

# *Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve*

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Dear Mr. Menashes:

On behalf of the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources I wish to express support for the proposed NERRA restoration proposal being submitted to the NOAA Restoration Center. Although Sapelo Island represents one of the more naturally intact islands of the Georgia coast it has several documented habitat restoration needs that would significantly enhance the Reserve's value as both a reference site for condition status from which assessment of nearby restoration coastal efforts may be compared, but also as a scientific resource involving restoration science implementation. On a larger scale the establishment of a national restoration science program within the NERR will not only ensure a continued legacy in natural history and biodiversity protection within our nation's estuaries but it will also serve to provide information on adaptive strategies to best preserve, enhance and restore our valuable but degraded estuarine wetlands on a national scale.

The Sapelo NERR, in conjunction with the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), is currently conducting an ecological assessment within the Reserve. This assessment program will provide a baseline of data for future restoration efforts including parameters such as water quality and contaminant levels, vegetation and habitat mapping and status, faunal components ranging from bio-diversity to biomass and overall habitat condition and extent. Coupled with this program we are currently working toward the establishment of vertical elevation indexing that will be coupled with our water and atmospheric monitoring to gain a better understanding of shifts in environmental parameters that may be affected by global climate change. These programs uniquely position the Sapelo Island NERR as an excellent reference site for current environmental conditions and drift from those assessed conditions over time.

The Sapelo NERR has already partnered with the following agencies in documenting and developing capacity for coastal restoration programs within the Reserve:

- The Georgia Coastal Zone Management Program (CZMP);
- The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR);
- The Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Long Term Ecological Research Program (GCE-LTER);
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC);
- The University of Georgia Marine Institute (UGAMI), Sapelo Island;
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE); and
- The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Salt marsh restoration within the Sapelo Island NERR will reverse many negative environmental impacts resulting from historical human induced manipulations. The entire island and its ecological systems, which collectively form our marshland heritage, will benefit from this project. Additionally, the work will be qualified scientifically and environmentally, thus demonstrating that negative human impacts to salt marsh ecosystems can be cost-effectively reversed.

In addition to the ecological lift that our local natural systems will experience through this potential restoration funding the restoration itself will have significant positive impacts upon the local and in some cases the distant economy by providing jobs and employment opportunities for equipment operators, technicians, students and the local residential community living upon and surrounding the Reserve.

Project opportunities containing the economic, environmental and educational benefits found within the scope of this proposal are rarely afforded rural areas such as Sapelo Island. For the reasons stated above and the long-term environmental benefits that restoration funding provides both the natural systems and the people living within and upon these systems we hope you will consider this proposal worthy of your highest level of funding consideration.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Buddy Sullivan  
Manager, Sapelo Island NERR