

## REDEFINING PROGRESS: Coastal Georgia threatened by poorly evaluated business activities.

Consistent with the well-considered advice from Columbia University economist, Geoffrey Heal, Georgians need to get savvier about how state policies are being used to support business ventures and job creation.

According to Professor Heal, “If we don’t make some changes in the way we organize our economic systems... we will see catastrophic environmental change in our lifetimes.” (Quoted in *Catalyst*, Winter 2017.) He stresses that neglecting nature in economic decisions seriously threatens our prosperity.

This message resonates with special relevance in coastal Georgia, where about one-fifth of our jobs are derived from nature-based businesses in tourism, fisheries, and outdoor recreation – and where properties are especially vulnerable to rising sea-level. Yet, despite our communities’ dependence on healthy natural resources, environmentally disruptive activities are being sanctioned by current Georgia policies and economic development programs.

Unless we improve economic policy and legal measures that control business practices, ongoing environmental damage will continue jeopardizing the future of coastal Georgia. We need to become prudent about state and local development choices and incentives, including government subsidies such as tax breaks and discounted or deferred fees.

Coastal Georgia is now in the destructive cross-hairs of rising sea-level, mounting damage to fisheries and nature-based jobs, toxic water-pollution, and other hazards caused by careless development, weak enforcement of regulations, and unfairly opportunistic industries.

Consider some highlights of these ill-considered activities done – or proposed – in the name of economic development:

(1) Toxic threats to our coast include coal-ash disposal at risky locations such as the Broadhurst Landfill in Wayne County, a vulnerable area that's interlaced with wetlands, waterways, and vital groundwater aquifers.

(2) LCP Chemical in Brunswick is one of the nation's most notorious industrially contaminated sites - where lethal pollutants still saturate coastal marshlands. The world's most PCB-contaminated dolphins have been found in nearby offshore waters, yielding conclusive evidence that's chemically traced to LCP pollution sources.

(3) Thousands of acres of Georgia forestlands have been clear-cut to produce wood-pellets for export to European markets. Clear-cutting and monoculture forestry destroys wildlife habitat while adding to erosion, water pollution, and degraded fisheries.

(4) Compounding all of this, we now face yet another volley of threats from the fossil-fuel industry, pushing to drill offshore and export natural gas and crude oil from Georgia ports.

(5) Worst of all, burning these fuels (wood, oil, and gas) will release still more heat-trapping greenhouse gases, magnifying the severe, accelerating threats of sea-level rise, damage to essential marine food supplies, and coastal flooding.

With the full support of Georgia’s leadership, such speculative, poorly controlled ventures continue impairing the future of coastal communities - our natural resources, jobs, public health, and quality of life.

When government policies neglect or marginalize objective evaluation of economic development impacts on our environment, we undermine the state’s existing businesses that depend on diverse wildlife, clean water, and unimpaired natural systems.

Of all the regions of Georgia, our coast is most vulnerable to these misguided, irresponsible notions of progress.

To avoid profound threats to our region, we must demand the adoption of responsible measures that reliably evaluate and control the disruptive consequences of business activities.

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