The Georgia Coast

An Interdependence of People, Place, and Policy
As a statewide philanthropic network, the Georgia Grantmakers Alliance (GGA) supports the collaborative energies of foundation leaders who share a passion for helping others and giving back to the community. For many, that investment comes in the form of communicating critical trends, encouraging public/private partnerships, and supporting local leadership. The 2020 GGA Coastal Tour features grantmakers and other leaders facilitating placemaking efforts that help coastal communities imagine and create a better future.
Welcome

Georgia's people have a profound connection with our coast, both socially and economically. Many Georgia communities thrive at the intersection of the land, rivers, and sea. The sense of home and family is powerful. The coast’s biodiversity includes flora and fauna as well as the many cultural gifts added by each wave of inhabitants. The region's natural beauty is largely intact due to community-led policy and conservation.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of our state’s Coastal Marshlands Protection Act, which has helped enhance and complement the conservation legacy of a highly collaborative group of partners that includes the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, nonprofits, the U.S. Department of Defense, courageous individuals and private philanthropy. Today, however, Georgia’s coast is experiencing unprecedented challenges to its people, infrastructure, and ecology, including pronounced multigenerational poverty, coal ash that compromises water quality and issue-by-issue perspectives that lose sight of the totality of the region.

During this program, our beloved coastal landscapes and communities will be highlighted through the lens of the regional issues we face here as grantmakers, community members, and residents: persistent poverty, population growth, and an increasingly vulnerable environment. We will showcase how philanthropy is continuing to foster environmental conservation and also help communities in coastal Georgia create and implement small projects and larger-scale transformative activities towards a shared sense of place. We welcome you to our home.

Paul White
President & CEO, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation

Steering Committee

Pat Lummus (Chair) | The Sartain Lanier Family Foundation
Mark Crosswell (Treasurer) | Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Sonia Vick (Communications) | Williams Family Foundation of Georgia
Shell Berry | Community Foundation for the Central Savannah River Area
Lydia Clements | Georgia Grantmakers Alliance
Robbo Hatcher | Georgia Pine Level Foundation
Janine Lee (ex officio) | Southeastern Council of Foundations
Atiba Mbiwan | The Zeist Foundation
Lisa Medellin | Healthcare Georgia Foundation
Lizzy Smith | Woodruff and Whitehead Foundations
Suzanna Stribling | Wilbur and Hilda Glenn Family Foundation
Tené Traylor | The Kendeda Fund
Yvonne Whitaker | NCR Foundation
Paul White | Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation
“One of the unique features of the Georgia coast today is its thorough conservation. At first glance, it seems to be a place where nature reigns. But another distinctive feature of the coast is its deep and diverse human history. Indeed, few places that seem so natural hide so much human history.”

“…Successive communities of Native Americans, Spanish missionaries and settlers, planters, enslaved Africans, lumbermen, pulp and paper industrialists, vacationing northerners, Gullah-Geechee, nature writers, environmental activists, and many others developed distinctive relationships with the environment and produced well-defined coastal landscapes. Together the histories of these communities suggest that contemporary efforts to preserve and protect the Georgia coast must be as respectful of the rich and multifaceted history of the coast as they are of natural landscapes, many of them restored, that now define so much of the region.”

—Paul S. Sutter and Paul M. Pressly, Editors, Coastal Nature, Coastal Culture
Program Agenda

8:45am  Welcome
Roy Richards, Jr., Southwire (retired chief executive)
Paul White, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation

9:00am  Regional Shifts and Impacts (includes activities)
J. Scott Pippin, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia
David Tanner, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia

10:00am  Georgia Coast Collaborative
Megan Desrosiers, One Hundred Miles
Laura Early, Satilla Riverkeeper
Susan Inman, Altamaha Riverkeeper
Charlie Phillips, Sapelo Sea Farms
Moderator: Dr. Dionne Hoskins-Brown, Savannah State University

11:10am  Break

11:30am  Lunch
  Featuring a performance by McIntosh County Shouters

1:00pm  Guided Bus Tour to Brunswick
Bert Roughton, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (retired senior managing editor)
Paul White, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation

1:45pm  Forward Brunswick Panel at Newly Renovated Brunswick Library
Dr. Felicia M. Harris, City of Brunswick Board of Commissioners
Michael Kaufman, Kaufman Development Group, LLC
Chris Moline, Sea Island Properties & Silver Bluff Brewing Co.
Courtney Prince, Real Estate Developer
Moderator: Bert Roughton, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (retired senior managing editor)

3:15pm  Closing Remarks

Planning Committee

Paul White (Chair) | Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation
Lydia Clements | Georgia Grantmakers Alliance
Pat Lummus | The Sartin Lanier Family Foundation
Christine Reeves Strigaro | The Sapelo Foundation
David Weitnauer | R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation
Our ability to sustain and improve quality of life for all of coastal Georgia’s residents and its many visitors is rooted in the interdependence of people and place. Building resilient communities is inextricably linked with stewardship of the region’s globally significant landscapes and the cultivation of economic life that celebrates those landscapes and sustains them. Likewise, nurturing resilience in coastal landscapes is deeply tied to building engaged and equitable communities. This fundamental interdependence of people and place provides the context for coastal philanthropy and community development in a time marked by significant growth across coastal Georgia.

The population of coastal Georgia is the fastest growing region of the state outside of metropolitan Atlanta.

Ports, military, and tourism drive the coastal economy.

High rates of poverty persist across coastal counties where 22.7% to 38.4% of families with children have annual incomes less than 150% of the federal poverty threshold.

Tax rates paid by property owners in rural Southeast Georgia are as much as 50 percent more in than those living in counties with higher populations.
The Georgia Coast is home to many natural resources – lush marshes full of life, maritime forests full of history, deeply necessary underground aquifers, and globally significant migratory birds overhead. It is here that we can see Mother Nature at her best.

In this region full of natural abundance, the charitable resources of families, businesses, agencies and community institutions that have planted roots here are now giving back. The Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation (CCGF), founded in 2005, is the sum of these parts and is tasked with stewarding the community’s charitable resources, financial and social, to have the greatest impact in the area.

Over time, the foundation has grown into the largest grantmaking organization in the tri-county region of McIntosh, Glynn and Camden. “The folks in this region are among the most generous I’ve had the privilege of working with in my career,” says Paul White, the foundation's president and CEO. “As a result, we’ve had very engaged board members and fund holders to work with to get things done.”

As a nexus for good people, good ideas, and good results, the foundation is stepping into a leadership role on issues critical to the coastal community. In 2019, CCGF convened experts and community members around the topic of rising seas and coastal resiliency, hosted coastal Georgia grantmakers to discuss philanthropic identity and impact, and pulled together the College of Coastal Georgia and other Brunswick stakeholders to support a surging downtown revitalization. The foundation is now housing the Forward Brunswick initiative, a civic-level vehicle for dialogue and discussion, supporting the economic and community development of downtown Brunswick.

“We know that we can’t do it all, but we have seen how our entire region benefits from having a responsive community foundation that can facilitate purposeful conversations,” says Jack Kilgore, who chairs the foundation’s board. “By bringing funders, community members and leaders together, we’ve been able to rally resources toward action.”
Coastal Conservation: Global Significance, Local Leadership

The R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation, based in Atlanta, became interested in the Georgia coast in 2006 when Board Chair Cody Laird posed a question to the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC). “What part of Georgia is most ecologically valuable and most threatened?” Answer: The coast. That conversation led to grant support for SELC to conduct a comprehensive coastal assessment.

SELC’s *At the Tipping Point* was released in July 2007. It concluded the greatest threat to Georgia’s coast was poorly planned development. Among the study’s recommendations was the development of a coast-wide, coast-focused advocacy organization and more collaboration among existing coastal nonprofits.

The collaboration started quickly. From 2008 to 2011, the Dobbs foundation worked in partnership with SELC, the Sapelo Foundation, and the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation through an informal alliance known as “Save Georgia’s Coast.”

In 2011, SELC’s lead attorney reached out with a call of alarm: Coastal threats were increasing; the need for a dedicated advocacy organization was more urgent than ever, but little progress had been made. The foundation and SELC agreed to change that. Teaming up with business leader and conservationist Roy Richards, Jr., by November 2012 they had launched One Hundred Miles, with Megan Desrosiers as president and CEO.

The process of launching One Hundred Miles revealed the need for a larger philanthropic community supporting the Georgia coast. In 2014, the Dobbs foundation and Richards, along with Scott Coleman of Little St. Simons Island, organized an immersive weekend coastal experience for generous donors and foundation staff and trustees. The weekend, known as Chautauqua for the Georgia Coast, was free of solicitation, but made a clear call to action. With additional backing from the Bobolink Foundation, Chautauqua would soon become an annual event.

The Chautauqua gatherings soon spawned an informal network of coastal donors, Stewards of the Georgia Coast, that now hosts the event while also providing members with news, resources and other programs.

The seventh annual Chautauqua gathering is slated for March 2020 – an encouraging sign that people and foundations are increasingly investing their skills, influence and funds on behalf of Georgia’s coast.

Georgia’s coastline includes 14 barrier islands, approximately one-third of the remaining salt marsh on the Eastern coast (500,000 acres), and extensive estuaries where the state’s major rivers flow into the ocean.
Changing Future: Faith-Based Leadership at Work

“Church gets a $60 million dilemma,” “Big gift overflows church cup,” “$60 million gift – a blessing and a curse.”

These were just a few of the many national headlines announcing that St. Marys United Methodist Church had been named the beneficiary of a $60 million bequest in the summer of 2000. At the time, it was the largest donation ever made to a single church in the United States.

Dr. Derek McAleer, senior pastor in 2000, addressed the congregation with these words:
“Friends, the future has changed. We are about to be tested as never before. I am frightened, in some respects. But I am comforted in two ways. I am so grateful for the character of our congregation’s leadership. I am thankful for their Christian depth in this time of testing. And I am very, very grateful for the gift of God’s guiding Spirit.”

The bequest was unrestricted – the church could have done most anything it wanted: build a new sanctuary, a new family life center, and more. However, the congregation came to believe this newfound wealth was not for them, but instead had been entrusted to them by God – and that they should act as His faithful stewards.

Consequently, St. Marys United Methodist Church Foundation, Inc. was established in January 2001 to support the church’s charitable activities. Over the following 19 years, the foundation has invested almost $30 million in grants to organizations in southeast Georgia, the nation and the world that respond to people in need, institutions related to United Methodism, and organizations that promote evangelical Christianity.

A considerable amount of the foundation's grants benefit four southeastern counties in Georgia: Camden, Glynn, Charlton and Brantley. “Along the way, the foundation has grappled with its capacity to make a difference in the lives of the people living in the region,” says CEO Jeff Barker. “Over time, our grantmaking has shifted from making charitable gifts to investing in local communities to end cycles of physical and spiritual brokenness and to help people realize their God-given potential.”

For example, its work with Salvation Army to expand Pathway of Hope in Camden County will significantly increase the potential for families living in the margins to become more self-reliant and self-sustainable. A partnership with House of Hope in Glynn County supports teenage victims of sex trafficking. Work with MAP International helps bring affordable life-saving medicines and health supplies to Brantley and Charlton counties.

Going beyond financial capital, the foundation also works closely with the Georgia Center for Nonprofits to deliver resources that improve the effectiveness of many southeast Georgia nonprofits. It also helped establish the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation.

“$60 million has been a blessing – so far at least,” says Barker. “Our board is focused, involved and committed.”
Speakers

Dr. Dionne Hoskins-Brown
Savannah State University

Megan Desrosiers
One Hundred Miles

Laura Early
Satilla Riverkeeper

Dr. Felicia M. Harris
City of Brunswick Board of Commissioners

Susan Inman
Altamaha Riverkeeper

Michael Kaufman
Kaufman Development Group, LLC

McIntosh County Shouters
Musicians/Storytellers

J. Scott Pippin
Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia

Courtney Prince
Real Estate Developer

Roy Richards, Jr.
Southwire (retired chief executive)

Chris Moline
Sea Island Properties & Silver Bluff Brewing Co.

Charlie Phillips
Sapelo Sea Farms

Bert Roughton
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (retired senior managing editor)

Paul White
Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation

David Tanner
Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia
Leaders and Resources

Books

And the Coastlands Wait: How the Grassroots Battle to Save Georgia’s Marshlands Was Fought–and Won
By Reid W. Harris

African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee
Edited by Philip Moran

Coastal Nature, Coastal Culture: Environmental Histories of the Georgia Coast
Edited by Paul S. Sutter and Paul M. Pressly

Conservation Organizations Serving the Coast of Georgia
Produced by Stewards of Georgia Coast

Fanny Kemble’s Journals
Edited by Catherine Clinton

Georgia’s Environmental Nonprofit Sector State of the Sector Assessment and Report
Produced by Chandra Brown and April Ingle (January 2016)

Web/Media

Georgia Coast Atlas
http://georgiacoastatlas.org/about_islands.html

Georgia Coastal Management Program 20th Anniversary Film
By Georgia DNR Coastal Resources Division
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=258&v=7MMh-L0N_BI&feature=emb_logo

Spirituals and Shout Songs for the Georgia Coast
By The McIntosh County Shouters on the Smithsonian Folkways
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUdBru-7s7w

Georgia Research

Georgia Coastal Ecosystems LTER
https://lternet.edu/site/georgia-coastal-ecosystems-lter/

Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Georgia Profiles
https://gafcp.org/georgia-profiles/

NOAA Office for Coastal Management, Georgia
https://coast.noaa.gov/states/georgia.html
We connect and educate grantmakers to leverage philanthropy and improve the lives of Georgians.

Founded in 2010, the Georgia Grantmakers Alliance (GGA) is a nonpartisan initiative open to all private grantmakers interested in peer learning, critical Georgia issues, and promising solutions. Our programs feature place-based philanthropic tools, future trends, and local examples of the connections between state policy and grantmaking. By fostering relationships and strengthening the network of Georgia funders, GGA is making a positive and lasting difference in Georgia’s communities.

Special Thanks to the Following Organizations

Get more information and get involved!
georgiagrantmakers@gmail.com or at secf.org/gga

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