



**Insider's Update: Sea Island Groin
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You've probably read a lot over the past few weeks about the new groin that Sea Island Acquisitions wants to build at the south end of Sea Island, on the property commonly known as the Spit. I wanted to take a moment to update you on our work to date and next steps.

First some background. One Hundred Miles got involved in the Spit development discussion back when it was first proposed in early 2014. At the time, Sea Island proposed to subdivide 7.3 acres to build eight new homes in a development to be known as the Reserve. Although we were a new organization at the time, we wrote letters, engaged our members, and spoke at public hearings about this issue. Our concern about the development really revolved around the Spit's suitability (or more accurately, its lack thereof) for development.

In a letter to the Glynn County Planning Commission dated January 20, 2014, OHM VP of Coastal Conservation Alice Keyes wrote:

"The 4.5 acres of uplands to be subdivided and developed on the southern tip of Sea Island are narrow and surrounded by a dynamic dune system and active marshlands. The ocean-facing land in this particular spot is subject to significant erosion. Data show that the average erosion rate of the area is approximately 1.2 meter (1.5 feet) per year. Researchers have compiled up to 135 years of data and estimate that the area to be subdivided has experienced a net loss of land of about 63 meters (189 feet). Further, a one-meter rise in sea level (projected to occur by 2100) will inundate the sandy dune system and beach on the site."

The heart of our concern was the fact that irresponsible development saps public resources. Although we mentioned our concern for the sand-sharing system in our comments, the conversation in 2014 mostly revolved around publicly subsidized flood insurance, infrastructure, and necessary relief in the case of a natural disaster like a flood or hurricane. We felt that allowing the development of such a volatile piece of land would put our local, state, and federal government resources at risk for the benefit of a few people who choose to develop and live on the Spit.

The debate about the development of the Spit ended when representatives from Sea Island and four conservation groups (GreenLaw, Altamaha Riverkeeper, Center for a Sustainable Coast, and the Atlanta Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation) announced that they had come to agreement about the Spit's future. In that agreement, the conservation groups agreed not to challenge the future development of the eight homes at the Reserve in exchange for a conservation

easement on the nearly 80 acres of land south of the Spit. This land would be protected in perpetuity, ensuring that future generations of Georgians would have access to and could enjoy the undeveloped beach south of the new development.

Fast forward to the fall of 2015, when OHM learned of Sea Island Acquisition's plans to stabilize the beach in front of the Reserve development. The State of Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the United States Army Corps of Engineers announced they were seeking comments on permit applications for the construction of a new T-head groin 1,200 feet south of the existing T-head groin on Sea Island. Sea Island was also seeking permission to renourish the beach between the old and new groins.

Sea Island's theory was that the new groin would work with its existing south groin to create a protected area in front of the new development. They would then renourish the beach and Reserve residents would benefit from stable, wide beach in front of their new homes.

It turns out that it's not that simple, and once again, the debate highlights Sea Island's reliance on public resources to provide a return for their investors.

The sand on Georgia's beaches is a precious resource that we all share. As sand and sediment are flushed out of our river basins and into our coastal system, sand erodes and accumulates accordingly on our barrier islands. This is a natural and necessary process to keep our coast healthy and resilient. Groins extend perpendicularly from the shoreline into the ocean. They are solid rock walls that are impermeable. As such, they catch objects that currents, tides, and natural flows move along our shoreline. Including sand. For this reason most groins are built to collect sand and aid the beach building process. It is very important to remember that the supply of sand and sediment that moves throughout our system is not unlimited and when we choose to utilize a groin to feed one beach with this sand, another starves.

Sea Island's new groin will collect sand that would otherwise nourish beaches to the south. Most immediately impacted will be the Sea Island Spit south of the new groin. But Gould's Inlet and East Beach on St. Simons Island will also experience changes.

This is not a secret. Back in December of 2015, friends and residents of Georgia's coast spoke out against the proposal for the groin because of its impacts on the availability of sand that we all share, and subsequent threats to wildlife nesting habitat. Unfortunately, despite receiving hundreds of letters and comments in opposition to the groin construction, a committee of the Department of Natural Resources granted one of the permits necessary to move forward with the project. One Hundred Miles, along with our partners Altamaha Riverkeeper and the Atlanta Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation appealed the permit. OHM is represented by attorneys at the Southern Environmental Law Center, while ARK and Surfrider are represented by attorneys from GreenLaw.

The Corps of Engineers has yet to issue its decision on the federal permit, but the trial regarding our appeal at the state level is ongoing. Testimony took place the second week of May in downtown Brunswick. During that grueling week, as evidence was revealed and opinions were expressed, three thoughts resonated strongly in my mind.

- Over and over again I was reminded (and have been since the trial) that speaking out is so important but not easy. Those who wrote letters, added their names to the list of standing witnesses, testified in court, and helped our case in other important ways have done so at a cost. It may be difficult to believe, but some have faced retaliation from their peers and others in our community. Yet despite the risks associated with taking action, it is absolutely necessary to do so in order to protect the coast we love.
- Our Georgia coast is just that. Ours. It belongs to all of us. One Hundred Miles' mission is to preserve this public resource for all of us – humans and wildlife – and our future generations. We must raise our voices when we see public resources being commandeered to the detriment of many for the benefit of only a few.
- The debate over the Sea Island groin is significant. We must use the tremendous dialogue that has surrounded this project since 2015 to ensure the discussion grows beyond Sea Island. It would be a tragedy if we successfully stop the construction of this groin only to repeat this same conversation again in the future. One Hundred Miles and our partners need to seize this opportunity to ensure that no new groins are built on the Georgia coast now or in the future.

With your help, we plan to do all of these things. We'll be in Atlanta for closing arguments on July 13, and we'll work with our partners to elevate and continue these conversations at the local level and in the State Capitol in January. I'll keep you updated on our progress, and hope you'll feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, or suggestions.