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CBRA and the CBRS (Coastal Barrier Resources System) Digital Mapping Pilot Project

Earlier this month, the County and local municipalities offered public comment concerning the CBRS (Coastal Barrier Resources System) Digital Mapping Pilot Project. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS) prepared this report disclosing the results of a National re-mapping effort for the Coastal Barrier Resource Act, commonly referred to as "CBRA".

CBRA was first enacted into Public Law in 1982 and as you may know maps undeveloped barrier shorelines that are deemed highly susceptible to erosion and inundation. As stated in the enacting legislation the primary purpose of CBRA is to; (1) minimize loss of human life by discouraging development in high risk areas, (2) reduce wasteful expenditure of federal resources, and (3) protect the natural resources associated with coastal barriers. This can be considered as the philosophical meaning of CBRA. Practically however, CBRA uses the power of the purse string to achieve its objectives by restricting many types of federal financial assistance within CBRS, including expenditures for waterway dredging, beach nourishment, and other types of infrastructure (roads, bridges, water lines, etc.), in addition to government subsidized loans associated with the Small Business Administration. National Flood Insurance Program coverage is also withheld in areas designated as a CBRA unit.

In 1990, the USF&WS was directed to add Otherwise Protected Areas (OPA) to the CBRA program, consisting of mostly undeveloped state and federal parks or wildlife areas, where only flood insurance is restricted – other types of federal expenditures are allowed. Thus there are two designations for the CBRS; (1) **System Units** where no new federal expenditures or participation in the National Flood Insurance Program is allowed, and (2) **OPAs** where the only restriction is related to flood insurance.

With Geographic Information System (GIS) technology now readily accessible, Congress in 2000 and again in 2005 directed the USF&WS to convert the paper maps of 1982 and 1990 to more accurate digital maps and assess the cost of a National mapping upgrade. There are currently 585 Coastal Barrier System Units and 271 OPAs in the Country, and the boundaries were originally hand-drawn on hard copy maps. Rather than preparing digital maps for all the system units and OPAs in the CBRS at once, Congress directed the USF&WS to conduct a pilot study first to develop and vet mapping methodologies and protocols.

The Pilot Study includes 70 system units and OPAs located in Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. Of the 8 pilot areas selected in the State of North Carolina, **two** are located in Carteret County. Possibly more importantly, is that one of the two areas located in Carteret County includes a proposal to create a new system unit encapsulating an 8,162.5 acre swath (the largest proposed expansion in the entire Pilot Report), encompassing the area at Bogue Inlet and extending all the way to the Cameron



Langston Bridge. This has important implications because as mentioned in the introduction of this piece, CBRA restricts federal expenditures on any new projects or improvements and Small Business Administration loans for the purposes of navigation dredging, beach nourishment and shoreline protection, and infrastructure (roads, water lines, etc.). The proposed boundary for the new "NC-06" system unit also abuts the mainland community of Cedar Point and our neighbor to the west, Swansboro; and similarly could prohibit the use of federal funds for any waterfront access or development projects in these communities.

After taking a careful look at the accompanying map, you may be able to distinguish that the USF&WS is recommending reducing the current OPA known as the "NC-06P" to reflect only that property owned by Hammocks Beach State Park. All other land or aquatic habitat that was in NC-06P is converted to the new system unit NC-06 (~5,400 acres) in addition to the proposed expansion to the Cameron Langston Bridge (~2,800 acres). When reviewing the map, keep in mind that all land and aquatic habitat to the west (or left) of the dashed red line is part of the current OPA NC-06P – everything included within the green lines is either proposed to be reclassified as NC-06P or part of the proposed system unit NC-06.

The public comment letter offered by the County recommends that the geographic area of NC-06P should be reduced to reflect the holdings of the State only, and the proposed NC-06 unit should be removed entirely from the Pilot Project Report. The public comment period has been extended to August 5th and is available for review on the USF&WS website - http://www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/coastal_barrier.html.

The second major issue highlighted in the public comment concerns how the USF&WS demarcates the boundaries of system units and OPAs. The maps "are the law" regarding the CBRA, meaning there are no legal descriptions for the boundaries, just the lines on the maps. Thus any discrepancies on the maps that accidentally dissect a structure or incorrectly demarcates marsh and/or mean high tide lines has important consequences for that entire piece of property, and literally takes an act of Congress to fix. It would be beneficial for the maps to be used as a primary guide that augments the legal description. While this is a minor issue compared to the creation and expansion of NC-06 in Carteret County, it is still relevant for our interests and deserved mention in the public comment letter.

This could be a very important issue for our area and although admittedly a "cerebral" subject, it may be worth a couple minutes of your time to review.

