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Pew: To Finance Coastal Resilience, States Turn to Innovative Policies and Partnerships

Pay-for-success initiatives, public-private collaboration, and environmental markets can deliver numerous benefits

Coastal wetlands—including tidal marshes, forested swamps, mangroves, and seagrasses—are among humankind’s most powerful natural allies. These ecosystems not only absorb and store large amounts of carbon but also protect communities from flooding and wildfires, provide habitat for commercially and recreationally important species, and filter pollutants and excess nutrients from the water. Yet these habitats are disappearing at alarming rates because of sea-level rise, erosion, and development. Further, communities seeking to protect and restore coastal wetlands have struggled to secure the funding needed to meet the scale of the challenge.

To help address these issues, the Blue Carbon Network—a Pew-hosted group that connects state agencies, practitioners, academic researchers, and nongovernmental organizations working on coastal conservation and climate initiatives—coordinated a webinar that highlighted innovative state-led programs and initiatives to finance coastal resilience projects. Experts from Maryland, Louisiana, and Duke University shared information about a variety of successful approaches. One example is emerging environmental markets, which assign monetary values to environmental benefits—such as cleaner air and water, or carbon emission reductions—that then can be bought, sold, or traded to encourage protection and underwrite conservation projects.

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