

# Community Disaster Resilience Zones: Building Resilience Through Private Sector Partnerships

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The Community Disaster Resilience Zones (CDRZ) Act of 2022 builds resilience across the nation by driving public and private resources to the most at-risk and in-need communities.

## Summary

The [Community Disaster Resilience Zone Act](#) is a bipartisan measure signed into law on Dec. 20, 2022. It amends the [Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act](#) and requires FEMA to use a natural hazard risk assessment index to identify census tracts that are most at risk to the effects of natural hazards.

In September 2023, FEMA designated the first 483 CDRZ spanning all 50 states and the District of Columbia. To date, the Agency has announced an additional 284 tracts across 57 tribes and 4 territories. This brings the total to 767 designated zones.

Designated zones provide a geographic focus for financial and technical assistance from public and private organizations to support entities as they plan and implement resilience and mitigation projects to help reduce risks associated with natural hazards. This initiative helps communities seeking to strengthen their resilience by working across all levels of government and with a wide range of public and private sector partners.

## Leveraging Private Sector Partnerships to Build Resilience in Designated Zones

Partnerships between entities with CDRZ designations and private sector organizations help proactively mitigate disaster risk and aid recovery efforts. Each partner leverages their unique strengths under a shared mission to use their resources and expertise to support our most at-risk and in-need communities. Building resilience is not solely a government-led initiative; a whole-of-community approach is required to support and strengthen communities. The examples below showcase how private organizations are supporting CDRZ across the nation today.

### Climate Smart Communities Initiative

The [Climate Smart Communities Initiative \(CSCI\)](#), funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and managed by a consortium of nonprofit partners, has provided crucial support to designated zones in communities to scale their resilience planning, while reducing financial burdens on vulnerable communities. CSCI has provided awards totaling more than \$500,000 to entities with CDRZ designations spanning multiple states and



# FEMA

Tribal Nations for targeted resilience projects. For example, Charleston County, South Carolina (with four designated zones) received an award of \$121,821 to enable a systematic approach to flood mitigation investments and catalyze climate-smart community revitalization through brownfields redevelopment.

*“The Climate Smart Communities Initiative grew out of a multi-year effort to advance climate adaptation and resilience based on input from practitioners around the nation. Working with CDRZ is a natural extension of this collaborative spirit and brings more focus to communities that can benefit the most. NOAA is committed to building a Climate Ready Workforce, and these projects are one of the important ways we can build public-private partnerships for that purpose.”*

**Program Manager, NOAA CSCI**

## Geos Institute

The [Geos Institute](#) incorporated CDRZ designations into its existing [Navigator Network](#) to focus assistance on communities that have high climate risk and high social vulnerability. Geos Navigators have engaged with every CDRZ in their service region, supporting many with applying for grants and other technical assistance. They have seen significant impacts in shifting how community leaders think about resilience toward a more data-informed perspective. The Geos Institute credits this shift to the collaborative, trusting relationships that Navigators have developed with communities with designated zones.

In Liberty County, Georgia, the [Navigator Network](#) is working with the Seabrook Village Foundation, formed by members of the historic Gullah Geechee community of Seabrook Village, to design, permit, and construct a living shoreline. This nature-based solution will protect their community center along the bank of a tributary of the North Newport River that is threatened by significant erosion. The Navigators’ colleagues at the Georgia Conservancy wrote the grant applications for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Community Resilience Fund for the living shoreline design, the Southern Company Georgia Power for Waters grant for water quality monitoring, and the NOAA Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Tribal Nations and underserved communities for construction. All three grants were awarded.

*“FEMA’s designation of CDRZ communities has helped the Geos Institute focus the development of its Navigator Network on communities that sit at the intersection of high risk and high social vulnerability. Our Navigators are showing what dedicated local leaders in underserved areas can do when provided with customized assistance to help them meet their community-driven resilience goals. Partner organizations in many other states are ready to hire Navigators and we are working to secure resources to expand this Network from four states in the southeast to the rest of the country.”*

**Executive Director, Geos Institute**

## SBP

[SBP](#) has nine community-based Resilience Fellows who are hired locally. These Fellows add critical human capacity to help communities access available federal and state resilience and adaptation resources. In communities with both SBP Resilience Fellows and Geos Institute Navigators, Fellows and Navigators have collaborated closely to offer

enhanced direct technical assistance. SBP believes this is a successful and replicable model, and it plans to expand the Recovery and Resilience Fellows Program where community interest and available funding exists.

*“SBP supports FEMA’s use of data and science to designate high-risk, highly vulnerable communities that need more resilience investment. SBP looks forward to working closely with local communities, especially those with limited capacity, to access all of the resilience and adaptation resources and benefits that a CDRZ designation should provide.”*

**Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer, SBP**

*“Thanks to SBP’s Fellows Program, we are looking forward to making meaningful investments within the Community Disaster Resilience Zones in Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester counties, in South Carolina. We are hopeful that initiatives like CDRZ will continue to bring necessary attention to areas in our region who could best benefit from resilience and mitigation funding in advance of future disasters. Both CDRZ and SBP’s Fellows program open doors to greater possibilities for the future.”*

**Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Council of Government, South Carolina (BCD-COG)**

## Headwaters Economics

Through its [FloodWise](#) program, [Headwater Economics](#) supported the small towns of [Custer](#) and [Hermosa](#) in South Dakota when they experienced powerful floods by assisting community leaders and residents with commissioning engineering studies to determine how flood risks could be minimized. Each town incorporated the findings into highly competitive FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant applications. As a result, Custer County secured funds from FEMA and the state of South Dakota to finalize plans for flood mitigation. Not only did Custer County secure grant funds from FEMA, the CDRZ designation in the Town of Hermosa facilitated Hermosa’s selection to receive FEMA BRIC direct technical assistance.

## Community Adaptation Program

Across the United States, multiple designated zones are located in counties supported by the [Community Adaptation Program](#) (CAP) of the American Red Cross. Through CAP, Red Cross partners with local nonprofits to increase their capabilities with training, equipment, materials, volunteer pools, program consultation, information sharing, and funding. There are now 72 CAP nonprofit partners, over 95,000 projected individuals served by current enhancements, and seven new Resilience Hubs. This year, CAP also provided critical post-disaster response and recovery support to two CAP counties with designated zones in the wake of the Thompson Fire (Butte County, California) and Hurricane Francine (Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana).

## Center for Climate and Energy Solutions

The [Center for Climate and Energy Solutions](#) (C2ES) launched a two-year pilot Accelerator focused on wildfire and extreme heat, which engaged more than 90 key public and private sector leaders. The pilot region—the North Front Range of Colorado—was selected for its high risk and social vulnerability. The Accelerator created a common vision, identifying seven key action areas for regional resilience. Continuous collaboration informed, connected, and empowered stakeholders, resulting in a regionally tailored implementation toolkit. With adequate funding, C2ES

intends to launch Accelerators in two new regions with CDRZ. Together, these partnerships will build capacity for these regions to mitigate the effects of future disasters.

*"Climate resilience and equity are central to thriving communities, and effective and accessible public resources are critical to accelerate community resilience. The Resilience Zone designations have been a valuable new tool to help increase awareness of those communities with greater vulnerability to climate hazards and lower capacity to adapt to them. With this information, governments and organizations have a clearer opportunity to better channel where important limited resources are spent to achieve more balanced outcomes."*

**Director, C2ES**