

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

A commemorative compilation of selected published commentary
on important coastal Georgia environmental issues

Celebrating the first 20 years of the Center for a Sustainable Coast
1997 –2017



@issue

Economy, environment form a team

By DAVID KYLER

Gov. Sonny Perdue recently spoke about the importance of promoting tourism in Georgia, in part to compensate for the state's continued lackluster economic performance. Yet recent actions of Georgia officials are a direct threat to tourism as a strong and growing economic force.

By our reckoning, at least \$15 billion of the state's annual tourism activity is directly attributable to healthy natural resources — especially water quality and fisheries, which here on the coast contribute some \$1 billion in tourism and outdoor recreation business revenues every year. Some 40,000 coastal jobs and as many as 600,000 jobs in Georgia depend directly on a well-protected environment. Even minor harm to natural resources could cause millions of lost annual revenues in nature-based business, severely curtailing Georgia's potential for further tourism diversification.

In light of the governor's public commitment to boosting Georgia's tourism efforts and overwhelming evidence of that sector's growth potential, it is especially ironic that those charged with protecting the state's natural resources have adopted an exemption that would

Georgia is long overdue for an economic development strategy and budget that are reconciled with the state's environmental laws.

abolish certain water quality safeguards.

By taking away buffers for streams that only flow during rainstorms, the Board of Natural Resources is exposing state waters to more threats from "non-point" source pollution, blatantly at odds with Georgia's tourism interests.

Most non-point source pollution is generated by storm-water runoff, when rains carry petrochemicals from roads and parking lots, fertilizers and pesticides from farms and suburban lots, and all sorts of industrial and agricultural contaminants to public waterways.

No matter how seldom a small stream or ditch may transport water, without natural buffers it is likely to convey contaminants, which can add substantially to the non-point source pollution of state waters — already a well-documented and serious water quality problem throughout Georgia.

Exposing hundreds if not thousands of such streams to these risks by adopting the buffer exemption unjustifiably jeopardizes Georgia's water quality and long-term economic interests through further impairment.

This unwise exemption adds more problems to a program already plagued by poor performance.

By various estimates, the Environmental Protection Division is underfunded by 60-80 percent of what is needed to properly enforce existing point-source permitting regulations. State erosion and sedimentation regulations are also known for having chronic enforcement deficiencies, due at least in part to major funding and staffing shortages. Local governments share in this default of public water protection responsibilities by often failing to adequately monitor and enforce erosion controls in land use decisions.

Georgia is long overdue for an economic development strategy and budget that are reconciled with the state's environmental laws. Given the short-term, fragmented thinking that dominates most decisions affecting the condition of Georgia's public trust resources such as air, water, habitat and wildlife, this is a formidable challenge.

We urge Perdue to use his considerable authority to recognize the vital functions of the natural environment when promoting the state's economic development. This objective should be at the very heart of the governor's efforts to achieve greater fiscal responsibility, because our natural resources are among Georgia's most valued forms of wealth — and essential to the shared future prosperity of all our citizens.

► David Kyler of St. Simons Island is director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution / ajc.com

@issue

Savannah Morning News

April 6, 2004

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Clean water is essential to area's economic growth

Kudos to the editors of the Morning News for their insightful defense of Georgia's coastal marshes ("Don't trash the marsh," editorial, July 9).

As further troubling evidence of the threats against which this defense is needed, consider official state-issued reports about "impaired waters" — those that fail to meet federal Clean Water Act standards for fishing, drinking and/or swimming.

According to these standards, more than 60 percent of the waters sampled in Georgia are impaired, and given current trends conditions are likely to get worse before they get better. As the downstream receivers of pollution coming from about two-thirds of Georgia draining into the Atlantic Ocean through five river systems, coastal residents suffer the brunt of the problem.

In the face of rapid growth, this is all the more reason why we need to take careful steps to do whatever we can to protect both our fragile environment and the robust business activity dependent on fisheries, water quality, and ecotourism — worth more than \$1 billion a year and supporting some 40,000 jobs here.

Our tidal marshes are both the nursery and lifeblood of this productive environmental and economic engine.

We cannot afford to allow one sector — real estate development — to compromise the future of all other interests, including many that already responsibly derive their family income from nature's bounty.

As our successful appeals of several ill-considered marsh permits have shown, the law is on the public's side, thanks to the wisdom of our legislators who passed the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act in 1970.

Let's make sure that any new rules for uplands development will honor that legacy.

DAVID KYLER

Executive Director

Center for a Sustainable Coast



Real estate speculation hurts coast

By DAVID KYLER

Published on: 07/20/06

Nearly everyone living in coastal Georgia has noted how much the area is growing. But is population growth really increasing at the same rate as construction and land sales?

According to a recent article in USA Today, "Nearly 28 percent of homes bought last year were for investment purposes, and an additional 12 percent were vacation homes. More than three-fourths of the buyers had no interest in renting their property. About 20 percent said it would one day be their retirement home."

Assuming these proportions apply here in coastal Georgia, 40 out of 100 homes being built are not the primary residence of the buyer, and 30 of those homes will not be rented out by their owners and, therefore, will be unoccupied.

For example, if a new subdivision has 200 lots and all lots are built on and sold, no more than about 140 will have residents, assuming we have the same real estate market profile as the nation.

With more extra income available for investment and the prospect of handsome real estate profits, development speculation has become rampant.

This ghost market is of concern to those of us troubled by

unwise or poorly planned development because it unnecessarily increases the area of land being prepared for sale, bringing a host of related adverse environmental impacts.

By imposing an artificially urgent demand for real estate, more erosion is being generated, resulting in increased contamination of wetlands and waterways. Likewise, more natural landscape and drainage features are being altered in ways that cause flooding of properties already developed.

Even to the less environmentally conscious, there may be unsettling issues raised by speculation. Of all the apparent demand for roads, sewers and water supply, how much is really needed?

Providing these amenities prematurely can induce still more speculation, since areas served by public facilities tend to gain greater market value. Thus, a disturbing share of development may be driven as much by financial gaming as by real population growth and related needs.

Much of this imprudent activity is no doubt unintentionally subsidized and condoned by taxpayers when their local governments indulge speculation or even promote it by readily approving

development and new infrastructure.

It is probably impossible to eliminate all speculation in any market, including real estate, but surely there are ways to

reduce its most extreme risks. These risks include not only environmental harm, but also financial penalties for both taxpayers and unlucky investors. If permit applicants were required to demonstrate the need for their projects based on a legitimate market analysis, it could help curb the reckless "gold-rush" nature of many current development practices.

As a matter of public policy, elected officials need to give this issue thoughtful consideration and try to fulfill their obligation to serve coastal citizens. To do this will require the means to carefully distinguish between well-planned growth and unbridled speculation.

Decisions about land use — and the public infrastructure that supports it — need to be guided by improved methods of analysis that avoid the pitfalls of the "ghost market."

Unless new policy is adopted to control development and its consequences, we can expect to see continued casual approval of projects that produce quick profits at the public's expense.

A League of our Own: Intramural Water Wars

We have faced the enemy and they are us. By David Kyler

AJC December 2007

Almost three years ago when the Atlanta Journal Constitution published my commentary as a guest column (*Economy & environment form a team*, Dec 20, 2004), little did I know how topical those remarks would become by 2007. Thanks to extreme drought in combination with state officials' continued neglect of water management, north Georgia faces a long-predicted water shortage. Because of persistent wrong-headed thinking about water management by some leading politicians, Atlanta's plight now threatens all the state's water resources.

Pragmatic growth constraints dismissed previously had better be reconsidered now, or more crises will follow.

Our 3-year old commentary came as a result of cut-backs in water protection made by the General Assembly and the DNR board in 2003 and 2004. Those reversals in regulation were at obvious odds with the governor's then-current proposal to promote eco-tourism — dependent on good water quality and ample flow in Georgia's rivers — but no one in state government seemed to understand this glaring contradiction.

Since then, Gov. Perdue launched a massive "Go Fish" program, which was intended to bring abundant added recreational fishing revenues to Georgia. Meanwhile, despite multiple warnings about the need for water conservation, improved state energy policies, and growth management to curb water

demand, leadership in the Capitol continued its careless plundering of state resources to support Atlanta's rampant expansion.

Now these same "leaders" are pointing fingers everywhere but at themselves in laying blame for the water supply crisis. Since they are unwilling to admit their own fault in contributing to this crisis, there is little reason to hope for more responsible and accountable policies in the future.

Several news articles have reported that Georgia's *Go Fish* program will have to be put on hold because of the water shortage. And many editorials around the state express grave concerns that influential Atlanta interests will grab water from everywhere else, depriving downstream water users of their legal rights, economic potential, and ecosystem health.

This all suggests the \$64,000 question underlying this perennial debate:

Can Atlanta's sprawl remain Georgia's ever-growing & indulged pet behemoth while the state cultivates a nature-based tourism sector -- including recreational fishing?

Willful neglect of Georgia's natural resources in supporting unsustainable growth has come home to roost, and its talons are now firmly around the throat of Atlanta's sprawling giant. Meanwhile, the classic debate about "Two Georgias" has taken on new

meaning, pitting Atlanta's gigantic thirst against the rest of the state, especially rural areas and the coast, where environmental quality and nature itself are most treasured as a part of daily life.

Georgia's water dilemma must be seen correctly as a profound water management challenge, not simply a water supply crisis. Supply needs as well as environmental responsibilities can only be met through a serious and sustained commitment to water conservation, which will enable Georgia to grow wisely, in the locations of the state that are best suited to support further development. State policies, including taxing, infrastructure financing, and environmental permitting, must be used to promote rational growth, not to shore up monumentally bad choices, including more Atlanta sprawl. Quick-fix, deceptively bad "solutions" to water supply like river basin transfers, aquifer storage/recovery, and desalination will only deepen and prolong Georgia's water management crisis, while degrading natural resources in the process.

If there is any hope of preserving and — where possible — restoring Georgia's natural splendor, Atlanta's growth must be reined in. Decision-makers need to make the tough choices essential to living within the intrinsic limits of our shared environment. More water cannot be bullied or engineered into existence, and neither more growth — nor any amount of private profits — can justify the destruction of our rivers, wetlands and estuaries.

The Center for a Sustainable Coast is a membership-supported non-profit organization serving the public interests of coastal Georgians. The Center is the only staffed, not-for-profit organization exclusively serving coastal Georgia on issues related to the region's growth, economy, and environment. The Center's mission is to protect, conserve, and sustain coastal Georgia's natural, historic, and economic resources. Our motto is, "Conserving Coastal Georgia's Natural Heritage, Investing in Our Children's Future." For more information about the Center, including membership, please visit www.sustainablecoast.org.

Nuclear power bad on so many levels

By David Kyler

After 60 years and many billions of dollars in government subsidies, nuclear power should finally have to prove itself on its own merits – which evidently it cannot do in a free market.

Not only are taxpayers and citizens shouldering an unfair burden of the costs of nuclear power, but, even with these subsidies, as consumers we will be forced to cover the rising costs of nuclear plant construction.

These costs have consistently been well above even the high price tag quoted at the start of the project. Overruns of 50 percent or more will be paid by energy consumers, as utility rates are raised ever higher to protect guaranteed profits for investors.

The rules for rate increases used by the Georgia Public Service Commission provide a safe incentive for those who invest in energy facilities. Commitments made by allowing such unwise investments will lock consumers into paying rising energy costs that are unjustified and truly unnecessary.

Added to these unfair economic burdens on American taxpayers and consumers are the significant risks of moving and storing nuclear materials, made even more threatening by the prospects of terrorism.

Following six decades of attempting to find a “safe” and dependable way of storing radioactive waste from nuclear plants, experts still have no solution. These materials will remain a major public health threat for thousands of years. The more such materials we use, transport and store, the greater that threat becomes.

Two nuclear plants are located in coastal Georgia’s watersheds: Plant Hatch in Baxley, along the Altamaha River, and Plant Vogtle near Augusta, on the Savannah River. Not only are their radioactive operations a continuing risk, but these plants consume vast quantities of water. At a time when Georgia is in escalating disputes over water supply, this must be a critical consideration in making energy choices.

At Vogtle, a proposed doubling of the number of reactors in use at the site would mean an additional 65 million gallons a day taken from the Savannah River, two-thirds of which would be lost to vapor in the cooling process. This withdrawal jeopardizes a river already suffering from impairments, thereby compounding problems of growing water demands in both South Carolina and Georgia.

At Plant Hatch, radioactive waste is stored outside in canisters, right along the Altamaha River. This was done as a temporary measure, but after many years it remains a continuing threat across an enormous downstream hazard area. As a potential terrorist target, it adds still further risk to tens of thousands of Georgians.

Due to water demands for cooling, extravagant federal subsidies for new nuclear plants would worsen problems in our rivers and intensify disputes over water supply. Fish habitat and recreational amenities would also suffer, while funds taken from taxpayers and consumers paid for this wasteful energy choice.

Clearly, such subsidies for the nuclear industry are unwise, unfair and unjustified. Instead of sinking billions more tax dollars into this hazardous, extremely expensive source of energy, we should be converting to clean, proven technologies that are far more practical. According to the Georgia State Wind Map validated by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, there is over 10,000 megawatts of wind potential off Georgia’s coast. That’s the equivalent output of 10 large power plants — far more power than that to be produced by new coal and nuclear plants now proposed in the state.

Not only is wind energy free, but we could begin producing needed power in half the time required to build nuclear or coal plants. Infrastructure costs for offshore towers, generators and distribution lines would be readily justified by decades of reliable service and billions of pollution-free megawatts.

Atlanta Journal Constitution

Sunday, November 02, 2008

Ultimately, the costs of wind power would be far lower than those of conventional sources that face rising fuel prices and diminishing supplies. Recent analysis by Amory B. Lovins (“The Nuclear Illusion”) found that, including expenses for facilities, infrastructure and operations, power produced from wind costs half as much as nuclear. Notably, the enormous costs of storing radioactive waste and decommissioning old plants were not even included in this comparison.

Distractions in energy policy — such as offshore drilling, coal or nuclear power plants — will only delay the inevitable and logical transition to renewable sources. The longer this delay, the more consumers will pay for energy.

Attempts by special interests to marginalize wind, solar and tidal power are directly contradicted by the facts. In countries such as Finland, Iceland, Germany and France, investments in wind and geothermal power over the past decades have brought ample rewards — economic, environmental and political.

American energy independence and consumer goals are only attainable by making serious commitments to renewable power sources and energy-efficiency improvements. Experts estimate that efficiency upgrades could save Georgians 30 percent or more in their energy use.

Legislators must give high priority to adopting incentives that reward rapid conversion to cleaner, more efficient and lower-cost energy sources. If our taxes continue to be used to subsidize costly and polluting technology, conversion to renewables will be severely slowed, benefiting power companies, not consumers.

GUEST COLUMN

Face the realities, true costs of our dependence on oil

By David Kyler

In spite of overwhelming facts, wishful thinkers still call for more drilling off our coastline. Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and at least one candidate in Georgia's race for governor insist that we need to get more domestic oil, wherever it may be, so that we can end dependence on "foreign dictators" who control our energy supplies.

Unfortunately, that goal cannot possibly be reached, no matter how much drilling is done within our borders, unless we cut our use of petroleum by more than 75 percent.

Because of the immense quantity of oil consumed in the United States compared with the small amount from all our domestic sources of supply — both existing and yet-to-be-tapped combined — as long as we depend so heavily on petroleum, the United States will be at the mercy of foreign suppliers.

Not only will offshore drilling fail to serve the goal of American energy independence, but for similar reasons it will not help reduce prices at the pump either.

Under congressional testimony, experts recently stated that the amount of additional oil to be tapped from new offshore oil wells would, at most, bring a savings of 3 cents a gallon, and no sooner than 10 years to 15 years from now when such oil could possibly become available.

Those arguing in favor of more offshore drilling fail to grasp some of the most essential facts about supply and demand for oil as a globally traded commodity:

- The U.S. has less than 5 percent of the world's total remaining supply of petroleum, while using about 20 percent of it.
- The price of oil is determined by the amount available around the world compared with total global demand for it, at any given time.
- Given limited supplies and growing worldwide demand, the price of oil will be rising and amounts remaining will be declining relative to global use.

Therefore, there are only two ways for the United States to reduce energy costs and to achieve energy independence.

- Drastically decrease use of oil by converting to mass transpor-

tation and patterns of development that enable people to be less dependent on motorized travel.

- As rapidly as possible, transfer to using other forms of energy that are not constrained by supply. The most obvious and abundant sources are wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal energy, all of which can be used to produce electricity. For transportation, this would mean converting to the use of electric vehicles and intensifying research in development of new battery technology.

The real costs of various energy sources also deserve closer examination.

We often hear claims about how "cheap" oil and nuclear power are relative to renewable sources such as wind and solar. Yet consider the study done by the International Center for Technology Research.

The study found that if all hidden costs were tallied — including U.S. military protection of access to oil fields in the Mideast, medical expenses for treating respiratory diseases linked to burning petroleum

products, federal tax credits to oil companies (some \$35 billion annually), and environmental protection (even prior to the BP disaster in the Gulf) — the price per gallon of gas would be \$12 above the current amount. Imagine paying \$14.50 a gallon at the pump!

In other words, if all hidden costs were included in the price of fuel, many uses of petroleum would already be obsolete because the market would support alternatives such as electric cars recharged from renewable power sources. With these costs concealed, consumers falsely think petroleum is their best choice. Political motives for supporting oil are another matter.

Comparable hidden costs in the form of tax subsidies and other public bailouts are tied to every single dominant form of energy — including coal and, above all, nuclear power.

In a truly free market, all conventional energy forms would be significantly higher in price than they now are, making renewables comparatively cheaper.

Consequently, it is completely misleading to compare lavishly subsidized oil, coal, gas and nuclear power with modestly supported capital investments in wind, solar and other clean energy sources.

Moreover, once the clean energy infrastructure is built, fuel is literally free. Defenders of free markets cannot justify continuing dependence on conventional forms of energy.

One last inconvenient fact: corporate spokesmen testified in the recent congressional hearings on the BP oil spill — including reps of BP and Halliburton.

Every one of them said that they could *not* prevent another disaster like the current one from reoccurring. Thus, there simply is no fail-safe way of saving even 3 cents a gallon by tapping U.S. offshore resources.

The risks of offshore drilling are simply not justified by the trivial benefits, if any. Responsible energy policy relies on the public being aware of the real costs and consequences of our choices.

David Kyler is the executive director for the Center for a Sustainable Coast at St. Simons Island.

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Pork-Barrel vs. Wise Spending in the Savannah Harbor Project

November 8, 2011

There's enough misinformation circulating about the proposed Savannah harbor deepening project to make a Greek bank-loan look solid by comparison.

Consider the following in relation to recent news about South Carolina officials refusing to issue a permit needed for Savannah's harbor project under the Clean Water Act.

- South Carolina's objections are primarily based on unanswered questions about the Corps' plan for mitigation – how they propose to compensate for, prevent, or control adverse environmental impacts. Perhaps the most dubious of many shaky mitigation proposals is the injection of oxygen into the Savannah River in an effort to prevent seasonal fish-killing dead zones. The U.S. Geological Survey reviewed the testing results for this mitigation approach and found them inconclusive, yet the Corps claims those same tests justify confidence.
- Although the project may have been studied extensively over the past decade, a broadly-representative stakeholder evaluation group guiding this review has never sanctioned the accuracy or completeness of Corps' impact studies and findings. In fact, some long-time members of that stakeholder group, including the Center for a Sustainable Coast, have lodged serious objections about analytical assumptions, mitigation, and administrative controls. These concerns remain unresolved.

- Of paramount importance in the midst of our national financial crisis, there has been no comprehensive analysis of port development alternatives in the Southeast – that is, a strategy for coordinating the improvement of ports and inter-connecting land transportation systems. Such a strategy is essential to assuring taxpayers that government funds in the billions of dollars will be wisely spent.

It's supremely ironic that some of the very same strident voices that disparage deficits and government waste are clamoring for big federal money to be spent on a project that remains so tenuous.

Where is their fiscal responsibility now?

If our state and nation are to recover from serious economic decline and regain global competitiveness in the 21st century, such decisions must be guided by objective analysis of the big picture over the long term. Major problems with both the Corps assessment of the harbor project and misrepresentation of it by state officials have been caused by a narrow focus that unrealistically fragments a complex array of relevant factors, recklessly eliminating issues that are vital to ensuring responsible public spending.

We cannot assume that a host of local projects are justified on the basis of truncated analysis and parochial support advanced by the notion that if enough money is spread around there will be some sort of economic benefit. Using this rationale, every port on the east coast would be deepened, creating vast overcapacity at enormous public expense, directly conflicting with the urgent need for greater scrutiny of federal expenditures.

Similarly, Corps' analysis rests on the questionable assertion that the only environmental costs (impacts) are for "mitigation" and that such mitigation is both accurately estimated in price and reliable in performance. Any objective review of past Corps projects demonstrates the blatantly illusory nature of such contentions.

Repeatedly, the Corps has inaccurately predicted the environmental consequences of their projects and efforts to mitigate adverse impacts – with grave outcomes. Two-thirds of highly important tidal freshwater wetlands in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge – some 8,000 acres of essential migratory bird habitat – have been destroyed by past deepening projects.

A tide gate that was intended as mitigation in a past Savannah deepening project not only didn't work, but it made impacts worse. Because Congressional approval was needed to get funds for removing it, years of costly but avoidable damage occurred before it was stopped. Numerous other examples of wasteful Corps misjudgments abound throughout the nation.

Fiscal responsibility in selectively expending public funds can only be achieved with a more comprehensive, systemic approach to planning. Unless pork-barrel politics can be overcome, progress is unlikely.

David Kyler
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Saint Simons Island, Georgia

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Climate Change: A Call to Action by the Center for a Sustainable Coast

February 2013

On behalf of the Center for a Sustainable Coast and all coastal Georgians, as well as fellow Americans and humanity at large, it must be said that the award-winning film, *Chasing Ice*, makes one thing abundantly clear: we simply must do as much as possible, as soon as possible, to confront the causes of climate change.

This means taking urgently needed steps to reduce carbon emissions by improving conservation, achieving greater energy efficiency, and above all, preventing the reckless production and use of massive sources of fossil fuels, contrary to current efforts underway in the United States and Canada.

We cannot allow short-term market objectives, falsely “cheaper” fuels and deceptively higher profits to subvert our long-term prospects when the evidence is so compelling and the consequences are so severe. To do anything less than making climate change the central issue of our time is rationalizing disaster, passively cultivating catastrophic outcomes for our people, our environment, and the global future of humanity.

Central to this call to action, we urge unconditional resolve to abandon further development of fossil fuels as soon as possible. Combustion of the immense quantities of oil and natural

gas to be extracted from shale deposits and tar sands will recklessly magnify the projected destruction of climate change. It’s a tragically foolish bargain to pretend that making these resources available will not court global disaster – intensifying the devastation of storms, floods, droughts, wildfires, and crop loss – at unconscionable cost in lives, treasure, and the natural systems upon which we all depend.

Such choices are even more irrational in light of proven alternatives for generating power from solar, wind, tides, and other natural, clean, and self-replenishing sources. When objectively compared on the basis of their consequences, combustion-free alternative energy technologies are infinitely cheaper than burning fossil fuels.

Climate change is a predicament that tests the capabilities and fortitude of our democracy like nothing else in history. To avert disaster for our environment and its inhabitants, for our children and the world they will inherit, our political will must be strengthened and focused with utmost determination.

We call upon all citizens of conscience and common sense to insist on timely, comprehensive federal legislation to prevent the worst damage of climate change, and to build a lasting

foundation for a sustainable future.

As pragmatic Americans facing this monumental challenge, we must lead the way.

David Kyler,
Executive Director

Letter to the Editor of *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, published April 6, 2014

In commentary on Savannah port deepening, conspicuously absent was any mention of the Corps finding that the \$652 million project would NOT increase commerce.

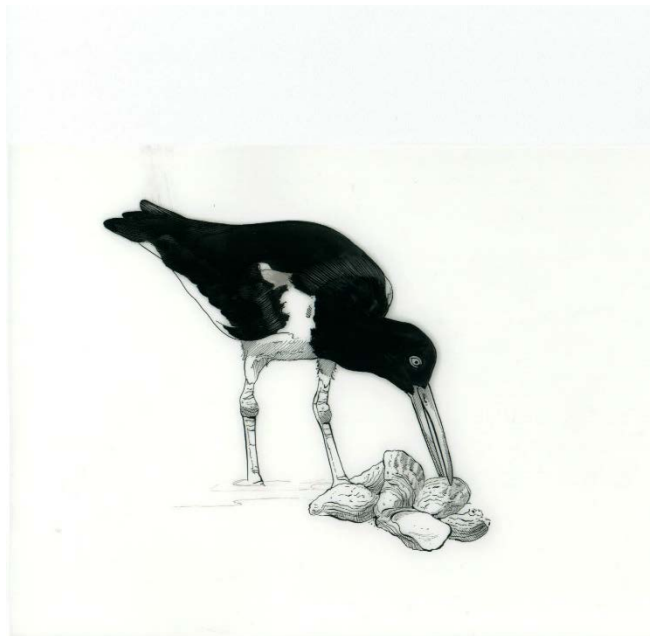
Contrary to lock-step adherence to the political dogma that Georgia must deepen Savannah's port, the truth is that Savannah's port will continue to thrive and the state's economic prospects will be unaltered without the project.

In the guise of economic development and competitiveness, Georgia leaders are perpetuating the frantic, counterproductive tradition of pork-barrel politics, which results in billions of tax-dollars being squandered on woefully deficient public investments.

And, without acknowledging it, they are subverting the national interest in optimizing U.S. transportation infrastructure by diverting scarce funds to well-connected private beneficiaries in Georgia, which will contribute little to legitimate public interest.

An objective examination of world-class deepwater ports reveals that Savannah's port, imbedded 38 miles upriver from the ocean, simply cannot compete with those that are on, or adjacent to, ocean shipping channels – many of which already have a low-maintenance depth greater than the 47-feet that this wasteful project will produce.

David Kyler
Center for a Sustainable Coast



Atlanta Forward >>

What is Atlanta Forward?

Our region is an important part of a complex world. On these pages, we will bring you a wide array of viewpoints and insights on the issues you've told us are most important to you. We're committed to bringing you smart work by some of the best thinkers in metro Atlanta and beyond. We want to involve you in the conversation, too, so let us know what you think.

Today's moderator: Tom Sabulis

A 20-year veteran of the AJC, Tom Sabulis has covered news, politics and the arts during a career that has taken him to newspapers across the country. Since 2008, he has coordinated many of the newspaper's pro/con debates and first-person guest columns.

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FRIDAY CONVERSATION: QUALITY OF LIFE

AJC.COM

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2013

Does government have to play fair? A Georgia environmentalist says it's not a level playing field when it comes to alternative energy getting the kind of government support traditionally offered to the fossil-fuel industry. A conservative writer counters that the mandating of renewable energy will increase our cost of living, even as air quality improves.

GUEST COLUMN

Clean options merit some breaks, too

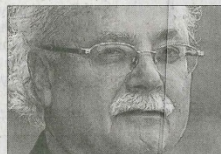
By David Kyler

It is often said that morality cannot be legislated, but that doesn't keep people from trying. Yet the public issues most commonly portrayed in moral dimensions seldom if ever include job creation, technology and the use and protection of natural resources.

Our state and nation would benefit greatly by linking government policies to standards that balance moral goals such as fairness and honesty with other important objectives, including economic opportunity, education, public health and defending civil liberties.

For instance, when energy policy favors conventional sources of power like fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) without comparable support for clean alternatives such as solar and wind power, it fails to meet the moral test of fairness and honesty. Jobs per dollar invested and per unit of energy produced are higher in solar and wind technologies than in traditional power plants.

It is unfair to deprive the public of the benefits of alternative energy and to protect the vested interests of the relatively few who are financially favored by the "fossilized" status quo. Likewise, it is dishonest to deny the threats caused by global climate change and



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its combustion-related causes.

The longer status-quo policies prevail, the greater the penalties on future generations, with potentially catastrophic consequences. While social programs are often condemned for longer-term moral implications, political analysis of energy and environmental policies misleadingly marginalizes them. Discounting cumulative damage to water, air and living resources imposes costly burdens on human health and economic prospects.

Even with existing safeguards in place, millions of Americans still suffer the effects of pollution. Asthma, encephalitis and other diseases are agonizing penalties imposed by dirty industries. Yet the cost of these injuries — in employment potential, medical treatment and shortened lifespan — are condoned under current policies and practices.

Defenders of the status quo also attack subsidies for green technologies, asserting that "free markets" should be the determinant of successful innovation. Such assertions also conflict with fundamental moral principles. It is dishonest to portray leading energy technologies as if they were a result of free markets.

Coal, oil and gas have been lavishly subsidized for decades. Dominant energy technologies impose hidden costs not tabulated in their market price. One respected expert estimates that tabulating pollution clean-up, military costs, and other public obligations supporting fossil fuels would add \$12 per gallon at the pump.

Should taxpayers and consumers accommodate the electric power industry, the state's largest water user, by exempting it from the deceptively named Georgia Water Stewardship Act? This injustice is worsened by the multibillion-dollar reservoir-construction program proposed by Georgia officials, to be paid for by residential and commercial water customers rather than the biggest water user.

If we agree that public policies should be guided by moral principles, surely we must adopt judicious and accountable methods for making such determinations.



The Brunswick News

Commentary

April 19, 2013

Development limits set have been exceeded

I am troubled that the Jekyll Island Authority is proposing to include any portion of the tidal marsh as part of the calculated area of upland on Jekyll Island. Having over thirty years of experience in environmental analysis, planning, and advocacy in coastal Georgia, I speak with some authority on the topic.

Georgia's Coastal Marshlands Protection Act (CMPA) is quite specific in distinguishing between uplands and marshes. By virtue of that law, marshes are, in effect, conservation areas ineligible for development except for strictly limited purposes of water access, regulated by law.

To propose including tidal marshes of any kind as part of the tabulation of Jekyll Island's land area is misleading and scientifically unfounded. By unjustifiably attempting to add marshes to the island's land area, the JIA is taking an unwise step that misrepresents the physical and biological characteristics that make these tidal wetlands unique.

The effect of this wrong-headed proposal is to mask the truth, which reveals that well over 35%, the legally-established development limit of Jekyll Island, is already developed.

Calling any adjacent tidal marsh around Jekyll Island "upland" does not make it so, nor does it change the harsh truth that the development limits set by law already have been exceeded.

David Kyler, Executive Director
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Atlanta Forward >>

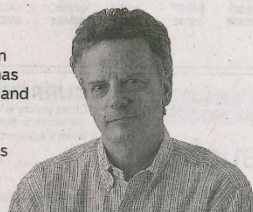
What is Atlanta Forward?

Our region is an important part of a complex world. On these pages, we will bring you a wide array of viewpoints and insights on the issues you've told us are most important to you. We're committed to bringing you smart work by some of the best thinkers in metro Atlanta and beyond. We want to involve you in the conversation, too, so let us know what you think.

Today's moderator: Tom Sabulis

A 20-year veteran of the AJC, Tom Sabulis has covered news, politics and the arts during a career that has taken him to newspapers across the country. Since 2008, he has coordinated many of the newspaper's pro/con debates and first-person guest columns.

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Credible. Compelling. Complete.

Jekyll Island is a favorite getaway for Atlantans – and home to a dispute over development on the state-owned barrier island. Today, a coastal environmentalist criticizes approval of a 200-room hotel whose height, he says, will harm Jekyll's natural beauty. A spokesman for the governing Jekyll Island Authority declined an invitation to write an op-ed in response, but said the project adheres to building guidelines approved long ago.

GUEST COLUMN

Development speeds Jekyll's urbanization

By David Kyler

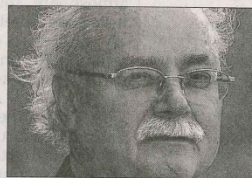
Among continuing disputes over the "revitalization" of Jekyll Island State Park is a mega-hotel that will degrade the island's treasured ambience and likely encourage further urban development.

Reaching some 67 feet in height, Jekyll's beachfront Westin hotel will be the tallest structure on Georgia's barrier islands, nearly double the height of anything allowed on Tybee Island and 50 percent taller than any beachfront building allowed on St. Simons and Sea Islands.

A 45-foot height limit was adopted by Glynn County to ensure no structures defile the tree tops of the renowned Golden Isles live oaks. However, the county has no authority over state-owned Jekyll Island.

In 2008, the Jekyll Island Authority (JIA) adopted design guidelines that included a building height limit of up to 72 feet. It was rationalized on the basis of an isolated portion of the island's highest structure – a tower atop the presidential suite at the historic Jekyll Club Hotel.

There are at least two reasons why JIA's reasoning is flawed. First, a tower imposes a far less intrusive, monolithic effect than a warehouse-width building erected to the same



David Kyler is executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast in St. Simon's Island.

elevation. Second, the historic hotel is on the back side of the island, nestled among mature trees that soften the visual effect of its scale.

In stark contrast, the Westin will stand on an oceanfront site having no large trees nearby, close to remnant dunes and active sea-turtle nests. Due to the Westin's sheer size as well as its site, the hotel will impair the scenic quality of both the island's entryway and the beach. Late in the day, the structure will cast a massive shadow over the beachfront, making the view look more like Miami Beach than the Golden Isles – damaging the island's most valued asset: its natural, tranquil setting.

JIA has three more hotels waiting for redevelopment. If these are built to the limits of JIA's permissive guidelines, Jekyll's image will rapidly mutate from natural to urban.

Besides profoundly degrading the experience of Jekyll's beach-going tourists, the Westin will pose a significant threat to sea-turtle nesting habitat. Lighting from beachfront structures is the single greatest threat to sea-turtle hatchling survival caused by shorefront development. And, according to biologists, artificial lighting problems grow exponentially with the height of shorefront buildings.

Past efforts to implement Jekyll lighting controls have not always been successful. Moreover, the Westin's size and location will make enforcement of lighting ordinances extremely difficult.

The \$200 average room rate predicted for the Westin also seems questionable in view of the affordability required in the founding legislation for the park. Cultivating an exclusive clientele is at odds with that mandate. If hotels now being planned follow this example, a trend toward less affordability will result, clashing with the public purpose of Jekyll Island State Park.

Decisions promoting such mammoth beachfront projects further conflict with the unique tranquility of the Jekyll experience. Concerned Georgians should urge JIA to reduce its building-height limitations.

Focus: Coastal Conservation

Saving Sea Island's Fragile "Spit"

By David Kyler,
Center for a Sustainable Coast

As the hundred-some people attending a recent meeting held at the St. Simons Casino found out, there are major discrepancies surrounding a controversial project proposed on the south end of Sea Island ("the Spit"), improperly approved by the Islands Planning Commission back in January.

The Spit has eroded from 200 to 400 feet at various locations in recent decades and roughly 100 feet in just the past 10 years (triple the rate of other eroding Georgia coastal areas).

Sea Island Acquisition's ("SIA") proposed lots are only 150 to 250 feet deep with one-third to two-thirds of each lot lying within a legally required beach/dune setback line. SIA's proposal includes a road, two bridges, eight lots with homes, and utilities including buried sewer, water, and electrical service in a pure sand environment that likely will accelerate further erosion and ultimately destroy the Spit's protective barrier function for St. Simons Island.

The Spit is the only area on Sea Island where FEMA flood insurance and federal disaster assistance are prohibited due to the Spit's extreme vulnerability to erosion and flooding. The drastic erosion taking place on the Spit will cause property owners with multi-million dollar investments to build seawalls that will damage adjacent shoreline and critical wildlife habitat for the endangered loggerhead sea turtle, the endangered Piping Plover, and 143 other species of birds.

Sea Island Company's legally required notice to rezone the Spit as part of the Cloister Planned Development District ("PD District") published in The Brunswick News in February 2004 did not include the Spit. Therefore, the rezoning of the Spit is legally invalid. The Cloister PD District approved by the Glynn County Board of Commissioners in 2004, which showed the nature and location of all future development within the PD District, did not show any plans for development on the Spit.

Sea Island Company repeatedly stated to Glynn County officials during the 2004 rezoning to a PD District that the purpose was to "redevelop the Cloister complex and related facilities." The proposed eight lots, despite SIA calling them the "Cloister Reserve," are not part of the Cloister complex, are not related facilities, and are not being redeveloped (as they have never been developed in the first place.)

In approving SIA's Spit project, the Islands Planning Commission ("IPC") improperly failed to identify one of three tax parcels that are part of the project (tax parcel 05-01326). The missing tax parcel includes all of proposed lot 7 and over one-



half of lot 8. In approving SIA's Spit project, the IPC approved amendments to the Glynn County Zoning Ordinance which also must be approved by the Board of Commissioners at a public hearing. The amendments include changes in land use, street access, public areas, and parking spaces by: building a new road, reducing the road right of way from 50 to 40 feet, allowing the road to encroach on a condominium building, subdividing eight lots for construction of houses on vacant land, moving a swimming pool, and eliminating parking spaces. The entire Spit should be rezoned to Conservation/Preservation consistent with the southern portion of the Spit.

At the meeting, GreenLaw attorney Steve Caley presented an authoritative and well-researched series of facts about the history of a 2004 "planned development" (PD) rezoning on Sea Island. According to official records related to explicit requirements of the county zoning ordinance, not only was the current project not mentioned as part of the area affected in the published public notice, but the concept plan approved for the PD excluded the 7-acre site from the mapping of proposed development for the entire project.

As a result, on behalf of two environmental groups, Center for a Sustainable Coast and Altamaha Riverkeeper, GreenLaw is asking County Commissioners to hold a public hearing on the matter.

**For More Information on the Campaign to
Save the Sea Island Spit, Please Visit:
www.facebook.com/savethespit**

THE BRUNSWICK NEWS

Grading on the Curve: Tough love and honest truth for Earth Day 2014

In evaluating the area's environmental progress over the past couple decades, certain truths must be recognized. ("Making the Grade," April 19-20.)

- Georgia's Coastal Management Program fails to achieve the very thing it is funded to do, which is coordinating environmental protection on the coast to ensure consistent compliance with regulations.
 - Public officials persistently defy law, prudent policy, and scientific facts to promote speculative projects, no matter how financially and environmentally risky. Georgia's record in real estate foreclosures and degraded landscape is stark evidence of the consequences of such recklessness.
 - Years ago, the Board of Natural Resources eliminated protective buffers along small streams that flow only during heavy rains, increasing land-based pollutants carried by Georgia's rivers into our coastal waters.
 - The General Assembly has drastically cut budgeting for regulatory activities intended to protect air and water, so that very few of thousands of environmental permits are properly enforced.
 - "Consent-orders" are increasingly used by EPD to allow environmental violations to continue or be only partially corrected, often with little penalty for law-breakers.
 - Recent Georgia court decisions will likely have the effect of encouraging environmental violations because law-breakers will be able to get better breaks with consent-orders.
 - Vast areas of forested wetlands throughout the coastal plain continue to be developed, resulting in ever more pollution and flooding, despite such activities being in violation of state and federal law.
- If coastal Georgia is to get a passing grade on environmental progress, the curve must be very steep.

David Kyler
Center for a Sustainable Coast

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Thursday, Jan. 1, 2015

EPA cleanup plan unacceptable

For over two decades, the LCP Chemicals site in Brunswick has been notorious as one of the nation's most dangerous examples of industrial pollution. Due to negligence, deliberate contamination and lax regulatory enforcement, a series of industrial occupants left the site saturated with toxic materials, including mercury and PCBs.

Under federal law, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has studied the site and proposed a "Cleanup Action Plan" now under public review. But that plan is deficient because it fails to recommend removing much of the poisonous contamination. Instead, despite distressing evidence of extensive damage, EPA proposes to cover polluted tidal marshes — exposed to daily tides and storm surges — with a thin layer of soil.

A primary concern is human health, put at risk by consumption of local fish made toxic by exposure to this industrial contamination. The LCP site also threatens surrounding marshes, waterways, habitat and wildlife valued for recreational qualities, natural beauty and related benefits to the local economy, supporting thousands of jobs in recreation, commercial seafood and tourism.

Research by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry found locally caught fish and shellfish was being eaten by some area residents at least 2 1/2 times more than the amount assumed by EPA in its planning assessment. Families identified in the study were eating two or three such meals weekly, equivalent to 100 to 150 meals annually. EPA assumed no more than 40 local fish meals a year.

Moreover, findings of the ATSDR investigation revealed PCB levels in the blood of some Sapelo residents 10 times the amount considered "normal." That stunning statistic correlates with an alarming level of PCBs also found in dolphins

sampled locally and considered the world's most PCB-contaminated dolphins.

These findings substantiate that the LCP site deserves a more aggressive, rigorous and proportionately costly program of toxic removal, containment and monitoring, as well as just compensation for residents whose health has been endangered. People at risk are far likelier to incur excessive medical costs, disabilities and chronic health impairments, possibly extending to future generations due to genetic mutations linked to PCBs.

The tragic LCP circumstances bring into stark focus the ominous consequences of poorly regulated and recklessly conducted business activity, often dogmatically promoted by politicians who trivialize impacts on the public and our shared natural resources. Those responsible for the extensive damage caused by this cumulative industrial pollution must be held fully accountable, regardless of the cost. We must demand that public and private-sector decision-makers strictly follow rigorous standards, recognizing any practices that clearly endanger public health must not be tolerated, much less defended.

It's painfully obvious the geographic dispersion, toxicity and prolonged damage already caused by pollution at the site make any genuine "cleanup" an unattainable euphemism. EPA's suggested "remedy" is at best an exercise in damage control.

I urge concerned citizens to review EPA's Cleanup Action Plan, submitting questions and recommendations in writing to EPA by Feb. 2. The plan and process for site analysis and response can be reviewed at: <http://1.usa.gov/1vDgzz7>

David Kyler is executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

April 16, 2017

Healthy environment favors robust economy

As Earth Day 2017 approaches it's fitting for coastal Georgians to reconsider the importance of strong ties between our economy and environmental health. Too often, outmoded, poorly-informed viewpoints unfairly portray environmental quality as being contrary to jobs and a robust economy.

Yet, coastal Georgia's economic vitality thrives on the protection of marshes, fisheries, and waterways.

According to estimates of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, at least 40,000 jobs and \$2 billion a year in commerce depends in one way or another on a healthy environment here in our region

This includes business ventures involved in tourism, seafood processing, and outdoor recreation and all the local services upon which these activities depend.

Beyond these well-documented ties between coastal Georgia's workforce and natural resources, we now face a new realm of growth potential – on a global scale, but with special relevance to our region's future.

Here again, we must insist that conventional wisdom be set aside. I'm referring to the latest report from three giants of the business sector who urge stepping up the transition to a clean-energy economy — not only to improve environmental quality and provide investment opportunities, but also to drastically cut emission of greenhouse gases that are

overheating global climate, raising sea-level, and jeopardizing vital marine food supplies.

In "From Risk to Return: Investing in a Clean-Energy Economy" co-authors Michael Bloomberg, Hank Paulson, Jr., and Tom Steyer, make a compelling case for boosting conversion to pollution-free sources of energy.

To quote Hank Paulson, Jr. (former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury), contrary to often-heard assertions, "We can reduce climate risks with existing clean technologies. We don't need an energy miracle."

The report calls for boosting three basic economic initiatives — which are already underway — to successfully (and profitably) curtail threats of catastrophic climate change:

1. Electrification of the economy, moving away from combustion-power and toward wider use of electric motors.
2. De-carbonizing the power sources used to recharge electric-powered equipment and vehicles (i.e., shifting to solar and wind-powered electricity production), and
3. Advancing energy efficiency.

Despite claims by defenders of the status-quo, these steps are technically feasible and well within the realm of near-term realization, according to the proponents of the recommended transition. The report clearly asserts that with the right policy decisions, businesses and investors will drive the needed

changes — both in the U.S. and worldwide.

These business-savvy authors remind us that the same ingenuity that "put billions of transistors on a single silicon chip and a smartphone in every pocket can also bring clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to every American home" and business, while boosting energy efficiency and providing needed technological progress.

In calling for this shift in public policy, they recall the pivotal role played by the U.S. government in making past advancements — such as railways, rural electrification, and telecommunications.

Rather than continuing to use billions in tax-subsidies to support outmoded and polluting fossil fuels, they advocate reforming public policy to support the three-part program outlined above.

Timely action is needed to ensure both economic stability and effective safeguards against, flooding, drought, wildfires, and costly property damage brought by worsening climate change.

There's no more appropriate time for this call to action. Let's revitalize the meaning of Earth Day by reaffirming that creating jobs need not jeopardize our environment, and pragmatic options must be supported by public policy.

David Kyler is the director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simons Island.

The Augusta Chronicle

April 30, 2017

Letter to the Editor

Opportunists distort science

The 20-year track record of the Center for a Sustainable Coast is a tribute to applying science to advocate improved protection of Georgia's environmentally vulnerable coast.

As director of that non-profit group, I am deeply concerned about the cynical manipulation of science, exploited unfairly to win vacuous victories that are politically convenient and dangerously deceptive.

Most disturbing in that regard is the conspicuous silence that neutralizes the preponderance of scientific documentation of human-caused climate change. For three decades, scientific evidence has been accumulating, clearly indicating that dangerous amounts of carbon in the earth's atmosphere – emissions called "greenhouse gases" (GHGs) – are causing our climate to increasingly overheat.

Alarming, equally well-documented consequences of climate-change have been reported based on compelling scientific evidence.

Sea-level rise, rapidly expanding wildfire damage, destruction of marine food supplies, and extreme weather conditions, including both drought and flooding, are all confirmed by scientific research of global systems. According to science-based trends, these impacts will worsen as GHGs continue accumulating.

At a regional level, consider the ill-fated amendments to Georgia's Shore Protection Act, which were doomed by their willful neglect of scientific evidence documenting erosion. Despite such neglect, many legislators, DNR staff, and even some environmental groups endorsed HB 271, which misrepresented or subverted scientific evidence by taking unjustifiably compromised positions.

If we are to benefit from scientific information, such research must be used consistently in taking actions supported by overwhelming evidence. Opportunists who distort science to leverage their political advantage are corrupting the critical importance of scientific inquiry.

David C. Kyler
Saint Simons Island

The writer is executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

THE BRUNSWICK NEWS

Saturday, May 27, 2017

Cumberland Island should not be rezoned for development

Published comments about proposals for developing as much as 1,000 acres of fee-simple property on Cumberland Island have lacked appropriate emphasis on several salient factors.

First, the acreage in question is within the boundaries of a “National Seashore” of unique conservation value to the public, as declared by Congress in making that designation in 1972. Some 60,000 visitors ferry to the National Seashore annually to experience the breathtaking beauty of a barrier island in its natural state – including rare maritime forests, diverse wildlife, windswept live oaks and magnificent sand dunes.

Aside from the substantial value of that tourism to the local economy, consider that hundreds of millions of federal taxpayer dollars and tens of thousands of hours of effort – by civil servants, non-profit groups and volunteers – have been invested in creating the treasured national park.

Furthermore, both a master plan for Cumberland Island National Seashore adopted by the National Park Service and the Camden County Comprehensive Plan – sanctioned under Georgia law – call for conservation of all undeveloped areas of the National Seashore.

When the Cumberland property was zoned “conservation-preservation” in 2008 under a “unified development code” adopted by Camden County, none of the property owners objected or mentioned intentions to develop.



Property owners constrained by the circumstances described above cannot expect to have the same development options as those who own land without such vital “pre-existing conditions.” Clearly, assumptions and assertions about “property rights” must be reconsidered in light of relevant legal factors. Cumberland should not be rezoned to allow more development.

David Kyler
Center for a Sustainable Coast

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

Sea-level rise is quite real and worsening. Rapid reduction in greenhouse gases urgently needed.

Doubts about projected rise in sea-level expressed in recent letters to the editor expose fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of climate change and how an overheating world produces such disastrous outcomes. Clearly, the writers fail to comprehend that land-based ice, as glaciers, when melted will add enormously to the volume of water in the world's ocean, thus rising seas.

Catastrophic events appear imminent according to scientists studying glaciers in Antarctica, as reported in a recent article in Rolling Stone, "Doomsday Glacier." The timing of such events is uncertain, but the processes producing them are well underway. As reported, if all land-based ice in the world melted, the world's oceans would rise by more than 200 feet. It is only a matter of time for such outcomes to occur unless efforts to reduce release of greenhouse gases are rapidly expanded.

It is noteworthy that authoritative, science-based reports issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are perpetually out of date because of a lengthy "peer-review"

process that takes about five years to complete.

As a result, IPCC predictions consistently under represent actual impacts, such as sea-level rise. Every time a report of IPCC is released, the computer modeling on which predictions are made is based on outdated information, while data gathered more recently suggest greater, worsening impacts. For that reason, predicted rise in sea-level by 2100 has tripled over the last two reporting cycles, from one foot to more than three.

Given this perennially outdated modeling, we can be assured that the next cycle of predictions will indicate an even greater rise in sea-level.

Another reason for this accelerating rate of destructive impacts — including rising sea-level — is that other contributing factors are worsening as well.

For instance, as global temperatures climb, land that has been in "permafrost" for thousands of years is thawing. According to scientific studies, such permafrost thaw, covering about a quarter of the world's land area, will release huge amounts of methane as

defrosted organic material decomposes. This methane is predicted to double atmospheric greenhouse-gases that are causing rapid rise in the earth's temperature.

Delay in taking corrective action through public policy will only cause more damage to coastal areas, marine food supplies, and — in various ways — public health.

Ironically, for those opposing climate-correcting action on the basis of cost, wise steps taken now will not only save lives and property, but they will cut future public costs by trillions of dollars.

DAVID KYLER
Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Coast
St. Simons Island