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Coastal Restoration Act

Coastal blue carbon ecosystems – including salt marshes, mangroves, seagrass meadows, kelp forests, tidal swamps, and other coastal wetlands — are among the most powerful natural carbon sinks on earth. According to NOAA, mangroves and coastal wetlands sequester carbon at a rate ten times greater than mature tropical forests and store three to five times more carbon per equivalent area, where it can remain locked away for centuries to millennia. These same habitats protect coastal communities from storms, flooding, and erosion, filter pollution, and support the fish and wildlife that sustain coastal economies.

But these ecosystems are being lost and degraded, largely from coastal development, drainage, pollution, and sea level rise. When they are damaged or destroyed, carbon stored over centuries is released into the atmosphere, turning a climate solution into a source of emissions. The United States is a global hotspot for this loss: a 2022 study in Nature found that the U.S. and Russia together accounted for 64 percent of global salt marsh loss between 2000 and 2019.

Federal efforts to research, map, protect, and restore these ecosystems remain fragmented across more than a dozen agencies, and there is no comprehensive national map or inventory of coastal blue carbon ecosystems, their condition, or their carbon storage potential. This deprives decision-makers of the data and tools they need to target protection and restoration investments where they will deliver the greatest benefits.

We must protect and restore the coastal ecosystems that protect us and safeguard communities, support fisheries and wildlife, and harness one of nature's most effective tools to address climate change.

The *Coastal Restoration Act* would:

- **Establish an Interagency Working Group on Coastal Blue Carbon** to coordinate federal research, monitoring, mapping, protection, and restoration efforts, set national priorities, and assess existing legal authorities;
- **Create a national map and inventory of coastal blue carbon ecosystems** to document each ecosystem's habitat type and condition, ownership and protected status, carbon sequestration potential and greenhouse gas emissions, and potential for landward migration as seas rise. This map would inform regional assessments, provide technical assistance to state, local, and tribal governments, support EPA's national greenhouse gas inventory, and scope a coastal blue carbon calculator to estimate the benefits of restoration projects.

- **Launch pilot programs to protect intact and restore degraded coastal blue carbon ecosystems** to develop best management practices across geographically and ecologically diverse sites, prioritizing projects that provide long-term carbon storage, protect fish and wildlife habitat, reduce flood and storm risk, and benefit underserved communities;
- **Establish a Coastal Carbon Data Clearinghouse at the Smithsonian Institution** to collect, standardize, archive, and provide public access to federally funded coastal blue carbon data, accessible through NOAA's Digital Coast platform;
- **Create a Coastal Blue Carbon Inventory Program at NOAA** to provide workshops, training, and carbon stock assessments for state, local, and tribal governments;
- **Quantify the climate contributions of coastal blue carbon ecosystems** through a national, measurable assessment to standardize carbon accounting methods, measure emissions from degraded ecosystems and the benefits of restoration, evaluate the viability of a coastal blue carbon credit market, and explore coordination with freshwater wetland restoration in the Great Lakes;
- **Assess the long-term effects of storing carbon dioxide beneath the deep seafloor** through a National Academies study on the effects of deep seafloor carbon storage on ocean and climate conditions, marine species, and ecosystems;
- **Authorize $15 million per year for fiscal years 2027 through 2031**.