

Protect Georgia's Salt Marsh

"A world of marsh that borders a world of sea."

- Sidney Lanier, *Marshes of Glynn*



ABOUT OUR MARSH

Georgia's nearly 400,000 acres of salt marsh is a wonder of the world. Together with the 14 barrier islands (only four of which are developed), our salt marsh provides a "landscape of hemispheric importance" for migrating and nesting shorebirds, according to the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network. Georgia contains more than 33% of the remaining salt marsh on the east coast, and that salt marsh is more than six to eight miles wide at any given point!

Learn more about Georgia's salt marsh



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Georgia's salt marsh is more intact than any other state's

by design. Nearly 60 years ago, in response to the threat of mining and "barrels full" of letters asking them to protect our salt marsh, the Georgia Legislature passed the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act. Since then, any activity affecting our marshes must get permission from the State before proceeding. And every time legislation has threatened the salt marsh, Georgians have spoken up and the legislature has chosen to protect it.

Protecting our marshes isn't easy, and the fight isn't over. While we don't foresee a fight against salt marsh mining in the future, there remain several concerning threats that need to be named and addressed.

THREAT: Privatization. According to the Public Trust Doctrine (affirmed by the Georgia General Assembly), Georgia's salt marsh is owned by the people of Georgia and held in trust by the state government unless a landowner can prove that some of that salt marsh has been granted to them by the State of Georgia or the King of England. Crown or State Grants of salt marsh are rare and very difficult to prove. The State of Georgia has done a great job holding the salt marsh in trust. Yet, every year there are efforts to facilitate the privatization of salt marsh for the purposes of monetizing this vital public resource.

THREAT: Long docks and fragmentation. Among other things, the Coastal Resources Division (CRD) regulates the construction of docks over publicly owned marshlands. Regulations which would allow private recreational docks longer than 1,000 feet or more than 3,000 square feet will lead to a fragmented marsh ecosystem—disturbing valuable habitat for High Priority marshland bird species; limiting public access to marshlands and waterways in favor of access for the wealthy; increasing the likelihood of damage and debris from storms; and diminishing marshland views for upland neighbors and boaters. Community docks and public piers and launches offer access to all and minimize fragmentation and diminished views.

THREAT: Shoreline hardening. Our marshlands are nature's sponges, absorbing floodwater, dampening storm surge, and filtering pollutants. In Georgia's dynamic coastal environment, the more natural the shoreline, the better. As sea levels rise, the marshland moves inland to adapt to the changing environment, preserving the ecosystem functions that protect humans and wildlife alike. Our marsh's resilience is threatened by shoreline hardening techniques such as seawalls and bulkheads. These stabilization methods harden or armor natural transition areas and, by design, separate land and sea, eliminating the function of that natural area. Alternative fortification tactics like living shorelines maintain the coast's critical dynamism while helping humans to adapt to rising seas.



Today you can speak up to protect Georgia's coastal marshlands. As CRD proceeds with new rules to regulate private recreational docks, join us in supporting their effort and asking the agency to:

- Update the Georgia dock database to provide a comprehensive picture of docks across the coast.
- Uphold current standards:
 - Limit private recreational dock walkway length to 1,000 linear feet or 3,000 square feet, with no variance process.
 - Prohibit docks to creeks less than 20 feet wide.
 - Restrict bridging over creeks greater than 20 feet wide.
 - Limit fixed deck size and overall footprint.
- Create a Georgia dock builders certification program to ensure safety standards are upheld.
- Develop an education program with the real estate community to support proper advertising of waterfront, marshfront, and deep water properties.

Take Action for Georgia's Salt Marsh

Current Action:
Support CRD's effort to adopt rules that carry forward clear and marsh-protective standards for private recreational docks

WHAT CAN I DO?

CRD is developing new rules to codify standards for private recreational docks. Check out our recommendations (left) and add your own concerns and perspective to comments you send.

Email CRD's Jill Andrews (jill.andrews@dnr.ga.gov). While not an official public comment period yet, comments are being accepted now on a rolling basis.

Share your concerns and ideas with the Board of the Department of Natural Resources, the decision making body for new rules. Attend their May 18 meeting and sign up to speak.

Meeting Details
Monday, May 18 @ 2 PM
DNR Board Room
2 Martin Luther King, Jr.
Drive SE, Suite 1252 East
Atlanta, GA 30334

