

Ask legislators to strengthen Shore Protection Act

The Georgia House of Representatives has been working on a bill supposedly to improve a bill that amends the Shore Protection Act, one of the most valuable legislative tools we have to protect our coast. Unfortunately, the bill, HB 271, which was favorably reported out of the House Natural Resources and Environmental Committee on Feb. 23, redefines the definition of sand dune in a manner that excludes “landscaped” mounds of sand and mounds of sand that are “stabilized by indigenous vegetative cover” from protected status. This means that property owners could build over any landscaped or otherwise excluded “mound of sand” without seeking any permits. This will result in further deterioration of our valuable and vulnerable shoreline, which protects the upland and provides critical habitat to nesting such as sea turtles and other threatened wildlife. The bill strangely recognizes sea oats and beach morning glory as “sparse pioneer vegetation” indicating the presence of a dune. But these are the only “indigenous vegetative cover” allowable from the dozens of recognized native plants that currently preserve and stabilize the fragile dune systems. I won’t try to give a botanical lesson, but bitter panic grass, saltgrass, salt-meadow cordgrass, railroad vine, sea lavender and muhly grass are a few that many beach goers will recall.

Simple observation will show the loss of beaches and dunes in just a few years. Rather than opening new opportunities for mankind to intrude on nature, we should be protecting nature against the ravages of man, especially when nature is trying to protect us from our own folly. This bill is sponsored by Reps. Jason Spencer, R-Woodbine, Don Hogan, R-St. Simons Island, Jeff Jones, R-Brunswick, Jesse Petrea, R-Savannah, Ron Stephens, R-Savannah, and Lynn Smith, R-Newnan (Committee Chair). Please contact them and ask them to correct this obvious oversight.

Barrett King
St. Marys

150 feet is needed to protect shoreline

In the 1960s Pogo Possum famously announced to Albert Alligator and Churchy LaFemme, “We have met the enemy, and they is us!!” At that time Pogo was referring to the federal legislature and the search for “Commies” in government.

Fast forward 55 years and focus on the Georgia House of Representatives’ HB271 and you will find the enemy, not “commies”, but a cabal of developers, lobbyists and gullible legislators who claim they are working for the common weal.

The goal, they say, is to standardize the shore protection and jurisdiction away from a 40-year-old gerrymandered saw-toothed line on the map to a “one size fits all” line on the map. Ignoring the fact that the present system has done a bang-up job of protecting the shore and beach front home owners, the “cabal” is hell-bent on establishing a 25’ buffer zone. TWENTY-FIVE!

At a time when oceans are rising and beaches are eroding, they want to reduce the buffer zone to practically nil. Can you say Hurricane Matthew?

What lesson did we see there? A lot of beach and dune erosion, but little or no damage to businesses or homes from high tides and storm surges. Lucky? No. Careful planning due to the saw-toothed line on the map.

Should it be standardized? Yeah, probably. How about a buffer that has a realistic chance of protecting the shore, dunes, homes and businesses?

Frank Mirasola

Jekyll Island

Shore protection bill is ill conceived

Georgia House Bill 271, currently being considered in the House Natural Resources Committee, proposes a 25-foot setback from the dune line, a shoreline stabilization structure, or the high water mark, whichever applies at a given site.

In 2013 the Department of Natural Resources proposed a 50 foot jurisdictional area. Given the historical rate of shore erosion, even a 50 foot setback is too little. A more reasonable and protective figure would be 100 feet.

The only people this bill would please would be short-sighted developers who probably won't be around when the sea encroaches on the million-dollar homes they put up.

Please contact members of the House Natural Resources Committee to voice your displeasure with this ill-considered measure.

Howard Sculthorpe

Jekyll Island