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Shore bill deserves study

Most people, including legislators, mistakenly think that Georgia's 1979 Shore Protection Act creates a "no-build" prohibition in the law's "jurisdictional area" along the ocean shoreline.

But General Assembly members considering House Bill 271 need to be aware that the SPA allows up to two-thirds of that jurisdiction to be developed — meaning that in many if not most cases, a 25-foot jurisdiction — as now proposed in SPA amendments — will leave less than an 8-foot band of undisturbed area along the shoreline. That is far less than the typical backyard setback that applies in most residential zoning districts.

In addition, local side yard zoning setbacks will make this no development area under SPA even narrower by pushing developed uses within the jurisdiction further toward the ocean.

Scientific evidence indicates that the bill's proposed 25-feet of "jurisdiction" is woefully inadequate. With growing erosion rates, now averaging more than a foot a year, and accelerating rise in sea level, coastal geologists say that a minimum of 100 feet is needed — which would leave an undeveloped area of about 30 feet along the shoreline after development under SPA.

Moreover, when Georgia's DNR proposed similar rule revisions in 2013, they suggested a 50-foot jurisdiction, double the width now being considered. Since then, DNR "experts" have changed their advice without explanation or citing any scientific evidence, despite extensive erosion research underscoring the risks of shoreline development.

Georgians deserve more accountability and open discussion of environmental safeguards that are based on science, not unfounded fears about threats to property rights.

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