



COASTAL ZONES (1980, R1991, R2000, R2001, R2007)

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. Where significant natural, cultural, recreational and scenic coastal resources exist, both public and private efforts should be directed at protecting them and guaranteeing their integrity. Where commercial interests and economic potential exist, only that development or use that allows the primary ecosystems to remain fully functional, or otherwise provides proper mitigation, should be allowed. Such development or use should be consistent with sound wetland ecosystem management practices and should recognize the extremely dynamic biological and geomorphological processes that shape and influence the local and regional areas.

Rationale

Fresh water and saltwater coastal zones, may be described as those areas along the land/water interface, affected by waves and currents, storms and spray, and characterized by a variety of landforms, including coral reefs, rocky headlands, sandy beaches, sand dunes, vegetated sand flats, maritime forests, marshes, inlets, bays, estuaries and near shore marine wetlands. According to the federal Coastal Zone Management Act, fresh and saltwater coastal zones are areas having a "direct and significant impact" on coastal resources.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) reports that coastal wetlands play a critical role in human health and well being through actions such as 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 dependant commercial benefit; and habitat diversity.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimates that 50 million people have settled in coastal counties in the United States. People wish to visit and live in coastal areas because of their scenic quality and their many recreational opportunities. The resulting use has more than local and national consequences. The MA has affirmed that coastal ecosystems are among 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.

Degradation and loss of coastal wetlands threaten the flora, fauna, human health and quality of life for residents and visitors alike. For instance, unwise coastal development may have the potential to dump and/or leak sewage, contaminated surface runoff, or agriculture related chemicals into coastal waters and thereby severely damages wetlands, dunes and shoreline ecosystems. Public reinvestment 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.

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 for coastlines. Uncontrolled and unwise development may also erase historical structures, landscapes and educational opportunities vital to our cultural heritage and future generations.

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Management and development strategies should 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 reflecting and respecting these processes.

Using open and publicly transparent processes, policymakers and planners should provide incentives for respecting the dynamic coastal zone. State and local governments should become involved 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.