



Community Resource Development  
TIMELY INFORMATION

ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE/AUBURN UNIVERSITY/AUBURN, ALABAMA

## ISSUES & GOALS FOR COASTAL ALABAMA

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### Sea Grant Advisory Service

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## INTRODUCTION

The Alabama coastal area includes approximately 780 miles of shore line on the Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi Sound, and Mobile Bay. A wide range of geographical features are found along this shoreline including sandy beaches, tidal marshes, and mud flats. Because of the topographic variations found along the coast, a number of discrete, identifiable, land use areas have developed. These include sections devoted to commercial fishing, seafood processing, and boatbuilding; sections with a heavy concentration of industrial plants; sections that have developed into commercial and business areas; sections which are primarily used for recreation, tourism and conservation-oriented activities; and, sections used primarily as residential areas. Additional distinctions can be made between urban and rural areas, with obvious differences between the metropolitan Mobile area and the undeveloped rural areas of both Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

Due to the wide diversity of both geographic features and economic and land use characteristics, it is understandable that numerous conflicting viewpoints have developed among groups competing for the use of the resources. It is because of these conflicts, both actual and potential, that the Alabama Coastal Area Board (CAB) has such an important role to play in attempting to resolve the present issues as well as those which may arise in the future.

The Coastal Area Board members are committed to consideration of not only the short-term effects, but also the long-term results of present and proposed actions on the environment, economy, and development of coastal Alabama. This study is one facet of their attempt to determine the problems, questions and issues that are perceived as the most important areas of concern by the residents of the State of Alabama.

As stated by the CAB in the premiere issue of Coastline, the agency newsletter, "A well-considered coastal management plan can assist the people of the coastal area in achieving the dual goals of economic prosperity and natural resource protection. This program should encourage economic growth along with providing safeguards for our environment."

### Public Comment and Input

In an effort to obtain public input to help provide guidance in the formulation of the coastal area program, the CAB and the Alabama Sea Grant Advisory Service, a unit of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, cooperated in a public affairs educational

program. The Advisory Service prepared, disseminated, compiled and tabulated responses to a "Public Comment Form on Issues, Goals, and Objectives for the Alabama Coastal Area Board." Advisory Service personnel also conducted a series of public meetings at which they presented an explanation of the goals, objectives, and issues that had tentatively been proposed by the CAB staff.

The Cooperative Extension Service does not assume an advocacy position, but rather presents an unbiased representation of the known facts; no advocacy role was assumed by the Sea Grant Advisory Service in relation to this project. All announcements, presentations, and publications were made in an effort to educate the public on the function and responsibilities of the CAB and to solicit public input to be used to help the Board in the formulation and determination of the issues to be confronted, and to help identify the appropriate goals and objectives of the Board.

#### PROCEDURE

The Advisory Service provided forms, materials and equipment used in this study, developed the format used and processed responses to the proposed issues, goals and objectives of the CAB, provided newspaper, radio, and television publicity for both the project and the public meeting workshop presentations, arranged for processing of replies by the University of South Alabama Computer Center, and provided the necessary localized expertise to coordinate these efforts. The cooperation of Extension Service County Agent Coordinators in both Mobile and Baldwin Counties played a major role in achieving support and media exposure for the project.

Advisory Service efforts in this project can logically be divided into three differing, but complementary, aspects that made up the total package of services provided. These are: a public comment form; public participation workshop sessions; and, the compilation and reporting of responses received by mail and at the workshop sessions.

#### Public Comment Form Mailing

Forms requesting public comment on the proposed and/or potential issues, goals, and objectives of the CAB were sent to those persons on the CAB mailing list. This mailing consisted of 578 pieces and was made on March 10, 1978. Additional mailings to 32 individuals were made upon request of CAB staff and/or in response to telephone requests by those individuals. Respondents were asked to assign a numerical ranking to the priority they believed the Coastal Area Board should give to each specific issue, goal, or objective. The numerical system used included these categories: 3 = high priority, 2 = moderate priority, 1 = low priority, and 0 = not an issue to be considered by the Board, or 0 = not a valid goal or objective for the Board, as appropriate. Space for comment and listing of other issues, goals, or objectives was provided at the end of each subsection.

All replies received in the Advisory Service office on or before April 15, 1978 were included in results presented. A total of 153 responses are included in the results section of this report; mail responses were received from 129 persons and the workshop sessions produced 24 completed public comment forms. A response percentage of 21.2 was obtained from the mailing list furnished by the CAB. Because of the selectivity of the CAB list, it was expected that a higher proportion of those contacted would respond. However, the relatively low response may be partly attributable to the decline in the controversy that surrounded the formative stages of the Alabama Coastal Area Board, especially the enabling legislation and the boundary designations. Since that time, the CAB concept has become better understood and more acceptable to area residents.

### Public Workshop Sessions

Six Coastal Area Board Workshops were conducted by the Sea Grant Advisory Service in an attempt to stimulate public input in the formulation of the issues, goals, and objectives to be addressed by the Board. These workshops were held in Gulf Shores, Bay Minette, and Foley in Baldwin County and in Bayou La Batre, downtown Mobile, and north Mobile in Mobile County. Five sessions were scheduled in early evening hours to enable persons to attend without interference with their working schedule. One Mobile session was held in mid-afternoon to provide those unable to attend the evening sessions an opportunity to respond if they desired to do so.

Presentations at each of the meetings included the use of an overhead and slide projector to provide visual reinforcement to the explanation of the CAB's proposed goals, objectives, and issues. The presentations lasted approximately one hour, after which those attending were asked to complete the public comment form. Members of the CAB staff attended these workshops and assisted in answering questions on the function and role of the CAB.

Although the workshop sessions were publicized on radio and television through the efforts of the Local Extension Service County Agent-Coordinators in both counties and newspaper announcements in both the daily and weekly newspapers, attendance was limited. All persons who were mailed a copy of the public comment form also received a workshop schedule.

The entire series of workshops had an attendance of 40 persons; 24 of those attending completed public comment forms during the session and possibly other completed forms were returned by mail. All responses obtained as a result of these workshops are included in the tabulation of results of this study. They have been incorporated in the main body of responses and have not been treated in any particular manner.

The attitudes and questions of those attending the workshops reflected in general an interest and an understanding of the CAB's role. Most of the questions asked reflected individual or neighborhood type concerns and dealt with specific instances and cases

rather than broad policy areas. The principal reaction of those present appeared to be one of approval for the fact that an attempt was being made to involve the public in an overall policy formulation process for the Board.

### Computer Analysis

All replies to the public comment form were processed through the Advisory Service office, screened, and responses under "other information desired" coded to provide the degree of uniformity required for computer processing, and then delivered to the University of South Alabama Computer Center for tabulation and frequency analysis. Confidentiality of all responses to the public comment form has been assured by the incorporation of individual responses on punched cards with no identification of the respondent.

Frequency of response for each question was tabulated in the following way: Total frequency of responses for all persons taking part in the study, frequency of response for residents of Baldwin County, frequency of response for residents of Mobile County, responses of those persons owning property within the 10-foot contour, responses of those persons not owning property within the 10-foot contour, responses from persons living in an incorporated town or city, and responses from persons not living in an incorporated town or city.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The information contained in this report is not to be construed as being drawn from a statistically valid sampling of any population; the results shown herein are based only on replies received from persons who either attended the public meetings or whose names appeared on the list of interested persons furnished by the CAB. No claims are intended or implied for the statistical validity of the data presented other than an accurate representation of the replies of those persons responding to the invitation to comment.

### Profile of Respondents

Of the replies received, 114 persons or approximately 75 percent were residents of one of Alabama's coastal counties. Replies from 66 Baldwin County residents made up 43 percent of all replies; Mobile County residents accounted for 48 of the responses or 30 percent of those completing the form. Eighty-four percent of those living in the coastal counties indicated that they had been living in a coastal county for more than five (5) years.

Almost 83 percent of those respondents who indicated their sex were male. The 30-49 year old age group made up the largest portion of the replies received and accounted for 48 percent of all



Tank Use. The issue receiving the greatest frequency of high priority responses was Beach and Dune Protection (67.3%). Several other issues were also considered extremely important. Over 50 percent of all respondents considered the following of high priority: Spoil Disposal (52.3%), Oil Exploration and Extraction (54.2%), Beach Access (53.6%), Wildlife Protection (57.5%), Wetland Protection (62.7%), and Point Source Discharge (58.8%).

#### Variation in Responses among Groups

This discussion centers primarily on variations in responses made by the coastal (10-foot contour) landowner and the non-landowner groups, and the respondents living in Baldwin County as compared with the Mobile County residents. The variations discussed are not all inclusive, but include some of the more widely divergent responses.

Obvious differences between responses made by residents of Baldwin and Mobile Counties occurred in numerous instances. In many cases, these differing opinions might have been predicted due to the localization of the issues, goals and objectives involved and the agricultural-industrial polarization that exists between the two counties. For example, Mobile County residents gave much higher priority to several industrially-oriented issues such as the Theodore Industrial Park development, Air Pollution and a Central Permitting Information Center for new industry.

On the questions concerning proposed goals and objectives for the CAB, substantially higher percentages of Mobile County respondents thought that the following goals and objectives merited higher priority than did their Baldwin County counterparts: continued development of a strong economic base for the Coastal Area, facilitation of permitting requirements for industrial development, ensuring high levels of air and water quality in the Coastal Area, institution of a water management program, and enforcement of coastal air quality standards. Primarily these goals and objectives are all closely connected with industrial development as might be expected in the more highly industrialized Mobile County area.

Predictably, a higher percentage of Baldwin County replies accorded high priority to amending tax policies to reduce pressure to convert agricultural land to urban or industrial development.

Several cases of wide difference in opinion between the residents of the two counties are not readily explained by the earlier comments. Cases in point include a larger percentage of Mobile County residents who felt that Solar Energy Activities were not an issue to be considered by the Board, the smaller percentage of Baldwin Countians who believed that Non-point Source Pollution was an issue for the Board, and the lower percentage of Baldwin County replies that considered Hazard Management as a high priority goal or objective for the CAB.



Variation in responses was also evident between the owners of land within the 10-foot contour and those who did not own property within the 10-foot contour. In each of the following cases a larger percentage of non-landowners than landowners felt that the Board should place high priority on these goals and objectives: assure public access to appropriate coastal areas, public recreational use consistent with natural resource protection, reduction of beach and channel erosion, preservation of marshes and estuaries, coordination of local zoning ordinances and building permits with the coastal management program, and coordination of regulatory and research activities of the various governmental agencies in the Coastal Area.

However, those respondents who owned property within the CAB boundary placed a high priority on these issues, goals, and objectives: commercial fishing, development of a strong economic base, development of the Port of Mobile as a major transportation center, and encouragement of positive actions to take advantage of trade opportunities to be derived from the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway.

#### SUMMARY

Two general areas of polarization are highlighted by the results of this study; major differences are related to the questions of coastal property ownership and economic orientation of the respondents.

The most apparent difference in attitude exists between individuals owning land within the 10-foot contour and those not owning property within this boundary. Non-property owners desire to retain a large degree of public access to coastal areas, the preservation or protection of natural resources, marshes, and estuaries, and indicate a willingness to accept regulation and control of activities within the Coastal Area. This group appears to strongly favor the public use of coastal beaches, marshes, and other areas.

The property owners, however, are less than enthusiastic about this prospect; they tend to favor activities that will enable them to gain an economic benefit from land ownership. Public access and private ownership seem to be two mutually exclusive concepts; unless some equitable and acceptable method of compensation for private landowners who use their holdings for the public good is adopted, this conflict seems destined to continue.

The second major point of attitudinal difference occurs because of the industrial-commercial orientation of Mobile County and the essentially non-industrial or agricultural orientation of Baldwin County. Due to the differences in the size of the population of Mobile and Baldwin Counties and the established residential/agricultural/tourism composition of Baldwin County in comparison to the more urban/industrial/commercial makeup of Mobile County, this difference in attitudes and beliefs should be recognized by the Board.

