

# 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.

