

# Center for a Sustainable Coast

## HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

June 1997 – June 2017



**1997** (June) – The Center registered as a non-profit corporation in Georgia and adopted a mission focusing on fact-based conservation of coastal Georgia’s resources. We defended public water supplies by successfully opposing a speculative proposal to privatize water as a commodity. The Center produced a widely quoted estimate of coastal Georgia jobs in nature-based business.

**1998** – Continuing with coastal water protection, the Center filed legal action against the Army Corps of Engineers for issuing a “letter of permission” that allowed a large offshore gambling ship to use a small-boat marina in a shallow creek. The Center challenged the Corps evaluation of the Savannah harbor expansion project (Tier I) because it lacked assessment of multi-state, multi-port trade-offs.

**1999** – The Center prepared proposals for establishing Altamaha Riverkeeper, securing grants from The Sapelo Foundation and the Turner Foundation, as well as obtaining the “Riverkeeper” licensed designation from Waterkeeper Alliance. We continued protecting coastal marsh, shorelines, and vulnerable habitat by commenting on numerous DNR permit applications.

**2000** – The Environmental Protection Agency awarded the Center a multi-year grant for preliminary design of the Coastal Georgia Greenway, administered by the Center, to begin implementing a master plan developed by the Coastal Georgia Land Trust. Defending the coast against various unwise development projects continued, as Center staff reviewed and commented on a variety of proposals.

**2001** – The Center filed legal action against proposed residential development of marsh hammocks in Chatham County related to a Coastal Marshlands Protection Permit. Center staff provided leadership as a member of a Stakeholder Evaluation Group that was formed to analyze impacts of deepening the Savannah harbor, emphasizing cumulative impacts and mitigation cost.

**2002** – Center staff assisted in formalizing the “coastal advisory committee” of Georgia’s Coastal Management Program by developing by-laws and converting the group into a standing “advisory council” – with members appointed by the commissioner of DNR. We successfully opposed proposals in Glynn County to build a coal-burning power plant and to strip-mine titanium.

**2003** – The Center joined several groups in filing legal action to oppose the re-development of a long-dormant marina on the Mackay River in Glynn County that impinged on tidal marshland. We began a “State of the Coast Report” based on extensive research about coastal Georgia environmental conditions and trends. The report included a map showing all “impaired waters” in the five coastal watersheds.

**2004** – Center staff assisted in forming Satilla Riverkeeper, developing and analyzing issues to be addressed, including a titanium mining operation. We began evaluation of Cumberland Harbor, a major residential development in Camden County adjacent to Cumberland Island National Seashore. Legal action seemed likely, pending DNR permitting.

**2005** – Represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Center filed legal action to oppose a Coastal Marshlands Protection Permit issued for the Cumberland Harbor project, which proposed building nearly a hundred private docks and multiple commercial marinas. The development project was aggressively promoted by developers for its direct access to “recreational amenities” on Cumberland Island.

**2006** – The Center was represented on EPD’s River Basin Advisory Committee for the Satilla and St. Marys rivers, providing analysis and recommendations in a series of meetings of that group. Center staff participated in a coastal Georgia climate-change conference, further strengthening the Center’s deep understanding about related issues – including speculative development activities, efficiency in using water, and energy planning in relation to water conservation.

**2007** – Working under a contract with the Trust for Public Land, Center staff prepared a comprehensive analysis of coastal Georgia issues and the roles of various non-profit groups working in the region. The Center also issued recommendations for adopting “sustainability indicators” for coastal Georgia, which could be used by cities and counties to guide local development decisions on land use and job creation. A proposal for a climate-change action plan by the General Assembly was prepared by the Center.

**2008** – As a member of the Georgia Water Coalition, the Center voiced concern about inter-basin water transfers, state water-planning district boundaries and district planning advisory for the sub-state planning areas. The executive director had two opinion pieces against offshore drilling published in coastal and statewide newspaper. Center staff worked successfully to stop a large development project near the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge in McIntosh County.

**2009** – As a result of a controversial proposal as part of the Jekyll Island Authority’s “redevelopment” of the barrier island state park, the Center was an outspoken opponent of the beachfront project known as “Linger Longer.” We collaborated with the Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island (IPJI) in raising public awareness about flagrant clashes between the project and conservation priorities for Jekyll Island. The Center was selected as financial administrator for grant funds awarded to a collaborative known as “Save Georgia’s Coast” – coordinating the activities of seven advocacy groups addressing environmental issues on Georgia coast.

**2010** – In response to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the Center became further involved with other groups in protesting offshore oil development. We participated in a beachfront rally on Tybee Island, speaking about the irresponsible and unjustified consequences if fossil fuels were developed along Georgia’s coast. During the year, the Center’s executive director wrote additional opinion columns on the topic – both before and after the BP oil-spill calamity – that were published in area newspapers.

**2011** - The highlight of the year was the Center’s very successful public forum on the controversial Savannah harbor deepening (expansion) project, attended by more than a hundred concerned citizens. Two new legal actions were initiated by the Center – one challenging DNR’s use of “letters of permission” and the other objecting to EPD’s mishandling of a marsh-buffer violation by using a poorly devised “consent order.” The Center was deeply involved in updating Jekyll Island’s Master Plan, an effort to guide the redevelopment of Georgia’s barrier island state park.

**2012** – The Center’s website and online archives were reorganized to improve accessibility to the public in raising awareness about priority coastal issues and their relevance to residents and tax-payers. The Center hosted a session in Savannah with the Citizen’s Climate Lobby (CCL) to discuss options for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases. With the guidance of the Georgia Center for Non-Profits, the Center developed a strategic plan focusing efforts on priority issues.

**2013** – In collaboration with the Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island and Greenlaw, the Center worked to document and strengthen a position for resolving disputes raised by the Jekyll Island Authority which challenged how much of the island must remain undeveloped. Center staff presented a summary of climate-change issues to Sierra Club members in Savannah. A provocative finding was based on a U.N study concluding that climate changes are occurring so rapidly that many predictions commonly understate destructive impacts.

**2014** – In collaboration with Altamaha Riverkeeper, Surfriders, and Greenlaw, the Center opposed an ill-considered plan that would allow development of eight lots on the south end of Sea Island. On Earth Day, when the director of EPD declared that the 25-foot buffer would no longer apply along Georgia’s tidal marshes, the Center’s executive director convinced the Coastal Advisory Council, by a unanimous vote of support, to send a letter of objection to the Board of Natural Resources. “Waters of the U.S.” determination was actively defended by the Center.

**2015** – The Center was successful in collaborative efforts to “Push back the pipeline” in response to an unprecedented proposal to construct the Palmetto Pipeline, intending to span the coastal Georgia region from the Savannah River south of Augusta to Jacksonville, Florida. The Center focused its objections to the project on a little-known leap in U.S. oil and gas production that made the nation the world’s largest exporter of fossil fuels, despite support for U.S. “energy independence.” A panel discussion on media coverage of environmental issues was hosted.

**2016** – The Center was honored by receiving the Smith Bagley Public Advocacy Grant Award for outstanding work in representing the public interest of Georgians. Increasing effort was spent in raising awareness about the growing threats caused by climate change – foremost rising sea-level. The Center hosted a presentation by a professor in climate-change law from Columbia University. Emission of greenhouse gases linked to liquefied–natural-gas exporting were cited in the Center’s official comments opposing the licensing of a plant at Elba Island.

**2017** – Responding to a flawed legislative proposal to revise the Shore Protection Act, the Center played a leading role in getting the bill tabled for further review. To defend Cumberland Island National Seashore, the Center collaborated with several other organizations in raising public objections to proposed development. In addition to publishing comments on these issues, we renewed objections to offshore drilling and promoted conversion to clean-energy power sources.

*NOTE:* In an effort to improve public understanding of coastal issues, Center staff and board members have written dozens of opinion columns and letters-to-editors published in newspapers throughout Georgia – from Atlanta to Saint Marys. *The Center’s comments are more frequently published than those of any other environmental group in Georgia.* A complete listing of Center publications is available.