



**Insider's Update: Spaceport Camden
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Balancing economic development and coastal conservation isn't rocket science.

But in Camden County, where officials have applied for a license to launch rockets from the banks of the Satilla River, this seems to be an alien concept.

Over the past two years, One Hundred Miles has been learning more about the commercial space industry around the country, educating residents, and evaluating the costs and benefits Spaceport Camden would have on our coast. We've worked with hundreds of residents, dozens of legislators, and just this week, we announced the formation of a coalition of seven groups (OHM, Southern Environmental Law Center, GreenLaw, Sierra Club Georgia, Georgia ForestWatch, American Rivers, and National Parks Conservation Association) – all in an effort to raise awareness about spaceport operations around that nation and the potential impacts of a new spaceport on our coast.

The Spaceport Camden proposal comes with significant tradeoffs. And despite being billed as a silver bullet, we now know that investing hundreds of millions of tax dollars to build a new spaceport isn't the best way to enhance our quality of life.

Our coast is unmatched in its magnificence and splendor, and its conservation supports a rich economic base – from military and port operations to commercial fisheries, tourism, recreation, and real estate. The happiness and peace that come from experiencing nature and living in great communities attract people, companies, and jobs. This is positive reinforcement for regions that have done a good job of protecting these resources.

That is, if they recognize it.

Herein lies the rub. Many of our elected officials and Economic Development Authority and Chamber of Commerce leaders still do not recognize the contribution that the conservation of our natural resources has made to our regional economic growth. As such, they do not consider the threats many new proposals pose to the condition of our natural resources, or the subsequent effect on our economy and quality of life. In fact, many economic development proposals would bring fewer jobs than would be offset – thus being a net loss for the region.

Regarding Spaceport Camden, it is clear that this proposal will threaten those resources and the jobs that rely on them.

We know that:

- Mostly unmanned rockets will be launched from Spaceport Camden. The average failure rate of manned and unmanned rockets is about 6%. The failure rate of unmanned rockets is ten times the failure rate of manned vessels.
- When rockets fail, they usually explode within the first two minutes after they launch.
- The trajectory range on the Spaceport Camden website illustrates that launches may lift off over the Cumberland Island National Seashore, Little Cumberland Island, or Jekyll Island, which are likely to be evacuated at the appropriate times.
- Activities at the Jacksonville International, Brunswick, and St. Simons airports, the Brunswick and Jacksonville ports, and even nuclear submarine operations at Kings Bay may be affected and/or delayed by launches.
- Commercial fishermen, container ships, recreational boaters, tourists, outfitters and others will be evacuated from mandatory exclusion zones in the Atlantic Ocean.

In other words, if Spaceport Camden is built, businesses, residents, and industries all along our coast will have to step aside to accommodate the facility's operations. Though this accommodation may result in lost revenue, property, and livelihood, it is completely ignored by officials supporting the project. Additionally, Camden residents will lose public money invested in the spaceport that could go towards economic development projects that don't sacrifice what is good for what is flashy.

As we all consider the future of this region, the metric by which we need to evaluate opportunities is "quality of life," which can be defined as the intersection of maximum economic benefit and maximum preservation of our beloved coastal environment.

When considering economic development options for our region, not many people in coastal Georgia are saying, "Don't develop." Everyone is saying, "Don't ruin." The line between developing to the point of ruin should not be so hard to find. Spaceport Camden clearly crosses it. It's time to turn back before we pass the point of no return.