

Informal Statement Made by the Executive Director Regarding Sustainability and Speaking Truth to Power

A major reason why the Center was based on sustainability resulted from documenting the strong relationships between coastal ecology and the economy. Since 1997, from the very start, we have been emphasizing the economic value of the environment in coastal business, including eco-tourism, as well as the value of services provided by wetlands and other ecosystems, such as flood protection and water filtration. The last time I estimated it, we valued eco-tourism in the six coastal counties at nearly \$2 Billion annually. Likewise, the annual services value of an acre of tidal marsh is around \$15K, which converts to several billion dollars a year when you do the math for Georgia's vast marshes.

Regarding confronting the truth about public policy affecting the environment, sometimes conflict is inevitable, and not necessarily bad. In a talk given several years ago, when I explained the high level of federal subsidies supporting nuclear power, upon which the nuke industry utterly depends, several of the most conservative, 'pro-Capitalism' members of my audience were visibly agitated – though they had no facts to refute my assertion, since there are none. Rather than confronting their own internal contradictions and learning from them (in the case cited, being in favor of both free markets AND nuclear power) they accused me of being a zealot. My only satisfaction was in the assumption that most in the room understood what was going on and learned from the experience – and permanently revised their position on responsible energy choices.

In my opinion, one of the most compelling ways of presenting our views and engaging people on related issues is to track the origins and consequences of the status quo in comparison with viable alternatives – while always emphasizing the public interest and how it is determined. Without changing minds, we can never advance policy, which is imperative on many fronts – especially in Georgia.

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