

2024 Coastal Georgia Issues Update

Learn more, get involved, and support our work at OneHundredMiles.org.



In January, OHM and residents near the Okefenokee Swamp traveled to the Statehouse to meet with legislators and deliver petitions supporting HB 71, the Okefenokee Protection Act.

Things move quickly this time of year—a round-the-clock dash that's unique to every legislative session. From January through March, the One Hundred Miles team travels to and from the Capitol every week, meeting with legislators, strategizing with our partners, and ensuring the voices and interests of our coast are heard. Closer to home, we're working county by county on projects ranging from local zoning to wildlife protection and environmental justice.

Our Issues Newsletter is designed to take you behind the scenes on OHM's current projects—*the essential work made possible by supporters like you*. Read on to learn how you can support our efforts and get involved.

Our Shared Resources

The water we drink, the air we breathe, the natural resources that fuel our quality of life—these shared assets exist for the benefit of all Georgians—not just a few select individuals or wealthy interest groups.

This legislative session, several proposed bills have sought to privatize access to our shared public resources, with potentially devastating implications for our coast. House Bill (HB) 370 would have made it easier to privatize Georgia's salt marsh, while HB 1146 seeks to privatize access to drinking water in the Floridan aquifers. These bad bills—and others like them—would jeopardize our right to natural resources that provide essential ecosystem services, recreation, and access to clean food and water. These resources are managed by state and federal agencies on behalf of all Georgians.

OHM works to stop dangerous bills like these because they assign power and privilege to select groups who want to profit off of access to these essential public resources for their own private benefit.

TAKE ACTION 

Learn the latest updates and speak out on these and other bills at OneHundredMiles.org/TakeAction.

Saving our Salt Marsh



Another year, another attempted roll back of protections for Georgia's salt marsh. After advocates like you helped us stop HB 370 before Crossover Day last legislative session, the bill's sponsors wasted no time in trying to push it forward again in 2024. At issue: the process for certifying Crown Grants issued by the King of England before American independence in 1776. HB 370 aimed to flip the presumption of ownership to the private petitioner immediately upon submission of documentation—opening the door to a massive giveaway of one of our state's most iconic resources. We immediately mobilized supporters to speak out—and you answered the call! In just the first few weeks after we sent out our action alert, more than 600 Georgians contacted their representatives asking them to vote NO. As a result, this bad bill died in committee again this session, without ever making it through to the House floor for a vote. What a victory!

TAKE ACTION 

Learn more about this victory at OneHundredMiles.org/SaltMarsh. You can also learn about other issues impacting our marsh, including GADNR's proposed changes to their oversight of salt marsh buffers and other regulatory changes.

At the Cap: What's Happening Under the Gold Dome



Advocating for the Okefenokee Swamp at the Capitol in January.

Every January, OHM's staff begin trekking to and from Atlanta for the legislative session. This year, we've had company—local advocates who've joined us to talk with legislators about their concerns. Their presence sends a message that coastal Georgians will do whatever it takes to protect our coast.

During these conversations, we've encountered themes in many of the natural resource bills introduced. For example, Rep. Lynn Smith, Chair of the House Natural Resources and Environment Committee, continues to stand in the way of protective environmental legislation but moves forward bills supported by private industry. As a result, the Okefenokee Protection Act (HB 71) has been blocked, despite bipartisan support from 96 co-sponsors—while several harmful bills moved quickly under the guise of protection.

TAKE ACTION 

Make sure you're signed up for alerts at OneHundredMiles.org/MailingList. We'll let you know all the latest and how to help!

Impact on Human Health



Study partners are working to reduce human exposures to toxic chemicals through community outreach and education about contamination in Glynn County waterways, fish, and shellfish.

TAKE ACTION

On March 14, Emory researchers will lead a webinar to help health care providers better understand

the risks of PCB exposure—anyone interested in learning more about health impacts can register at OneHundredMiles.org/Coastal-Toxins. The web page is also a way for coastal residents to learn more and find other ways to speak out on the toxic legacy across our 100 miles .

With industrial operations dating back 100 years, Glynn County has a long legacy of toxic contamination. Decades of unchecked industrial pollution and insufficient cleanup efforts have led to concerns and unanswered questions for many families living in the shadow of Glynn's four Superfund sites.

OHM partnered with local NGOs and the Emory University School of Public Health to conduct an exposure study to determine whether residents of Brunswick and Glynn County have higher than average levels of harmful chemicals. Last March, 100 volunteers donated blood samples that were tested for contaminants such as PCBs, mercury, toxaphene, lead, and PFAS. The results, shared with community stakeholders in a September public meeting, showed alarmingly elevated levels of PCBs associated with Aroclor 1268 and the pesticide toxaphene—chemicals that were used or produced in former Brunswick plants.

The results have led to a long-overdue community conversation and renewed hope for meaningful action. The study partners are now working to broaden the exposure study, expand outreach to decrease risk, and establish a "Superfund research center" in Glynn County.

VICTORY: Stopping Toxic Air Pollution in Riceboro

Last November, Weyerhaeuser, a lumber company with operations across Georgia, submitted a permit to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, detailing its plans to build a new log fumigation plant emitting the highly toxic chemical methyl bromide (a gas used as a pesticide/fungicide). The facility, located in the majority Black rural community of Riceboro, would have been one of the largest sources of the toxin in the country. Methyl bromide is known to cause severe birth defects, and inhalation can lead to respiratory and neurological issues, among other serious risks.

"Timber farming is an important industry in Georgia, but methyl bromide is bad news for our people and our environment," says OHM Mid-Coast Advocate Susan Inman. "We won't back down when these toxic chemicals threaten our community's health."

OHM and our partners jumped into action. We created an action alert, helping more than 350 individuals send in comments in opposition within days. Together we spread the word to community groups and the media, and mobilized more than 60 concerned residents and two state elected representatives to show up at a City of Riceboro press event. On December 18—only two months after submitting its application—Weyerhaeuser cited

public opposition in announcing they were withdrawing their plans! It was a huge community victory and a successful example of advocacy in action. Special thanks to our partners, including SELC, the City of Riceboro, Liberty County, Dr. Amir Jamal Touré—and most importantly, the people of Liberty and McIntosh Counties!

Zoning for our Coast's Future



Every day, decisions are being made that determine our coast's future. Warehouses are boxing in longstanding residences. Oversized developments threaten our wildlife corridors and cultural heritage sites. Local governments are under pressure to allow development at all costs. Growth and economic progress are good things—but only when they are in line with community vision and values. *We're working county by county across the coast:*

Chatham, Bryan, and Effingham: From water use to out-of-control warehouse development, there is a major disconnect between residents' vision and the knee-jerk decisions of their elected representatives. We're mobilizing advocates, speaking at hearings, and working with partners to address these critical issues.

Liberty: The 2050 Liberty County Comprehensive Plan process is underway. OHM is working with residents to attend monthly meetings and provide input into the plan's development. The process is a critical opportunity for a county that is seeing its rural areas transformed by industrialization.

McIntosh: Using the lessons learned in the Spaceport Camden campaign, we're working with local partners to collect signatures from McIntosh registered voters to force a referendum of the County Commission's controversial zoning changes impacting Hog(g) Hummock Community.

Glynn: After a convoluted five year process, Glynn County has finally released new drafts of its zoning ordinance. We're working to engage community members and are pushing for sensible revisions that benefit our landscapes, neighborhoods, and wildlife.

Why Planning Matters

Zoning ordinances—the detailed set of codes that govern how and where a community develops—and county comprehensive plans aren't exactly the stuff that bestselling novels are made of. They're often dry, and the language can be wonky.

But zoning is the single most important variable in the conservation of our coast. It determines everything from how much traffic you sit in on your way home from work and how densely-packed neighborhood homes are, to whether protections are in place for threatened wildlife. In most cases, these decisions are determined when the zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans were first created—long before a project has been proposed.

At OHM, we're paying close attention to what's happening—and helping local residents speak out for the future they want to see.

TAKE ACTION 

There's too much at stake to sit these conversations out.

Attend meetings and share your ideas and vision with your elected representatives. Visit OneHundredMiles.org/Planning to learn about what's happening in your community.

The Okefenokee Swamp, author Janisse Ray wrote in a moving 2023 essay in *The Bitter Southerner*, is a “gigantic, ethereal, god-touched swamp in southeast Georgia that’s like no other place on earth. It’s a world wonder—nearly 700 square miles of labyrinthine wildness, the largest blackwater swamp in North America and the largest wilderness area in the eastern U.S.”

OHM has been fighting to protect this beloved place since 2018, when Alabama-based Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, first announced its plans to mine for titanium in Trail Ridge, the ancient geological formation and ecologically-sensitive area adjacent to the swamp. The fight entered a new stage of urgency on February 9, when the Georgia Environmental Protection Division issued draft permits for Twin Pines and announced a 60-day comment period and March public hearing.

“The significance of the Okefenokee Swamp cannot be overstated,” says OHM VP of Coastal Conservation Alice Keyes. “Yet all of the characteristics that make it so special and worthy of recognition are the very ones put at risk by Twin Pines’ proposal.”

Our focus for the past three legislative sessions has been on passing legislation securing the long-term protection of the swamp. Unfortunately, despite widespread bipartisan support and impassioned advocacy from thousands of Georgians in its favor, House Bill 71, the Okefenokee Protection Act,

was blocked yet again. In February, we rallied to fight a new, dangerous bill—HB 1338—which undermined true conservation efforts and would have made it easier for mining to occur over time. Georgians spoke out in opposition, and stopped the bill before Crossover Day! We’ve also brought residents who live near the swamp to Atlanta to connect with their elected representatives in person. And “Okefenokee Connections,” a series conducted in partnership with the Okefenokee Protection Alliance, pairs hands-on experiences in the swamp with advocacy training—we’ve now reached more than 200 participants!

**TAKE
ACTION**



If you’ve been waiting for just the right moment to speak out on Twin Pines’ proposal—now’s the time. Comments are being accepted through April 9. Visit OneHundredMiles.org/Okefenokee to personalize and send your letter to Georgia EPD.



Speaking for our Wildlife



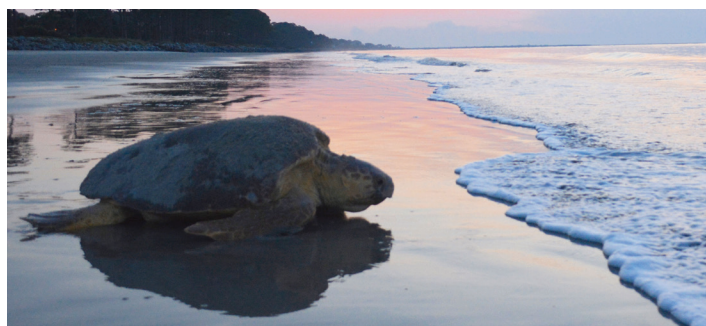
Juno's calf—the first documented calf of the season—off Sapelo Island on February 1. It was spotted in early January with propeller wounds around its head and mouth. On March 3, the calf was discovered dead on Cumberland Island. Credit: GADNR/NOAA MMHSRP permit 24359.

Coastal Georgians are watching a species go extinct before our very eyes—ship strikes and entanglements are killing North Atlantic right whales faster than they can reproduce to sustain the population. The first documented calf of this season, born to mother “Juno,” was spotted in January with grievous wounds, mere weeks after birth. Scientists believe the baby was struck by an unregulated 35-57 foot vessel—the same size class that would be covered under NOAA's expanded ship speed rule, currently under consideration by the agency. On March 3, the calf washed up dead on the beach on Cumberland Island.

We know that such injuries are anything but rare—even as certain politicians want you to believe they occur with “one in a million” frequency. In 2023, OHM wrote an open letter calling out Rep. Buddy Carter on his fuzzy math; now we're helping Georgians contact him and other decision-makers to demand action.



OHM is working with the Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition to advocate for stronger protections for horseshoe crab (HSC) populations from over-harvest by the commercial fishing and pharmaceutical industries. We co-hosted a webinar with Manomet to help Georgians support the adoption of synthetic alternatives to HSC blood in pharmaceuticals.



In May, we celebrated another big win (for the 3rd year in a row!) for Georgia's sea turtles, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agreed to halt year-round dredging plans while they conduct an Environmental Impact Statement. We're also working to update Glynn County's outdated beach lighting ordinance to protect sea turtles from harmful lighting impacts.

TAKE ACTION 

Georgia's threatened and endangered wildlife may not have a voice, but WE do. Cut through the misinformation and better understand the science—and what you can do to help protect these beloved animals—at OneHundredMiles.org/Wildlife.

Celebrating 'Our Georgia Coast'

This is a place unlike any other. Coastal Georgia stretches for 100 miles and features 14 major barrier islands, nearly 400,000 acres of salt marsh, and some of the most vital ecosystems on the planet. Not only does our region support dozens of high-priority plant and animal species, it's also home to historic communities and is an important driver of our state's economy. OHM created the [Our Georgia Coast storytelling campaign](#) to expand awareness, deepen understanding, and promote ways for Georgians to get involved in our coast's preservation. Here are just a few snippets from our year-long series, airing in the metro Atlanta market and on social media across the state:



EXTRAORDINARY Flows From Here. "What I can hope for is that we have the wisdom to continue to conserve this, to continue to learn more about it. Georgia's coastline answers the questions that we aren't even thinking to ask. That's why these places are important." — [Stacia Hendricks, Little St. Simons Island](#)

WILD Flows From Here. "A lot of the work we do with individual species, like loggerhead sea turtles and right whales, those are species that are telling us a story. And the story is that as humans, we've had an effect on the system." — [Mark Dodd, Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources](#)



COMMUNITY Flows From Here. "I think that people make the most impact in community. The most important thing that people can do is to look around them, and fall in love with the nature that's around them, to fall in love with their neighbor, to cultivate a real sense of passion and care for all that you see." — [Codi Norred, Georgia Interfaith Power & Light \(GIPL\)](#)

PROMISE Flows From Here. "It fills me with awe. The beauty of this area, it captures you. When I look at the marsh, and I look at these majestic oaks—there is that pull. The Atlantic Ocean pulls me." — [Anita Collins, BRAG \(Bike Ride Across Georgia\) Dream Team Gullah Geechee Club](#)



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LEARN & EXPERIENCE

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community outreach events, and more!**
OneHundredMiles.org/Events



Join us in protecting and
preserving Georgia's coast by
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➔ Visit OneHundredMiles.org to join as a member and get involved as an advocate.

Follow us on social media — every *like, share, and comment*
helps us expand our reach and increase our impact!



Thanks to Supporters Like YOU

Thanks to your generous support, One Hundred Miles is ready to respond whenever and wherever our coast needs us most. Join us in celebrating some of the projects and community impact you made possible over the past year:



OHM is working to address the systemic flaws that cause our people and natural resources harm. Over the past few months alone, our Justice Strategist has presented at national justice conferences, worked with Georgia's congressional offices on equitable healthcare access, and more.



Our Youth Environmental Leadership Program celebrated its 5th year of service, with more than 73 students participating since 2019! This year, students completed action projects advocating for protections for wildlife like horseshoe crabs and redfish.



We've implemented a new online system making it easier than ever for Georgians to add their voice with the click of a button—through emails, calls, social media, and more! More than 1,300 advocates have already connected with decision-makers using this new system.



When Bryan County—under pressure from industry to provide water beyond its allotted usage—approached Bulloch County with a proposal to drill new wells, OHM joined residents & leaders to share concerns..leading EPD to implement special conditions.

➔ We're planning for One Hundred Miles' next chapter! Inform our future successes by taking our strategic plan survey at OneHundredMiles.org/Survey.