

The Brunswick News

Thursday, October 9, 2025

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Encourage ecosystem benefits instead of jeopardizing them

Among Georgia's most urgent challenges are the environmental consequences of data-center development.

Driven by billions being invested in artificial intelligence systems, the demand for digital storage provided by data centers will require enormous amounts of energy as well as huge volumes of water for cooling. The Public Service Commission has approved Georgia Power's proposal to generate that energy using fossil fuels. The PSC also endorsed energy produced by burning wood, without objectively evaluating public risks.

PSC-approved biomass will be produced by combusting woody materials to generate heat powering steam turbines. Even with high-temperature processes and advanced methods for filtering stack emissions, experts consider burning wood more harmful than using coal. It quickly releases massive amounts of carbon, which would require years to regain by regrowing trees. Moreover, carbon storage lost by removing trees will worsen the heat-trapping effects of air pollution already rapidly overheating our climate, while further threatening public health by emitting harmful particulates and carcinogens.

We should be motivating owners of timberland to use their resources more responsibly through a state-sponsored program to compensate them for retaining valuable ecosystem services. These services include water storage and filtration, wildlife habitat, and improved air quality. Under such a program, owners of forested land would be eligible to receive annual payments proportional to the substantial value of these public benefits.

Such fees would improve the health of Georgians and natural resource conditions by rewarding land management that prioritizes healthy ecosystems. Rewarding conservation will cost far less than jeopardizing vital ecosystem services.

David Kyler
Center for a Sustainable Coast