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Updating Georgetown County's Comprehensive Plan

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Georgetown County's Office of Planning and Code Enforcement and The Natural Resources

Element of Georgetown County:

Updating Georgetown County's Comprehensive Plan

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Natural resources are the foundation for growth and economic stability in Georgetown County because tourism, agriculture, fisheries, and forestry depend on them. A diversity of natural resources including clean water, productive habitats, and abundant wildlife are among the greatest assets in the county. To promote environmental accountability for Georgetown County's residents and governing body, a Comprehensive Plan to safeguard long-term sustainability is necessary, and must be updated every 10 years. The goal that my research primarily focuses on updating is entitled the "Natural Resources Element." According to Georgetown County's 2009 Comprehensive Plan, the goal of the Natural Resources Element is to identify the natural resources in Georgetown County and implement strategies to protect, maintain, and sustain them. By establishing written goals, this holds Georgetown County accountable for analyzing change over time, providing new strategies to maintain/protect their natural resources, and allowing these resources to flourish and eventually be restored.¹

By interning at the Georgetown County Office of Planning and Code Enforcement (GPCE), I am able to promote sustainability for Georgetown County, as well as many of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainability Development Goals (SDG). For example, updating the County's Comprehensive Plan will fulfill the UN SDG #11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Additionally, my focus on the "Natural Resources Element" of the plan supports the various forms of life in Georgetown County. Specifically, updating this part of the Comprehensive Plan fosters UN SDG #14: Life Below Water, and UN SDG #15: Life on Land. Throughout my internship, emphasis has been placed on certain targets and indicators associated with each UN SDG.²

¹ "Building, Planning & Zoning." Georgetown County, SC. Georgetown County, SC, 2021. <http://www.georgetowncountysc.org/175/Building-Planning-Zoning>.

² "THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Project/Organization Relation to SDGs

Goal 11: UN SDG #11 highlights the significance to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. By updating the Comprehensive Plan for Georgetown County, many targets of Goal 11 are supported. For example, Target 11.4 states that this plan must, “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage.” By updating the Comprehensive Plan every ten years, this allows Georgetown County to not only improve upon previously mentioned aspects of the county’s heritage, but to add new cultural/national discoveries and developments as well. Target 11.a is also improved with the update. Target 11.a explains that the best way to positively link urban, pre-urban, and rural areas is to strengthen national and regional developmental planning. Essentially, the GPCE is doing this through their collaborative efforts to update the Comprehensive Plan. The last relevant target associated with Goal 11 is Target 11.b.1: “Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030a.” The Natural Resources Element of the Comprehensive plan describes the goals that Georgetown County has for mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and the efficiency/quantity of their resources.³

Goal 14: UN SDG #14 describes the importance of maintaining and protecting life below water. Georgetown County and the GCPE have created specific regulations to protect marine wildlife and ecosystems. For example, Targets 14.2 (sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems) and 14.3 (minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification) are more

³ “THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

sustainable because of various buffer requirements and regulations⁴, as well as the Natural Resources Element’s educational descriptions of local wetlands. Additionally, the Natural Resources Element improves Target 14.4 (effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing) because of the specifics provided on endangered species, public/private fishing locations, and various marine hazards.⁵

Goal 15: UN SDG #15 states that it is imperative that we, “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.” During my internship, I worked to meet Targets 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.5, 15.7. The Natural Resources Element specifically helps meet these goals by educating individuals/groups about the programs, public resources, and viewing locations throughout Georgetown County. For example, the element specifically helps work towards Target 15.7 (action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products) by providing a list of public and private fisheries.⁶ This element also stresses that it is necessary to replenish the resources harvested by the community and its citizens.

Georgetown County and the Natural Resources Element

Not only does the Natural Resources Element list and describe all of Georgetown County’s natural resources; it also requires the county to establish sustainability-related goals. These county-wide goals will be redeveloped every ten years and stay in effect until the next

⁴ Currently, Georgetown County is working to make sure that their wetland buffer requirements reasonably promote sustainability, but more/specific information is available at:

<http://www.georgetowncountysc.org/DocumentCenter/View/231/Buffer-Requirements-PDF>

⁵ “THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

⁶ “THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

version of the Comprehensive Plan⁷. By requiring the county to solidify their sustainability goals, it promotes a greater sense of accountability within the county.

The Natural Resources Element also helps the county better educate their citizens on how important natural resources are to its economic growth and stability. This element functions as a physical representation of Georgetown County's need for sustainability. Without a population that is educated on the importance of sustainability, the county's natural resources may end up abused and locally nonrenewable.

The Planet and the Natural Resources Element

Conversation surrounding natural resources and wetlands has become widely prevalent over the past few decades. According to the official Ramsar Convention website, "Wetlands include swamps, marshes, billabongs, lakes, salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves, coral reefs, fens, peat bogs, or bodies of water - whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary." Although many of these conversations are the effects of the negative environmental impacts caused by humans, these issues are finally gaining the attention and action that they need. For example, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands has inspired many countries to shift their focus away from further developing on wetlands, both conventionally and residentially. Through encouraging international cooperation, promoting new policy, capacity building, and technological developments, the Ramsar Convention works to halt the rapid loss of wetlands.⁸ Comparably, through various county-wide impacts⁹, the Natural Resources Element allows slow improvement to be made to our planet's current level of sustainability.

⁷ Typically, the Georgetown County Comprehensive Plan is updated every ten years.

⁸ "The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands." Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. Accessed August 14, 2021. <http://environment.gov.au/water/wetlands/ramsar>.

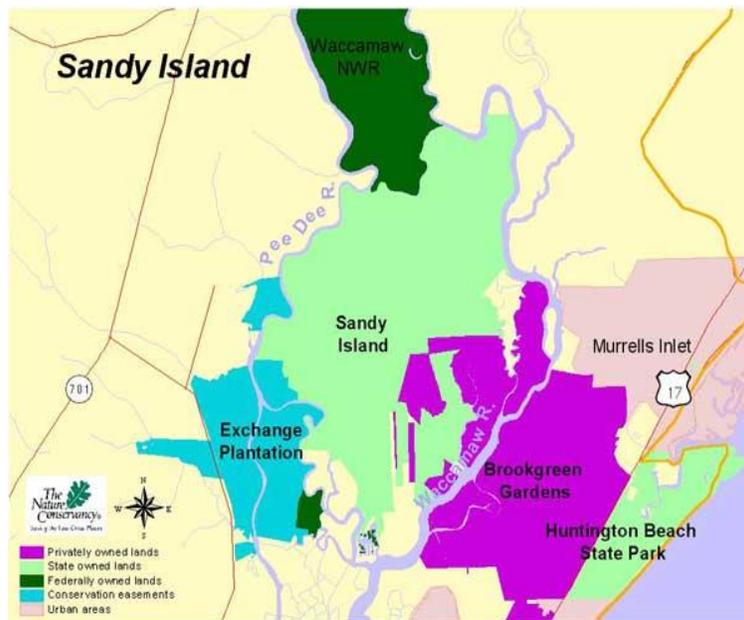
⁹ These impacts are referenced in the section titled, "Georgetown County and the Natural Resource Element."

Other Natural Resources Element

Compared to counties like Horry and Beaufort County, Georgetown County has an abundance of wealth related to their natural resources.¹⁰ The 2010 Natural Resources Element for Beaufort County, South Carolina is less than half the size of the 2010 Natural Resources Element for Georgetown County. Both documents for Horry and Beaufort County communicate that, much like Georgetown County, both counties are made up of various different types of land¹¹. However, the list of available natural resources for surrounding counties does not compare to Georgetown County’s rich abundance of natural resources.¹²

Empirical Evidence/Observation/Interviews/Data

Figure 1: Scenic Sites in Georgetown County



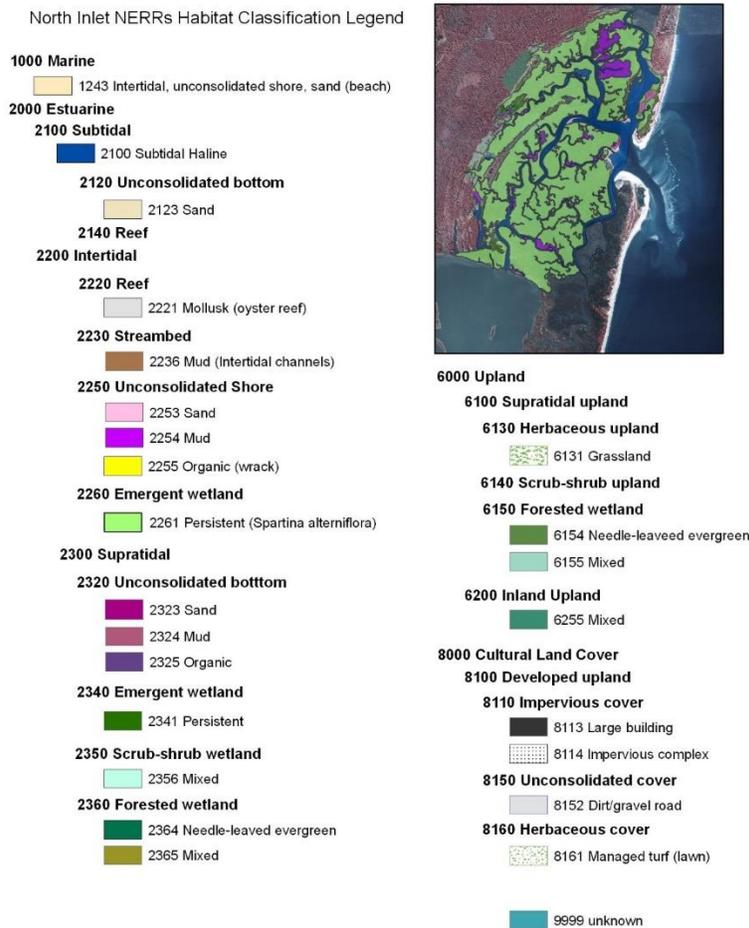
¹⁰ “Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan: Natural Resources.” Beaufort County, South Carolina, 2010. <https://www.beaufortcountysc.gov/council/comprehensive-plan/documents/2010-comprehensive-plan-documents/chapter-5-natural-resources.pdf>.

¹¹ For example: beaches, forests, marshes, wetlands, etc.

¹² “Natural Resources Element: Horry County.” Horry County, South Carolina, March 3, 2015. <https://www.horrycounty.org/portals/0/docs/planningandzoning/Envision2025/Natural%20Resources%20Element%202015.pdf>.

Georgetown County is full of scenic sites and areas that provide the citizens of the county with opportunities to appreciate the various natural resources in the area. Accessibility to natural resources indirectly supports UN SDG#14: Life Below Water and UN SDG#15: Life on Land. By making the county’s natural resources accessible, individuals are able to connect with and better understand the importance of said resources.

Figure 2: North Inlet Habitat Map



The physical data in this element mostly relates to United Nations (UN) Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) #14: Life Below Water, and UN SDG #15: Life on Land. “Figure 1” illustrates the different types of habitats along the North Inlet of South Carolina. A map of this kind offers a variety of data possibilities, mostly relating to UN SDG #15. Georgetown County’s

most relevant usage of this map relates to soil variations and wetland protection.¹³ The need for proper drainage plans in Georgetown County is prevalent. Without understanding soil variations and land types, Georgetown County will be unable to assess drainage possibilities for the future. Each of the 28 different soil types are placed into categories and then drainage professionals begin their assessment on each soil type.¹⁴

Figure 3:

Craven-Coxville- Lenoir	<i>Broad level area; gradients 0 –6%</i>
Capers	<i>Level tidal flats; subject to daily saltwater flooding.</i>
Norfolk-Goldsboro-Coxville	<i>Broad; level or gently sloping area; gradients 0-2%.</i>
Lynchburg-Coxville	<i>Broad; nearly level areas; gradients 0-2%</i>
Bayboro-Portsmouth	<i>Level, oval shaped depressions (Carolina Bays); subject to wetness or periodic flooding.</i>
Chastain-Chewacca	<i>Flood Plains on Santee, Waccamaw, Great Pee Dee rivers old river channels; subject to flooding.</i>
Troup-Wagram-Rutelege	<i>Level or gently sloping areas; gradients 0-10%.</i>
Wando-Coastal Beach	<i>Beach areas and broad level areas around inlets; sand dunes formed naturally adjacent to the sea.</i>
Lakeland-Chipley	<i>Broad, level or gently sloping areas, gradients 0-10%.</i>
Kershaw-Rutelge	<i>Restricted to Sandy Island; high, nearly level or sloping areas; low level areas; gradients 0-10%.</i>
Chipley-Scranton-Rutlege	<i>Broad nearly level or gently sloping areas; gradients 0-10%.</i>
Leon-Rutlege	<i>Broad nearly level areas; gradients 0-6%</i>
Swamp-Fresh Water Marsh	<i>Flat swampland along Black River and Mingo Creek.</i>

The chart in “Figure 2” lists the known wetlands in Georgetown County and a brief description of them. Nearly half (44%) of Georgetown County is classified as a wetland. This means that Georgetown County has over 137,000 acres of wetlands. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and

¹³ “Building, Planning & Zoning.” Georgetown County, SC. Georgetown County, SC, 2021. <http://www.georgetowncountysc.org/175/Building-Planning-Zoning>.

¹⁴ “Watersheds Program.” SCDHEC.gov. S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, 2020, scdhec.gov/environment/your-water-coast/watersheds-program.

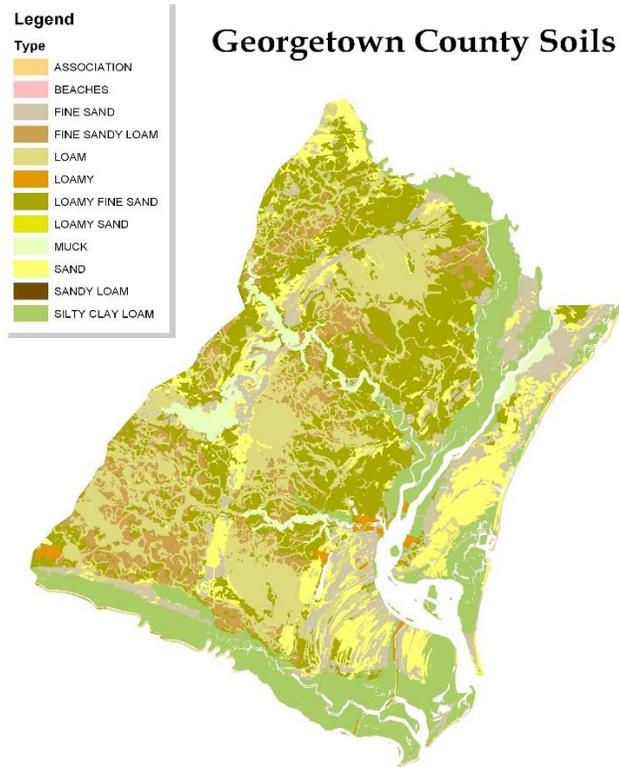
similar areas.¹⁵ This chart primarily relates to UN SDG#14. However, both Figures can tie into UN SDG #12: Responsible Consumption and Production , and definitely UN SDG #11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. These maps will allow the Georgetown County Office of Planning and Code Enforcement to better draft the Natural Resources Element for their 2021 Comprehensive Plan.

Policy Recommendations

The most pressing issue that I came across when working with the Georgetown County Office of Planning and Code Enforcement on the Natural Resources Element was the lack of updated information regarding certain topics in the element. For example, the document that I did work on is for the year of 2021. However, the most recent soil survey for Georgetown County is from 1983 (as seen in Figure 3). Since the state of South Carolina requires an entire section in the Comprehensive Plan on “Soil Types,” updated data on the topic may improve the document. Additionally, an updated version of the soil survey may allow Georgetown County to better analyze and measure negative impacts on the planet.

¹⁵ “What Is A Wetland?” EPA. Environmental Protection Agency, March 31, 2021. <https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/what-wetland>.

Figure 3:



Conclusion

Georgetown County is wealthy in natural resources. These resources not only improve the living environment for every individual living in/visiting Georgetown County, but they can also be given the credit for promoting most of the county’s economic growth and stability. The Comprehensive Plan for Georgetown County allows the county to educate individuals on the types/importance of different resources throughout the county. More specifically, the Natural Resources Element promote actively informing Georgetown County residents on what needs to be protected. By informing residents about the types of natural resources and how to protect

them, Georgetown County promotes the overall sustainability of their county, as well as the Earth.

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