

STEWARDSHIP SHORT: Estuary Etiquette



Take Action

Leave it intact

Connect with people

and place

Observe, don't disturb

Explore

**Sapelo Island
National Estuarine
Research Reserve**

sapelonerr.org

**Georgia State Parks
Crooked River and Fort
McAllister**

gastateparks.org

**Cumberland Island
National Seashore**

www.nps.gov/cuis

**Savannah Coastal Refuges
Complex**

fws.gov/refuge/Savannah

Connect

The Dolphin Project

www.thedolphinproject.org

NOAA Fisheries

www.fisheries.noaa.gov

**UGA Shellfish
Research Lab**

gacoast.uga.edu

Rivers network

www.rivernetwork.org

**Georgia DNR Coastal
Resources Division**

coastalgadnr.org

Georgia's estuaries are bodies of water that form where rivers meet the sea. Fresh and saltwater mix, creating a unique, ideal habitat for a variety of coastal plants and animals.

Action 1 | LEAVE IT INTACT

Georgia's coastal estuaries include salt marshes, marsh hammocks, tidal creeks and oyster reefs. Estuaries provide habitats and nursery areas for migratory birds, marine mammals, and commercially valuable fish and shellfish. Estuarine habitats filter pollutants from our waterways, stabilize sediments and protect properties from erosion and storm surge. It is important to keep Georgia's estuaries pristine.

- Properly dispose of solid and liquid waste to keep our coastal waters healthy.
- Support oyster restoration efforts in Georgia by donating oyster shells to the G.E.O.R.G.I.A program. Oyster reefs provide habitat for fish and crabs, filter and clean the water, and protect estuarine shorelines from erosion. Learn more at gacoast.uga.edu/oyster-restoration.
- Know your Georgia Coastal Marshlands Protection Act, which limits development that impacts these sensitive areas. Learn more at coastalgadnr.org.



Action 2 | CONNECT WITH PEOPLE AND PLACES

Explore the estuary and meet the people, plants and animals connected to this extraordinary habitat. Learn about estuary functions to find out how you can play a positive role in the ecosystem.

- Enjoy the estuary's edge by foot while hiking, birding or fishing.
- Explore estuarine waters with a guided charter boat, paddle trip or kayak class.
- Visit a marine education center to learn more about estuarine plants and wildlife.
- Connect with your local Riverkeeper (Waterkeeper.org) to get involved with conservation projects.

Action 3 | OBSERVE, DON'T DISTURB

When visiting estuaries, be sure not to disturb the local wildlife. Always keep your distance and dedicate time to learning about the animals that rely on these habitats.



Terrapins

The diamondback terrapin is the only turtle in North America that lives in brackish water, which includes a mix of fresh and saltwater.

- When boating or paddling be alert for terrapins and sea turtles.
- Watch for terrapins crossing roads during nesting season, which is from May to July.
- Do not attempt to relocate turtles. Never remove adults, eggs or hatchlings from their natural habitat.

Birds

From snowy egrets to bald eagles, a wide variety of birds rely on estuaries and salt marshes for nesting, resting and feeding.

- Avoid all posted nesting sites.
- Observe from a distance using binoculars.
- For more information about what to do if you encounter a bald eagles nest consult the Department of Natural Resources' website georgiawildlife.com/bald-eagle.

Marine Mammals

Dolphins and manatees are examples of marine mammals commonly found in Georgia estuaries.

- Do not approach, feed, touch or give fresh water to dolphins or manatees. These interactions are all considered harassment.
- Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, it is illegal to "hunt, harass, capture, or kill" marine mammals.
- Consult www.fisheries.noaa.gov for more information on safe viewing guidelines for marine mammals.
- If you observe a stranded marine mammal contact GA DNR at 1-800-2-SAVEME.



This Stewardship Short was prepared by Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant under grant award #NA17NOS4190164 to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources from the office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The Statements, findings, conclusions and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of DNR, OCM or NOAA.

Estuary Etiquette References

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (2018, June 25). What is a salt marsh? Retrieved from <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/saltmarsh.html>.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration– Office of Protected Resources (2017, October 10). Marine Mammal Protection Act. Retrieved from <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/marine-mammal-protection-act>.

Authors: Kayla Clark, Anne Lindsay, Cecilia Nachtmann

