

## GEORGIA BARRIER ISLAND RESIDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF VULNERABILITY TO SEA-LEVEL RISE

*Dean Hardy, Center for Geospatial Research, University of Georgia*

Georgia's mean sea level has risen approximately eight inches since the 1930s at a rate approximately one-and-a-half times faster than global mean sea level. This faster rate is consistent with estimates of spatial variation in future global mean sea level rise that predict Georgia being in a higher-than-average zone.

While most of Georgia's 14 barrier islands are undeveloped, for those islands with developed areas the accelerated rate of sea-level rise could have significant consequences for current residents and their descendants. What local residents know about climate change and sea-level rise will affect their interest in addressing it through actions such as building resilience and adaptation planning. However, more important than knowing about rising seas is having the capacity to take action. I present qualitative findings from 40 semi-structured interviews and ethnographic participant observation for nine months of fieldwork on Sapelo and Tybee Islands regarding resident's knowledge and concerns about how sea-level rise may affect their communities. Given the relatively small sizes of Tybee and Sapelo Island populations and economies from an outsider (i.e. federal or state) perspective, the ability to adapt rather than abandon becomes embroiled with not only questions of social, political, and economic capital, but more specifically with questions of race and class. Preliminary findings suggest that many residents underestimate their elevation above high tide and that they are generally unaware of the possibility of their children and grandchildren losing their inheritance from rising seas. Initial analyses further suggest potential disparities in knowledge and capacity to take action.