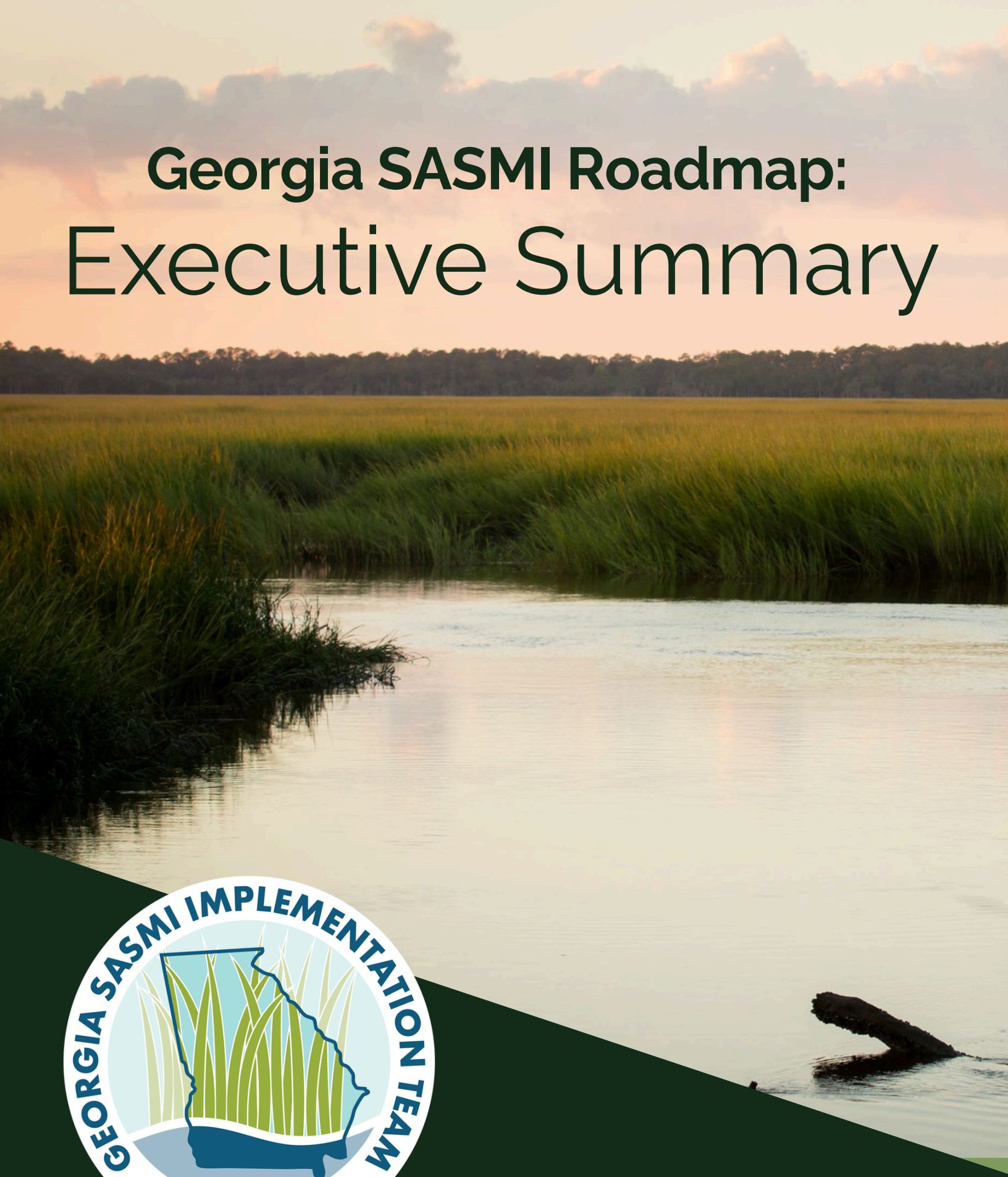
Georgia SASMI Roadmap:
Executive Summary



GEORGIA SASMI IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

March 2026

The South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative

The state of Georgia has an estimated 368,000 acres of salt marsh across our coastline, which makes up more than a third of the connected marsh habitat corridor along the coast of the southeastern United States. However, marsh habitats in Georgia are facing severe threats of drowning due to sea level rise.

The South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI) is a voluntary coalition that aims to bring together government agencies, members of academia, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations to:

- *Protect* and *restore* the health and functions of existing salt marshes, and
- *Conserve* marsh migration corridors and remove or retrofit barriers to ensure salt marshes can shift as sea levels rise.

All across the state of Georgia, people are invested in the protection, restoration, and conservation of salt marsh ecosystems. In the Georgia SASMI Roadmap, we consolidate the efforts and knowledge of communities, field experts, and other stakeholders to guide salt marsh protection strategies with recommended actions.

Models projecting sea level rise across Georgia's coast are clear: marshes need conserved areas in which they can migrate. In this plan, we identify many of the key marsh migration areas that should be prioritized for conservation and recommend nature-based practices that facilitate marsh migration. By coordinating and listening to community and stakeholder voices, we also identify current programs and partners addressing salt marsh issues across the state and recommend specific actions to fill gaps that prevent achieving SASMI goals in Georgia.

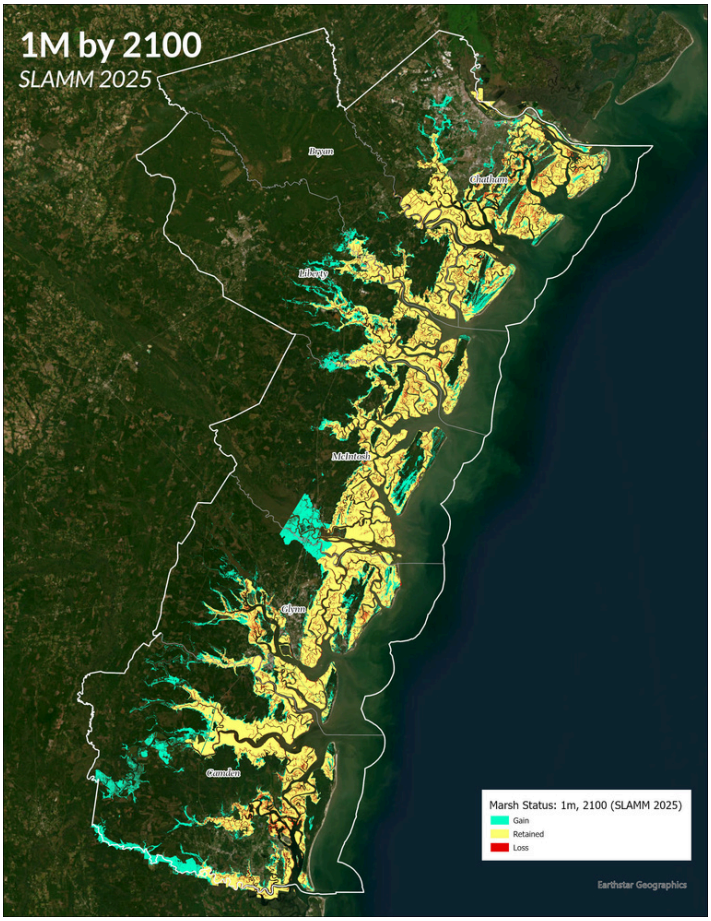
Utilizing nature-based practices and advancing recommended strategies and programs, we can work together to “Marsh Forward” in Georgia and protect, restore and conserve the benefits of these ecosystems for centuries.

Sapelo Island, GA

Explore the full Georgia SASMI Roadmap via StoryMap:

To submit questions, comments, or resources for the Georgia SASMI Implementation Team, contact sasmi@gaconservancy.org

Marshland Conservation Assessment

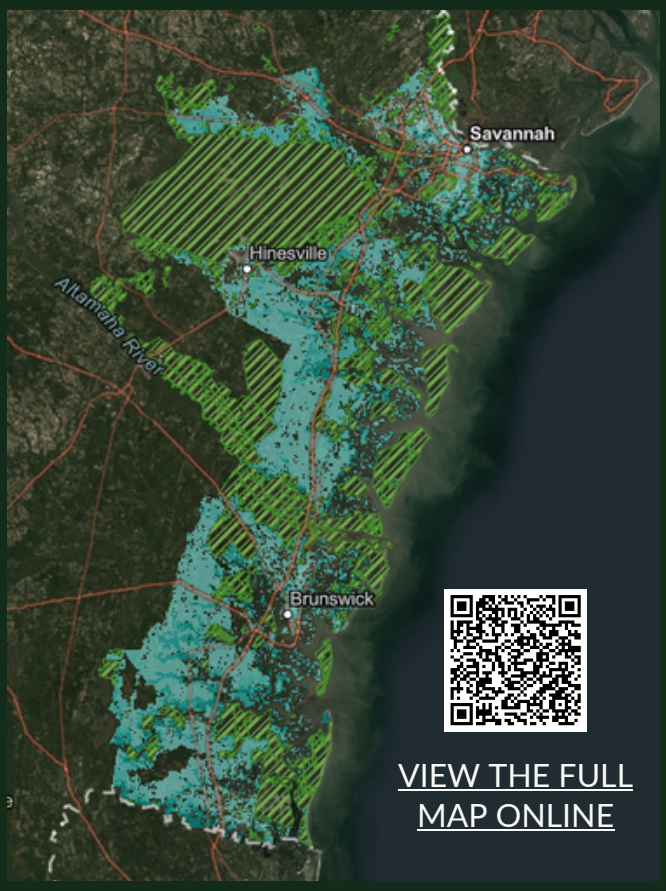


Sea Level Rise in Georgia:

SLAMM, or Sea Level Affecting Marshes Model, is a predictive model that charts how salt marshes will change in the future. The model uses inputs like sea level rise rates, sedimentation rates, and elevation to project how marshland habitats are most likely to shift across the landscape over time. Historical and recent measurements of sea levels indicate 1 meter of sea level rise is expected by 2100 (1m SLR, 2100), and these model parameters form the groundwork for Georgia's SASMI efforts.

The marsh migration corridors - areas of marsh gain predicted under the 1m SLR, 2100 conditions - serve as the basis for the analysis, prioritization, and action plan of the GA-SASMI team. Currently, less than 35% of the land in the marsh migration corridor is conserved.

See the full results of our Georgia SLAMM analysis in Chapter 2: Marshland Conservation Assessment



VIEW THE FULL MAP ONLINE

Georgia SASMI Conservation Priorities:

The Georgia SASMI Implementation Team collaborated to develop the Georgia SASMI Conservation Priorities Map, which scores 25 acre geographic units within Georgia's coastal counties based on their priority for conservation as a marsh migration corridor.

This prioritization is intended to serve as a blueprint for conservation agencies and local governments juggling marsh conservation and development goals. This map can be used as a tool to prioritize certain areas for conservation, while directing future development to other areas that are least vulnerable, protecting both our coastal marshland and vulnerable near-marsh communities.

Restoration Practices

After coordinating and engaging with numerous restoration and conservation professionals across our state, the Georgia SASMI Implementation Team recommends the following nature-based practices that facilitate marsh migration and survival in the face of inevitable future sea level rise.

Martha Randolph Stevens Park, Midway, GA

Living Shorelines

A living shoreline is an erosion control technique that uses natural materials to absorb wave and tidal energy while also enhancing coastal habitats. Living shorelines:

- Support habitat growth and diversity for numerous flora and fauna
- Strengthen over time as vegetation roots and oyster reefs establish, as opposed to traditional concrete structures

Aquatic Barrier Removal

Undersized culverts block aquatic connectivity between water bodies, which reduces marsh habitat connectivity and can fragment important populations of flora and fauna. Replacing these barriers with open water options, such as bottomless box culverts and bridges, encourages the migration of marsh species in coastal aquatic habitats.

photo: Jaynie Gaskin

6th St Culvert, Tybee Island, GA

photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, DE

Beneficial Use of Dredged Material

Using dredged sediment from necessary maintenance projects can benefit eroding marsh environments by supporting sediment accretion. These practices include:

- Thin-layer placement - dredged material is placed to elevate existing marsh
- Dredge islands - sediment islands created for bird habitat, nesting, and foraging

Georgia Strategic Actions

Within the broader regional goals of SASMI, the Georgia SASMI Implementation Team hosted public and stakeholder workshops to gain feedback and identify programs and partners working to achieve SASMI actions in Georgia. Using this information, the GSIT recommends Georgia-focused strategic actions to fill the gaps in SASMI goals not currently being met by organizations or programs in our state.

Conservation

1. Conserve prioritized properties within the marsh migration corridor via fee simple purchase and conservation easements.
2. Support multiple avenues for state-level dedicated funding for conservation.
3. Coordinate with federal funding sources where priorities overlap.
4. Invest in and expand land trust capacity to protect salt marshes, with specific focus on protecting and managing coastal properties of all sizes that contain current or future priority salt marsh areas.
5. Work with private philanthropic organizations to identify and access alternative funding sources for conservation purchases and land transaction fees.
6. Focus on coastal river corridor conservation elsewhere in coastal Georgia using the Altamaha River conservation corridor success as a model for implementation.
7. Reach out to owners of priority properties in the marsh migration corridor to educate them about conservation opportunities.
8. Prioritize conservation of working lands likely to be impacted by saltwater intrusion.
9. Develop and adopt local land use policies that protect marsh migration corridors from development and leave space for future marsh migration.
10. Support the integrity of the Coastal Marshland Protection Act to sustain protections for coastal marshlands.

Restoration

1. Develop a financial incentive for private land-owners to choose nature-based solutions over hardening shorelines.
2. Investigate opportunities to engage with the wetland mitigation industry to support SASMI goals.
3. Support programs that increase the availability of raw materials for nature-based solution implementation.
4. Develop opportunities for beneficial use of sediment that sustain, create, or enhance salt marsh resilience.
5. Work with regulatory agencies to support agency staff who are regulating nature-based practices and assist applicants in their agency review process.
6. Support transportation agencies in their work to identify and prioritize removing and avoiding marsh barriers as part of their road capital improvement programs.
7. Expand the number of consultants and contractors designing and installing nature based solutions in coastal Georgia through training, education and support.
8. Update and improve access to geospatial information related to marsh health, change, and impacts.
9. Conduct additional scientific research to understand coastal salt marsh health and resilience.
10. Support the development of a standard framework for assessing marsh health in Georgia as a baseline for restoring or protecting salt marshes.
11. When scientific and geospatial data become available to provide a reliable picture of marsh health in coastal Georgia, identify areas of degraded marsh that should be prioritized for restoration.

Cross-Cutting Approaches

1. Engage private landowners and stakeholders in marsh migration corridors to collaborate on conservation opportunities and prioritize sustainable land management practices.
2. Provide training to elected officials on the consequences of “coastal squeeze” and the need to protect existing marshlands and future marsh migration corridors from development impacts.
3. Work with state and local governments to create and adopt policies to conserve future migration corridors before they are developed.
4. Coordinate and support existing efforts to educate coastal communities and visitors on coastal marshland ecology, restoration, nature-based solutions, and the importance of protecting coastal marshland.
5. Provide more opportunities for Georgians to visit and access coastal marshlands.
6. Engage private foundations and other granting agencies to align funding goals with SASMI priorities.
7. Collaborate with State and Regional agencies to incorporate marsh resilience in existing planning processes.
8. Outline strategies for engaging coastal communities, including both residents and local community-based organizations, in ongoing SASMI projects and implement opportunities for continued engagement.
9. Expand the GSIT to include more stakeholders practicing marsh conservation and restoration in public and private sectors, and develop GSIT standard communication and branding strategies that align with regional SASMI strategies.
10. Facilitate consensus building across the SASMI partnership to promote broad based support among practitioners, researchers, managers, and regulators, for activities and policies that sustain salt marsh.
11. Develop a system for GSIT to assign responsibility and track progress on these Strategic Actions and report annual on progress.

The Georgia SASMI Implementation Team

The Georgia SASMI Implementation Team (GSIT) is tasked with leading Georgia's SASMI implementation efforts and has collaboratively developed the Georgia SASMI Roadmap. The GSIT is comprised of subject matter experts ranging across SASMI's focus areas: restoration, conservation, research & emerging technologies, coordination, and education & outreach.

Thank you to the following contributing members:

- Georgia Conservancy: Courtney Reich, Luben Raytchev, Michaela Master, Monet Murphy, Brian Foster, Sarah Roney
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Resources Division: Meghan Angelina Chrisp, Jaynie Gaskin, Jan Mackinnon, Jennifer Kline
- Georgia Institute of Technology, CEAR Hub: Jill Gambill
- Georgia Southern University: Christine Hladik
- Georgia-Alabama Land Trust: Hal Robinson
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): Ian Rossiter
- Ogeechee Riverkeeper: Damon Mullis
- One Hundred Miles: Jazz Watts
- Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve: Brittany Dodge
- Savannah State University, NOAA Fisheries: Dionne Hoskins-Brown
- The Nature Conservancy: Christi Lambert, Ashby Worley
- University of Georgia Institute for Resilient Infrastructure Systems: Ben Carswell
- University of Georgia Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant: Michelle Covi, Sydney Williams
- US Army Corps of Engineers: Jared Lopes
- US Fish and Wildlife Service: Nathan Hawkuluk, Craig Faulhaber (*Atlantic Coast Joint Venture*)