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Center Appeals State Permit For Marsh Hammock Bridges



St. Simons Island, GA

The Center for a Sustainable Coast, with several collaborating environmental organizations, filed an appeal of a recently granted state permit for construction of three bridges over state-owned marshland that would connect three marsh hammocks to Emerald Pointe, a residential area near the Wilmington River in Chatham County. Joining with us in filing this appeal are Altamaha Riverkeeper and the Sierra Club.

We strongly believe that this case is critical to the future protection of hammocks and adjacent marshes, as well as water quality supporting wildlife habitat and fisheries. Because these resources have enormous value to our members and many other coastal residents and businesses, we ask that you consider supporting our efforts by contributing your time and other resources in helping us raise public awareness about this case.

The appeal was filed by attorneys at the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) to address our concerns regarding development activities that would result if the bridges were built, and the environmental disruption caused by related land-disturbing activities and land uses in these sensitive marshfront areas. We believe that risks to the resources and wildlife habitat of the estuarine ecosystem introduced by hammock development are unjustified, and that they are particularly ill-advised in this case for various specific reasons.

We believe that the impacts of the bridges were considered independently, without evaluating the adverse effects caused by subsequent development activities that the bridges would make possible. The Center, SELC, and the other petitioners take issue with this severely limited interpretation of regulations under Georgia's Coastal Marshlands Protection Act.

This appeal will be heard by an administrative judge, probably in mid-June. We are hopeful the judge will determine that the permit is unlawful as issued. If we are successful, the case will become a landmark decision advancing protection of both hammocks and the surrounding marsh ecosystem.

Wilmington River Marsh Hammock: (see story above)

The Center has numerous members who enjoy the wildlife, fisheries, and recreational amenities sustained by this very same marsh area. If you use the resources in the project vicinity, either recreationally or commercially, please mail a statement to us describing such activities, including canoeing, kayaking, fishing, bird-watching, nature photography, and other outdoor recreation, as well as commercial fishing and nature-based tourism.

Come See Our Website:
www.sustainablecoast.com

More Web Links on Page 6

**JOIN THE CENTER!!!
SEE PAGE 11**



IS A SUSTAINABLE COAST POSSIBLE?

THIRD & FINAL SEGMENT

David Kyler, *Executive Director of The Center for a Sustainable Coast*

Two previous issues (Summer and Fall 2000) featured the first installments of this three-part series looking at regional growth trends, implications, and alternatives. Briefly, highlights of trends already analyzed are as follows:

- *Rapidly expanding areas of disturbed landscape, including use of poorly drained and unsuitable areas;*
- *Mounting threats to property from exposure to erosion, flooding, and storms, with related public costs;*
- *Increasing discharge of contaminants into air and water, threatening human health and nature-based business;*
- *Accelerating costs of public facilities (water & sewer lines, schools, etc.) needed to support continuing growth;*
- *Displacement of traditional neighborhoods and cultural groups due to increasing property taxes;*
- *Critical limits on water supply for both urban and rural needs, raising disputes among various user groups; and*
- *Risks to human health and economy caused by lack of understanding about ecosystem functions and their value.*

Regulatory Fragmentation

Environmental regulations are often misunderstood by the public and elected officials, while their enforcement is often criticized for being fragmented and uncoordinated. There are two important implications of these problems.

1. Enforcement is inadequate, with too little field sampling, assessment, and follow-through on permit conditions.
2. Elected officials and regulators continue to make critical decisions based on incomplete, short-term views – with inadequate consideration of the replenishment capacity and other baseline requirements of key resource systems such as rivers, groundwater aquifers, and wetlands.

Local Control vs. Political Reality

Distinctions between the legal authorities granted to state and local levels of government make effective action difficult. For instance, although most water pollution is caused by non-point sources such as building construction, storm-water runoff from parking lots and chemically saturated lawns, and soil erosion, most decisions related to these activities cannot be directly controlled by state environmental agencies. Under Georgia law, cities and counties have exclusive control over land-use decisions, including approval of development projects (location, building density, vegetative buffers, etc.)

and supporting infrastructure (roads, water/sewer service, schools, police and fire protection). Furthermore, the technical expertise needed to make such decisions is often lacking at the local level due to funding limitations, and many communities incorrectly fear that setting strict environmental standards will reduce their ability to capture vaguely imagined economic opportunities. Growth indicators can be used to help achieve desired control over community development, but few cities or counties presently use them. **(See box.)**

Examples of Community Indicators

Economy

- o Number/percentage of jobs held by individuals already living in the community; rate of employment.
- o Percentage of local earnings spent within the community.
- o Amount/percentage of employer payrolls spent on training and education.
- o Number/percentage of jobs based on sustainable use of local resources.

Environment

- o Number/percentage of existing structures used for new activities (residential/commercial/industrial).
- o Water Conservation: volume of water used per capita; per employee; per unit of product, by industry.
- o Land Use: acres of developed land per capita; per employee; per business; amount/portion of acreage with mature-tree cover; amount/percentage of wetlands/wildlife habitat restored/undisturbed.
- o Number/percentage of water, sediment, and/or tissue samples with excessive contaminant levels.

Society/Culture

- o Number/percentage of adults with high school diploma; technical training; college degree; other.
- o Number/percentage of high school drop-outs.
- o Crime rate and number – violent, non-violent.
- o Distribution of income and property ownership by race, national origin.

With adequate staff assistance (and funding), local governments could do a much better job of managing growth by setting development objectives and using critical indicators to measure results. With commitment to locally adopted goals and control devices (reliable land-use ordinances, well-designed and planned public facilities, tree protection, etc.), coastal communities could vastly improve their ability to evaluate and direct local patterns of change. Without such measures being adopted, the region's environment will continue to be subject to isolated decisions that cause loss of community character, erratic economic performance, and jeopardy to natural resources.

. . . continued next page



The Myth of Technological Solutions

The success of some of our most effective modern technologies has led us to assume that all problems we create have technological solutions – which they most assuredly do not. Among the most difficult challenges to resolve with technology are environmental ones. Additional problems are often created by attempts to engineer solutions to environmental constraints, due to inadequate understanding about how complex natural systems function and the proper conditions needed to sustain them. Decisions made to promote growth, despite mounting indications of problems being caused by growth, are often rationalized by the assumption that technical solutions can be found. Examples of technological failures abound: sea walls, intended to protect ocean-front property, can accelerate shoreline erosion; flood-control projects may eventually create worse flood damage than ever before; and highways built to alleviate traffic may soon generate record-breaking grid lock.

By artificially over-extending the capacity of natural resources to support human activities, we often create still other problems – such as pollution of water and fish from wastewater treatment plant discharges and seepage of septic tank drain-fields, respiratory problems caused by emissions of cars and power plants, and water-supply shortages due to excessive industrial withdrawals. Balancing support of human activities within realistic limits of natural systems is not readily accomplished – but we seem to be unwilling to get serious about it until there is a crisis. We are taking increasing risks by stabbing in the dark, making unwise trade-offs to gain questionable short-term benefits having ominous long-term consequences for this and future generations.

The Precautionary Principle

Despite having limited understanding about certain aspects of environmental conditions and capacities, we know enough to be able to reduce unjustifiable risks. In addition to being more conscientious about using currently available information (water tables, soil permeability, pollution sources, toxic exposure, etc.), we must realize that not every environmental risk is worth taking, and not all development proposals are equally desirable. To ensure that we avoid threats to human health and biological systems, we should adopt policies that prevent actions from being taken whenever their consequences are uncertain but potentially harmful. Comparable to a universal doctrine of medical practice, we must first seek to do no harm as we make decisions affecting our environment.

By adopting this ‘precautionary principle’ we will accomplish at least two important things. First, we will be placing a premium on practical research and its application in decisions about resource use and protection. By deferring decisions that jeopardize human health and natural resources until there is enough reliable information (to reduce risk to an acceptably low level), there will be greater political and financial support for environmental research, monitoring and assessment. Second, the precautionary policy will bring a shift in the ‘burden of proof,’ requiring those who wish to use or disturb resources to provide impartial, compelling evidence that their activities are benign. Under current practices, in the absence of conclusive proof of adverse effects, an environmental permit is most often issued – meaning that those who think they will be harmed must produce the evidence, an impractical and unfair burden for most at-risk groups. If evidence is gained only after the permit is issued and adverse impacts are incurred, there is sometimes irreversible damage – and in any case, the cumulative public costs may be enormous.

Because the benefits from a specific environmental permit are usually concentrated, typically gained by the permit holder and related business investors in the short-term, while the costs are spread among a multitude of the public over a much longer period, decisions now tend to favor permit applicants. Furthermore, because adverse effects are dispersed over time and space, once they occur they are often extremely difficult to trace to specific polluters or environmental disturbances. Decisions based on undervalued future benefits of natural resources ignore their growing value to society.

For all these reasons, it appears increasingly obvious that we need new ways to predict and evaluate environmental risks, as well as more responsible procedures for avoiding them. To better address such issues, we must change our priorities and practices, based on the realization that protecting our landscape and waterways is in the long term interest of everyone. Redefining self interest in terms of the fundamental value of natural resources is imperative if coastal Georgia is to fulfill it’s potential in years to come.

***For Series Reprints
contact the Center at 912-638-3612***



CENTER'S PRIORITIES TOWARD A MORE SUSTAINABLE COAST

Highlights of Recommendations
in the table, **Toward a Sustainable Coast**,
developed by Center Staff.

1. Improve use of information in environmental monitoring, enforcement, and response.

- Expand existing sampling of water, sediments, and fish to achieve more comprehensive assessment.
- Delegate specific environmental permitting follow-through responsibilities to appropriate staff of DNR/EPD.
- Post all results of resource sampling and permit monitoring in media in readily understandable language.
- Alert potentially affected residents and property-owners about permit violations and substandard conditions.
- Use results of monitoring and regulatory permit review as guidance for environmental research priorities.

2. Build stewardship into environmental regulations.

- Protect resources using desired conditions (i.e., fishable & swimmable waters), instead of minimum legally acceptable standards (i.e., avoid "race to the bottom").
- Use best possible science to determine instream-flow requirements for healthy ecosystem support in rivers and estuaries – under all conditions, including drought – and apply uniformly as standards for permit decisions.
- Restore wetlands functions on forestry and agricultural lands – using valid best management practices.
- Implement a comprehensive water conservation program, including further reductions in industrial uses.
- When impact assessment information is inconclusive but conditions are risky, simply do not issue permits.

3. Base future development on more complete assessment of soils, hydrology, habitat and other natural features.

- Establish local growth criteria, including standards for water quality, ecosystem health and social diversity.
- Get serious about implementing soil erosion controls – with better local tech support, penalties for violators.
- Adopt land-use ordinances that encourage use of landscape buffers, retention of storm-water runoff and mixed land uses.
- Diversify economic development within the limits of environmental support capacity and carefully track it.
- Promote compatible nature-based business based on assessment of markets, environment, and job needs.

Toward a Sustainable Coast: Issues, Problems & Alternatives

Issue/Resource	Problems/Limitations	Opportunities/Solutions	Comments
Environmental Monitoring, Regulation & Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmented and reactive protection procedures Severely limited funds & staffing Inadequate monitoring data & field science Insufficient coordination and use of research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement permit review by watershed Augment EPD staff with peer review Complete study of in-stream flow needs Annual research agenda & status report 	<p>Need substantial additional funding; raise application fees for permits, seek foundation grants for research. Use watershed-based analysis.</p>
Land Consumption, Community Values, and Disturbance of Natural Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing use of marginal lands Septic fields and other non-point source pollution Removal of natural vegetation, greenspace Insufficient buffering of state waters Market-driven effects reduce local character No cohesive means for protecting public values Fixed and low-income groups often taxed out Importance, value of natural resources and nature-based business poorly understood Emphasis on property value, not resources History of toxic releases, dumping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct land assessments; ID critical areas Provide local density bonuses for protecting sensitive/vulnerable areas Criteria for location/expansion of water & sewer, roads, schools, etc. to reduce sprawl Ordinances for protecting trees, greenspace Provide tech support for counties to assist in implementing soil erosion controls Create incentives for infill development Adopt ordinances for mixed land uses to create neighborhoods, not just subdivisions 	<p>Conventional lot subdivision causes disproportional burden on land and water resources; analyzing features of prospective building sites at larger scale supports better use of land, reduced impact on natural resources. The value and marketability of natural features are poorly understood by many developers. Existing zoning imposes land-use dispersion, dependence on cars. Use of conservation easements is vital.</p>
Wetlands, Fish Habitat & Related Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health risks – fish-consumption advisories Poorly understood relationships between aquifers, recharge areas & surface water Declining fisheries health & diversity Conversion of wetlands via forestry, agriculture Evident loss of groundwater outflow Contaminants released throughout watershed Estuaries threatened, vital to most marine species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate air deposition of mercury, SO2 Increase research of stream flow & groundwater recharge, distribution Improve aquifer recharge-area protection Expand sampling of water, tissue, sediment Restore vital wetlands by filling ditches Disperse wells; monitor natural outflows Permitting and assessment by watershed 	<p>Federal legal loophole for non-conforming power-plant emissions must be closed. Septic systems must be routinely tested and buffer. Need baseline data, monitoring & evaluation of land cover, water quality, hydrology. Analysis of permits should include impacts on nature-based economic activities.</p>
Water Supply & Water Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentrated withdrawals in urban areas Water use dominated by industrial demand Under-evaluated conservation potential Increasing inter-basin transfer proposals Agricultural irrigation inadequately monitored & rapidly increasing Demands met at growing risk to ecosystems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate all conservation alternatives Estimate costs/benefits of conservation Coordinate withdrawal, discharge, water planning and conservation programs Develop new low-loss irrigation methods Explore markets for low-irrigation crops Determine in-stream flow requirements 	<p>Existing conservation practices are limited and inadequately evaluated. Evaporation losses in conventional irrigation methods are enormous. Research & experiment with crop varieties, rotation, diversification, and scheduling to reduce irrigation. Integrated state water policy needed.</p>
Job Creation & Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under-evaluated development alternatives Community & environmental costs unknown Existing economic values poorly understood Actions not coordinated among jurisdictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rate economic value of natural resources Establish & monitor performance criteria Definitive study of nature-based business 'Downstream' impacts must be evaluated 	<p>Relationships between natural environment and economy tend to be undervalued despite their importance. More training & coordination needed</p>



WEB

Visit our website:
sustainablecoast.com

Highlights Include:

Toward a Sustainable Coast: Issues, Problems, & Alternatives

Summary of Major Coastal Water Resource Problems

Resources Worth Millions of Dollars Annually Are at Risk

There Are Important Yet Poorly Understood Interrelationships Between Surface Water (Rivers & Streams) and Groundwater

What Can Be Done to Resolve These Issues?

Featured Articles available at website include:

Vision & Commitment Essential to Realizing Higher Expectations: Development on Saint Simons Island as Lessons for Coastal Georgia
(commentary by Center executive director published in Golden Isles Weekend.)

Georgia Environmental and Health Advocates Expose State's Failure to Enforce Clean Air Laws based on a press release prepared by staff of the Clean Air Task Force and the Public Interest Research Group.

Other Internet Links on Coastal Issues

formyworld.com
graysreef.nos.noaa.gov
georgianature.org
smartgrowthamerica.com
neighborhoodcoalition.org
scorecard.org
pewoceans.org
seaweb.org
georgiaconservancy.org

Has your group got a website?
Send the address to:
susdev@gate.net

[Note from Center staff: This editorial about the politics of Georgia water policy is so brutally compelling that we paid for permission to reprint it, in case our members missed it. Even for those who saw the piece before, this is worth re-reading. Take special note of the closing paragraph.]

The Atlanta Journal and Constitution

Reprinted with permission from The Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution
Monday, March 19, 2001

Aim to make state's water both fishable and drinkable

Water doesn't run downhill in Georgia --- it runs toward money." That is one of the lessons of the General Assembly's debate this session over three water measures. Two of them, a bill to create a North Georgia Metropolitan Water District and a resolution to establish a state water planning committee, are destined to win final approval this week. Both have laudable goals, but they fail to include adequate citizen and environmental balance.

The creation of the committee to fashion a state water plan is noncontroversial. It's essential, in fact, if Georgia is to prevent pollution crises like the one it now faces --- the result of decades of failure by state and local governments to enforce the water-quality standards of the Clean Water Act. A federal court has decreed that the state must have a workable plan to monitor and clean up rivers and creeks by 2003.

Given that backdrop, the House ought to add an amendment, which failed last week in committee, stating a key water plan goal: Georgia's waters must be fishable and drinkable. The rejection of such a basic principle, part of the federal Clean Water Act for 30 years, is an astonishing example of industry lobbying influence over policy-makers.

The metro water district bill, based on the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce's Clean Water Initiative recommendations, is also flawed, though it may force metro area governments to improve waste-water treatment and to control stormwater runoff. That will only happen if the state Environmental Protection Division exercises strict enforcement, not something EPD has done in the past. The bill's major weakness is that it gives county commissioners the power to solve water problems they have created by winking at developers' blatant disregard for existing pollution prevention requirements.

Two amendments that may come before the House would improve the bill: a requirement that stormwater controls and water quality plans be approved by EPD before any plans to increase metro water supply by taking water from other areas of the state; and, having legislators in each water basin, rather than the metro board, choose the proposed citizen water basin advisory committees. That would assure stronger non-metro community watershed representation.

A third water proposal, the Water Bill of Rights, is dead for now because lawmakers were more influenced by paid industry lobbyists than the 1.5 million citizens who have expressed support for the public trust doctrine for water, one that is written into many state constitutions. The doctrine, already law for Georgia's surface waters, simply declares that water is a public resource to be managed for the people, not private interests. Nevertheless, lobbyists for the pulp and paper industry and the state realtors spread false rumors that the public trust doctrine would destroy private property rights. The scary truth is that without it, commercial water interests could prevail over public health and environmental priorities.

The lesson for citizens in this session's water debate is that legislators need to hear a lot more from the grassroots if the public values concerning water uses are to come first.

Editorial Board of the Atlanta Constitution

Meet Holly Christensen New Board Member

In February, the Center appointed Holly Christensen of Glynn County as a new board member. Holly is the Director of Continuing Education at Coastal Georgia Community College in Brunswick, where she has worked for several years. She is also active with the Coastal Georgia Regional Advisory Council, one of several regional groups set up by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Department of Industry, Trade, and Tourism to recommend economic development strategies for their areas of the state.

"We are fortunate to have someone of Holly's experience and interests joining our organization's board," said board president, Dr. Jim Henry, director of Georgia Southern University's Coastal Research Lab. "The Center's success depends on the active involvement of talented and conscientious people who care about the future of our region. We look forward to working with Holly in analyzing conditions and trends, suggesting new policies, and advising our members about issues that affect the growth, economy, and environment of coastal Georgia."

Asked why she joined the Center, Holly made the follow remarks:

"We want the benefits of economic development balanced with preservation of those things that make the fragile environment of the coast unique."

"Growth and economic development are important to all of us. We need to grow wisely and with careful consideration of the impact that decisions made by government agencies, businesses, and others have on our environment. There is a tendency in our culture to believe more is better, to focus on short-term gains rather than long-term consequences. Sometimes the desire for growth is so all-consuming that we pursue it without adequately evaluating costs."

"The Center for a Sustainable Coast plays a key role in balancing growth and preservation by informing the public about current issues of concern, providing measures of sustainability to assist governments in making appropriate development decisions, and bringing together experts to help solve problems that affect our environment."



Did you know?

- Based on the Center's estimates, Georgia's current nature-based business activity is valued at some \$15 billion a year, employing around 600,000 people. If we invested just one-tenth of one-percent of the annual value of this sector in environmental monitoring and assessment, that would amount to \$15 million a year – about five times Georgia's current state expenditure on these crucial activities. Given the economic value of our natural resources and the demands being imposed on them by Georgia's growth, surely this would be a sensible investment of public funds. Furthermore, such an investment could help us avoid potentially enormous costs of environmental restoration (and at least temporary reductions in local jobs and income) by preventing the loss or contamination of natural resources.

- President Bush, Secretary of State Collin Powell, and EPA Administrator Christy Whitman announced support of the Global Treaty on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) on April 19th. The treaty will impose restrictions on use of 12 POP chemicals that are linked to cancer, central nervous system disorders, reproductive problems, and immune and endocrine system disruptions. A number of these chemicals are known to be present in coastal Georgia communities, as determined by various studies of soil and water contamination.

- The Glynn Environmental Coalition reports that clean-up costs for four toxic sites in Glynn County have cost over \$100 million so far, and the work is still underway.

We strongly urge you to ask your elected officials in the General Assembly and Congress to support increased funding for environmental monitoring, assessment and research.

News & Notes

Growth Conference on Jekyll Island 'Growing Wisely on the Coast'

On February 22 and 23, some 200 participants met on Jekyll Island to hear renowned speakers address growth and development issues at a conference organized by The Georgia Conservancy.

The Center, one of several co-sponsoring organizations, arranged for guest speaker Dr. Fred Holland of South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources, who presented findings about development threats to coastal estuaries. Copies of the conference agenda and proceedings are available. Please call the Center for more information.

Georgia Water Resources Conference

On March 26 and 27, the University of Georgia hosted this statewide biennial conference at the Center for Continuing Education in Athens. Among many speakers from research groups, regulatory agencies, and environmental organizations was the Center's executive director who presented a paper proposing expanded use of scientific expertise in the review of complex environmental permits.

Water Quality Issues

Top Agenda at Press Meeting

David Kyler, with the *Center For A Sustainable Coast*, met with Tom Barton, managing editor of the *Savannah Morning News*. The meeting, arranged by Maggie Kelly, staffer of the Georgia Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), discussed issues related to air and water quality that affect the Savannah area, including water quality in the Savannah River. Ms. Kelly commented on water quality related to point-source discharges of industrial plants, which according to EPA, **make the Savannah one of the nation's most 'officially' polluted rivers**. Kyler discussed **water withdrawal and diversion of coastal rivers to reservoirs** used by upstate communities that discharge wastewater into other watersheds.



Illustrations in this issue are courtesy of local wildlife artist Jennifer Smith.

Graphic Design and Photography credits Bob Drury.

Wise Growth on the Coast? Should Your Tax Dollars Subsidize This Development?



The Georgia Environmental Enforcement Project,

The Center has partnered with the Georgia Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) and other groups in supporting the Georgia Environmental Enforcement Project, **a PIRG campaign to achieve greater compliance with state and federal environmental laws in Georgia.**

In November 2000, the Center's executive director, spoke about the **importance of enforcing air pollution laws** at a press conference organized by PIRG at the downtown Savannah waterfront. That event heralded submittal of a joint letter from **PIRG and the Center to the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requesting that they review EPD files on three power plants, including Plant Kraft in Savannah, which are known to be in violation of emission standards of the nation's Clean Air Act.**

Southern Company Pollution Questioned

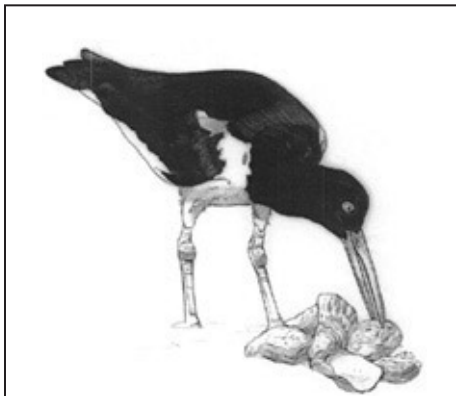
On April 3rd, the Center joined with PIRG in a multi-state effort to challenge the Southern Company, owner of Georgia's illegally polluting power plants and other facilities violating air standards throughout the Southeast, by hosting another press conference on the Savannah waterfront.

As Kyler explained at the press conference, **"Mercury in stack emissions from these illegal coal-burning power plants enters our food supply** by way of deposits that contaminate rivers and creeks, where they then accumulate in fish that are consumed by humans. **Over half of the state's fish consumption advisories are on the coast, and the vast majority of these are due to mercury contamination.** Studies show that about a third of mercury, a deadly and debilitating toxin, enters the environment from power plants. **Allowing these plants to continue their illegal polluting threatens the health of us all, and puts our children and future generations at unjustified risk by poisoning our air and water."** The group seeks to build public support for meeting with Southern Company executives to convince them to bring the violating plants into compliance with regulations.

The Savannah River Site

has been an issue of frequent concern and much dispute for many years. **The most recent threat comes from a proposal to use the SRS facility to process plutonium taken from nuclear warheads into fuel for power plants.** On April 18, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) held a scoping hearing in Savannah to gather comments from the public about the proposal. Speaking on behalf of the Center, Kyler emphasized that **even a small accident or leakage of such materials at SRS could cause major destruction of coastal ecosystems and severe health hazards for generations.** Because **plutonium remains dangerously radioactive for thousands of years,** it is precariously misleading to evaluate the project's costs for only a few decades. NRC is legally required to incorporate public comments in the Environmental Impact Statement by mid-2002.

Please refer to our website (sustainablecoast.com) for more about the risks of radioactive materials in this region.



What will
an Oyster Catcher
catch when there
are no more oysters
to catch?

Legislative Update

*Overall, the 2001 session of the Georgia General Assembly was, as usual, a mixed blessing. Although the session was touted as the 'Year of Water' the most notable water bill that survived (SB130) was focused on Atlanta, and it leaves serious doubts about the interests of down-river regions like the coast. **The Water Bill of Rights (an effort supported by more than 1.5 million Georgians, reported in our last issue) was tabled due to misunderstandings created by those who spread the unfounded rumor that it would lead to citizen's lawsuits against property owners.***

Senate Bill 130 – The Governor's Water Bill (also known at the Clean Water Initiative)

was passed to establish an 18-county 'metropolitan' water-planning district, with a 29-member board charged with resolving Atlanta's water-management issues. Due to the dominance of local elected officials and other politicians on the board, it seems likely that the group's preoccupation will be water supply, with minimal attention to ensuring water quality and flow needed to support Georgia's rivers, wetlands, or coastal estuaries and fisheries. Since the water district created by the bill is based on political boundaries and not watersheds, it also appears that moving water from one river system to another will remain an option, which could have cumulatively disastrous effects on this region on the downstream end of Atlanta's thriving thirst. **The bill's check on inter-basin transfer still allows diversion from one river to another within the 18-county district.** The Center joins others in being concerned with the lack of more comprehensive planning and assessment prior to this effort to allocate water to metro-Atlanta from upriver areas.

The Water Bill of Rights (House Resolution 28 and Senate Resolution 85), according to observers, was derailed by lobbyists from the state Chamber of Commerce, Georgia-Pacific, Georgia Power, Georgia Pulp and Paper Association, Georgia Mining Association, and Georgia Textile Manufacturer's Association. In the end, the **measure was tabled** because of gross misrepresentation of its purposes and legal implications. The standards set forth in the BoR are wholly consistent with provisions in both the Georgia Constitution and regulations of the federal Clean Water Act, which the Georgia EPD is legally obligated to enforce. Allegations about new powers created by the measure, supposedly enabling citizen's lawsuits against industrial aquifer users, were completely off base. The measure's only real threat was against those who would exploit water resources by profiting from them as a marketable commodity – a risk to Georgia's economic and environmental interests alike. (See the AJC editorial reprinted in this issue.)

Senate Resolution 142 is a modest but potentially meaningful proposal that creates a **state water policy study committee**, an idea the Center has been advocating for several years. If successful, when completed with its work in 18 months, the committee will recommend comprehensive state water policies to help resolve major issues about the use and protection of all water resources – above and below ground. Of course, it remains to be seen if the study committee will accomplish this, and if it does, what the General Assembly, Board of Natural Resources and EPD will do with the results. Moreover, the resolution disturbingly omits any guiding principles or standards to be used in developing state water policy. **An amendment introduced by Rep. Debose Porter, proposing the standard of fishable and swimmable waters and assuring adequate supply of clean water for all Georgians, was defeated in spite of this very language being part of the federal Clean Water Act, which EPD must legally enforce.**

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE COAST!

Get Involved

- **Help us work toward needed improvements** in environmental policy and research **by joining the Center**, and, if possible, volunteer to get the message out through our Action Network and your community groups.
- **Attend local planning commission meetings**, and become familiar with your city/county comprehensive plan.
- **Speak out at public hearings and work sessions** on water resources issues, river basin management plans, etc.
- **Examine and disseminate information about natural and historic resources** by researching various websites, such as those of EPA, EPD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).
- **Form a local group of concerned citizens to discuss growth issues** in your community **and create strategies** for environmental conservation – call and/or write state and Congressional delegates about your group's concerns.
- **Ask your elected officials to set specific, comprehensive standards for community growth**, and insist on these being used to measure performance in future years. If deviations from plans and standards are made, make sure the reasons are clearly explained, well justified, and that they reflect true commitment to public interests.
- **Participate in your local Adopt-a-Stream program** by joining with your neighbors in sampling water and conducting cleanups in nearby rivers and streams. (Call toll-free at 888-373-5947 for more information.)
- **Become an environmental sleuth!** When you are out in your community, carefully observe conditions – like loss of trees and other vegetation, disturbance of soil (digging, filling, etc.), water levels in ditches and creeks, and unusual smells or colors in waterways, along embankments at storm-water outflows, or at pipeline discharges. If you have questions about dubious conditions, call a local watchdog group, EPA, EPD, or an environmental consultant or attorney. HINT – it usually pays to get more than one opinion, especially if ulterior motives are suspected. **(Note: EPD hotline for suspected illegal pollution or dumping is toll-free at 888-241-4113.)**

Cultivate a truly 'green' lawn & garden Help protect and conserve water

- Over-application of lawn and landscaping chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, etc.) is one of the major causes of water pollution in the United States. Not only does rain carry these pollutants into nearby creeks and rivers, contaminating fish and other wildlife in the process, but wind can also drop them onto coastal land and water habitats. Using less of these toxic products, or better yet, boycotting them altogether, can improve water quality and reduce health risks to humans and wildlife.
- With the advent of automated irrigation systems, in nearly every community thousands of gallons of water are wasted daily just for the dubious convenience of watering vegetation around homes and commercial buildings. Avoid landscaping with water-intensive exotic (non-local) varieties of plants. Once started, native plants require very little if any irrigation, and can thrive with minimal fertilizing or pest control. If you must water your yard, do so late in the day when there is less wasted by evaporation.

Be A Responsible Consumer

Curtail the use of toxic chemicals like solvents, petrochemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Cultivate a preference for natural pest controls like citronella and cedar oil. Compost lawn debris instead of burning it, and use cuttings as mulch to help moisten and enrich soil.

DO NOT dispose of any questionable materials improperly – like motor oil, solvents, old paint, or antifreeze. When it's time to buy a new vehicle, seriously consider fuel efficiency as a key factor in your purchasing decision. And maintain your car by having it checked regularly for leaks – of brake fluid, coolant, etc.

Become More Aware Of The Consequences Of What You Are Doing

- Buy products with less packaging, and in refillable containers if possible; recycle packing materials.
- Consider repairing an appliance or household item instead of simply replacing it. Rather than throwing them out, donate old items to the Salvation Army or a local thrift shop where they can be reused or properly recycled.
- Scale back on purchasing any products that create disproportionate waste – either at the time of purchase or during use – like chemical-intensive cleaners, fossil fuels, or artificial, energy-consuming room deodorizers.
- Turn off unused lights and keep indoor temperature settings moderate – limiting air conditioning loads, heating demands, and other uses of power can reduce energy bills while also lowering related environmental burdens.
- Use your muscles more, your car less! Whenever feasible, walk, bicycle, or share a ride with a friend or neighbor.
- Try to set aside at least one day a week as a car-free period. Investigate the possibility of building a bike-path or greenway connecting your neighborhood to commercial areas and shopping centers so cars won't be needed to get there. Trails also provide safe, alternative routes for kids to get to school and other destinations.

[Note: The Coastal Georgia Greenway is a regional project with plans to build local trails in a system linking the entire coastal region. To learn more about the project and how to get involved, call the Center at 912-638-3612.]

Make Socially Responsible Investment Decisions

Integrating personal values and societal concerns with investment decisions is called Socially Responsible Investing (SRI). SRI considers both the investor's financial needs and an investment's impact on society. With SRI, you can put your money to work to build a better tomorrow while earning competitive returns today. Social investors include individuals and institutions such as corporations, universities, hospitals, foundations, insurance companies, pension funds, nonprofit organizations, churches and synagogues. How does it work? Three key SRI strategies have evolved over the years: Screening, Shareholder Advocacy, Community Investment and Social Venture Capital. A guide is available from the Social Investment Forum, with information on each of these strategies and practical ways for all types of investors to get involved.

On the web at - <http://www.socialinvest.org/>

Membership Application, Renewal & Contribution Form

Please lend your support by joining the Center!



The Center for a
**Sustainable
Coast**

Conserving Our Natural Heritage
... Investing in Our Children's Future

PLEASE PRINT!

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

E-Mail Address _____

Please send me "Action Alerts" on coastal issues. [Note: If you know someone who may want to be added to our mailing list, be sure to let us know.]

Although I do not want to become a member, I would like to make a contribution in the amount of \$_____.

I would like to:

become a member of the Center
 renew my membership with the Center by making the following tax-deductible donation.

Individual (\$30)
 Family (\$40)
 Other
 Small Business (\$100)
 Corporation (\$200)

For work on Issues:
 education advocacy
 water quality fisheries
 OTHER

\$ _____ Issue _____

\$ _____ Gift in honor of (name) _____

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(Liberty County)

Hal Wright
Attorney working in the areas of
natural resources, local government,
and land-use law
(Camden County)

What We Do...

Educate our members, coastal communities, business owners, and elected officials about the conditions and trends of coastal Georgia's environment – natural, cultural, and economic.

Collaborate in advising citizens and interest groups about threats and opportunities relevant to safeguarding coastal resources and the many people who depend on them for income, health, and sustenance.

Advise decision-makers and stakeholders about existing and potential economic value of nature-based business and jobs.

Advocate legislation and scientific research vital to improving the accountability and reliability of decisions significantly affecting the coastal environment and the public interest of this and future generations.

Take legal action as needed, to prevent or control unwise activities that threaten the quality, capacity, or diversity of our region's resources.

Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution as an individual or on behalf of your family, business, employer, or community group by completing and mailing or faxing the membership contribution form. You may also register or make inquiries by e-mail at susdev@gate.net.



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Sustainable
Coast**

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Center Moves to Saint Simons Island, Hosts Open House

In January, the Center's opened the doors to our new office, located in the village area on Saint Simons Island. To help raise the community's awareness about our new location, we held an open house at the office in February, attended by board members, local Center members and advisors, and other guests.

Board president Dr. Jim Henry, a marine geologist who is director of Georgia Southern University's Applied Coastal Research Lab, was delighted with the turnout. "We were quite pleased to see the strong support represented by participation in our open house. The success of our work depends on the involvement of individuals throughout the region. It is encouraging to know that many others share our concerns about coastal growth and development issues."

Within the first several months at the new office, the Center also hosted a number of meetings and work sessions for other groups, including The Georgia Conservancy, Glynn Environmental Coalition, the Coastal Georgia Greenway Steering Committee, Southern Environmental Law Center, and the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund. Board members have enthusiastically promoted this coordinating role for the Center.

Last year, the Center's board and advisors determined that collaboration with other organizations is one of our highest priorities. "To make the most effective use of each organization's strengths, groups need to do as much as we can to communicate with one another in coordinating appropriate actions on critical issues affecting the coast," observed Center advisor, John Train. In keeping with this goal, the Center invites members of other environmental groups that may need meeting space in Glynn County to consider using our office for upcoming events.