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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN | Natural resources element

Long-delayed draft emerges from 'mire of impropriety'

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Everyone agrees there was something improper about the natural resources element of Georgetown County's comprehensive plan.

"The extent of strikes and inserts in the revised draft creates something that is no lon-

ger the Planning Commission's original recommendation," Monica Whalen, staff attorney for the S.C. Environmental Law Project, said.

That list of goals and objectives for protecting the county's natural resources was adopted unanimously by the commission in 2022. It was amended by staff and County Council mem-

bers after a retreat in January 2023, removing items that they thought were outside the county's purview, such as improving shellfish beds, or would create additional expense, such as managing conserved land.

The council tabled the element before it received the second of three required readings in July 2023. It voted last month

to bring it back.

"The long delayed and revised natural resources element is on your agenda for the third reading tonight improperly," Duane Draper, who chairs the citizens group Keep It Green, told the council this week.

The Planning Commission
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Chris Sokoloski/Coastal Observer

Jackie Akers, a SCUTE volunteer, helps a hatchling through the surf at DeBordieu.

SEA TURTLES

Nests down, but hopes high as season ends

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

There were far fewer sea turtle nests this year (4,816) than last year across the state (6,597).

Despite that, the people who oversee the volunteers for the S.C. United Turtle Enthusiasts along the Waccamaw Neck consider this year to be a "good" season.

"It was a relatively uneventful year. We didn't have any drama. We didn't have any storms. We didn't have any renourishment," said Rick Scott of Litchfield, the leader of SCUTE, which monitors nests under a permit from the state Department of Natural Resources.

North Litchfield and Litchfield Beach combined for 12 nests. Last year there were 13.

For the first time since at least 2008 Litchfield by the Sea did not have a nest. Scott said there was one false crawl.

Pawleys Island had 19 nests but lost one to coyotes and foxes. Last year, there were 30 nests.

Of the 2,209 eggs laid on the island, 1,734 produced hatchlings, which is a success rate of 85 percent.

Mary Schneider, who oversees SCUTE volunteers on the
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WACCAMAW HIGH

Student leaders get their groove on

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Georgetown County schools may be closed this week for fall break, but not all of them have been empty.

Hundreds of students from the eastern half of the state gathered at Waccamaw High for the S.C. Association of Student Councils District II rally.

The entire event was planned and organized by students, led by seniors Megan Madigan and Skylar Lombard.

"It's even more than what we expected," Madigan said. "This exceeded our expectations completely."

"It's a time when you can network with other schools," Lombard said. "You can get new ideas for student council and build your leadership. You learn a lot about yourself and your council comes back even stronger."

Along with serious discussions and exchanging of ideas, there was also dancing, singing and a lot of laughter.

The theme of this year's rally was "get groovy with leadership."

"We've gone to a lot of conferences in the past and we got a lot of ideas from other student councils," Madigan said. "We just thought it would be a great way for other students to see what we do, see what they do, network and collaborate."



Photos by Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Megan Madigan, left, and Skylar Lombard, right, organized the district rally and joined other WHS student council leaders in warming up the crowd of 340 students, below.

Julie Humowitz, who has been the faculty advisor to the Waccamaw High Student Council since 1994, was proud of the students.

"Sometimes it shocks you how well they step up to the plate when you just let them. I think all too often as adults we try to hold on to something," Humowitz said. "We have to let them and we have to trust them. That's when their leadership skills come out. They realize they could do things they didn't even know they could do."

Humowitz hopes after the rally all the students will realize how "wonderful" their school is.

"I think all too often we see the problems in the schools and
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ENVIRONMENT | Beachfront management

Sand will run out before the money does, hazards expert says

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

Rob Young thought he could improve on the WNC Strong slogan created after flooding from Hurricane Helene wreaked havoc in the mountains of western North Carolina.

How about WNC Smart? It hasn't caught on. And Young, a geology professor and director of the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines at Western Carolina University, is not surprised. Data that he has collected about beach nourishment projects since the 1980s shows why.

With just the amount of sand moved in Southern states in the last 25 years, Young said, "you could build a beach from the Virginia line all the way

around to the Mississippi-Louisiana line that would be about 1,200 feet wide and would be about 10 feet thick. This is our current coastal management strategy."

Young told the audience at the 15th annual Wild Side benefit for the S.C. Environmental Law Project that the strategy isn't smart or sustainable.

He said he is often asked why a coastal hazards specialist lives in the mountains.

"Well, I know too much about hurricanes to live at the coast," used to be his reply. "I'm going to have to rethink that."

The area around Asheville, N.C., was often cited as a destination for people moving from storm risks in Florida.

"The lesson is, there are no climate havens in the United



Charles Swenson/Coastal Observer

Rob Young said he fears lawmakers will weaken South Carolina's landmark legislation.

States of America right now," Young said, choking up. "There are no climate havens."

Beachfront management

has always been a key issue for the law project, said Amy Armstrong, its executive director.

"The beachfront is real-

ly symbolic of the public interest in our state's resources," she said.

Under the "public trust doctrine," the state of South Carolina owns all the land below the high water mark and holds it in trust for the citizens. That is a tool the law project uses in its work.

"Literal and figurative lines in the sand must be drawn, and they must be enforced so that land and life have a chance to adapt to rising sea levels, extreme weather and other climate impacts," Armstrong said.

Young is worried that South Carolina may weaken its Beachfront Management Act. This year, Gov. Henry McMaster vetoed a budget proviso that would have allowed private
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WHS sports: A.J. Grate's four first-half TDs lead Warriors over Georgetown.

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