



# Works in Progress

Conserving Our Natural Heritage . . . Investing In Our Children's Future Spring/Summer 2002

## Georgia's Coast at Turning Point Center calls for marsh hammock moratorium

### Moratorium Needed

If coastal Georgia is to successfully protect the resources and quality of life that has made this region legendary, and nature-based business a major source of our employment, there are tough choices that must be made, and made soon. The Center recommends a moratorium on any state or local permits that would allow hammock development until thoroughly examined policy alternatives and supporting environmental research studies are available for public review.

During this time, as concerned citizens, we should take stock of what we value most in our communities, what we are, and are not, willing to trade off, and the implications of these issues for how we live. To be responsible and realistic, each of us must adjust our habits of consuming, driving, working and playing in recognition of basic values, as our actions cumulatively take their toll in an increasingly urban Georgia.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Marsh Hammock Advisory Council recently released a report summarizing their work to date in determining the environmental value, vulnerability, and protection options for Georgia's marsh hammocks. The report includes only rudimentary analysis of the environmental function of hammocks. Options for protecting hammocks have not been evaluated, ranked, or recommended.

In the two hearings held by DNR on the issue in Savannah and St. Simons recently, two things became clear. First, much additional work of the Advisory Council remains to be completed. Second, and most importantly, many coastal Georgians are re-evaluating fundamental assumptions about the value of public resources and their use by owners of private property to make profits.

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Most people agree that providing road access over tidal lands to marsh hammocks is pivotal to their development. But for this to occur, the state must approve permits for bridges across these environmentally sensitive tidal marshlands that have been protected by state law under the Marshlands Protection Act since 1970.

Because there is no clear prohibition against such bridges, there has been a troubling tendency for DNR's Coastal Resources Division to approve them. And due to the sheer number of hammocks in private ownership, the prospect of this trend spreading has many coastal residents seriously concerned. Imagine hundreds of bridges and elevated roadways spanning coastal Georgia's marshfront vistas. And reflect on the escalated loss of native wildlife, migratory birds, and maritime forest, not to mention harm to the diversity and abundance of fish.

No wonder this issue has become so critical under such circumstances! The question is: should marshlands protected in the public trust be used to provide the means for private financial benefits gained from the development of hammock property? And if so, how often and under what circumstances? Trade-offs made in allowing hammock bridges that may have seemed acceptable not long ago are being increasingly questioned. As Georgia's burgeoning population imposes unprecedented stress on natural resources, coastal residents are reaching a new awareness that will redefine the ground rules for such decisions. This is largely motivated by understandable alarm about the accumulating effects of many seemingly negligible individual actions that disturb land, uproot native habitats, and risk further environmental decline.

Most commonly, these concerns focus on the visual quality of our communities. But what we cannot see may be far more significant to the interests of this and future generations. As we have previously reported, based on EPA publications, the permitted release of toxins into Georgia's waterways

rose by more than 80% from 1989 through 1998. Half of Georgia's fish consumption advisories are in the coastal region, even though the coast is less than one-fifteenth of the state's geographic area. Loosely translating, this means that coastal Georgians are seven times likelier to encounter toxic

materials in fish than are other Georgians. Yet, our economy is far more dependent on these resources than any other area of the state. This can mean only one thing: those who have profited by improperly using Georgia's air and water resources are doing so at the expense of others, including the public at large, as well as nature-based businesses.

Indications of such trends, once understood by coastal citizens, can bring a major turning point in our perception of public interest. We believe that coastal Georgia is now in the midst of such a re-evaluation, and that the Center has contributed to the awareness needed to reach this stage of reassessment. As important as it is, the hammock issue is just one of several fronts along which these changes are taking hold. The Center will continue working to identify and protect public interests by collaborating with other organizations on air quality, water quality, land use, and economic development. Please visit our website for further elaboration on these

various issues and activities. Your support, involvement and insights are needed!

Won't you join us at the Center on these important issues? Someday we may look back and remember these efforts to save one of America's Last Chance Landscapes much as the authors of the Marshland Protection Act today take pride in their contribution to the preservation of the Georgia coastal marshes. Working together, we can achieve ecologically responsible prosperity for coastal Georgians.

- David Kyler  
Executive Director

## Truth & Consequences: Values & Vulnerabilities of Georgia's Coastal Resources

- (1) Bridges across tidal marsh and development of hammocks cause the contamination or disturbance of vegetation, land and water resources important to both wildlife and humans.
- (2) Coastal population has doubled since the keystone piece of coastal legislation, the Marshlands Protection Act, was passed in 1970, and it will double again by 2030, with proportional impacts on water and land use.
- (3) Thousands of coastal Georgians derive their income from fisheries, seafood processing, and nature-based tourism [40,000 jobs, worth \$1.5 billion a year], all of which depend on environmental quality.
- (4) Coastal resources are under growing threat from unprecedented urban and rural development across the vast watersheds of coastal rivers, which carry associated pollution hundreds of miles downstream to our estuaries; these inter-tidal areas are highly sensitive essential fish habitat, ecologically vital to many marine species.
- (5) Recent blue crab harvests have dropped to about one-quarter of their levels 30 years ago, while the diversity, health, and productivity of other species are in question.

# Center Takes Steps to Protect Coastal Rivers, Fisheries

On April 3 the Center for a Sustainable Coast sent a set of recommendations to a state study committee that is charged with developing Georgia water policies. These recommendations follow two previous actions by the Center defending coastal resources, including a water quality petition filed with the Georgia Board of Natural Resources in late November and a subsequent letter to the Director of the Environmental Protection Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

The Center is also among a group of organizations calling for a moratorium on power plant permits in Georgia, pending a report by the Governor's Energy Policy Task Force later this year. Power generation is the single largest water user in the state, even larger than agriculture and industry. Power plants that burn coal and oil also produce mercury, a dangerous neurotoxin.

These actions take on added significance in light of the recent announcement by American Rivers, which proclaimed that the Altamaha is the nation's seventh most endangered river.

In its recommendations, the Center called for stronger measures for evaluating new proposals to use water and for enforcing safeguards already in state and federal laws. Specifically, the focus of the proposal, entitled *"Improving Protection of Coastal Water Resources"* covered four main topics:

- 1. Make more extensive use of information and scientific expertise in evaluating environmental permits under various programs.**
- 2. Minimize flow disruptions in river systems.**
- 3. Restore wetland functions and provide adequate buffers to protect water quality.**
- 4. Consider potential impacts on all down-stream users when making permit decisions by applying the precautionary principle.**

In explaining the recommendations, the Center advised that the state should ensure that no new uses unwisely divert or consume water flowing to the coast, where this flow is needed to support fisheries.

"Even before the current period of drought, salinity in the inter-tidal areas of coastal rivers had been increasing, putting various species of fish at risk, especially in their earlier life stages. Remaining fresh water flowing into Georgia's estuary system is needed to retain the function of this highly valuable habitat, which supports thousands of jobs in commercial and recreational fishing and seafood processing. The economic

importance of these coastal resources is on the order of \$1 billion annually, and putting them at further risk by reducing river flow is directly contrary to the public interest."



The Center executive director, David Kyler, said that this destructive trend of increasing salinity is attributable to several factors, including the depletion of freshwater wetlands by forestry, agriculture, and urban development, as well as excessive withdrawal of groundwater by industry.

Recommendations advised policymakers that restoration of at least some of these lost wetlands and wider buffers along waterways are essential to help protect against further decline in valuable coastal resources.

Actions being proposed by the Center are needed as Georgia's growth imposes increasing burden on natural systems that are not being adequately protected under current practices. "Long-term public interests will be best served by state and local governments learning to regulate the use of resources within sustainable limits of natural processes. The sooner these actions are taken, the less Georgia taxpayers will

ultimately have to pay for improved water resources," the Center declared.

Water resource recommendations are posted on the Center's website [[www.sustainablecoast.org](http://www.sustainablecoast.org)] and on the website of the Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee [[www.cviog.uga.edu/water](http://www.cviog.uga.edu/water)].

## **ACTION ALERT!!!**

**\*\*\* URGENT & TIME SENSITIVE \*\*\***

Our friends at Georgia AirKeepers Campaign, with whom the Center is working on air quality issues, have asked that we enroll support for the CLEAN POWER ACT (Senate Bill 556) to help reduce pollution, such as the mercury contamination of fish described above, by as much as 90%! Over time, it would require every power plant to meet the most recent pollution control standards, erasing the 'grandfather' loophole that exempts dirty plants. Please call or send your statement supporting this bill to both senators today!

**Senator Max Cleland** phone: 202-224-3521  
fax: 202-224-0072

**Senator Zell Miller** phone: 202-224-3643  
fax: 202-228-2090

**Please take action now!**



## THANKS AND SPECIAL RECOGNITION

*Informing the public and taking timely action on major coastal policy issues is a team effort. Without the generous help of an impressive array of individuals and their diverse affiliations, the Center could not effectively pursue its mission. By giving recognition to those who have assisted us, we not only express fitting appreciation to individuals for their teamwork, but also provide a sampling of the variety of relationships and tasks involved in doing our work. We hope that you will be inspired by their example. The Center looks forward to further successful activities with our many colleagues, members, and supporters. If you would like to assist the Center, give us a call at (912) 638-3612.*

Appreciation to Center member **Sara Barczak**, who as the Safe Energy Director of **Georgians for Clean Energy**, has so generously assisted us in participating in statewide energy issues. In March, Sara encouraged us to attend the Energy Summit in Atlanta, which was co-hosted by her organization. Sara spoke out in favor of the Center's continuing involvement in energy policy planning activities that were developed at the Summit. **Rita Kilpatrick**, the director of **Georgians for Clean Energy**, was kind enough to provide overnight lodging and 'taxi service' for us in Atlanta.

Sincere thanks to **Helen Alexander**, who has been providing administrative and financial assistance to the Center for the past year. Helen has continued to help enormously in smoothing out administrative snags, and working with Center board member and secretary-treasurer, **Alan Bailey**, recently succeeded in getting approval from the IRS for renewing the organization's 501(c) 3 designation. This will enable the Center to continue offering tax-deductions for contributors supporting the Center.

Board member **Venetia Butler**, an environmental educator at the **Oatland Center** in Chatham County, deserves our thanks for arranging several presentations for the Center's executive director at conferences in recent months. For providing a similar outreach opportunity, we also owe recognition to Center intern, **Kimberly Stewart**, who scheduled a talk for the executive director at a Georgia Southern University seminar. And we must also thank **Clean Coast's Clete Bergen** for inviting David Kyler to speak at a March conference held on Ossabaw Island.

We express our profound sorrow upon the death of **Tom Cross** of St. Simons Island, who was very helpful to the Center by providing bookkeeping assistance and related computer services whenever needed. Tom, who shared a nearby office, always had a kind word and was an unusually patient man. We were shocked and saddened by his untimely passing in March.

We are again grateful to Center advisor and supporter, **John Train** of Macon, who represented the organization at several conferences, accompanying the executive director to the Georgia River Network conference in Milledgeville, the Clean Coast conference on Ossabaw Island, and the Georgia Energy Summit in Atlanta.

Kudos to **Harold Reheis, Director Georgia's Environmental Protection Division** who decided to deny a permit for water withdrawal from the Lower Floridan aquifer in Richmond Hill (Bryan County) after considering extensive opposing comments from hydrologists, geologists, and numerous others, including the Center. Mr. Reheis acted responsibly in holding two public meetings on this issue, which produced decisively valuable information. We also owe gratitude to **Ben Brewton Coastal Environmental Organization** and **Patty McIntosh The Georgia Conservancy** who were so instrumental in generating public attention about this important issue. The Center is very thankful for the assistance of our advisor and veteran geologist **Rick Krause**, who kindly provided insightful help in our comments on this issue, which were presented at the Board of Natural Resources in Atlanta as well as at the public meetings in Richmond Hill. The incisive and influential public remarks on this issue by hydrogeologist **Dr. Jim Reichard** (also a Center advisor) deserve our praise as well.

**Colleen Kiernan Sierra Club** and **Allie Kelly Georgia Environmental Enforcement Project** did an outstanding job in generating public involvement on public health issues related to dirty power plants. Largely through their initiative, assisted by testimony of the Center and other groups, EPD agreed to hold public meetings in Savannah, Macon, and Cartersville, home to the three plants that are violating the Clean Air Act. In Savannah, Colleen and Allie organized a truly compelling display of public protest against pollution caused by Plant Kraft. We are indebted to these two dedicated environmental advocates for providing the opportunity for the Center to participate. The three plants in question are owned by the Southern Company.

Our thanks to **Center board member Alan Bailey** for his generous donation of six gift memberships in the Center to individuals concerned about coastal issues.

We are especially grateful to the **Glynn County Board of Commissioners** for their resolute protection of coastal water resources in a recent decision denying a rezoning that would have allowed strip-mining on a tract near Interstate 95. They expressed justifiable concern about the effects the operation could have on water quality and remaining aquifer capacity by soundly defeating the proposal in a vote of 6 to 1. It is clear that water conservation has finally become a key issue for decision makers in our area.



Our friends and colleagues with the **Southern Environmental Law Center** have earned our admiration for their intelligence and hard work on behalf of coastal Georgians and the organizations that represent them. These outstanding individuals include (alphabetically) **Derb Carter, Chris DeScherer, Blan Holman, Laura Jones, Amanda Lail, and Wes Woolf**. Through their tireless efforts, the Center and our fellow advocacy groups represented by SELC have held forth on compelling legal arguments that are likely to affect future interpretation of the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act.

Congratulations to veteran staffer **Susan Shipman** at the **Coastal Resources Division of the Georgia DNR** for being promoted to director of that division. Center board members and staff have the highest regard for Susan's past work and wish her every success. We look forward to collaborating with Ms. Shipman and her staff in resolving various issues of common concern.

**Nancy Thomason** of Saint Simons Island, current president of **Residents United for Planning and Action (RUPA)**, deserves tribute for her persistence and foresight in pressing for protection of marsh hammocks. Largely through Nancy's efforts, a number of environmental groups, including the Center, have become involved in legal actions and policy analysis related to these ecologically significant areas.



We also wish to thank **DNR Commissioner Lonice Barrett** for holding public hearings on hammock development and protection here on the coast. These hearings and the work of the Marsh Hammocks Council have helped expand discussion of this critical issue.

# Marshland Protection Cases: Emerald Pointe & Man Head Marina

## A bridge too far and a site too small

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### Testing the Marshlands Protection Act

In 1970, the Georgia legislature enacted the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act to protect this “vital natural resource system.” The Act requires persons to obtain a state permit prior to making alterations to marshlands and establishes the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee to implement the permit program

In recent years, increased population and development activities on the Georgia coast have exerted pressures on the coast’s fragile ecosystems. As the supply of available waterfront properties has dwindled, developers have begun to target marsh hammocks as potential new sites for waterfront development.

Access roads built across the marsh and residential development of marsh hammocks adversely impact the surrounding marshlands and tidal waters by siltation, polluted runoff, and failing septic systems.

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### Emerald Pointe Ruling Called “Disappointing”

#### A bridge too far

Administrative Law Judge Jesse Altman recently upheld a permit for the development of three small upland areas in the coastal marsh near Savannah. The permit was the subject of a legal challenge brought by the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) on behalf of the Georgia Center for a Sustainable Coast, Altamaha Riverkeeper and the Sierra Club. “We are disappointed in the decision,” said Wesley Woolf, director of SELC’s Atlanta office. Woolf added that the conservation groups are concerned about the precedent this permit could set along the coast, where development pressure is increasingly threatening the marsh hammocks and surrounding ecosystems. “We don’t think developers have the right to destroy marshes owned by the citizens of Georgia to develop land for personal gain,” he said.

The controversial permit has drawn statewide and national attention to the plight of these ecologically sensitive “marsh hammocks,” which were identified by Scenic America earlier this year as one of America’s most endangered landscapes. In addition, marsh hammocks provide roosting and refuge sites for marsh wildlife, such as wood storks, bald eagles and ibises.

The state Department of Natural Resources issued a permit in 2001 to Emerald Pointe development to build three private bridges over state-owned marshlands off the mainland in

Savannah. The bridges use two marsh hammocks as stepping stones to a third hammock for a planned community dock or marina. The two other hammocks would have as many as 40 high-end houses or condominiums. While the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee has issued permits allowing the development of marsh hammocks in the past, this was the first administrative challenge to the issuance of such a permit.

The groups filed an appeal of the permit last March, saying the state had failed to consider the full environmental impact of the bridges, particularly the impact from the development they would engender. Although the court concluded that development on the marsh hammocks would not occur without the bridges, the court considered only the direct environmental impact from the bridges in ruling on the permit.

“I think most Georgians would be surprised to learn that state-owned marshes are not protected from developers who want to build private roads to develop hammocks,” said Chris DeScherer, SELC attorney.

The court’s final order includes a significant pronouncement regarding this important issue, Woolf noted. The order states: “If access to private land and development of private land is considered potentially destructive to the overall area of coastal Georgia and the marshlands, some real legislative changes would be necessary to address these concerns.”

The case is being appealed in Superior Court, challenging the administrative law judge decision in favor of the DNR, which supports the bridge building.

# Appeal Heard in Man Head Marina Permit

## A site too small

From April 9 through 11, Administrative Law Judge Jesse Altman presided over the appeal of a Coastal Marshlands Protection Act permit authorizing the construction of a marina to be located on the western bank of the Intracoastal Waterway adjacent to the Torras Causeway which connects Brunswick and St. Simons Island, Georgia. The appeal was filed by the Southern Environmental Law Center representing five coastal environmental groups, including the Center for a Sustainable Coast. The four other organizations are: Altamaha Riverkeeper, Glynn Environmental Coalition, Residents United for Planning and Action, and the local group of the Sierra Club. At issue are various threats to water quality, aquatic habitat, and public safety that result from the marina's size and location.

The marina permit authorizes the construction and maintenance of a full-service marina on less than one acre of private uplands, supported by an additional 10.5 acres of public water bottoms. Marina plans call for 109 wet slips, a 785-foot transient fueling dock, a travel lift structure, an 11,000 square foot dry dock and boat maintenance yard, a storm drainage system that will discharge stormwater directly to the marsh, a building for a marina store and administrative offices, a septic system, a paved parking lot with 42 spaces, and a bulkhead at the marsh edge that will surround the entire 1-acre upland. In addition, the application reveals that the development will cover the entire upland, leaving no buffer between the development and the marsh.

The Petitioners argued that this marina will severely degrade surrounding marshlands and coastal waters by directly discharging polluted runoff from the parking lot and boat

maintenance yard and wastewater from on-site restrooms and boats that dock at the facility. Further, although the developer had maintained throughout the permitting process that the development of the marina would not require the filling of wetlands, Petitioners demonstrated that the changes required to the Torras Causeway to afford access to the marina site would likely require the filling of marshlands. A ruling on the case is expected this summer.



**Man Head Marina Site  
on the MacKay River in Glynn County**

# Water

## Resource Use and Conservation in Georgia

**S**urface water, ground water, and wetlands are interconnected resources that are vital to our coastal ecosystems, and these water resources are already being overused. For example, by taking too much groundwater for one type of user (industry), we have greatly reduced the capacity of the aquifer to provide potable drinking water for continued population growth. Because such huge amounts are withdrawn for industry and power production, if current water use efficiency in coastal Georgia could be improved by just 10%, enough water would be saved to support population growth for at least 35 years. This approach would provide needed water without further jeopardizing water resources or aquatic life, unlike virtually every other alternative.

The coastal region's economy greatly depends on water flow and water quality throughout vast watersheds, covering more than 60% of Georgia's geographic area, to support nature-based businesses.

Note: This piece and other position papers are posted for public review on the Georgia Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee website, [www.cviog.uga.edu/water](http://www.cviog.uga.edu/water).

Champney River at Daybreak



## What is a Healthy Environment Worth?

- ❖ **Recreational fishing** in coastal Georgia was estimated to generate \$350 million in business activity during 2000.
- ❖ If this region reflects the national average (**nature-based tourism** averaging one-quarter of total tourism), at least \$450 million a year in our tourism business activity is derived from natural resources.
- ❖ **Commercial fishing**, while in decline, is still a major economic factor in coastal Georgia – between \$200 and \$250 million estimated total annual business impact.
- ❖ This combined annual total of a **one billion dollar nature-based business sector** supports an estimated 40,000 jobs in the region, and many coastal communities depend on them.
- ❖ National studies find that natural features enhance **property value of homesites** by up to 30%
- ❖ **Respiratory illnesses, birth defects, and other health problems caused by pollution** can be controlled through wiser and safer use of natural resources.

Yet, we continue to parcel out and deplete water resources as if there is no limit. With the approval of state officials, every year more water is being taken out of coastal river systems and aquifers, and more wetlands are being ditched, drained and filled. Combined, these practices are depleting the capacity of our natural water-dependent ecosystems. No one knows for certain how much environmental damage would be done by taking still more water from the Altamaha, Ogeechee and other coastal rivers. We do know that our rivers are under threat from rapidly growing upstream areas – every year there are more state permits issued for taking water from our rivers and for discharging more waste into them. This unquestionably reduces the amount and quality of fresh water available downstream here on the coast. Furthermore, statewide from 1989 through 1998, EPD issued wastewater permits for the release of 83% more toxins into Georgia waters. (EPA Toxic Release Inventory reports.)

Instead of proceeding recklessly by withdrawing and impounding more water from our rivers, and granting still more pollution permits, we should consider making existing amounts of water go further by conserving water presently being wasted. This would solve all Georgia's water supply problems for the foreseeable future.(SEE BOX PAGE 10)

- ❖ National studies have found that between 10% and 50% of water in municipal, commercial, and industrial systems is being squandered – either through faulty equipment (leaking pipes, valves & meters), excessive use (like irrigating during a rainstorm!), or obsolete, water-intensive processing methods.
- ❖ There has been no comprehensive Georgia study to evaluate the feasibility of achieving greater water use efficiency, while the state continues to issue permits that further threaten public resources unnecessarily.

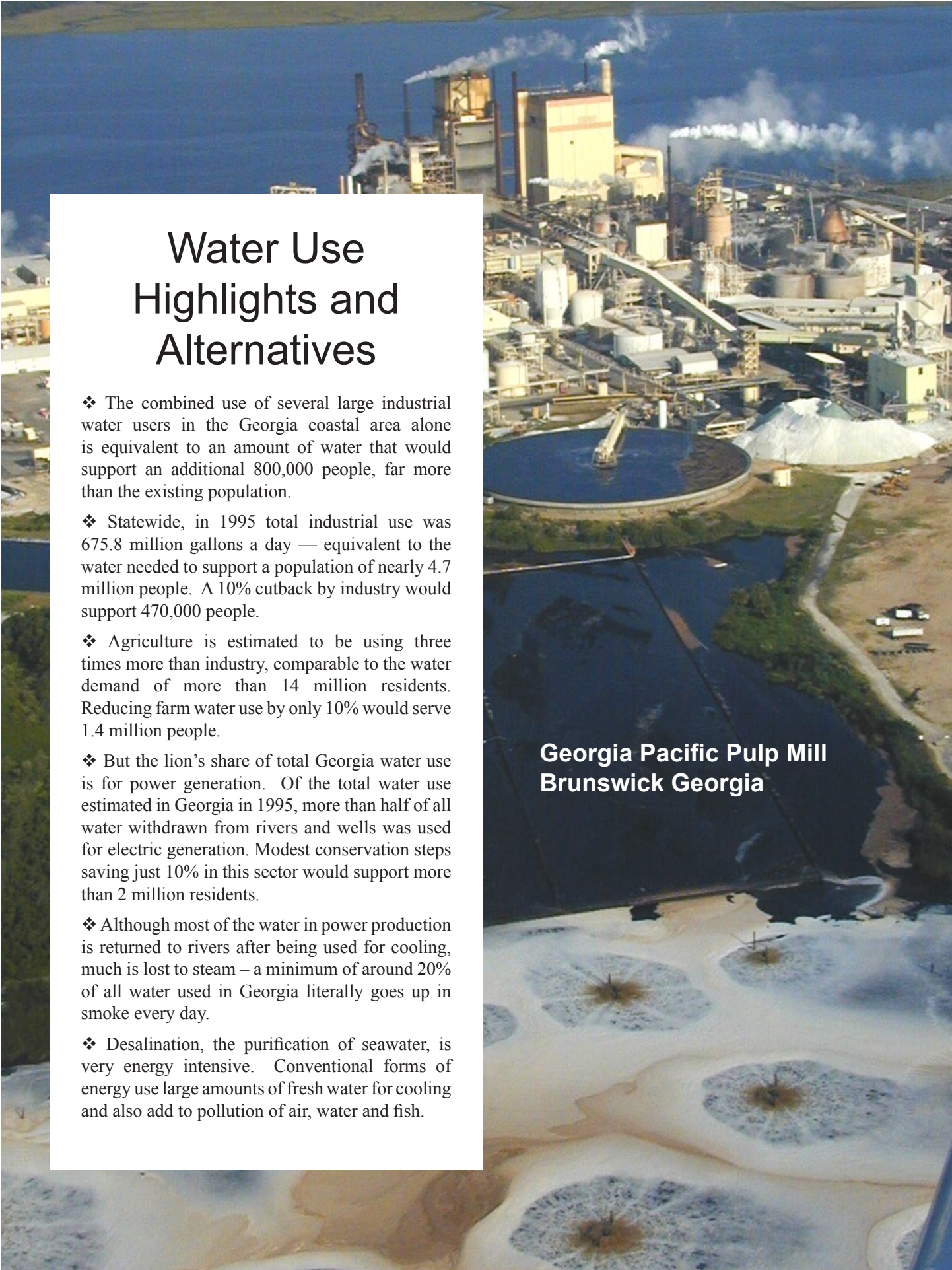
We need to get smart about water use in Georgia sooner rather than later. This means adopting and enforcing an aggressive water conservation policy, while becoming more thoughtful about development choices. We should choose options that are compatible with our natural environment and the proven, traditional nature-based business sector – having a growth potential beyond most every other alternative – while preserving our quality of life within the sustainable capacity of natural systems. Natural resources are our most irreplaceable form of public wealth – let's invest them wisely for the continuing benefit of this and future generations.

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## The Center Needs You Why Your Membership Is Important!

With your support, we will continue promoting new policies to help redefine "progress" in coastal Georgia. The Center is providing essential guidance that will help determine how our natural resources are to be used, conserved and protected.

Your tax-deductible donation is an investment in the future of coastal Georgia. Please join us in confronting the profound challenges that our region faces as Georgia's growth continues. Be assured that every membership counts and your commitment to our work will help improve the prospects for you and generations to come. Support the Center and encourage your friends and neighbors to follow your example. Please use the postage-free return envelope included in this issue to send your comments and contribution. Together, we can ensure the prosperity of our coastal communities while safeguarding natural resources.



## Water Use Highlights and Alternatives

- ❖ The combined use of several large industrial water users in the Georgia coastal area alone is equivalent to an amount of water that would support an additional 800,000 people, far more than the existing population.
- ❖ Statewide, in 1995 total industrial use was 675.8 million gallons a day — equivalent to the water needed to support a population of nearly 4.7 million people. A 10% cutback by industry would support 470,000 people.
- ❖ Agriculture is estimated to be using three times more than industry, comparable to the water demand of more than 14 million residents. Reducing farm water use by only 10% would serve 1.4 million people.
- ❖ But the lion's share of total Georgia water use is for power generation. Of the total water use estimated in Georgia in 1995, more than half of all water withdrawn from rivers and wells was used for electric generation. Modest conservation steps saving just 10% in this sector would support more than 2 million residents.
- ❖ Although most of the water in power production is returned to rivers after being used for cooling, much is lost to steam – a minimum of around 20% of all water used in Georgia literally goes up in smoke every day.
- ❖ Desalination, the purification of seawater, is very energy intensive. Conventional forms of energy use large amounts of fresh water for cooling and also add to pollution of air, water and fish.

### Georgia Pacific Pulp Mill Brunswick Georgia

# News & Notes

## Mercury Pollution Cited

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports in a national study of mercury contamination that Georgia has more fish consumption advisories than all but a few other states, and most of these are caused by mercury. Citing the EPA work, a recent article from the American Chemical Society states: **“To determine the true scope of contamination, environmental chemists must analyze the entire ecosystem for trace mercury. It’s particularly important to accurately analyze fish tissue, because consuming fish is the major source of human exposure to [the more toxic forms of mercury].”** Physicians for Social Responsibility estimates that over 400,000 birth defects and cases of mental retardation are caused by mercury exposure every year in the United States. Note that this is an especially significant problem in coastal Georgia due to the chemistry of our rivers, which converts mercury to its more toxic form, methyl mercury. The single largest source of mercury is fossil-fuel burning power plants (coal and oil). There are three plants in Georgia that are in violation of Clean Air Act standards and numerous others in the Southeast. [See: [http://fish.rti.org/formCountsRpt\\_map.htm](http://fish.rti.org/formCountsRpt_map.htm) and the Center’s website, [www.sustainablecoast.org](http://www.sustainablecoast.org) ]

## Docks Killing Salt Marsh Grasses

A South Carolina study reports that docks in the Lowcountry are killing salt marsh grasses that are essential for crabs, fish, and other small marine life. A Study by the SC Department of Natural Resources said that the surge in **dock construction over the past ten years has exterminated about 150 acres of salt marsh habitat.** They found that, although the percentage lost is small compared to total tidal marsh in the state, without proper controls, loss in some areas, like tidal creeks, could be critical ecologically. The same study predicts that the number of docks in the state will double in the current decade, bringing the total to around 14,000. [Note: Since Georgia has similar rapid growth in dock building, we can expect equally troublesome consequences here.]

## Assistance for Local Water Monitoring

The Global Rivers Environmental Education Network **website offers help with monitoring and data analysis for groups doing water sampling and assessment.** There is no fee for using the services, and trained staff is available to assist in using the site. For further information, log on at <http://www.green.org>

## National Watershed Report Released

Recommendations are available from EPA based on a forum held last year that addressed diverse issues related to protecting and restoring U.S. rivers and streams. **Topics covered include data management, source water protection, using TMDLs (Total Maximum Daily Load criteria), protecting endangered species and their habitats, land planning for water protection, funding watershed projects, and education.** The report is available online at [www.epa.gov/owow/forum](http://www.epa.gov/owow/forum) .

## Non-Point Pollution Program Launched

The Brunswick office of the Marine Extension Service (UGA) has started an education program intended to reduce non-point source water pollution caused by land development. Urban planner **Lee Sutton** was hired to help officials and developers make better decisions about site selection and design. Through this training and assistance, development will be made more environmentally responsible while still meeting the diverse needs of our growing region. For more information about the Non-point Education for Local Officials call Lee at 912-264-7306.

## New Growth Drains Public Funds

A recently completed study of six Georgia counties found that **residential development cost an average of \$2.23 in local services and facilities for every dollar of taxes produced** by the same land uses. In such cases, this means that the existing tax base is unfairly subsidizing new growth. There are several ways to remedy this problem, including adoption or increase of impact fees, creation of special service districts, or other appropriate forms of targeted assessment. The report is available at <http://www.forestry.uga.edu/warnell/cfb/> or directly from the Center in limited quantities. We urge all communities to carefully evaluate how much is being spent to support new development compared with the tax revenues being generated by it. Cost analysis should include roads, sewer and water lines, schools, public drainage (projects and operation/maintenance). The Center will be glad to assist in organizing such an evaluation. In the past nationwide research has led to similar findings, but this is the first study of its kind in Georgia.

## Extinction Always Risky

Recent research at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (UC, San Diego) found that **extinction of any species, no matter how seemingly negligible, could cause serious damage** to related ecosystems. Due to the sheer complexity of natural systems, it is not evident how removal of any one species will affect those that remain. Although the new study centers on the marine environment, researchers believe the findings also apply to terrestrial and aquatic ecology.



*Works in Progress*

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