

# The Beaufort Gazette

## Wins for the environment a challenge for 2017

*The Editorial Board*

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- To see what it will take to protect Beaufort County's environment in 2017, we need only look at two successes of 2016.

In June, the state legislature passed the "Shoreline Bill" to keep people from building too close to the ocean.

The legislation was years in the making, and is considered the state's strongest shoreline management tool in a quarter of a century. It permanently sets a baseline along the shore to stop foolish construction ever closer to the powerful ocean waves.

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The policy of retreat was established with the Beachfront Management Act of 1988. But the line in the sand could move seaward, and construction has been approved for vulnerable, sandy land during temporary accretion cycles and following beach nourishment projects. In short, the 1988 law did not result in retreat from the beach and dune systems as hoped.

The new law represents an important milestone. The permanent baseline was suggested by a Blue Ribbon Committee on Shoreline Management appointed in

2010 by the board of the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. The committee, chaired by William W. “Wes” Jones Jr. of Bluffton, filed its [list of 16 recommendations](#) in 2013.

State Rep. Bill Herbkersman of Bluffton sponsored a House bill to codify the recommendations, and was a leader in the long slog to final passage of the Senate version this June.

The S.C. Environmental Law Project said: “In passing the bill, the legislature took a critical step toward protecting our public beaches, as well as human life and property, by preventing structures from being built closer to the ocean. In the face of rising sea levels, and constant development pressures, we are proud that our legislators took this decisive action.”

But in many ways, it has taken since 1988 to get that victory.

And still, pressure for development in vulnerable areas will not go away, with proposals for Bay Point Island in Beaufort County and Capt. Sam’s Spit near Kiawah Island being prime examples.

Another victory this year involved offshore oil drilling. Local governments, with Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling taking the strongest stand, played a role in a dramatic reversal in federal policy. The Coastal Conservation League based in Charleston helped organize opponents. In the spring, the Obama administration announced it had scrapped plans to open the southeast Atlantic coast to oil and gas drilling in leases tentatively set for 2017 to 2022.

That was a great grassroots victory, with communities up and down the coast objecting to its potential to ruin the economy for very little return.

But it is a temporary reprieve, a point that was hammered home this month when President Barack Obama did not include our area in the permanent drilling bans he announced for other areas.

And still threatening the coastal waters of our community is the seismic testing that precedes potential drilling. Permits for that work remain under consideration. This underwater airgun blasting is a threat to the commercial fishing industry as well as marine mammals.

As we celebrate these wins, we recognize that threats to Beaufort County’s environment — which is the backbone of the economy — are relentless. The fight

is never finished. And “seismic blasts” of intense mainland development can be a threat, just like the offshore blasts.

But we can still take a moment to recognize the victories.

And as we look to the new year, we should study the ingredients that led to these wins. They include financial donations to organizations that lead the fights on a full-time basis, perseverance, political lobbying, grassroots involvement and coalition-building that includes municipal and county leaders. Here’s to more of it in 2017.

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