

# Working Together to Protect Coastal Georgia

## Coastal Georgia's Subtropical Ecosystem

is made up of barrier islands, marsh hammocks, freshwater wetlands, salt marshes, estuaries, and rivers. Marsh hammocks were named as one of the most endangered landscapes by Scenic America, a national conservation organization. This globally important region would greatly benefit from opportunities to conserve the marshes, hammocks, and wetlands that a Coastal Program in Georgia would provide.



Marsh hammocks

## Coastal Georgia is home to:

- Six counties that front the Atlantic Ocean and eleven counties have tidal shoreline pushing nearly 60 miles inland;
- 100 miles of direct coastline, thirteen barrier islands, and nearly 2000 miles of tidal shoreline;
- Over 367,000 acres of estuarine wetlands, including one-third of the eastern seaboard saltmarshes;
- At least 120 rare species including 18 T/E species such as the woodstork, manatee, indigo snake, and flatwood salamander; and provides 8 months of wintering habitat for the piping plover;
- 9 coastal National Wildlife Refuges including the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge;
- 3 active military installations including the US Army's Fort Stewart, the Marine Corps' Townsend Bombing Range, and Kings Bay Naval Base;

- The Cumberland Island National Park and Wilderness Area, Jekyll Island State Park, Sapelo Island and Ossabaw Island State Natural Areas;
- Gray's Reef NOAA National Marine Sanctuary;
- The Nature Conservancy Altamaha River Bioreserve;
- Over a half million people permanent residents;
- Seaports that produce more than \$35 billion in sales;
- Freshwater aquifers that are rapidly becoming contaminated with encroaching salt water;
- One of the most rapidly developing second home markets and coastal areas in the nation.

## Coastal Station Highlights

- Georgia ES worked closely with Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Coastal Resources Division and local officials to develop construction and lighting plans for the Sidney Lanier Bridge that would not impact manatees or sea turtles. Turtle-friendly lights were installed on the bridge to avoid confusing nesting and hatchling sea turtles in the area.
- Georgia ES is working closely with developers and local governments in an attempt to keep manatees safe from impacts associated with the rapidly-developing coastal area. Increased boat traffic and upland runoff are key issues of concern.



Jeff Footitt

manatee



Eric Horan

woodstorks

- Wood storks feed and nest along the Georgia coast. The FO works with local landowners to minimize impacts to this endangered bird. Recently, staff began coordinating with new owners of the Durango plant on the St. Mary's River regarding potential impacts to a wood stork rookery. The old pulp plant site is being partially cleaned of hazardous materials and redeveloped as a residential site.



USFWS

gopher tortoise

Representatives of the landowner, Georgia Coastal Resources Division and the FWS are meeting with species experts to design a project that will maintain the rookery while allowing redevelopment to proceed.

- Many coastal species are at risk due to increasing urban development. The FO provides technical assistance to landowners, agencies and others regarding conservation of gopher tortoises, a state-listed species.



Fisheries & Habitat Conservation

Additionally, the FO is participating in the Georgia Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, an organization of academic, scientific, regulatory and private institutions/organizations formed to assess the status of terrapins and determine a strategy for its conservation.



USFWS

*Georgia flatwood salamander*

### **Contact information**

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