

# The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership

## *Building Collaborative Action for Shorebird Conservation*

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Dr. Rob Clay, Director  
Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Executive Office  
Manomet  
P.O. Box 1770  
Manomet, MA 02345

Dear Dr. Clay,

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Council supports the nomination of Georgia Barrier Islands as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Landscape of Hemispheric Importance. It is exciting to see that the Georgia coastal partners have positioned this unique region to receive this important designation that will help highlight the area's significance to shorebirds and will provide leverage for increased support to continue the great work being done to protect and manage coastal habitats for shorebirds and other natural resources. The nominator and partners provide a thorough nomination package and there is broad support for the nomination among the partners. A few comments and questions follow that we believe would strengthen the nomination. No response to the USSCP Council on these inquiries is needed.

At first glance, we were surprised to see a number of important areas (e.g., Little Tybee, Ossabaw, and Sapelo Islands) not included in the nomination but realize there may be political or management reasons for their absence. Given some overlap with the current Altamaha River Delta WHSRN site designation, we assume it will be merged into the new landscape designation. With respect to the landscape designation, were the presented numbers derived only from the sites included in the landscape nomination or from the entire coast? Although the hemispheric importance designation focuses on two populations that mainly occur on beaches and associated sand/mud flats, we assume the landscape also includes the extensive salt marsh system.

The biological support for the ranking of hemispheric importance for *rufa* Red Knots seems warranted. It was interesting to note that the majority of Red Knots are from the northern wintering population, which implies that virtually all of this population stops over in Georgia during the fall. Even if this estimate is biased high (or if the total population size estimate is low), it seems likely that the Georgia Barrier Islands do support >30% of the current *rufa* Red Knot population.

A plausible case is also made for supporting >30% of the biogeographic population of the Great Lakes population of Piping Plover. Although this might be a small number of birds (61) to designate a landscape of "hemispheric importance", the combination of use by Red Knots and

other species strengthens the case. Data on the international importance of the Georgia Barrier Islands (>10% of a biogeographic population) for Black-bellied Plover, American Oystercatcher, and Short-billed Dowitcher are reliable. Why were Whimbrel (*N. p. hudsonicus*) and Dunlin (*C. a. hudsonia*) not included in this section? It should be noted that the estimate for passage American Oystercatcher assumes that every oystercatcher bound for Florida (and beyond) stops over in Georgia.

The nomination includes an impressive level of participation and support from a wide variety of local partners, organizations and agencies. The participation and support of the Georgia Shorebird Alliance and its role in developing the Site Assessment Tool for the landscape lend a great deal of strength to the nomination.

Overall, the nomination packet highlights the unique status of the Georgia coast in that much of it is protected in various ways and managed for shorebird and other natural resources. The new designation of almost the entire barrier island system in the state will provide an important platform for raising awareness and increasing support for shorebird conservation in coastal Georgia and beyond.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Penner II

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