



Georgia's 2018

# CLEAN WATER HEROES

## Lodge on Little St. Simons Island

### GEORGIA'S COAST

#### Eco-Tourism Destination Protects 11,000-Acre Barrier Island

#### INTRODUCTION:

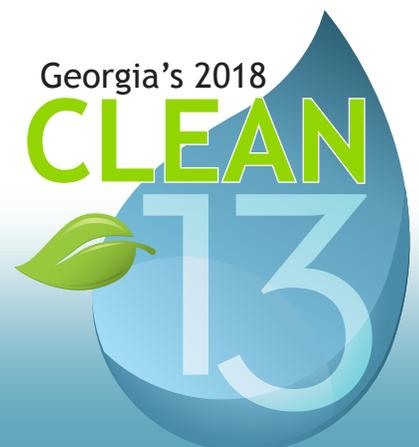
Imagine a coastal getaway with no golf courses, no tennis courts, no spas, no televisions and—God forbid—sometimes patchy and slow internet access. In Georgia, thanks to preservation of many of the state's barrier islands, many such places exist, but on Little St. Simons Island they've taken primitive, upscale eco-tourism to a new level. Accessible only by boat, the Lodge on Little St. Simons bills itself as a "sustainable island paradise." The Lodge hosts just 32 guests each night and those guests have the run of the pristine, undeveloped 11,000-acre barrier island with seven miles of beach and a staff of naturalists to lead them from turtle nests to rookeries of hundreds of water birds. Meanwhile Little St. Simons Island works to restore and sustain the island wilderness while providing researchers a place to study the barrier island ecosystem and the wildlife it supports. Among the Lodge's most recent endeavors was the successful replacement of a wooden bulkhead at its boat dock with a "living shoreline."

#### THE WATER BODY:

Georgia's 14 major barrier islands stretch 100 miles along Georgia's coast, creating a network of salt marshes, tidal creeks, oyster reefs, maritime forests and sand beaches that bring both man and animal to the edge of the sea. While the coast hosts an estimated 15 million human visitors each year, it also attracts throngs of migratory birds. In 2017, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network named the barrier islands a "landscape of hemispheric importance." The coastal estuaries are critically important habitat for important seafood like shrimp, crabs and oysters, while the salt marsh surrounding them forms the basis of the aquatic food chain. Georgia's nearly 400,000 acres of marsh grass are considered the most productive land in the state. The barrier islands also serve to buffer the mainland, protecting coastal properties from the impacts of hurricanes.

#### THE CLEAN:

Much to the delight of today's visitors, Little St. Simons Island was saved by its iconic wind-sculpted trees. The island was purchased in the early 1900s by Eagle Pencil Company owner Philip Berolzheimer who had his eyes on the island's cedar trees. But the trees, gnarled and twisted by the coastal winds, proved unsuitable for pencils.





Instead of harvesting the island's forests, Berolzheimer held on to the property to create a hunting lodge and family retreat that eventually became a resort open to the public. In the early 2000s, former U.S. treasury secretary and Goldman Sachs CEO Hank Paulson and his wife Wendy began purchasing shares of the island, eventually becoming sole owners. In 2015, the couple donated a conservation easement for the entire island to The Nature Conservancy, ensuring that the island would remain in its natural state forever.

Since then, the Lodge and multiple state, federal and private partners have worked to sustain and restore the island wilderness and its diverse wildlife populations. In 2013, the Lodge replaced a wooden bulkhead at their boat dock with a living shoreline created from 10,000 bags of oyster shells. Gone is the long man-made wooden seawall; in are native plants, a reproducing oyster bed and more fish. The project has even mitigated flooding during recent hurricanes.

It's been so successful that the Lodge is duplicating it elsewhere on the island and other partners are using it as a model for bulkhead replacements elsewhere along the coast.

The Lodge itself is a model of sustainability. Much of the food served to guests is grown on the island; food scraps are composted and returned to the same garden soil; some of the guest cottages are climate controlled through geothermal systems; and water-saving fixtures are used throughout. Each winter, the Lodge even puts its guests to work, organizing multi-day marine debris cleanups along the island's shore.

But the real star of the show is the island's beauty and wildlife enjoyed by guests and studied by visiting researchers with special attention to shorebirds, sea turtles, invasive plants and even bats.

"People are just amazed," said Bonnie Klawitter, assistant manager at the Lodge, of the island's visitors. "They are in awe that something like this exists. People connect with the island and return year after year."

Thanks to the vision of the Lodge on Little St. Simons Island, year after year, they will return to an unspoiled wilderness.



*Top: Georgia's 14 barrier islands like Little St. Simons create a network of salt marshes, tidal creeks, oyster reefs, maritime forests and sand beaches that attract some 15 million visitors each year. Above: Prior to the construction of a "living shoreline," a wooden bulkhead fronted the water at the Lodge on Little St. Simons Island. Now, that same area looks like this. The project has improved fish habitat and created a reproducing oyster bed.*



#### For More Information Contact:

Scott Coleman, Ecological Manager, Lodge on Little St. Simons Island, 888-733-5774, [scottc@littlessi.com](mailto:scottc@littlessi.com)  
Jen Hilburn, Altamaha Riverkeeper, 912-441-3908, [jen@altamahariverkeeper.org](mailto:jen@altamahariverkeeper.org)