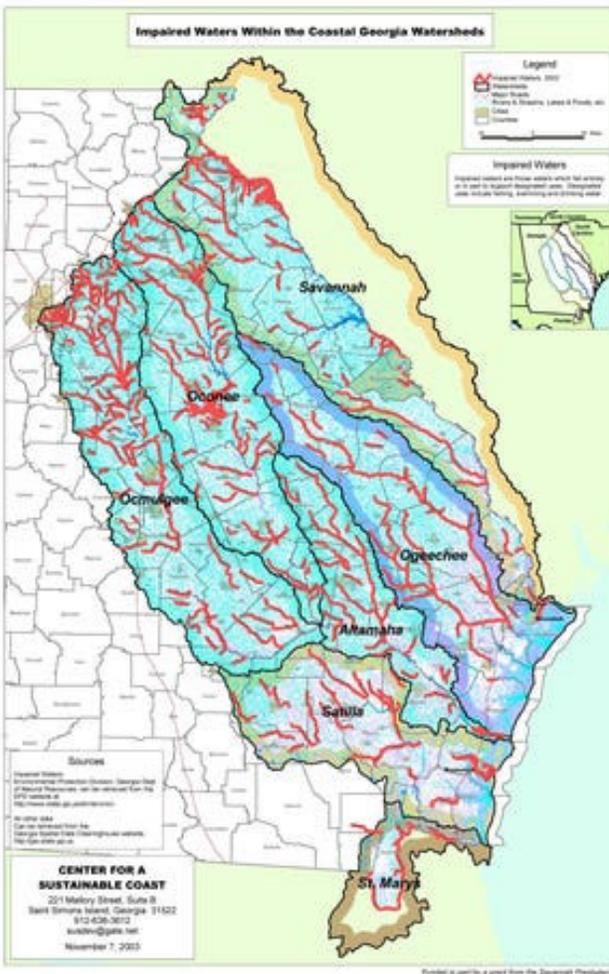




Tuesday, May 31, 2022

Defending Georgia's Coast: Center for a Sustainable Coast ushers in its 25th anniversary

By Laura Nwogu



Impaired waters in Georgia's five coastal watersheds, depicted in red, based on 2003 EPD sampling data. Over 60% of Georgia's land area drains to the coast.

When a group of public-spirited environmental professionals and concerned citizens teamed up in 1997 to form the Center for a Sustainable Coast, it jumpstarted a fight to defend Georgia's coast.

25 years later and the fight is still alive. The nonprofit organization began with a focus on water protection and water quality issues. At the time, there were a number of known problems with water quality in coastal watersheds including upriver contamination.

In an effort to strengthen the protection of the watersheds, they helped launch two Riverkeeper groups for the Altamaha and Satilla rivers by organizing them as nonprofits, securing initial grants and assisting in their certified designation as riverkeepers by the Waterkeeper Alliance.

In 2006, the center's focus shifted toward climate change. David Kyler, founding director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, noted that while most local environmental groups dealing with climate issues limit attention to "resiliency" and adaptation to climate impacts, the center's focus is on preventing the worst impacts of escalating climate change.

"What we've been advocating more than anything else over the last 15 years is eliminating the cause of climate change, that is reducing greenhouse gases, getting off fossil fuels, and converting to clean power," Kyler said. "Decisively reducing the cause of climate change is unique to the Center's footprint because we firmly believe it is a high priority that too few others are adequately advocating."



Kyler explains the hazards of offshore drilling and carbon emissions to beachgoers on St. Simons Island.

Throughout those years, Kyler said the work he's most proud of is a series of public forums on climate change they hosted in Savannah from 2012 to 2018. With those forums, they helped educate coastal residents about the cause of climate change and its escalating consequences, which laid the groundwork for developing a resolution dedicated to reducing greenhouse gases.

The resolution, which set a community-wide goal of 100% safe, clean and renewable electricity by 2035, was adopted by the Savannah City Council in 2020. Karen Grainey, then co-director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, was among those who pushed for the resolution in Savannah the hardest.

[See: [Savannah pledges a low carbon future](#)]

On another issue, in 2016 a rail spur was proposed that would have enabled as much as 10,000 tons of toxic coal ash per day being deposited in a local landfill in Jesup, the county seat of Wayne County. The Center assisted the residents, whose health and waters were at risk, by establishing a Coal Ash Legal Fund that defeated the proposal.

These instances are just a few of the many issues the center has tackled in its 25 years.



**NO MORE
OFFSHORE DRILLING!**

- Unjustified risks to Georgia's treasured coast.
- 40,000 jobs depend on a clean environment.
- Costs to taxpayers are unacceptable.



Reflecting on the past and the future, Kyler stressed that there's still much work to be done to decisively curb carbon gas emissions in the next 10 years that, if not achieved, would cause "apocalyptic outcomes."

"If humans are going to have much of a future, we've got to work together collectively. And by that I mean working with the public, and collaboratively with other organizations – nationally, regionally, statewide and internationally – to reduce greenhouse gases," Kyler said.

"If you don't put your energy and commitment behind your hope, then it's just wishful thinking and complacency. So, at the Center we encourage optimism, but we're also strongly advising people to put their hope into action by supporting critically needed policy changes."

Laura Nwogu is the quality of life reporter for Savannah Morning News. Contact her at LNwogu@gannett.com. Twitter: [@lauranwogu_](https://twitter.com/lauranwogu_)