

Coastal Georgia Issues 2015

Published Commentary and Citations



The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Opinion

EPA cleanup plan unacceptable

Posted: 2:00 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 1, 2015

By David Kyler

For over two decades, the LCP Chemicals site in Brunswick has been notorious as one of the nation's most dangerous examples of industrial pollution. Due to negligence, deliberate contamination and lax regulatory enforcement, a series of industrial occupants left the site saturated with toxic materials, including mercury and PCBs.

Under federal law, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has studied the site and proposed a "Cleanup Action Plan" now under public review. But that plan is deficient because it fails to recommend removing much of the poisonous contamination. Instead, despite distressing evidence of extensive damage, EPA proposes to cover polluted tidal marshes — exposed to daily tides and storm surges — with a thin layer of soil.

A primary concern is human health, put at risk by consumption of local fish made toxic by exposure to this industrial contamination. The LCP site also threatens surrounding marshes, waterways, habitat and wildlife valued for recreational qualities, natural beauty and related benefits to the local economy, supporting thousands of [jobs](#) in recreation, commercial seafood and tourism.

Research by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry found locally caught fish and shellfish was being eaten by some area residents at least 2 1/2 times more than the amount assumed by EPA in its planning assessment. Families identified in the study were eating two or three such meals weekly, equivalent to 100 to 150 meals annually. EPA assumed no more than 40 local fish meals a year.

Moreover, findings of the ATSDR [investigation revealed](#) PCB levels in the blood of some Sapelo

residents 10 times the amount considered "normal." That stunning statistic correlates with an alarming level of PCBs also found in dolphins sampled locally and considered the world's most PCB-contaminated dolphins.

These findings substantiate that the LCP site deserves a more aggressive, rigorous and proportionately costly program of toxic [removal](#), containment and monitoring, as well as just compensation for residents whose health has been endangered. People at risk are far likelier to incur excessive [medical costs](#), disabilities and chronic health impairments, possibly extending to future generations due to genetic mutations linked to PCBs.

The tragic LCP circumstances bring into stark focus the ominous consequences of poorly regulated and recklessly conducted [business activity](#), often dogmatically promoted by politicians who trivialize impacts on the public and our shared natural resources. Those responsible for the extensive damage caused by this cumulative industrial pollution must be held fully accountable, regardless of the cost. We must demand that public and private-sector decision-makers strictly follow rigorous standards, recognizing any practices that clearly endanger public health must not be tolerated, much less defended.

It's painfully obvious the geographic dispersion, toxicity and prolonged damage already caused by pollution at the site make any genuine "cleanup" an unattainable euphemism. EPA's suggested "remedy" is at best an exercise in damage control.

I urge concerned citizens to review EPA's Cleanup Action Plan, submitting questions and recommendations in writing to EPA by Feb. 2. The plan and process for site analysis and response can be reviewed at: <http://1.usa.gov/1vDgzz7>.

David Kyler is executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Letters

June 5, 2015

EPA rule protects coastal economy

Water for drinking and recreation can only be kept clean, and fish uncontaminated, by ensuring all waters flowing into water supplies, rivers and swimming and fishing areas are protected. The new EPA rule (“Feds look to regulate 40K miles of Ga. streams,” News, May 28) is based on extensive studies evaluating such [connections](#), so that previously exempted small streams can no longer cause downstream health problems for humans and wildlife.

In coastal Georgia, this rule has particular significance because the environment is so vital to our quality of life and nature-based economy. Some 40,000 [jobs](#) in the six coastal counties — one fifth of our economy, valued at \$2 billion annually — are derived from outdoor recreation, eco-tourism, fishing and related environment-dependent activities. Objections to the new EPA water rule are grossly unfair and disingenuous – political propaganda in the guise of sanctimonious “regulatory overreach” accusations. If we value our health and economic vitality, the new water protections should be celebrated, not scorned.

DAVID KYLER, Executive Director, Center for a Sustainable Coast, Saint Simon’s Island

September 8, 2015

Obama’s bipolar energy policy

I witnessed the Alaska tour of President Obama with great interest and more than a little editorial-inducing intrigue – pushing both climate change action and more drilling for oil? ‘Bipolar’ has never seemed more apt in describing the U.S. approach to energy and climate.

Rationalizing the need for “energy independence” is surely a discredited tactic, since the record clearly shows that the U.S. is now a major fossil-fuel exporter – including oil products – and it has been since 2012.

Although the drop in oil prices may have temporarily reduced the fracking-derived U.S. output, that transitory factor certainly would not justify drilling in the Arctic.

Is the president masking U.S. foreign policy strategy as an energy gambit? Containing Russian expansionist ambitions by checkmating its oil-exporting influence is understandable, but there may be more involved – including a need to appease the oil lobby to win nominal political support for incremental advancement on climate-friendly clean-energy alternatives.

DAVID KYLER, Executive Director, Center for a Sustainable Coast, Saint Simon’s Island

Opinion

'Progress' that Georgia can do without

Posted: January 23, 2015 - 10:25pm | **Updated:** January 24, 2015 - 12:23am

By David Kyler

According to a survey that was reported in a recent newsletter of Georgia Sierra Club, more than 80 percent of Georgians are convinced that climate change is real, caused by humans and in urgent need of political action, yet state officials continue to ignore or deflect the issue.

Very true and important, but our officials also need to be schooled on other related issues and facts they seem to be reluctant to consider.

- Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is now proposed for distribution worldwide from a precarious coastal site at Elba Island east of Savannah, adjacent to a major shipping channel. In addition to the obvious public-safety risks, a problem ignored by our officials (state and federal) is that much of this gas now comes from fracking operations that release heat-trapping methane at dangerous levels. Per ton, methane is 30 times worse than CO₂ in global warming effects.

According to authoritative sources, the latest research concludes that so much methane escapes when fracking is done that it completely negates the carbon-reducing advantages of burning gas instead of coal or oil. Therefore, facilities like those proposed at Elba Island will add to climate-overheating problems, not reduce them.

Last month, when I pointed this out to the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee, noting that sea-level rise caused by continued global warming is the biggest threat to our tidal marshes, they looked at me as if I were speaking Chinese. Then they summarily

approved the marsh permit needed for the LNG exporting facility.

To be honest but cynical, federal policy could be used to rationalize this bad decision-making, since EPA now controls only new sources of methane pollution, not existing ones, which are the greatest part of problem. Again, unwise political concessions have led to weak policies.

- Woodchips exported by Georgia are also adding to heat-trapping global-warming gases, compounding problems of climate change, but that fact is ignored in public policy. Not only that, but clear-cutting vast areas of Georgia's commercial forests wreaks havoc on our water quality and wildlife, including fisheries that generate hundreds of millions of dollars in business, supporting thousands of Georgia jobs.

As a major source of these woodchips, Georgia is not being held accountable, while ill-informed or cynically short-sighted public officials (take your pick) cavalierly boast of this destructive export industry.

Current federal policy fails to reflect the harsh truth, falsely favoring wood burning as a source of "green energy" even though it pollutes worse than coal, including dangerous releases of CO₂, while also causing the loss of beneficial carbon-sequestering forests. A campaign of our colleagues at the Dogwood Alliance is addressing this issue, and we will be assisting as needed.

Until Georgia officials are far-better informed and willing to work on behalf of authentic, responsibly-defined public interest, we can

expect continued bad behavior in the name of woefully misled “progress.” This kind of progress Georgians can do without.

When denying facts about energy policy serves the campaign financing goals of so many officials, no wonder we so commonly suffer from their willful ignorance.

David Kyler is the director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simon’s Island.



Letters to the editor Sunday

Posted: March 8, 2015 - 7:26pm | Updated: March 8, 2015 - 11:04pm

Palmetto pipeline not helping energy independence

Regarding the proposed Palmetto Project and building a pipeline to bring petroleum products to the Georgia coast, please be aware that projection of fossil fuel markets through 2035 (MIT is the source) clearly show that U.S. demand will be nearly flat, while foreign markets will be skyrocketing.

Can we justify exposing our communities, marshes, rivers and wildlife to the risk of pipeline hazards primarily, if not exclusively, to accommodate foreign demand?

Research indicates that some 350 pipeline accidents have occurred in the U.S. just in the past 15 years, many of them catastrophic.

Inspection of pipelines, though regulated, is notoriously deficient.

We should also consider the substantial value of conserving U.S. fuel resources as a long-term strategic benefit to our country.

Energy independence is not the same as energy extravagance. What is good for Big Oil is often not good for our citizens or our national interest.

Public resources such as water, fisheries, tidal marshes and wildlife are worth far more than marginal increases in Exxon stock, and, unlike stock, they are of lasting, universal benefit.

It is time to carefully reconsider public interest before these pipelines and other risky fossil-fuel ventures — including offshore drilling — are permitted and built.

Once again, this is “progress” that Coastal Georgia can do without. To ignore these realities would be sheer folly.

DAVID KYLER

David Kyler is Executive Director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simon’s Island.

Letters to the editor Friday

Posted: September 11, 2015 - 7:05am | **Updated:** September 24, 2015 - 1:00pm

Alaska drilling and Georgia's coast

By David Kyler

I witnessed the [Alaska tour](#) of Obama with great interest and more than a little editorial-inducing intrigue — pushing BOTH climate-change action AND more drilling for oil?

'Bipolar' has never seemed more apt in describing the U.S. approach to energy and climate. Rationalizing the need for 'energy independence' is surely a discredited tactic, since the record clearly shows that the U.S. is now a major fossil-fuel exporter — including oil products — about 200 million gallons daily by the end of last year — and it has been since 2012. Although the drop in oil prices may have temporarily reduced the fracking-derived U.S. output, that transitory factor certainly would not justify drilling in the Arctic.

Is the president masking U.S. foreign policy strategy as an energy gambit? Containing Russian expansionist ambitions by check-mating its oil-exporting influence is understandable, but there may be more involved — including a need to appease the oil lobby to win nominal political support for incremental advancement on climate-friendly clean-energy alternatives.

And how does this pertain to Georgia's coast? The prospects of the Palmetto Pipeline and offshore drilling in the Atlantic are likely to be [determined](#) by the same influences as drilling in Alaska. Seen in this light, preventing the loathsome, environmentally degrading industrialization of Georgia's coast, brought by the unjustified [activities](#) of a rapidly obsolescing oil [industry](#), does not bode well.

We should heed the wise advice of many, including investment guru Warren Buffet: Leave U.S. oil in the ground as a strategic resource instead of exporting it.

DAVID KYLER

David Kyler is Executive Director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simon's Island.

Letters to the editor Friday

Posted: September 24, 2015 - 11:23pm | **Updated:** September 25, 2015 - 6:35am

The port project is not what it seems to be

Even when the harbor and channel are deepened, as approved, to 47 feet, Savannah's port will still be behind the curve on global shipping requirements. By the time the project was OK'd several years ago, experts agreed that a modern global-ready port would have to be more than 50 feet deep at all tide levels to accommodate the largest vessels.

As it stands, when Savannah's port is 47 feet deep, world class, deep draft ships will have to delay entry or off-load cargo at deeper ports prior to coming here (or both), if they can fit at all — which contradicts the very purpose of Savannah's deepening project.

Given that reality, one wonders about the reasoning behind this huge investment of tax dollars. The real question, not answered by years of study and the massive, but deeply flawed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project, is this: What is the incremental benefit — if any — of a deeper port that fails to measure up to current world class shipping standards?

For a project that proposes to use nearly half of its budget to compensate for environmental damage caused by it, that pivotal question is especially troublesome. What are the real trade-offs being made? Will there actually be any net public benefit? And — if not — how will we find out? Will anyone be held accountable for it?

Considering that Georgia's political leadership claims to be concerned about government accountability and the pragmatic use of public funds, such unanswered questions reveal a disturbing lapse in responsibility.

DAVID KYLER

David Kyler is Executive Director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simon's Island.

Letters to the editor Friday

Posted: November 6, 2015 - 12:06am | **Updated:** November 6, 2015 - 7:36am

Coastal residents must cut greenhouse gases

The recent ‘king-tide’ (extreme high-tide) flooding was an eye-opening thing to witness. According to official reports, these were the highest waters on our coast ever recorded without any hurricane causing them.

In addition to heavy rains there were other factors, and one of particular significance. Besides moderate offshore winds that were blowing landward, as coastal development continues, there are increasing areas of pavement and other impervious surfaces that shed storm-water into low-lying areas.

But also noteworthy is sea-level rise, which – so far – may seem trivial, yet causes more damage during storms and is expected to accelerate in the years ahead.

The Risky Business report, endorsed by renowned private sector leaders – Michael Bloomberg, Hank Paulson, and Tom Steyer – predicts coastal flooding damage in the hundreds of billions yearly thanks to rising seas brought by an overheating climate. Furthermore, they say energy consumption will soar, especially here in the Southeast, just trying to keep cool with dangerously climbing temperatures.

As Risky Business clearly explains, these trends are primarily induced by human activities that generate air emissions trapping solar heat in the world’s atmosphere. As the preponderance of scientists agree, we must reduce the production of carbon, methane, and other ‘greenhouse gases’ – as much as possible and as soon as possible.

Several projects in coastal Georgia are now proposed that directly conflict with that key objective.

Until we directly acknowledge and take effective action on the underlying causes of rising sea-level, coastal residents will be futilely reacting to the symptoms of flooding, paying dearly for the accumulating consequences.

DAVID KYLER

David Kyler is Executive Director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simon’s Island.

Letters to the editor Tuesday

Posted: November 23, 2015 - 10:33pm | **Updated:** November 26, 2015 - 8:00am

Offshore drilling a transparent hoax

Contrary to Hunter Hopkins' claims, Georgia's energy opportunities do not lie anywhere near fossil fuels, offshore or otherwise ("Georgia's energy opportunity lies offshore," Nov. 16).

Among his many deceptive assertions, Hopkins (a paid oil-industry spin-doctor), says that drilling offshore is needed to prevent dependence on foreign suppliers and their manipulation of the oil market. Yet, if the oil industry is so concerned about using domestically produced oil in this country, then why are they exporting nearly 5 million barrels a day of liquefied petroleum products?

And a related question: Why is the oil industry pushing so hard to remove the current ban on the export of crude oil from the U.S. if it's truly interested in supporting American "energy independence"?

Clearly, the most robust markets for fossil fuels are overseas — and various projects, including not only offshore drilling, but also the Elba Island LNG facility and the proposed Palmetto Pipeline, are intended to serve those markets, not our needs here in the U.S.

Regarding his unfounded claims of jobs to be created, consider that the solar industry in Georgia has created far more employment in recent years than all fossil-fuel projects combined, existing or proposed. Moreover, per dollar invested, clean energy projects produce at least two or three times the number of jobs compared with fossil fuel ventures.

And, above all, continuing to burn oil and other fossil fuels will impose enormous climate-change costs on coastal Georgians — including dangerous flooding, property-damage and degraded quality of life — that will dwarf any alleged economic benefits of drilling offshore.

DAVID KYLER

David Kyler is Executive Director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, based on St. Simon's Island.

The Brunswick News

Healthy marshes, environment pay the bills

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Posted: Friday, January 9, 2015 12:00 am

Yearly, some \$2 billion in business is generated by coastal Georgia's marshes, beaches, wildlife, and waterways.

Tourism, recreation, fishing and nature-watching support about 40,000 jobs here, according to our estimates, based on analysis of local, state, and federal data sources.

Annually, over \$500 million is generated by recreational fishing alone.

Clearly, coastal Georgia's environment must be safeguarded not only because it sustains our quality of life and property values, but also because thousands of local jobs depend on clean waters, healthy marshes and abundant wildlife.

We must not allow reckless development schemes or weakly enforced laws harm our natural wealth and shared bounty.

David C. Kyler
Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Coast

Posted: Friday, January 23, 2015 12:00 am

Officials' hands not tied

In researching the Glynn County Zoning Ordinance as it applies to the Flash Foods proposal on Saint Simons Island, on behalf of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, I have concluded that:

- The Glynn County Zoning Ordinance is very clear that zoning decisions require the Planning Commission to qualitatively assess the public interest as well as specific requirements such as parking, access, and set-backs.
- Contrary to claims often made, the hands of PC members and elected officials are NOT "tied" – there is ample justification for legal rejection of proposed development projects if they are deemed to be at odds with the public interest.
- Public interest as defined in the ordinance includes effects on roads, water and sewer, traffic, noise, lighting, and the use and value of surrounding property, as well as "other factors" considered to be important. Legal allowances for the PC evaluating public interest impacts are quite open-ended.
- There is no reason for the PC to be coerced due a threat of being taken to court if the project is rejected. Any proposed development project can be denied on the basis of unwanted effects on public interest, and if such assessment is well reasoned it will be upheld in court.

We need to ensure that county officials know the laws they are obligated to uphold and motivate them to protect the public interest. Without this disciplined effort to properly follow the law, political rationalizations to allow undesirable development will ruin our treasured quality of life.

David C. Kyler
Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Coast

The Brunswick News

Camden spaceport proposal focus of critics

Posted: Thursday, December 17, 2015 12:00 am

By GORDON JACKSON

WOODBINE — Critics of a proposed spaceport in Camden County were not swayed by the turnout of supporters at last week's scoping meeting in Kingsland conducted by the Federal Aviation Administration.

David Kyler, executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, calls the spaceport proposal "delusional" and "a fiasco in the making."

He posted criticism on the organization's website, saying comments made at the hearing were to promote the proposal instead of realistically assessing the consequences of establishing a spaceport.

He said the Camden site can't be compared with other sites because there are developed areas in harm's way regardless of the flight path taken during launches.

"A failed launch could produce disastrous outcomes simply because of this exposed risk, which makes the site unsuitable

for a spaceport," he said. "Considering the recent number of launch failures in the nation, this risk is significant and irrefutable."

A crash could contaminate marshes, wildlife and fisheries habitat and waterways, as well as harm tourism and damage private property.

There are lots of questions about the level of contamination at the site where the launches would take place.

He said the close proximity of the spaceport to Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay is a concern because a failed launch could generate "extremely dangerous radioactive contamination."

"These fundamental obstacles make the Camden County site ill-suited for a spaceport, and in my unconditional opinion the project would directly conflict with public interest," he said. "If permitted at this location, I believe that the spaceport would

prove to be an expensive fiasco if not a tragedy."

Terri Keller of Kingsland expressed concerns about launches over private property and potential impacts to the environment if an accident happened.

"If they do come here, rocket companies should be aware that their every move will be minutely scrutinized, analyzed and reported on, as will any waste of taxpayer money," she said.

James Coughlin, director of the Camden County Joint Development Authority, said he has confidence in County Administrator Steve Howard and the team of experts he has assembled to address all the issues surrounding a spaceport.

"They have a clear understanding of the project," he said. "This team will work to ensure this is a safe, responsible project for Camden County and the entire region."

Connect

Savannah

December 15, 2015

<http://www.connectsavannah.com/savannah/reader-you-offend-me-greatly-by-being-so-pc/Content?oid=3104031>

Fight continues on Sea Island controversy

On Dec. 11 Georgia's DNR "Shore Protection Committee" approved a controversial permit to disturb wildlife habitat and the beach-dependent sand-sharing system to allow Sea Island Acquisition (SIA) to install a third groin and deposit 120,000 cubic yards of sand to protect fast-eroding lots they are trying to develop as the "Sea Island Reserve."

Over 100 individuals and organizations submitted written comments and all but three were opposed to the proposal. Greenlaw, a public-interest environmental law non-profit, presented compelling evidence of the damage expected by approving the project, substantiated by coastal geologists and evidence of rapid erosion made worse by a previous groin built in the same area.

When the vote was called after more than 90 minutes of testimony—overwhelmingly against the project, despite time allotments and rebuttal allowances that unfairly favored SIA lawyers—there was some doubt that the motion to approve would be seconded.

A hesitant and delayed second to the motion came only after DNR Commissioner Mark Williams turned to the committee member who belatedly made it, strongly suggesting a cue to proceed and a prearranged vote.

Once again, environmentally concerned Georgians have learned that a predominance of public opinion and professional advice has little if any effect on decisions made by state permitting authorities, decisions that pose profound threats to public resources meant to be protected by state law. These outcomes are highly political, favoring applicants having the most influence with the governor and other officials.

The decision will be appealed by several environmental organizations, including the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

David C. Kyler

Executive Director, Center for a Sustainable Coast