisiana and Texas combined, and Florida had as many hurricanes as did the rest of the South Atlantic states combined (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia). Hurricanes have resulted in the loss of human life and serious injuries, imperiling coastal residents and visitors. By removing taxpayer subsidies for coastal construction, the CBRA removes incentives for people to build in highly hazardous areas that are prone to repeated disasters.

Florida's marine fisheries provide more than 2.5 million recreational anglers with sport fishing opportunities, and more than 15,000 commercial fishers with employment. Habitat like wetlands and clean coastal water is the lifeblood for saltwater fisheries, and CBRA protects nearly 700,000 acres of coastal wetlands and nearshore habitat in Florida. CBRA's beaches, dunes, and islands also provide important habitat for birds, which draw bird enthusiasts and Audubon members in Florida and nationwide.

Conclusion

The National Audubon Society supports H.R. 2947 and H.R. 4880 and commends the Subcommittee for holding a hearing on these bills as needed steps toward improving and strengthening CBRA. We hope that the Committee will take further steps to move

legislation that would add the remaining areas included in the Digital Mapping Pilot Project to the CBRA System.

Thank you Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide this testimony.