



PRESS RELEASE

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Coastal Advisory Council sending letter to DNR board urging restoration of marsh buffer

Diverse advisors agree to reverse a recent marsh-buffer ruling and improve Georgia's marsh protection.

At its regular quarterly meeting on May 7, the Coastal Advisory Council (CAC) voted unanimously to support restoring the recently revoked coastal marsh buffer by sending a letter to the state Board of Natural Resources, urging corrective action as soon as possible. The state board oversees Georgia's Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which is responsible for regulating and protecting the state's water, air, wildlife, and natural environment.

The buffer – a strip of naturally-vegetated land, which had been limited to 25-feet wide, running along the upland edge of the marsh – filters out pollutants headed to the marsh and reduces flooding when winds drive high-tides landward. The EPD ruling will eliminate these benefits by removing the buffer.

The CAC action was prompted by an April 22 Environmental Protection Division (EPD) decision to eliminate the critically important marsh buffer by reinterpreting technical language in state law, debilitating the law's purpose of protecting "state waters." Veteran CAC member David Kyler proposed the letter seeking to restore the buffer by making a formal motion for consideration by his fellow members. Kyler is the founding executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, a non-profit environmental advocacy group serving the region, established in 1997.

In proposing the motion, Kyler said that "The CAC should recommend two main steps to the DNR board: first, immediate reversal of the EPD decision by restoring enforcement of marsh buffers, and secondly to support a legislative initiative based upon cutting-edge environmental science to further protect marshes, ready for approval by the General Assembly at its next session."

Center board president Steve Willis, serving on the CAC as a representative of Georgia Sierra Club (Coastal Group), said "It is extremely important that we use environmental science as the basis for environmental policy rather than allowing political trade-offs that degrade our vital ecosystems."

Georgia's tidal marshes are among the world's most productive natural resources, serving as the foundation of the state's multi-billion dollar eco-tourism economy -- which includes nationally renowned recreational fishing and bird-watching. Moreover, these vast tidal areas, a third of those remaining on the U.S. East Coast, are treasured for their unique natural beauty, featuring stunning vistas across inter-tidal wilderness populated by diverse species, including migratory birds, shrimp, and blue-crab. Marshes also help protect developed upland areas against the destructive forces of coastal storms.

The Coastal Advisory Council consists of more than forty individuals selected from Georgia institutions of environmental research and education, local governments in the coastal zone, non-profit conservation groups, and citizens at large who volunteer their time and expertise to guide the Coastal Resources Division of the Georgia DNR in administering Georgia's Coastal Management Program.

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