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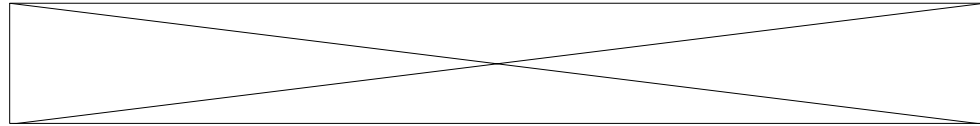
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In Coastal Georgia: Expect 844,000 residents by 2030

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A Georgia Tech report predicts half again as many coastal Georgians by 2030

If you're planning to stick around coastal Georgia, you'd better move over.

About half again as many people are expected to populate the coast by 2030, according to a report commissioned by the Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center.

Over the next two decades, the report predicts, Georgia's six coastal counties and the next tier of four inland counties will grow to about 844,000 people.

Georgia Tech's Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development produced the report, in which population projections outstrip those from the State of Georgia Office of Planning and Budget.

The report combined data from the 2000 U.S. Census with more recent information, including building permits and certificates of occupancy from nine of the 10 counties, said Jason Barringer, research scientist with the Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development.

Don't look to local maternity wards to supply all those new people.

Instead, it's a previous baby boom that will contribute migrants from other parts of the country. Retiring baby boomers, to be exact.

"Most of the new growth will be from in-migration," Barringer said. "We're seeing a lot of retirees move in. Also both bases (King's Bay and Fort Stewart) bring in a lot of people."

Several million baby boomers will retire in the next seven to 10 years, said Vernon Martin, executive director of the Coastal Georgia RDC. Those from the Northeast see coastal Georgia's average home price of 260,000 as a bargain. Those who suffered through recent hurricane seasons in Florida see Georgia's coast, perhaps mistakenly, as protected.

"People who lived in Florida got those four or five storms. And there's overcrowding," he said. "Demographers call them half backs. They move to Florida and then move halfway back."

Population numbers are pivotal to funding formulas for federal and state monies for items such as roads and schools.

That's why the RDC funded the 50,000 study from an academic center. It expects to work with Georgia Tech to update the predictions every two years.

"We need something that's defensible about what population is now and what it's projected to be in the next 20 years," Martin said.

Population also plays into other resources controlled by the state, such as ground water, which is already a hot button issue for developers in coastal Georgia.

Higher populations will make the job of allocating water use and waste water discharge permits even more difficult, according to Nap Caldwell, senior planning and policy advisor at the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

"It's safe to say it's a new day in how we handle wastewater in Chatham and Effingham even without growth," he said. "Place growth on top of that and you've got some challenges."

Politicians often love positive growth projections. In fact, Chatham County Commission Chairman Pete Liakakis has only one complaint about the report: It may have underestimated growth in Savannah and Chatham County.

"It can, if it's the Mercury Milan with SYNC."

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Just look at all the new houses popping up on the county's west side, said Liakakis, who is also on the board of the Coastal Georgia RDC.

But not everyone thinks more is necessarily better.

Growth on Tybee worries council member Paul Wolff.

"It's crucial we not allow the kind of development that's been done here to continue because of its cumulative effect on water quality," he said.

A recently published study from Peter Verity of the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography showed declining water quality in the Skidaway River estuary. The data stood on its head a long held paradigm that Georgia's estuaries, with their twice-daily flushing from high tides, could never get to a low oxygen state.

Verity spoke to a Tybee neighborhood group earlier this month and fingered coastal development as a large part of the problem.

"We've had a frontier mentality and that works as long as the population density is low," Verity said. "The way daddy did it is not good anymore."

Newcomers, especially those who have seen environmental degradation in the Northeast, may want to do things differently, according to Will Berson, a policy analyst with the Georgia Conservancy, who himself hails from New Jersey.

"They've seen the first order mistakes," he said. "You may see these come-heres with some pretty definite views about what should happen in land use, planning and the environment that may surprise people."

Increase in population

County name	2000 population	2030 population	percent increase
Bryan	23,417	45,986	96
Bulloch	55,983	82,111	47
Camden	43,664	70,997	63
Chatham	232,048	307,472	32.5
Effingham	37,535	79,935	113
Glynn	67,568	100,483	49
Liberty	61,610	89,163	45
Long	10,304	22,607	119
McIntosh	10,847	18,626	71
Screven	15,374	26,779	74

City	2000 population	2030 population	percent increase
Bryan County			
Richmond Hill	6,959	14,825	113
Pembroke	2,379	4,672	96
Bulloch County			
Brooklet	1,113	1,632	47
Portal	597	876	47
Register	164	241	47
Statesboro	22,698	33,291	47
Camden County			
Kingsland	10,506	18,996	81
St. Marys	13,761	22,589	64
Woodbine	1,218	1,980	62.5
Chatham County			
Bloomingdale	2,665	3,531	32.5
Garden City	11,289	14,958	32.5
Pooler	6,239	12,902	107
Port Wentworth	3,276	4,341	32.5
Savannah	131,510	174,256	32.5
Thunderbolt	2,340	3,101	32.5
Tybee Island	3,392	4,495	32.5
Vernonburg	138	183	32.6
Effingham County			
Guyton	917	2,901	216
Springfield	1,821	3,878	113
Rincon	4,376	10,319	136
Glynn County			
Brunswick	15,600	23,200	49
Liberty County			
Hinesville	30,392	43,984	45
Allenhurst	788	1,140	45
Flemington	369	534	45
Midway	1,100	1,592	45
Riceboro	736	1,065	45
Walthourville	4,030	5,832	45
Long County			
Ludowici	1,440	3,159	119
McIntosh County			
Darien	1,719	2,952	71.7
Screven County			
Hiltonia	421	733	74
Newington	322	561	74
Oliver	253	441	74
Rocky Ford	186	324	74
Sylvania	2,675	4,659	71.7

Source: Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center

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