



***** 25 Years of Defending Georgia's Coast *****
Summary of Center activities, 1997 – 2022

Friends of Coastal Georgia ~

We are delighted to invite you to join us in celebrating 25-years of the Center's work protecting Georgia's coast – our inter-tidal and ocean waters, shorelines, marshes, wildlife habitat, freshwater wetlands, and maritime forests.

This noteworthy event calls for reflecting on both past efforts and the need to confront daunting challenges ahead.

In our early years, from 1997 through 2005, the Center engaged in a range of activities advancing our broad mission, confronting issues as they arose.

- Center staff successfully collaborated in opposing the injection of water into the coast's Floridan aquifer to curb the risk of further industrial contamination.
- We elevated the public's understanding of the need to protect coastal marshes and estuaries by reducing upriver contamination in watersheds. [*Please see the Center's map of Georgia's coastal watersheds on our website*].
- In efforts to strengthen the protection of vast watersheds with rivers flowing into coastal Georgia, we played a major role in launching two Riverkeeper groups for the Altamaha and Satilla by organizing them as non-profits, securing initial grants and assisting in their certified designation as Riverkeepers by Waterkeeper Alliance.
- The Center engaged in several legal actions using the Clean Water Act to prevent the development of hammocks and hazards to tidal marsh, as well as improved enforcement of related state and federal laws.
- As a founding member of the Georgia Water Coalition, the Center collaborated with environmental organizations across the state to structure efforts defending the state's water resources and wetlands.
- We actively participated in the comprehensive assessment of proposed deepening of the Savannah River in harbor expansion, threatening critical habitat at the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. Although the project was ultimately approved, through these discussions we advanced public support for natural resource protection in coastal estuaries and improved regional methods used for evaluating environmental and economic trade-offs.

The Center's next phase of activities (2006 – 2015) encompassed a broadening array of challenges, some of which persist as profound threats to public interest related to energy policy, economic development, and marsh protection.

- The Center initiated Georgia's first public discussions about climate change, its causes and consequences, and began publishing a series of commentaries on these and related topics in area newspapers and online outlets.
- Center staff and board members successfully collaborated in opposing the proposed Palmetto Pipeline by preparing well-reasoned letters and presenting public testimony. Ultimately, the proposal for an oil pipeline that severely threatened tidal marshes and water quality across the entire region was ultimately withdrawn.
- We raised awareness about the wasteful and destructive effects of various human activities that cause pollutants to enter Georgia waterways, groundwater, and wetlands. This work entailed legislative opposition to "concentrated animal feeding operations" as well as industrial and commercial facilities that dump – or leak – dangerously contaminated run-off into surrounding wetlands and waterways.
- The Center launched a "Marshes Matter" campaign to strengthen public understanding of and support for the vital functions of Georgia's tidal marshes – including flood protection, water filtration, and fisheries habitat – irreplaceable to quality of life, and worth millions of dollars in essential benefits annually.
- We collaborated in active opposition to the controversial expansion of Plant Vogtle, a nuclear power plant on the Savannah River near Augusta. The project continues to threaten water-supply and water-quality, while burdening the public with lethally toxic waste and unfairly imposing hundreds-of-millions in cost overruns on residential energy customers. Plant Vogtle became an unparalleled fiasco, creating a notorious reputation that vividly demonstrated the consequences of irresponsible, publicly-subsidized profitmaking

Since 2016 the Center has continued and amplified efforts in three major areas of effort dedicated to protecting Georgia's coastal region and its residents: (1) Understanding climate change and vitally needed corrective actions,



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(2) Evaluating, revising, and raising public awareness about coastal development proposals to prevent disruptive projects from harming vital natural resources, and (3) Taking legal actions, as needed, in efforts to ensure that environmental laws are properly enforced. Following are some highlights of this work.

- The Center organized and hosted a multi-year series of public forums on climate change in Savannah. From 2016 through 2018 three major events were held to help educate coastal residents about the causes and escalating consequences of rising global temperature. These forums featured the assistant director of the Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia University and a renowned environmental policy author as speakers.
- These efforts laid the groundwork on the climate issue in the area, which led to the Center collaborating with the Climate Reality Project and other local advocates in developing a resolution dedicated to reducing greenhouse gases, which was unanimously adopted by the Savannah City Council in 2020.
- Consistent with the Center's commitment to the use of science and critical analysis in educating the public to build responsible public policies, we have achieved unparalleled levels of published commentary on pivotal issues. From 2018 until the present, Center staff and board members have authored nearly 150 opinion columns and letter-to-editors that were published by media outlets across Georgia. (A complete listing of our published commentary, by date and name of media outlet, is available.)
- In 2016 the Center assisted Wayne County residents by establishing a Coal Ash Legal Fund that paid for attorneys whose work was instrumental in defeating a proposal to build a rail spur that would have brought as much as 10,000 tons of toxic coal ash per day into the Broadhurst Landfill. Had this plan not been thwarted, a leak at this landfill could have threatened the health of local citizens, and coal-ash toxins may have contaminated the Altamaha River, with degrading accumulative effects on Georgia's tidal marshes – and areas between – as those pollutants flowed downriver.
- In 2019 the Center launched a blogsite to provide an online platform to reach the public with our lengthier analysis of issues critical to coastal Georgia. Spanning an array of topics, some of our blog's content has been published elsewhere, including *The Savannahian* and *Like the Dew*. [See: www.southatlanticbytes.blog]
- On September 22, 2019, an estimated one-thousand people of all ages came to Savannah's Forsyth Park to encourage decisive, effective action on the climate crisis in support of the Global Climate Strike. The Center's board president and our staff co-director – both Savannah residents – initiated and organized the march, while also recruiting effective media coverage. This was not only the largest climate event ever held in coastal Georgia, but the best-attended environmental rally in the history of Georgia's coast.
- To address timely issues crucial to the protection of Jekyll Island State Park, Center staff has presented numerous statements to the Jekyll Island Authority. All of these were related to development impacts on the island's environment and quality of life. Decisions related to hotel and condominium development as well as Jekyll's build-out capacity have been especially controversial. Public surveys overwhelmingly reflect increasing concern about over-development that is degrading the island's uniquely tranquil, natural character.
- In recent years we have been engaged in several multi-phase legal actions, prompted by public agencies failing to meet their obligation to enforce environmental regulations. One case, still under appeal, entails the illegal construction of a private dock within the boundaries of Cumberland Island National Seashore.
- Several other cases were filed against the Corps of Engineers, Glynn County, Sea Island Acquisitions, and other parties for environmental violations on other barrier islands. On Sea Island, the ocean shoreline was illegally damaged, with harmful effects spreading to the beaches of St. Simons Island. In two other cases, we challenged the destruction of rare freshwater wetlands and other resources when environmentally reckless and deceptive projects degraded them. An important legal precedent resulted, strengthening public safeguards.

Thanks to thoughtful donors like you, the Center has remained staffed, funded, and actively engaged since 1997. We hope you believe that our work is substantial, effective, and vital to the future of coastal Georgia. Donations can be made on our website or by sending a check to our office. For contributing stock, please call us for details.