



# SOUTH ATLANTIC SALT MARSH INITIATIVE

The South Atlantic coast is home to an expansive network of salt marsh and tidal creeks covering over a million acres. Filling and draining with saltwater as the tides ebb and flow, the salt marsh safeguards coastal communities and military installations from storm energy and floodwaters and serves as vital habitat for the fish and wildlife that support coastal businesses, state economies, and a unique way of life. The [Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability \(SERPPAS\)](#) is working together with diverse partners from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida and beyond to conserve this great expanse of salt marsh, helping it move with rising waters and ensuring its benefits for future generations.

## Why Are Salt Marshes Important?

Salt marshes are the ecological guardians of the coast, providing natural protection and resilience benefits valued at about \$1.8 million/km<sup>2</sup> per year. Marshes also reduce erosion, stabilize shorelines, filter upland runoff, and, along with other coastal wetlands, moderate the climate by absorbing almost 8.1 million tons of carbon dioxide in the U.S. each year. Salt marshes support popular species, such as redfish, blue crab, and black duck that are crucial to recreational and commercial fishing, hunting, birding, and related coastal businesses.

The salt marsh that protects South Atlantic communities and military installations faces increasing pressures from rising seas and poorly planned developments. For example, without proper planning to allow for its natural movement inland to higher ground as sea level rises, salt marsh will drown and its benefits to coastal populations will be lost. Preserving the connectedness of this ecosystem is vital. Regional, interstate collaboration is needed to conserve the 1-million acre stretch of economically and ecologically valuable salt marsh.

## How the Initiative Works

The South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI) uses a voluntary, collaborative, and non-regulatory approach that complements each state's existing programs to conserve the South Atlantic salt marsh. The initiative is inspired by the successful regional conservation effort known as America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative. Using that approach, SERPPAS will bring together additional local, state, and federal interests, scientists, non-governmental organizations, coastal communities, public and private landowners, and other interested stakeholders to develop and implement an integrated, coordinated, and focused regional conservation plan. A diverse Steering Committee will oversee the conservation plan development. A larger Salt Marsh Coalition of regional salt marsh experts and relevant stakeholders will be involved through the plan's development, including attending a collaborative, cross-discipline workshop. The workshop will be held in early 2022 and will build the framework for the conservation plan. The initiative will add value to ongoing efforts and help achieve landscape-scale conservation of one of the last vast areas of salt marsh in the United States, nearly the size of Grand Canyon National Park.

### WHAT IS SERPPAS?

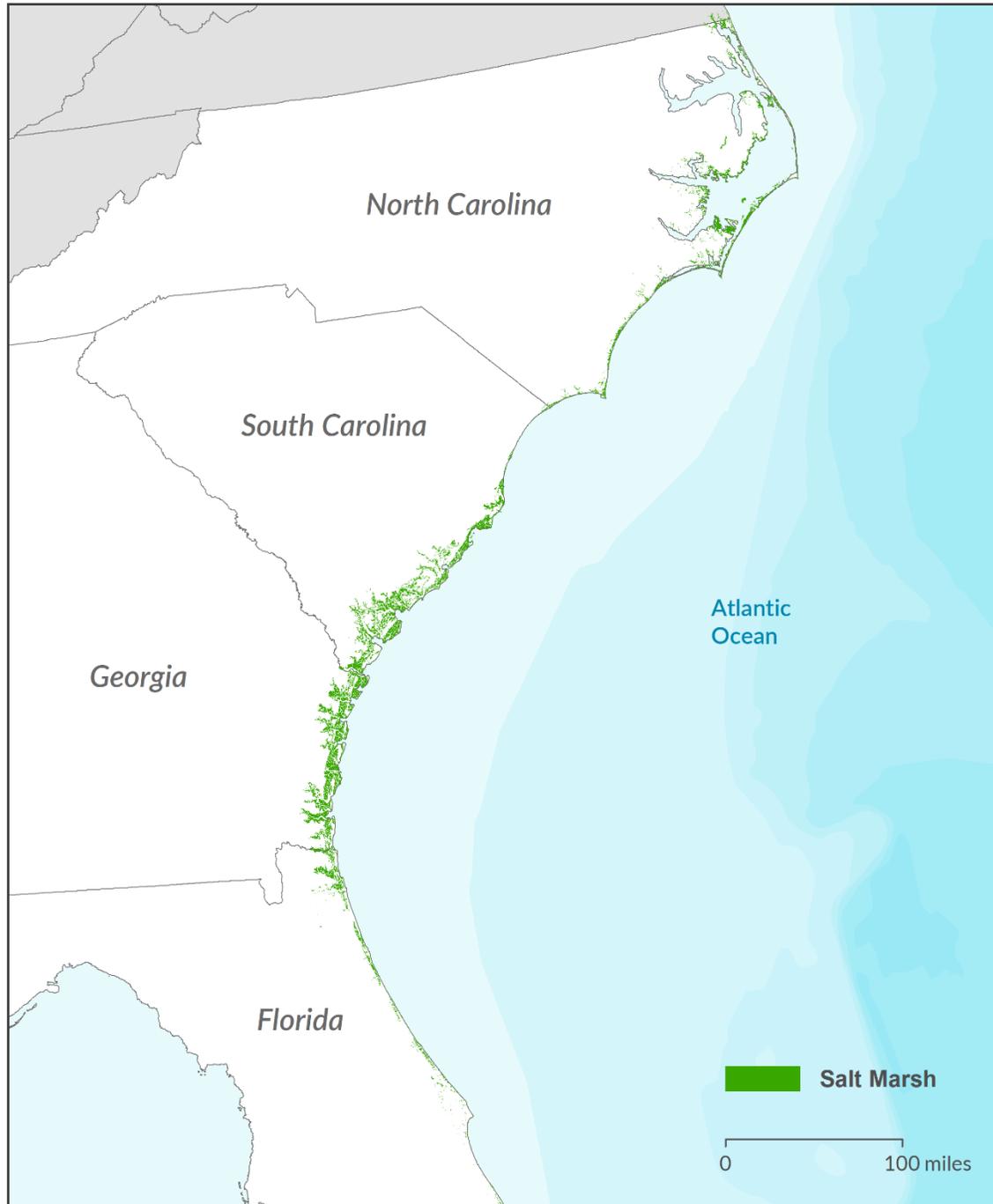
The [Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability \(SERPPAS\)](#) is a voluntary collaboration among leaders from natural resources, working lands and environmental protection agencies from the Southeastern states of NC, SC, GA, FL, AL and MS; regional leaders from their federal agency counterparts; and leaders from the Department of Defense and the military services in the Southeast. Formed in 2005, SERPPAS is an unconventional partnership that harnesses strategic planning and collaborative decision-making between public and private partners to support the military mission, conserve key habitats and species, sustain rural economies and industries, and foster better coordination among local, state, and federal stakeholders in the region.





## How to Get Involved:

To learn more about the SERPPAS South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative and potential opportunities to get involved, please contact the SERPPAS South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative Coordinator, Mallory Eastland, located in Greenville, NC. Phone: 936-788-3548 and email: [mallory.eastland@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mallory.eastland@ag.tamu.edu)



SOURCE: US Fish and Wildlife Service; US Census; Natural Earth.

