

Introducing Sea Islands 2050

Written by Mallory B.E. Baches, Executive Director

Tuesday, 27 March 2012 11:47 - Last Updated Wednesday, 28 March 2012 12:08



Gifford Pinchot, former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service and Governor of Pennsylvania, once said, “The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future.”

Looking around Beaufort, it is easy to doubt the vastness of our possibilities. Our natural resources are being compromised by the unintended consequences of past decisions. Our food system reflects an inefficient practice of exporting what we make and importing what we need. Our energy is produced hundreds and even thousands of miles away while untapped sources surround us on all sides.

Across the country, the problem facing towns like ours is the same:

How do communities with limited resources but ample desire best take responsibility for the vast possibilities of our great future?

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Sea Islands 2050 is local citizens working to be a part of the local solution.

Two years ago, a group of ordinary citizens began talking about the challenges they saw in our community, brainstorming ways to foster solutions. They were led by Bob Turner, President of the Habersham Land Company and longtime Beaufort resident, and Colonel Mark Mykleby, USMC (Ret.), then working for Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on a National Strategic Narrative, a paper offering sustainability as our nation's grand strategic imperative for the 21st Century. Commuting to the Pentagon from his home on Lady's Island, Mark saw the hometown his family loves suffering the same challenges he was charged with confronting on a national scale, and he wanted to start making a difference right here at home.

Turner and Mykleby, along with like-minded friends, began collecting a diverse group of locals, from



business owners to public servants, from public school educators to higher education leaders, from resource department staff to private fishermen, from social service workers to non-profit directors. The group (originally "Beaufort 2050") met monthly, discussing the challenges and, more importantly, the opportunities facing our region: how our community could move forward more sustainably. Over the next eighteen months, their dialogue turned toward meaningful ways to implement this vision, and they began to develop a non-profit charged with this mission. They

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broadened their named audience to the Sea Islands and they brought me on board to launch the organization. As Executive Director of Sea Islands 2050, I now have the privilege of helping steer the work of this inspired group of people.

Sea Islands 2050's mission is to develop, advocate, and implement the goals and supporting strategies needed to achieve full-spectrum sustainability. Partnering with local organizations, parallel initiatives, key stakeholders, and fellow communities, Sea Islands 2050 cultivates collective investment in a common vision, focusing on the critical environmental, social, and economic issues impacting the long-term potential of our region and its citizens, present and future.

Put simply, our objective is to help our community achieve full-spectrum sustainability by the year 2050.

Sounds ambitious. So what *is* sustainability, exactly?

In the past, the likes of Teddy Roosevelt and Thomas Jefferson spoke about the topic, and rhetoric for its importance stretches back to the earliest days of our democracy. Today, left-wing radicals and right-wing extremists alike co-opt the idea with self-legitimizing connotations.

But in simplest terms, sustainability describes the environmental *and* social *and* economic longevity of a community: the capacity of a place to endure. A favorite anonymous quote says:

"Sustainability is acting, with good grace, like we plan to stay."

There is perhaps no better way to describe a proper Southern sustainability, one that honors three centuries of past while respecting just as many years into our future.

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