

COASTAL ZONES

(1980, R1991, R2000, R2001, R2007, R2017)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects believes that preservation, development, and use of the coastal zone and its resources should be carefully planned, regulated, and managed, enabling them to function as ecological systems and provide benefits to the surrounding region. Coastal zone planning and development should reflect site-specific conditions caused by human activity, climate change, or other nonnatural conditions. Public and private efforts should be directed at protecting and guaranteeing long-term integrity of significant natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic coastal resources. Development in the coastal zone should protect, restore, or otherwise provide mitigation that enhances ecosystem functionality. Such development or use should be consistent with sound coastal ecosystem management practices and should recognize the changing biological, geomorphological, and other natural processes that shape and influence coastal locales and regions.

Rationale

According to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, freshwater and saltwater coastal zones have a “direct and significant impact” on coastal resources. This includes both natural and manmade areas within coastal watersheds, including island environments. Freshwater and saltwater coastal zones may be affected by waves and currents, storms and spray, and are characterized by a variety of natural and manmade landforms, including coral reefs, rocky headlands, sandy beaches, sand dunes, vegetated sand flats, maritime forests, marshes, inlets, bays, estuaries and nearshore marine wetlands, and human-built infrastructure and development.

People wish to visit and live in coastal areas because of their scenic quality and many socioeconomic opportunities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010 39 percent of the U.S. population is currently concentrated in counties directly on the shoreline, and 52 percent of the total population lives in counties that drain through coastal watersheds. This increasing population will continue to tax coastal resources locally, regionally, and nationally.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has affirmed that coastal ecosystems are the most threatened in the world. They “...produce disproportionately more services relating to human well-being than most other systems...but are experiencing some of the most rapid degradation and loss...” The primary causes are associated with land conversion, infrastructure development, invasive species introduction, water withdrawal, and pollution. Coastal wetlands, when managed and protected properly, provide many benefits, including water purification and detoxifications of wastes; erosion control; buffering flooding consequences of storms and sea-level changes; improved water supply; providing recreational, aesthetic, educational, tourism, and water-dependent commercial benefit; and habitat diversity.

To mitigate further degradation and loss of coastal ecosystems, continued public investment should be made to maintain and improve existing infrastructure, such as treatment plants and drainage systems, to mitigate environmental damage. Development too close to the shoreline inhibits access for the general public and is subject to destruction from coastal storms, overwash, and flooding. As increasing coastal destruction due to severe climatic conditions appears to be becoming more



commonplace, emphasis should be placed on protection of remaining natural areas in the coastal zone, taking advantage of opportunities to provide appropriate buffers between developed and surrounding natural areas.

Close examination should be made of local, state, and/or federal policies, such as flood insurance, that may serve to inadvertently encourage development and ignore the natural role of coastal ecosystems and processes in providing protection, stability, and quality of life in coastal areas. Uncontrolled and unwise development may also erase historical structures, landscapes, and educational opportunities vital to our cultural heritage and future generations.

Management and development strategies should recognize local and regional differences, including urban coastal zones, and acknowledge and respect the dynamism of the coastal zone ecosystems. As an example, many of the landforms within the coastal zone, such as barrier islands, undergo constant change and are not stable or fixed in place. These changes, including beach erosion and accretion and dune migration, should be allowed to occur naturally, with management and development strategies that reflecting and respecting these processes.

Using open and publicly transparent processes, policy makers and planners should provide incentives for respecting the dynamic coastal zone. State and local governments should become involved and support in federal programs that encourage community planning for mitigations, establish mandatory setbacks, and promote the natural and beneficial functions of undeveloped coastal ecosystems. States should develop policies regulating rebuilding in coastal areas after major storm damage. Local communities should incorporate comprehensive impact assessment and monitoring in all development, planning, design construction, and operation processes to maintain the quality of the coastal zone environments.