



Georgia's 2018

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Glynn Environmental Coalition

GEORGIA'S COAST

Coastal Watchdog Works to Protect Communities from Toxic Pollution

INTRODUCTION:

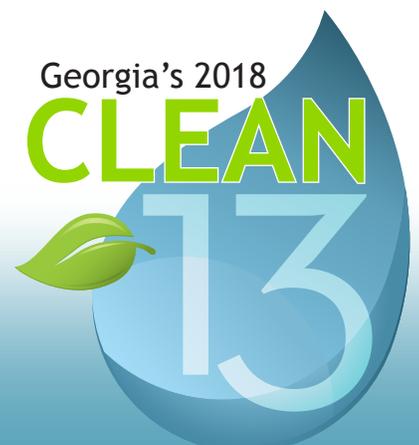
The year was 1986. Brunswick was a town of heavy industries using the water, wood and other resources of South Georgia to fuel the local economy. One morning resident Daniel Parshley woke up to a polluted yellow fog and walked outside. "I vomited off my porch because it stunk so bad," he said. "In that moment, I became a flaming environmentalist." Since then Parshley and the Glynn Environmental Coalition (GEC) have been lighting fires under the feet of industries and environmental regulators to clean up pollution and bring change throughout Georgia's beloved "marshes of Glynn" at the mouth of the Altamaha River. Forcing Georgia's Environmental Protection Division to limit air emissions as required by the federal Clean Air Act was just the beginning for Parshley. Since helping found GEC in 1990, Parshley and GEC volunteers have, among other things, monitored four Superfund sites for more than two decades, created a Safe Seafood Campaign to educate subsistence anglers and most recently helped prevent an elementary school from being built adjacent to a Superfund site.

THE WATER BODY:

Glynn County is home to the Golden Isles of Georgia, the state's most renowned and visited barrier islands—St. Simons, Sea Island, Little St. Simons and Jekyll. Hosting some 15 million visitors each year, the Georgia coast supports a tourism industry that pumps more than \$2 billion into the state's economy. Meanwhile the surrounding landscape of sand beaches, endless salt marshes and barrier islands provides habitat for 71 high priority animal species and 91 high priority plant species. The estuarine waters serve as nurseries for 70 percent of the species of fish and shellfish harvested off the Georgia coast. That commercial and recreational fishery contributes some \$400 million to Georgia's economy. In the midst of this abundance and bounty, Glynn County is also home to 17 identified hazardous waste sites, four toxic Superfund sites and an additional four actively polluting industries.

THE CLEAN:

As Daniel Parshley tells it, the Glynn Environmental Coalition started in 1990 with "just a bunch of people that cared about their community," and today, the organization is still essentially the same—neighbors advocating alongside many underserved, low-income and minority neighbors suffering under the legacy of polluting industries.





For more than two decades GEC has managed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Technical Assistant Grants designed to help residents impacted by Glynn County's four toxic Superfund sites understand the often complicated and highly technical cleanup plans. GEC experts evaluate the proposed cleanup plans and work with residents to ensure that the cleanups protect their health as well as property values and the surrounding environment.

Alarmed by the number of local residents subsisting on fish caught in waters near these sites, GEC has for some 18 years led the Safe Seafood Project, a program to educate locals about the risks of eating contaminated fish and shellfish.

GEC worked to have fish tissue analyzed, identified tainted species and fishing areas, posted warning signs and distributed written materials at local businesses and other outlets. In one instance, the organization successfully petitioned to

have a heavily polluted pond and popular fishing spot fenced to protect anglers.

Likewise, when GEC volunteers saw children playing in toxic soil at another site, they pushed EPA to install fencing and secure the site.

Earlier this year when the Glynn County School Board proposed building an elementary school adjacent to another of the county's Superfund sites, the Glynn County watchdog helped convince the Board to build the new school elsewhere.

Later this year, Parshley, a 28-year volunteer and employee of the organization will retire, leaving behind more than three decades of advocacy. He said during those years, the organization's greatest achievement is changing minds.

"We've changed the attitudes and expectations in our community," he said. "We've gone from a time when our environment was expendable for jobs to a time when our community is now sharing a vision for a future that is environmentally sound."



Top: As administrators of U.S. EPA Technical Assistance grants, GEC has helped local communities impacted by Superfund sites understand the complicated and highly technical cleanup plans. Left: GEC works with youth in communities impacted by Superfund sites. In one instance, the group protected children by demanding that a fence be placed around an area containing contaminated soils where children regularly played. Above: As part of its Safe Seafood Project, GEC worked to have fish consumption warning signs posted at popular fishing holes known to be locations where contaminated fish and shellfish could be harvested.



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