



# Works in Progress

*Conserving Coastal Georgia's Natural Heritage, Investing in Our Children's Future*

[www.sustainablecoast.org](http://www.sustainablecoast.org)

Autumn 2009

## A Call to Action: Reconsidering reality in times of rapid change

One thing can be agreed upon: we are living in a period of rapid transformation. Many of the changes underway are both sweeping and interconnected.

- ✓ As growth continues, disputes are increasing over (1) the use and condition of natural resources, (2) the proper roles of government and business, (3) distribution and justification of tax burden and other costs (sometimes hidden), and (4) balancing our independence and mutual responsibility as citizens.
- ✓ While access to information is improving through enhanced technology of the media and the Internet, there is much confusion about some of the most significant facts and trends. In part, this confusion is a result of the powers of propaganda that are growing with the aid of these same information technologies when they are manipulated by self-serving special interests.
- ✓ To the greatest extent possible, it is vital that we understand what is in our best interest. As a non-profit organization devoted to serving the people of coastal Georgia, the Center for a Sustainable Coast seeks to provide unbiased analysis of the most relevant issues affecting our shared future. By doing this, we hope to improve your ability to reach decisions that will help produce outcomes that favor the quality of life for coastal residents and the long-term sustainability of our communities.

- ✓ Conventional views on many issues are being rapidly outmoded by emerging economic, social, and environmental circumstances. To make wise choices, the public must be willing and able to revise the framework of their thinking that forms the basis of interpreting the reality around them.
- ✓ Restructuring these patterns of thought is not done quickly or easily, and it is natural to resist changing perspectives that have been formed over many years. Yet, unless we are capable of adapting appropriately, coastal Georgia is likely to suffer from ill-informed choices, with profound risks to this and future generations.

Given the above points, we ask for your good-faith effort in carefully reading and considering the topics and positions that we outline in this issue of our newsletter and throughout our website.

Further, we invite you to respond with your opinions, ideas, and suggestions and to share them with your family and friends. Lively, well-informed dialogue is as essential to our democracy as it is in shaping creative solutions to the problems we face.

We hope you will join us in this important discussion!

Please remember that the Center is a non-profit organization that depends on your tax-deductible contributions. If you value our work, please donate using the return envelope provided.

*David Kyler*

Executive Director

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## Bad choices produce toxic outcomes

Consider two recently released reports about Georgia's environment. One was published by the business magazine, *Forbes*, ranking Atlanta as the nation's most toxic city. The other, by the non-profit group Environment America, found that the Savannah River is the nation's fourth most polluted waterway.

Georgians have reasons to be concerned about these profoundly disturbing reports.

Being dismissive about the environment, as Georgia's state government tends to be, has costly adverse consequences, both for the private sector and the public. We all suffer when our leaders persistently use short-sighted rationales to minimize the state budget for environmental regulation and conservation.

The amount Georgia budgets per capita and per square mile is pitifully scant compared with most other states, and the funding shortage has gotten worse with our growing population. This is a direct result of our elected decision-makers treating environmental quality as an indulgent frill rather than a basic necessity. When combined with their indiscriminate support of development, the harmful results are multiplied.

Georgians suffer still more when state officials dismantle regulations protecting vital state resources.

Several years ago, after the General Assembly cut the buffers on trout streams in half, a UGA study found that trout population plummeted by some 80%. Impacts on water quality caused by the Board of Natural Resources' elimination of buffers on intermittent streams – those that only flow after heavy rains – was never studied, but has undoubtedly worsened it.

Ironically, as they turn a blind eye to the decline of ecosystems, many of the same officials continue to peddle Georgia's environment – promoting fishing, hunting, and outdoor recreation as important sources of income.

Bad policy takes its toll on Georgians in various other ways that are readily illustrated.

(1) Respiratory illness among the urban population —especially children and the elderly – is higher than ever. This means a greater burden of medical costs as well as compromised health and quality of life. Such health impacts are a result of various factors, including

the reckless use of coal-burning power plants that pollute both air and water quality. How much is our workforce being secretly penalized by inferior air and water, detracting from Georgia's productivity and business profitability? And how does a growing reputation for poor environmental quality affect Atlanta's ability to attract and retain high quality employers?

(2) When unsuitable flood-prone areas are allowed to be developed, homeowners pay dearly, as do taxpayers and anyone facing rising insurance premiums in the region. Much of the recent flooding in the state could have been avoided if higher standards of site selection and site design had been applied, and if wetlands had been properly protected. Floodplains and wetlands serve an important function by protecting citizens and their property. But many developers have fought hard against such regulations, and their political cronies have undermined these protections in the irresponsible pursuit of profit.

(3) In its 2008 session, the General Assembly passed an unprecedented requirement for utility customers to pay in advance for the costly expansion of Plant Vogtle, the nuclear-fueled power plant near Augusta owned by Georgia Power. If history is any indication of the future, this project is likely to entail gargantuan cost over-runs at the consumers' expense. Moreover, the project won't provide any benefits for at least 8 to 10 years and will remove about 40 million gallons a day from the already overstressed Savannah River.

It goes unnoticed that nuclear plants are by far the most heavily tax-payer subsidized source of power, while those who promote nukes often condemn much smaller government support for wind power and solar energy. Likewise, the state has invested little in energy conservation and given only nominal lip-service to far more practical and clean energy sources, most notably offshore wind.

Unless changes are made soon, as other states move ahead

aggressively with effective new energy alternatives, Georgia will slip further behind because of its failure to adopt enlightened policy.

Both the environment and the economy are systemic in nature and they are increasingly interactive. The environment cannot be short-changed without undesirable consequences, including economic ones. Cutting corners in public policy is a self-defeating tactic that may boost speculator profits, but it causes long-term burdens for the rest of us. As our state continues to develop, ever greater penalties will be inflicted by ignoring interactive impacts between the environment and our economy.

Globally, this tendency is epitomized by climate change. Though extremely counterproductive, many Georgia officials still stubbornly refuse to adopt needed policy reforms – preferring dogmatic fantasies that support comforting illusions tied to the status quo and outmoded policies that ultimately punish the public. A troubling indication of our leaders' disregard of this issue is that Georgia remains the ONLY state on America's east coast that is not adopting a climate change action plan.

When employers begin pulling out of 'toxic' Atlanta for greener pastures elsewhere, Georgia officials may begin to realize there's a downside to environmental neglect. Meanwhile, the cost of recovering our declining quality of life will increase enormously.

In the aftermath of the past year's economic collapse, does any well-informed, unbiased American doubt that attacking regulations has caused far more pain than implementing them? The poor environmental ranking of Atlanta and the Savannah River, combined with statewide bank failures, property foreclosures, and high unemployment, provide ample evidence that misdirected public policy is causing real hardship for many Georgians. Equally troubling are the implications for future generations.

The next governor had better have an effective, accountable plan for confronting this harsh reality. The inter-connected nature of these issues requires an integrated approach that replaces Georgia's currently fragmented policies.

# Five fundamentals for making progress on climate change

## 1. Climate change is real.

The jury is in and general findings are conclusive, though the details are incomplete. Extensive study of the climate over the past several decades presents clear and compelling evidence that the world is heating up and humans are at least contributing to it, if not causing it. Eighteen of the twenty hottest years in the past century have been in the last two decades. Although some local temperature deviations occur, these are to be expected and do not contradict the global warming trend.

## 2. Something can be done about it.

Experts agree that reducing emission of carbon-based pollution will help curb the rate of warming. This means cutting back as much as possible, as soon as possible, on burning organic fuels that release methane, carbon dioxide, and other emissions that trap heat in the earth's atmosphere. [Note: Burning these fuels also pollute our air and water, adding to human health risks and medical costs.] Existing methods for reducing energy consumption and producing clean energy are available and being increasingly put to use, in some countries more than others. Using the best existing technology, we can greatly reduce pollutants of concern while also advancing energy independence.

## 3. Something should be done about it.

Although detailed predictions are not possible, it is certain that sea level will continue to rise – and probably at an accelerating rate. Regional weather patterns will also change, increasing the occurrence of flooding and drought. Depending on where they live, some people may avoid the worst of these extremes, but many will suffer higher risk of food shortages, disease, and property damage. Unless cleaner, more efficient sources of power are rapidly put into use, energy costs will rise, while air and water become more polluted. All these threats can be limited while millions of jobs are created, if the public demands the improvements needed. The sooner this is done the greater the public benefits.

## 4. Taking corrective action is better than doing nothing.

If we do little or nothing about these issues soon, our prospects will diminish, and the longer we delay the greater the penalties – both environmental and economic. Despite many unknown details about the timing and location of the worst impacts of global warming, it is clear that taking no action is not in the public's interest. In coastal Georgia the most likely,

shorter-term risks are more frequent and damaging flooding, from heavy rain and storm surges.

Longer term, rising sea level could drastically reduce the area of land that can be safely occupied – imposing enormous costs on both property owners and tax payers. Equally alarming, the absorption of excess carbon by the ocean will

make it increasingly acidic, depleting shell fish and the many species that depend on them for food. If this happens, there will be dire human consequences worldwide.

## 5. There is no downside to timely action, regardless of actual climate impacts.

Even if climate warming impacts are less severe than expected, our timely actions will provide cleaner air and water, reduced energy costs and more accessible power from safe sources that are independent of foreign control. There is much to be gained, and the cost of new investments will be quickly recovered through the benefits they generate. Numerous experts agree that the technology needed to begin the required transformation already exists. Steps include:

- (1) Vast improvement in the energy efficiency of buildings, industry, and transportation.
- (2) Conversion to wind, tidal, geothermal, and solar power, while phasing our nuclear and coal.
- (3) Building and adapting our communities to be less energy intensive and wasteful.

Some assert that the basic changes in converting to renewable energy can be made within 20 years. (See the cover article in the November 2009 issue of Scientific American.)

The impediments to success are more political than economic, technological, or environmental. The question is: **Do we have the political will to face reality and make the right choices?** If so, steps are urgently needed to overcome special interests and political dogma to adopt federal legislation as soon as possible.

## Center survey on wind power reveals education needs & potential

In October 2009, at DNR's "CoastFest" in Brunswick, nearly fifty of the visitors to the Center's booth completed an informal questionnaire on their knowledge and opinions regarding Georgia off-shore wind.

Fewer than 40% of the respondents indicated that they were aware of Georgia's potential for generating electricity from off-shore wind. A 2007 report by Georgia Institute of Technology found that offshore wind along Georgia's coast could be harnessed to produce some 30,000 megawatts of electricity, about the equivalent of 30 power plants.

The lack of public understanding about wind potential persists despite several other findings published recently in the national media. Last summer there was a widely circulated statement by U.S. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar saying that potentially *all* of America's electrical energy needs could be supplied by off-shore wind alone.

Then a study published in the November Scientific American outlined a strategy for producing all U.S. electricity needs from wind, geothermal, and solar power by 2030. The same authors predict that

within a decade wind power will cost less than five cents a kilowatt hour (in 2007 dollars), far cheaper than the rate for electricity generated by coal or nuclear plants.

Another finding from the Center's public survey is that fewer than half of the respondents knew that coal and nuclear power generation are the biggest consumers of water in our state, using a stunning 2.7 billion gallons a day taken from our rivers and aquifers. Wind and solar power use virtually none of this increasingly critical and dispute-ridden natural resource.

On the other hand, more than 65% of survey respondents were aware that Georgia has a very wide and shallow coastal shelf. However, they did not know that our shallow offshore waters would accommodate the development of wind farms by significantly reducing the cost of installing platforms for wind generators, and far enough away to be unseen from the shoreline.

Beyond about six miles offshore, even the largest turbines are obscured by the limitations of eyesight and the effects of

humidity, or haze. Many of Georgia's most promising wind generation areas are more than 40 miles offshore. Ninety-four percent of respondents indicated that they would gratefully support the development of offshore wind if it were located beyond sight from land and produced electricity costing no more than current power rates.

Finally, about 70% of the respondents said that they would be willing to voice their support for off shore wind in Georgia. This clearly suggests that Georgians have the potential for building political endorsement of wind. Such public support has been key to overcoming obstacles created by traditional utility interests along the mid and upper Atlantic coast, where wind power is now being developed.

If Georgia hopes to realize the benefits of clean energy like other Atlantic states, we need to educate the public about the options for offshore wind power and use that to win political support for it in the years ahead.

### Public Survey on Wind Energy, October 2009

1. Are you aware of the potential for using clean, renewable wind energy offshore from Georgia?  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no
2. Did you know that conventional forms of power production, like coal and nuclear, consume huge amounts of water, much of which is lost in evaporation in the cooling process? (In 2005, energy production was the largest water user in Georgia, using 2.7 BILLION GALLONS A DAY from our rivers and aquifers.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no
3. Did you know that because Georgia's ocean bottom is shallow and wide, wind generators could be economically installed many miles offshore, where they would not be visible from our beaches?  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no
4. If offshore wind energy cost no more than existing power, and if it was located beyond sight from shore, would you support its use in Georgia?  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no
5. Would you be willing to voice your support for wind energy in Georgia?  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

*Survey created and conducted by Center for a Sustainable Coast, © October 2009*

# Advantages of Georgia's Continental Shelf for Generating Power with Off-Shore Wind

## 1. It's close to Florida

Georgia's coast has the southernmost economically recoverable off-shore wind resource on the east coast – this makes it the nearest potential development site to Florida, the largest electrical power consumer in the Southeast, which has very limited coastal wind potential of its own. Because on-shore transmission lines cost between \$2 million and \$5 million a mile to build, being close to major electricity consumers is a big plus.

## 2. It's close to Atlanta, Charlotte and the tri-cities area of N.C.

Georgia's coast is also equidistant from the big power consuming areas of Atlanta, Charlotte, and the Tri-Cities area of North Carolina, which further increases its value. (Note that the big on-shore wind farms in Texas and the Midwest are more than 1000 miles from East Coast power users – connecting them to the big East Coast electricity consumption centers will be dreadfully expensive.)

## 3. It has lower risks from major hurricanes

The Coast of Georgia is in the protective recess of the "Georgia Bight," a southeastern cut in the shoreline contour that distances Georgia from the forces of the open Atlantic Ocean. Our coast hasn't been hit by a Category 5 hurricane since storm intensities began being measured. It hasn't been in the path of a Category 4 since 1898, and off-shore wind turbines are guaranteed by their manufacturers to withstand impacts up to a Category 3. *(Note that the North Carolina coast, with plenty of offshore wind potential, is a virtual hurricane magnet, having been hit by about 90 hurricanes since the 1880s, 10 of which were category 4 or 5.)*

"More than three-fourths of the nation's electricity demand comes from coastal states and the wind potential off the coasts of the lower 48 states actually exceeds our entire U.S. electricity demand," Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar told a summit meeting of America's Energy Future, a group working to lower America's carbon emissions.

Source: Timothy Hurst, April 2009



## 4. It has vast building areas in shallow waters far from shore

The Georgia continental shelf is one of the widest on the East Coast, allowing relatively shallow-water wind turbines to be cheaply mounted on pilings twenty miles or more from shore, completely out of sight from the beach, no matter how large the turbines may be.

## 5. It has a significant wind resources

Scientists estimate that between 20% and 50% of Georgia's electricity needs could be met with off-shore wind, (Based on 2004 Georgia electricity consumption). It should be noted that other clean and renewable sources of energy could be used to augment power from Georgia's offshore wind – for instance, tidal and solar energy. For more about renewable energy, please go to our website, [www.sustainablecoast.org](http://www.sustainablecoast.org). We also recommend [www.energyjustice.org](http://www.energyjustice.org) for more analysis of conventional and renewable energy alternatives.

# Center for a Sustainable Coast mourns the loss of Professor Peter Verity

Skidaway Institute Professor Peter G. Verity died unexpectedly at his home on December 31. Only a month earlier, it was announced that Dr. Verity was the winner of the Center's annual *Nick Williams Award for Coastal Sustainability*, based on Peter's research and education related to coastal environmental issues.

The annual award is intended to recognize achievements in the advancement of science, advocacy, and policy supporting responsible conservation of coastal Georgia's natural, cultural and historic resources. Dr. Verity was honored with the award both because of the relevance of his environmental research and for making it accessible to the public through news articles, lectures, and published papers.

According to Center board member and fellow coastal scientist, Dr. Jim Henry, "Peter Verity was among the most outspoken scientists on coastal Georgia's water quality issues. Peter's evaluations and predictions of the present and future degradation of estuarine water quality were based on his scientific observations and analysis of relevant data."

Dr. Verity's work includes study of trends in coastal water quality in the Chatham County area, which led him to conclude that there are growing risks of environmental damage as coastal development continues. In 2006 Dr. Verity published a paper on this topic entitled "Human Impacts on Water Quality, Food Webs, and Implications for the Future of Georgia Estuaries," which received wide recognition. This work presented convincing scientific evidence that the coastal estuaries of Georgia, previously believed to be relatively insulated from the effects of human development, are in fact not.

Verity was a Professor of Biological Oceanography at Skidaway Institute. He received his B.A. in 1975 from Dartmouth College, and his M.S. in 1979 and Ph.D. in 1984, both from the University of Rhode Island. He joined the faculty of Skidaway Institute in 1986.

Peter was the author or co-author of more than 100 scientific articles and papers and a frequent speaker at professional conferences. His research interests include microzooplankton ecology, feeding interactions among plankton; gelatinous plankton, invasive jellyfish, the role of life cycles in ecosystem function; and the status and future of ocean ecosystems as they respond to increasing climate variability and human perturbations.



Dr. Peter Verity

Dr. Verity was well known in the environmental community for his work on the impact of coastal land use and development upon the environmental quality and ecosystem health of Georgia estuaries. He was a frequent speaker to local civic and environmental groups.

Peter was also a dedicated and passionate teacher who believed that perhaps the most important contribution of his professional career would be the legacy of his teaching and outreach efforts. Verity served on the graduate faculties of Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah State University, University of Georgia, and Georgia Institute of Technology, where he taught, advised and mentored graduate and undergraduate students.

Verity also served on numerous advisory groups and committees responsible for the development and implementation of science curriculum in the public school system and for the preparation of future teachers. Among his many responsibilities at the Skidaway

Institute of Oceanography, Verity was the Institute's Education Coordinator.

As a person, Peter was uniquely gifted in his ability to inspire and motivate those around him to examine their priorities and to reach valuable realizations about what matters most. He was fun and funny, serious and

superfluous, comforting and irritating. He was someone worth knowing and who impacted his family, friends, students, teachers, and colleagues profoundly.

Peter Verity is survived by his loving wife of 21 years, Melanie Elizabeth Mirande, his step-mother, Martha Verity; one sister, Diane Verity, and four half-brothers, Mark Verity, Todd Verity, Bruce Verity and Craig Verity. He will also be missed by many cousins, nieces, nephews, friends, and colleagues.

He was 56 years old..

Peter's death burdens us with a profound sense of loss, both personal and professional.

I always enjoyed interacting with Peter -- he had a lively and playful sense of humor, carried by his keen intelligence.

Peter's outspoken views on the environmental risks of coastal development were timely and compelling -- bolstered by his research and stature as a scientist. His directness in speaking publically about these issues (a rare thing among scientists) was a mark of Peter's integrity and his commitment to coastal conservation.

Peter's unique role on Georgia's coast resulted in our decision, just a few months ago, to honor him with the Nick Williams Coastal Sustainability Award.

We deeply regret the loss of our friend, colleague, and respected advisor. I hope that these words offer some measure of comfort to those closest to Peter.

David Kyler, Executive Director  
Center for a Sustainable Coast

# Biomass is a dubious energy source

Although the subject of energy from “biomass” is a difficult issue to evaluate, Georgians should take the time to understand it. For better or worse, much of our state’s energy future, economic outlook, and environmental prospects may depend on the decisions we make in the next few years regarding biomass.

“Biomass” technically refers to all living or recently living organic material used to produce energy for human use, as opposed to fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum, (which are the residue of ancient biomass). In practice, different types of biomass are often considered separately, i.e. crop biomass, usually corn, used to produce ethanol, fiber material used to generate cellulosic ethanol, and organic material to be burned to generate steam for the production of electricity.

Often the term “biomass” refers to only the incidental organic waste from agricultural practices such as tree tops and stumps, sawdust and shavings, pecan shells, cotton and corn stalks, and chicken litter. Of course, if the demand and price are high enough, additional biomass would be obtained either by harvesting whole trees or planting specialty crops such as kenaf and switchgrass, crops now virtually unknown and of questionable viability in Georgia.

Here we are using the term “biomass” to mean the feedstocks needed to fire electrical plants (domestic as well as export), in addition to the feedstocks needed to operate existing and proposed cellulosic ethanol facilities.

A recent study, “The Impact on Georgia Biomass for Feedstock from Rising Input and Transportation Costs in 2008”, by UGA’s Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development predicts that as much as 8.6% of all Georgia’s electricity needs could be met through biomass if the best available technology were used, all available agricultural byproduct biomass were gathered, and Georgians were willing to pay a price

“well above the current prevailing sales prices.”

Of course, this begs the key question: “Why?” Why should Georgia heavily invest in new and converted coal biomass fired plants, and heavily subsidize cellulosic ethanol plants if these investments will only produce power which is economically uncompetitive? (See our website for some speculative answers to this.)

Although these considerations are not difficult to understand, the question of whether investing extremely scarce capital in incentivizing biomass at the expense of truly clean renewable in Georgia remains. Besides the global warming and carbon emissions issue, burning of biomass also requires water used for cooling and fuel processing.

Another important consideration is deforestation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that about 20 percent of global warming is caused by deforestation. This impact includes the burning of much of the deforested biomass – which does not grow back if the area is deforested – as well as the loss of the mitigating effects of moisture retention, controlled evaporation, and shading provided by forests.

Only through careful planning and monitoring can Georgia be assured that growing demand and rising prices for biomass will not lead to overexploitation of forest resources and deforestation, erosion and top-soil depletion. UGA estimates that 85% of the nitrogen normally replaced by waste left after harvesting would be lost due to biomass harvesting; this would cost timber owners about \$115 an acre to replace with fertilizer. The history of Georgia’s legislators and the state’s bureaucracy does not bode well for such prudent management.

In areas where biomass electrical production has been in operation for some time, there have been sharp increases in demand and price of wood, often leading to clear cutting for new fuel. German and Swedish businessmen are

even now looking to establish large, long-term contracts to convert Georgia forest biomass into “pellets” for exportation to be used to power European biomass electrical plants. ***If biomass electrical production is truly a renewable practice, why aren’t they looking to burn their own forests?***

At the very least, Georgia must adopt a far more comprehensive view of forestry activities. Current harvesting for lumber and pulp must be considered in light of:

- Ongoing forest removal caused by residential and commercial sprawl with related impacts of paved areas.
- Climate change and sea level rise.
- Projected forestry extraction for export “pellets.”
- Biomass for electricity production and feedstock supply for cellulosic ethanol production.
- The effects of possible forest and other agricultural displacement caused by the introduction of crops like switchgrass and kenaf.

At the Center for a Sustainable Coast we believe that Georgia’s energy and economic policies are too important to be left in the hands of a few powerful special interest groups. An independent, non-governmental task group should be formed, composed mainly of highly informed economic, scientific and environmental experts, to evaluate Georgia’s future energy options.

We must make the most thoughtful, foresighted energy decisions possible that will serve the long-term interests of all Georgians.

## **Conclusion: Biomass must be opposed in favor of more responsible energy choices.**

There are precious few examples in Georgia’s history of environmental exploitation that leads us to conclude that sustainable forestry management practices will be adopted and reliably applied in burning biomass for energy. Moreover, investments made in biomass will delay implementation of clean energy from wind, solar, tidal, and geo-thermal sources. Biomass will divert urgently needed private and public funding toward a wasteful and disruptive form of energy that is inferior to others already being successfully used worldwide. ***To be responsible, we must conclude that developing this energy alternative should be opposed.***

Consider the advice below recently issued by *Democracy in Action*.

### ACTION ALERT: DON'T BURN OUR FORESTS!

One of the biggest new threats to forests in the United States is a modern take on a very old idea: burning wood for energy. Dozens of large, dirty, wood-burning electricity facilities -- staggeringly inefficient -- are now being planned across the country. (See map of existing and proposed biomass facilities in the Southeast.

**A single such facility would require increased logging on tens of thousands of acres of forest each year.**

Based on the flawed premise that any burning of wood is carbon neutral, electricity generated by burning trees and wood wastes -- referred to as "biomass" -- is counted as renewable energy by numerous state and federal programs intended to shift our reliance away from fossil fuels. **Unfortunately, biomass burning is far from carbon neutral.**

Carbon dioxide released from the smokestack of a biomass facility warms the planet just like CO<sub>2</sub> from a coal plant. And while an area logged to fuel a biomass facility may ultimately grow back, it takes decades or even centuries for a forest to recapture as much carbon as is lost when it's logged. We don't have decades to waste if we are to reduce our emissions fast enough to save the polar bear, coral reefs, and much of the world's biodiversity from global warming.

The Department of Agriculture has proposed regulations that would expand a massive, misguided subsidy program that encourages the harvest and burning of trees for energy. ***Please take a minute and let federal officials know that tax dollars should not go to the timber industry and power companies to subsidize actions that pollute the air, undermine climate solutions, and contribute to deforestation.***

## Center urges steps to protect Cumberland Island Wilderness

The great public benefit achieved by giving Cumberland Island its Federal Wilderness designation in 1982 is even more profound today -- providing the unique opportunity for visitors to experience a barrier island in its relatively natural condition.

To witness windswept maritime forest and magnificent 40-foot sand dunes while hearing only the cries of sea gulls, breaking waves, and rustling leaves is a breathtaking experience no longer attainable along most of the nation's rampantly urbanizing coastline.

Despite the unique and deeply valued wilderness experience afforded by Cumberland Island, it is being compromised by a 2004 action spearheaded by Rep. Jack Kingston supposedly intended to improve access to historic sites. But it is widely believed that it was actually devised to accommodate the daily motorized tours of private commercial promoters through the Wilderness.

Please consider these factors in forming and sharing your opinion about the proposal:

- By promoting a transportation scheme that imposes motorized vehicles along a corridor at the center of the island, the Kingston provision directly contradicts the island's Wilderness designation.
- The Kingston-sponsored legislation also mandated the NPS to initiate up to eight, but no less than five, motorized vehicle tours daily through the Wilderness, each with as many as 30 people. Yet there has never been a study that substantiates this level of demand or the cost of meeting it.

- A transportation management plan was developed by the National Park Service, pursuant to the Kingston provision. In conjunction with that plan, and with no public input or objective assessment of need, a structure in the north end settlement was renovated as a visitor center. This facility is being used by the private commercial tour provider, apparently at no cost.
- The pending disruption is, no doubt, more than incidental to the interests of private parties who advocate non-wilderness use of the island for profit-making purposes. An environmental assessment of the transportation proposal completed last year by the National Park Service failed to even acknowledge, much less evaluate, the likely impacts on wilderness experience.
- Whatever the plan's impacts on native plants and animals, the serenity and natural isolation provided by the island Wilderness will be degraded when Park Service vehicles shuttle tourists north and south. Imagine a tranquil outing to watch ospreys, blue herons, or pileated woodpeckers abruptly spoiled by the roar of vans passing by.
- Providing vehicular access to historic sites should not override the protected value of wilderness, especially on a barrier island where unaltered landscape is so rarely accessible to the public.

In a world now confronting the impacts of human technology reaching from one polar cap to the other, surely we can agree to honor an obligation to protect this precious fragment of nature for the unmatched beauty and tranquility that it offers.

**We urge concerned citizens to voice their opinions regarding this threat to coastal wilderness by writing or calling Ken Salazar, Secretary of Interior, to ask him to resolve this critical issue.**