

Shoreline protection changes should strengthen law

The article in The News dealing with why environmental advocates are objecting to the shore protection bill (HB 271) that is currently under review in the Georgia House of Representatives and sponsored by our local delegates raises several questions that are begging for answers. They include:

- Why would any elected official who cares about protecting our fragile shoreline sponsor a bill that sets the jurisdictional area of Georgia's Shore Protection Act to a mere 25-feet, as measured from either the landward-most dune, a shoreline stabilization structure, or the ordinary high water mark in cases where there are no dunes and no stabilization structure? Is it not clear that our shoreline is retreating and that more, not less, protection is needed?
- Why is the DNR supporting a 25-foot jurisdictional area extending landward from the three benchmarks cited above, when, in 2013, the DNR pushed for legislation calling for a 50-foot boundary from those same benchmarks? A 50 percent reduction of the previously proposed 50-foot figure makes no sense unless our shoreline has somehow miraculously stabilized over the past four years.
- Why doesn't HB 271 draw upon empirical data dealing with shoreline change and erosion rates along our coast? The best and latest research on this subject, which was

presented in a 2015 study by coastal geologist Dr. Chester Jackson (Georgia Southern University), was not consulted by HB 271's sponsors and has been disregarded by the DNR, which, ironically, commissioned the study.

Science-based analysis, common sense, and simple observation show that HB 271 should propose at least a 50-foot jurisdictional area extending landward from the benchmarks referenced in the bill. I urge our coastal delegates to push for such an amendment so our shoreline receives the protection it requires and deserves.

David Egan, Jekyll Island Coastal shoreline bill deserves further study

Due to widespread misunderstanding and disagreement about HB271 regarding the Shore Protection Act (SPA), we now believe the best course of action would be to withhold action pending more study and review under a series of townhall meetings hosted by coastal legislators and sponsors of the bill.

Such deliberations would enable comments from the public and coastal scientists to be considered in recommending better legislation that is widely supported and scientifically based.

Last week, I submitted a statement to the General Assembly House subcommittee reviewing HB271. Salient excerpts include:

- General Assembly members considering House Bill 271

need to be aware that the SPA allows up to two-thirds of that jurisdiction to be developed — meaning that in many, if not most cases, a 25-foot jurisdiction — as now proposed in SPA amendments — will leave only an 8-foot band of undisturbed area along the shoreline. That is far less than the typical backyard set-back that applies in most residential zoning districts.

- Scientific evidence indicates that the bill's proposed 25-feet of "jurisdiction" is woefully inadequate.
- With growing erosion rates, now averaging more than a foot a year, and accelerating rise in sealevel, coastal geologists say that a minimum of 100 feet is needed – which would leave an undeveloped area of about 30 feet along the shoreline after SPA-approved development
- When Georgia's DNR proposed similar rule revisions in 2013, they recommended a 50-foot jurisdiction, double the width now being considered. Since then, DNR "experts" have changed their advice without explanation or citing any scientific evidence, despite extensive erosion research underscoring the risks of shoreline development.

Georgians deserve more accountability and open discussion of environmental safeguards that are based on science, instead of unfounded fears about threats to property rights.

David Kyler, Center for a Sustainable Coast