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.
Estuary Etiquette References


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