

Curve on environment must be steep for coast

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

- EPD's director just irresponsibly reversed state policy, which will eliminate protective buffers along most tidal marshes in Georgia. By focusing on defective language in the state's erosion law rather than its purpose, to protect water, he accommodated special interests for political reasons.

- Georgia's Coastal Management Program fails to achieve the very thing it's funded to do, which is coordinating environmental protection on the coast to ensure consistent compliance with regulations.

- Public officials frequently defy law, prudent policy and scientific facts to promote speculative projects, no matter how financially and environmentally risky. Georgia's record-setting real-estate foreclosures, bank failures and degraded resources are stark evidence of the consequences of such recklessness.

- The General Assembly has drastically cut budgeting for regulatory activities intended to protect air and water so that few environmental permits are being properly enforced.

- "Consent orders" are increasingly used to allow environmental violations to continue or be only partially corrected, often at little penalty to law-breakers. Recent Georgia court decisions are likely to encourage environmental violations because polluters will get better breaks under 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.

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