

# COASTAL OBSERVER

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## Call for county wetlands ordinance follows court ruling

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

A crucial element of Georgetown County's resilience plan was dealt a setback last week with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that limited federal regulation of wetlands. In a case from Washington State, the court ruled that the Clean Water Act only applies to wetlands with "a continuous surface connection" to navigable waters.

That will roll back protec-

tion for wetlands that lack a direct connection to the so-called "waters of the U.S.," said Amy Armstrong, executive director of the S.C. Environmental Law Project.

The ruling was handed down as consultants took comments on a draft of the resilience element of Georgetown County's comprehensive plan. The element recommends that the county continue to work to preserve fresh and salt water wetlands. "To ensure their safe-

ty for years to come would be an incredibly productive way to prevent a decline in natural resilience for the county," it states.

Although no one has trouble defining wetlands, "we've fought over what wetlands are part of the waters of the U.S.," Armstrong said.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Corps of Engineers enforce the Clean Water Act, with the Corps responsible for issuing permits

for dredging or filling protected waters. In the opinion by Justice Samuel Alito, the court said the agencies have expanded the definition of waters of the U.S. even after a series of court challenges that sought to limit their authority.

"The agencies later admitted that 'almost all waters and wetlands across the country theoretically could be subject to a case-specific jurisdictional determination,'" the ruling states.

But the court decided that the act "extends only to those wetlands that are 'as a practical matter indistinguishable from waters of the United States,'" citing language from a prior ruling.

While the court proposed a two-part test to determine which wetlands are covered, "we can clear up a lot of that uncertainty in Georgetown County by saying we're going to protect all the wetlands in the **SEE "RESILIENCE," PAGE 2**

### LAND USE

## Multi-family plan review revisions won't end lawsuits

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County is one vote away from changing the way it reviews plans for large multi-family developments, but attorneys are due to argue in court this week that there is nothing wrong with the current system that led to the approval of 12 duplexes on a tract in the Pawleys Island area.

Since 2011, the process known as site plan review has required that projects with more than 10 multi-family units go before the Planning Commission for a public hearing and receive final approval from County Council. That process has been challenged in two lawsuits over multi-family projects in the Parkersville area.

County Council voted last week to allow staff to review and approve plans for those developments. Rather than conduct a public hearing, notice of the applications would be sent to property owners within 600 feet and the public would be able to review plans and submit comments within 14 days.

"This does not affect the public hearing process for other zoning requests," said Holly Richardson, the county planning director.

The plans would only be **SEE "PLANNING," PAGE 4**



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

## Dancing toward summer

Patrice and Tarpley Mott, left, found a quiet corner of the Pawleys Island Nature Park to dance during the town's Memorial Day party, which capped a rainy weekend. Mary Weston White, 3, of Greenville, above, dances with her dad and a flag. Below, Eberly Meehan, 5, sings along with "Mustang Sally," prompted by Joe Ross, who joined the band, Second Nature, for a guest solo.



### EDUCATION

## School's out, but vacation will be short this summer

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Friday marks the end of the 2022-23 school year in Georgetown County.

But don't blink. The start of the 2023-24 school year is just 61 days away.

"I don't really have any concerns about the shortened summer. We've been preparing for it for awhile," Adam George, principal of Waccamaw High School, said. "Lots of times the shorter breaks that you have actually limit the learning loss. I think that's going to be a benefit as far as the kids coming back sooner."

"I want to try and have people embrace the new schedule, versus 'oh no we've got a shorter summer than we usually do,'" said Chris Bergeron, who takes over as director of Coastal Montessori Charter School on Monday. "I want them to enjoy their time off, but I also want them to think and look forward to the benefits of our new schedule. I want it to be a positive and not looked at as a negative."

Teachers will report July 27 and the first day of classes is Aug. 3, which means the first semester ends before winter break.

"All finals, all grades, everything will be done before we leave for Christmas, which is a huge benefit," George said.

**SEE "SCHOOLS," PAGE 2**

### ENVIRONMENT

## Beachfront management plan helps keep pace with sea level rise

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Litchfield Beaches are among the state's most stable, and the goal of Georgetown County's updated beachfront management plan is to ensure that they stay that way, according to the consultant who is working on the plan.

The county is looking at options for an "engineered beach" that would provide federal funding to repair storm damage and, potentially, renourishment, said Steven Traynum, president of Coastal Science and Engineering. He was the project manager for renourishment projects at Pawleys Island, DeBordieu and the Peninsula community at the southern tip

of Litchfield Beach.

"Litchfield has been one of the most stable beaches in South Carolina," Traynum told the Litchfield Beaches Property Owners Association at their annual meeting. "That has changed recently."

The jetties built in the 1970s to stabilize Murrells Inlet block the flow of sand along the shore. Coupled with increased storms, a rise in sea level and the uncertainty of funding for beach renourishment around the jetties, that has raised concern about erosion at Litchfield.

The erosion rate is currently about 8 feet a year at the north end of Huntington Beach State Park, Traynum said. That could lead to increased erosion at

**SEE "BEACH," PAGE 4**

### BUDGETS

## County in line for state funds for port

BY CHARLES SWENSON  
COASTAL OBSERVER

Along with taking title to the port of Georgetown this month, Georgetown County is due to get \$2.5 million to repair or demolish portions of the aging facilities. The money is part of over \$13 million for projects in the county included in the state budget that is now before House and Senate negotiators.

"I don't see anybody getting upset about any of those projects," state Rep. Lee Hewitt said, although he cautioned that nothing is guaranteed. "It will be interesting to see the conference report and see what all is in there."

Hewitt introduced legislation last year to transfer 250 acres on the Sampit River from



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

The port facilities need almost \$14 million in repairs.

the State Ports Authority to the county by June 30. Engineers hired by the county found \$13.8 million in "structural deficiencies."

It was discovered this year that the ports authority had

funds allocated for the facilities that was never spent. This year's budget bill allows the county to keep that money, then buy the 210 acres that are designated as a spoils site for **SEE "PORT," PAGE 2**

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