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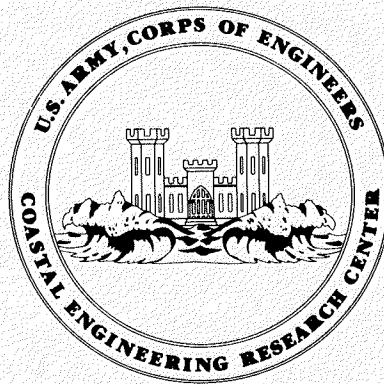
Shore Stabilization with Salt Marsh Vegetation

by

Paul L. Knutson and W. W. Woodhouse, Jr.

SPECIAL REPORT NO. 9

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) This report is published to provide engineers and scientists with guidelines on using coastal marsh vegetation as a shore erosion control measure in coastal regions of the United States. This erosion control alternative is suitable for relatively sheltered shorelines such as those found on bays, sounds, and estuaries. For various reasons this alternative has not been found to be effective in the Great Lakes, Alaska, or Hawaii. Criteria are provided on (1) determining site suitability, (2) selecting plant materials, (3) planting procedures and specifications, (4) estimating project costs, and (5) assessing impact.		

PREFACE

This report is published to provide engineers and scientists with guidelines on the use of salt marsh vegetation as a shore erosion control measure in coastal regions of the United States.

This is one of a series of reports to be published to form a Coastal Engineering Manual (CEM). The report is based, in part, upon information presented in SR-4 "Building Salt Marshes Along the Coasts of the Continental United States" (Woodhouse, 1979). The work was carried out under the U.S. Army Coastal Engineering Research Center's (CERC) Development of Functional and Structural Design Criteria work unit, Coastal Structure Evaluation and Design Program, Coastal Engineering Area of Civil Works Research and Development.


The report was prepared by P.L. Knutson, Ecologist, Coastal Ecology Branch, CERC, and W.W. Woodhouse, Jr., Professor Emeritus of Soil Science, North Carolina State University, under the general supervision of E.J. Pullen, Chief, Coastal Ecology Branch, and Mr. R.P. Savage, Chief, Research Division, CERC. R.A. Jachowski, former Chief, Coastal Design Criteria Branch, Engineering Development Division, was the CEM project monitor.

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Comments on this publication are invited.

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TED E. BISHOP
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
Commander and Director

CONTENTS

	Page
CONVERSION FACTORS, U.S. CUSTOMARY TO METRIC (SI).....	10
GLOSSARY.....	11
I INTRODUCTION.....	13
II BACKGROUND.....	13
1. Role of Marshes in Shore Stabilization.....	13
a. Wave Attenuation and Sediment Trapping.....	13
b. Soil Reinforcement.....	15
2. Coastal Salt Marshes of the United States.....	15
a. Eastern Region Marshes.....	17
b. Western Region Marshes.....	19
3. Establishing Coastal Marshes for Shore Stabilization.....	20
a. Invasion and Recovery in Natural Marshes.....	20
b. Planting to Encourage Establishment.....	21
c. Research on Planting to Control Erosion.....	22
III EVALUATING SITE SUITABILITY.....	25
1. Factors Influencing Planting Success.....	25
a. Soils.....	25
(1) Type.....	25
(2) Salinity.....	26
(3) Oxygen-Aeration.....	27
b. Exposure to Direct Sunlight.....	28
c. Shore Width Available for Planting.....	28
d. Sediment Supply.....	30
e. Summary.....	30
(1) Soil Type.....	30
(2) Salinity.....	30
(3) Oxygen-Aeration.....	30
(4) Exposure to Direct Sunlight.....	30
(5) Shore Width Available for Planting.....	30
(6) Sediment Supply.....	30
2. Evaluating Wave Climate Severity.....	31
a. Fetch.....	31
b. Shore Configuration.....	31
c. Sediment grain size.....	34
d. Winds.....	34
e. Ship-Generated waves.....	34
f. Offshore Depth.....	34
g. Tidal Currents.....	37
h. Discussion.....	37
i. Summary.....	37
IV SELECTING PLANT SPECIES, PLANT MATERIALS, AND PLANTING TECHNIQUES... 38	38
1. Selecting Plant Species.....	38
a. Principal Species.....	38
b. Other Useful Species.....	38
2. Selecting Plant Materials.....	40
3. Selecting Planting Techniques.....	42

CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
4. Summary.....	43
a. Principal Erosion Control Species.....	43
b. Plant Materials.....	44
c. Planting Methods.....	44
 V FERTILIZATION REQUIREMENTS.....	 44
1. Types of Fertilizer.....	45
2. Placement of Fertilizer.....	46
3. Fertilizer Rates.....	46
4. Maintenance Fertilizer.....	47
5. Summary.....	48
a. Types of Fertilizers.....	48
b. Placement.....	48
c. Rate.....	48
d. Maintenance.....	48
 VI PLANTING SPECIFICATIONS FOR PRINCIPAL SPECIES.....	 48
1. Smooth Cordgrass (<i>Spartina alterniflora</i>), Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.....	 48
a. Planting Techniques.....	50
(1) Sprigs.....	50
(2) Pot-Grown Nursery Seedlings.....	51
(3) Plugs.....	53
b. Soils and Salinity.....	53
c. Planting Zone.....	53
d. Planting Density.....	54
e. Planting Width.....	54
f. Planting Date.....	54
g. Fertilization Requirements.....	55
h. Planting Maintenance.....	55
i. Summary.....	56
2. Pacific Cordgrass (<i>Spartina foliosa</i>), Southern Pacific Coast..	56
a. Planting Techniques.....	58
(1) Sprigs.....	58
(2) Pot-Grown Nursery Seedlings.....	58
(3) Plugs.....	60
b. Soils and Salinity.....	61
c. Planting Zone.....	61
d. Planting Density.....	62
e. Planting Width.....	62
f. Planting Date.....	62
g. Fertilization Requirements.....	62
h. Planting Maintenance.....	63
i. Summary.....	63
3. Pacific Northwest.....	63
a. Lyngbye's Sedge (<i>Carex lyngbyei</i>).....	63
(1) Planting Techniques.....	65
(2) Soils and Salinity.....	65
(3) Planting Zone.....	65
(4) Planting Density.....	65
(5) Planting Width.....	65
(6) Planting Date.....	65

CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
(7) Fertilization Requirements.....	65
(8) Planting Maintenance.....	65
(9) Summary.....	66
b. Tufted Hairgrass (<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>).....	66
(1) Planting Techniques.....	66
(2) Soils and Salinity.....	66
(3) Planting Zone.....	66
(4) Planting Density.....	66
(5) Planting Width.....	66
(6) Planting Date.....	66
(7) Fertilization Requirements.....	66
(8) Planting Maintenance.....	68
(9) Summary.....	68
VII PLANTING SPECIFICATION FOR OTHER USEFUL SPECIES.....	68
1. Black Needle Rush (<i>Juncus roemerianus</i>).....	68
a. Planting Techniques.....	69
b. Soil and Salinity.....	69
c. Planting Zone.....	69
d. Planting Density.....	69
e. Planting Width.....	69
f. Planting Date.....	69
g. Fertilization Requirements.....	69
2. Common Reed (<i>Phragmites communis</i>).....	69
a. Planting Techniques.....	70
b. Soil and Salinity.....	70
c. Planting Zone.....	70
d. Planting Density.....	70
e. Planting Width.....	70
f. Planting Date.....	70
g. Fertilization Requirements.....	70
3. Cordgrasses.....	71
a. Big Cordgrass (<i>Spartina cynosuroides</i>).....	71
b. Saltmeadow Cordgrass (<i>Spartina patens</i>).....	71
(1) Planting Techniques.....	71
(2) Soils.....	74
(3) Planting Zones.....	74
(4) Planting Density.....	74
(5) Planting Width.....	74
(6) Planting Date.....	74
(7) Planting Management.....	74
(8) Summary.....	75
c. Gulf Cordgrass (<i>Spartina spartinae</i>).....	75
4. Red Mangrove (<i>Rhizophora mangle</i>), Black Mangrove (<i>Avicennia</i> <i>germinans</i>), and White Mangrove (<i>Laguncularia racemosa</i>).....	75
a. Planting Techniques.....	78
b. Salinity.....	78
c. Planting Zone.....	78
d. Planting Density.....	78
e. Planting Width.....	78
f. Planting Date.....	78

CONTENTS--Continued

	Page
g. Fertilization Requirements.....	78
h. Planting Management.....	78
5. Saltgrass (<i>Distichlis spicata</i>).....	79
6. Seaside Arrowgrass (<i>Triglochin maritima</i>).....	79
7. Siltgrass (<i>Paspalum vaginatum</i>).....	79
VIII COST.....	79
1. Cost Comparison with Other Erosion Control Methods.....	79
2. Planting Costs.....	81
a. Site Preparation.....	81
(1) Grading the Beach Face.....	81
(2) Wave-Stillling Devices.....	81
b. Harvesting, Processing, and Planting.....	81
c. Site Maintenance.....	83
(1) Fertilizer.....	83
(2) Debris Removal.....	83
(3) Wildlife Predation.....	83
3. Summary	83
a. Cost Comparison.....	83
b. Planting Costs.....	83
IX IMPACT ASSESSMENT.....	84
1. Potential Benefits.....	84
a. Marsh Ecology.....	84
b. Nutrient Cycling.....	85
c. Esthetics.....	85
2. Potential Negative Impacts.....	85
a. Public Access.....	85
b. Heavy Metal Release.....	85
c. Introducing Nuisance Species.....	87
d. Nutrient Pollution.....	87
3. Summary.....	88
a. Potential Benefits.....	88
b. Potential Negative Impact.....	88
LITERATURE CITED.....	89

TABLES

1 Wave heights produced by three vessels.....	37
2 Smooth cordgrass survival in lower intertidal areas.....	54
3 Pacific cordgrass survival in lower intertidal zone.....	62
4 Man-hours required to harvest, process, and plant 1,000 planting units.....	82

FIGURES

1 Coastal regions of the United States.....	16
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CONTENTS

FIGURES--Continued

	Page
2 Smooth cordgrass marsh (Virginia).....	17
3 Upper zone of saltmeadow cordgrass and lower zone of smooth cordgrass (Maine).....	18
4 Pacific cordgrass marsh (San Francisco, California).....	19
5 Lyngbye's sedge marsh (Oregon).....	20
6 Scarp of bank on seaward edge of an eroding coastal marsh (San Francisco Bay, California).....	21
7 Oldest reported salt marsh planting in the United States (Virginia)...	22
8 Establishment period for Cedar Island, North Carolina.....	23
9 Stability period for Cedar Island, North Carolina.....	23
10 Erosion period for Cedar Island, North Carolina.....	24
11 Clearing woody vegetation to provide direct sunlight exposure.....	29
12 Planting performance versus longest fetch.....	32
13 Planting performance versus average fetch.....	33
14 Planting performance versus shoreline configuration.....	35
15 Planting performance versus sediment grain size.....	36
16 Vegetative Stabilization Site Evaluation Form.....	39
17 Typical smooth cordgrass transplant or "sprig" from the wild or from an intertidal nursery.....	41
18 Planting by hand.....	43
19 Mechanical planting with disk-type tobacco planter.....	44
20 Smooth cordgrass.....	49
21 Pot-grown nursery seedlings.....	51
22 Harvesting seed.....	52
23 Nylon rope fence around smooth cordgrass planting.....	55
24 Pacific cordgrass.....	57
25 Pot-grown nursery seedlings.....	59

CONTENTS

FIGURES--Continued

	Page
26 Harvesting Pacific cordgrass seed.....	59
27 Cordgrass-mussel plugs of Pacific cordgrass.....	61
28 Lyngbye's sedge.....	64
29 Tufted hairgrass.....	67
30 Seven years growth from single sprig of black needle rush, CERC Field Research Facility, Duck, North Carolina.....	69
31 Erosion control planting with common reed, CERC Field Research Facility, Duck, North Carolina.....	70
32 Saltmeadow cordgrass meadow (Maine).....	72
33 Saltmeadow cordgrass planted landward of smooth cordgrass.....	72
34 Gulf cordgrass.....	76
35 White, black, and red mangroves.....	76
36 Cost comparison of various shore stabilization methods.....	80
37 Vegetative erosion control project (Maryland).....	86
38 Erosion control structure (Maryland).....	86

CONVERSION FACTORS, U.S. CUSTOMARY TO METRIC (SI) UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

U.S. customary units of measurement used in this report can be converted to metric (SI) units as follows:

Multiply	by	To obtain
inches	25.4	millimeters
	2.54	centimeters
square inches	6.452	square centimeters
cubic inches	16.39	cubic centimeters
feet	30.48	centimeters
	0.3048	meters
square feet	0.0929	square meters
cubic feet	0.0283	cubic meters
yards	0.9144	meters
square yards	0.836	square meters
cubic yards	0.7646	cubic meters
miles	1.6093	kilometers
square miles	259.0	hectares
knots	1.852	kilometers per hour
acres	0.4047	hectares
foot-pounds	1.3558	newton meters
millibars	1.0197×10^{-3}	kilograms per square centimeter
ounces	28.35	grams
pounds	453.6	grams
	0.4536	kilograms
ton, long	1.0160	metric tons
ton, short	0.9072	metric tons
degrees (angle)	0.01745	radians
Fahrenheit degrees	5/9	Celsius degrees or Kelvins ¹

¹To obtain Celsius (C) temperature readings from Fahrenheit (F) readings, use formula: $C = (5/9) (F - 32)$.

To obtain Kelvin (K) readings, use formula: $K = (5/9) (F - 32) + 273.15$.

GLOSSARY

ERGOT - A dark, spongy, parasitic mass of fungus found on the ovaries of various grasses.

FETCH LENGTH - The horizontal distance wind blows over open water to generate waves.

IRREGULARLY FLOODED - Areas of the shoreline which are not covered and uncovered by the rise and fall of the tide on a daily basis, but are subject to flooding during extreme lunar tides or wind setup. Generally, the region between mean high water and the estimated highest tide.

PRIMARY PRODUCTIVITY - The rate at which energy is stored by photosynthesizing organisms (chiefly green plants) in the form of organic substances.

PLANT PROPAGATION - Increase in number, or multiplication, of plants to perpetuate the species or variety. Also, the process and methods employed by man to promote natural increase in some plants and to bring increase about under conditions when it would not otherwise take place.

PLUG - A root-soil mass with attached aerial stems of living plants. A type of PROPAGULE.

POTTED NURSERY SEEDLINGS - Plants raised in nurseries in peat moss or plastic pots, usually the latter. Seeds are placed in the pots, germinated, and plants are raised for 3 to 7 months. A type of PROPAGULE.

PROPAGULE - A plant material such as seeds, SPRIGS, or seedlings used in PLANT PROPAGATION.

RHIZOME - A horizontal underground stem.

REGULARLY FLOODED - Areas of the shoreline which are usually covered and uncovered by the daily rise and fall of the tide. Generally, the region between mean low water and mean high water.

SPRIG - A part of a plant consisting of at least one node (joint of a stem from which the leaves arise) with attached stems and roots of living plants. A type of PROPAGULE.

SHORE STABILIZATION WITH SALT MARSH VEGETATION

by
Paul L. Knutson and W.W. Woodhouse, Jr.

I. INTRODUCTION

Shore erosion is a common problem in the bays, sounds, and estuaries of the coastal United States. A wide variety of structures have been developed and used to control this erosion. However, due to environmental objections and economic limitations it is often impractical to use even the most innovative of these structures. This is particularly true for relatively low wave energy areas where erosion may be costly but is not yet catastrophic. Low-cost, nonstructural techniques are now available for controlling erosion in salt and brackish water, low wave energy areas of the contiguous United States using native marsh plants. Vegetation, where feasible, is usually lower in cost than structures and may be more effective.

This report provides comprehensive guidelines on the use of marsh plants to control shore erosion resulting from wind waves and tidal currents. The report has been carefully organized to facilitate its use as a reference document. Each major section addresses a specific facet of project planning, design, or construction; most sections end with a summary of information generally presented in the form of graphs, tables, and matrices.

II. BACKGROUND

This section provides a background of information on the subject of using marsh plants to control shore erosion. It discusses the role of marshes in providing stability to the shore, describes natural coastal marshes by region, and provides an introduction to the concept of encouraging marsh establishment to reduce shore erosion.

1. Role of Marshes in Shore Stabilization.

Marsh plants perform two functions in abating erosion. First, their aerial parts form a flexible mass which dissipates wave energy. As wave energy is diminished, both the offshore transport and the longshore transport of sediment are reduced. Optimally, dense stands of marsh vegetation can create a depositional environment, causing accretion rather than erosion of the shoreface. Second, many marsh plants form dense root-rhizome mats which add stability to the shore sediment. This protective mat is of particular importance during severe winter storms when the aerial stems provide only limited resistance to the impact of waves.

a. Wave Attenuation and Sediment Trapping. Wave attenuation in marshes has not been studied extensively. Wayne (1975) measured small waves passing through a smooth cordgrass marsh at Adams Beach, Florida. Dean (1979) gives the following empirical methodology for describing wave dampening in marshes, based on empirical estimates of the fluid drag forces occurring on vertical cylinders and laboratory observation of various arrays of cylinders:

It can be shown that with reasonable assumptions, the ratio of incident wave height H_i , seaward of a stand of marsh grass, and height H_{le} , landward of the stand of marsh grass, are related as follows:

$$\frac{H_{le}}{H_i} = \frac{1}{1 + AH_i}$$

where

$$A = \frac{C_D D \ell}{3\pi S^2 d}$$

C_D = Drag coefficient (≈ 1.0)

D = grass stalk diameter

ℓ = length of "stand" through which waves propagate

S = average spacing of grass stalks (assumed on square centers)

d = water depth (assumed to be constant)

Example: Consider the following: grass stalks 4 millimeters in diameter on a 6-centimeter spacing in a water depth of 25 centimeters extending over a stand length, ℓ , of 10 meters. For this example an incident wave height, H_i , of 15 centimeters will be considered. The height, H_{le} , at the landward end of the stand is

$$A = \frac{C_D D \ell}{3\pi S^2 d}$$

$$A = \frac{1(0.4)1000}{3\pi(6)^2 25}$$

$$A = 0.0471$$

and

$$H_{le} = \frac{H_i}{1 + AH_i}$$

$$H_{le} = \frac{15}{1 + 0.0471(15)}$$

$$H_{le} = 8.8 \text{ cm}$$

This is a 41-percent reduction in the incident wave height. The associated rate at which energy will be dissipated against the shoreline will be reduced by 65 percent. In a series of field experiments Knutson, Seelig, and Inskeep (in preparation, 1983) found a modified version of the Dean model useful in predicting wave damping in sloping, natural marshes. They found that under conditions similar to those used in the above example about 64 percent of the energy associated with a 15-centimeter wave was dissipated by only 2.5 meters of natural, sloping marsh.

As the wave energy impacting the shore is reduced, there is increased potential for sediment deposition and decreased potential for erosion. Woodhouse, Seneca, and Broome (1974) measured sediment deposition resulting from marsh plantings and reported the deposition of 15 to 30 centimeters of sediment along three planted profiles at Snow's Cut, North Carolina, during a 30-month period.

The influence marshes have on waves depends primarily on the width of the marsh ("L" in Dean's equation). The width to which a marsh can extend, under optimal conditions, depends on the geographical area in which the marsh is located and the tidal amplitude and slope of the shoreline. The density of plants within a particular marsh depends on many variables including (1) species, (2) geographical area, (3) elevation zone within the marsh, (4) season, (5) substrate, (6) maturity of the marsh, (7) salinity, and (8) wave climate.

b. Soil Reinforcement. Though it is empirically evident that plant root systems improve soil stability, there is little experimental evidence on this subject. Gray (1974) summarized findings concerning soil reinforcement with vegetation. He noted that some independent studies have shown that plant roots do significantly increase soil stability (Endo and Tsuruta, 1969; Manbeian, 1973). In these studies the shear strength of vegetated soils was as much as two and three times greater. In addition, the shear strength of soils was higher when the volume fraction or weight density of the root system was greater.

2. Coastal Salt Marshes of the United States.

A coastal marsh is an herbaceous (plants lacking woody stems) plant community found on the part of the shoreline which is periodically flooded by salt or brackish water. A number of species in the grass family (Poaceae), sedge family (*Cyperaceae*), and rush family (*Juncaceae*) commonly form coastal marshes.

Coastal marshes occur naturally in the intertidal zone of moderate- to low-energy shorelines along tidal rivers and in bays and estuaries. These marshes may be narrow fringes along steep shorelines, but can extend over wide areas in shallow, gently sloping bays and estuaries. Such lands were extensive and widely distributed along the Atlantic, peninsular Florida, gulf, and Pacific coasts of the United States before development by man (Fig. 1).

There are two major groups of coastal salt marshes in the United States, based on physiographic differences--marshes of the Atlantic, peninsular Florida, and gulf coasts (the eastern region) and those characteristic of the northern and southern Pacific coasts (the western region). The eastern

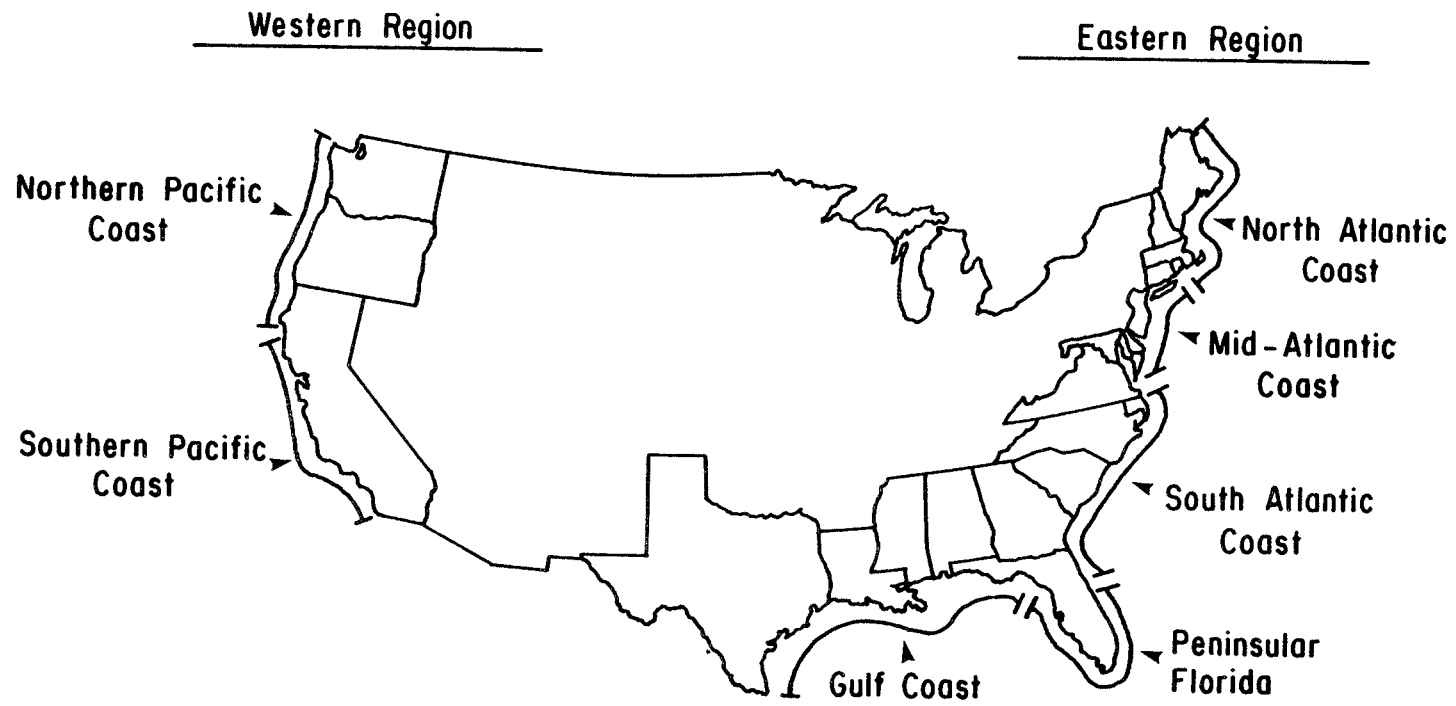


Figure 1. Coastal regions of the United States.

