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## Port Royal Sound estuary needs broad protection

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We thank Dick and Sharon Stewart of Beaufort for giving \$100,000 to the cause of protecting the Port Royal Sound watershed.

The Stewarts hope it will kick-start other contributions to the Port Royal Sound Fund they created to improve the health of the estuary system and encourage sustainable development and redevelopment practices.

The fund, administered by the Coastal Community Foundation serving several Lowcountry counties out of its Charleston headquarters, has other notable goals.

It also hopes to eventually award grants to conservation-minded programs and projects and help teach elementary students about the estuary.

The Stewarts' donation shines a light on a number of important issues for an ecologically sensitive area that spans roughly from St. Helena Sound south to the Savannah River:

- The need for an estuary-wide look at what is happening to the waterways. We must do more regional planning. It must be wider in scope than individual government jurisdictional lines because the waterways that underpin the economy do not recognize those boundaries. Also, municipal and county governments must look at development projects in the aggregate, making decisions based on the cumulative impact on the environment.
- The need for more involvement and concern from the business community, particularly land developers. Dick Stewart is founder and chief executive officer of 303 Associates, perhaps best known for developing the mixed-use Beaufort Town Center along Boundary Street. All business leaders must understand that their bottom line depends on thriving natural resources, and they must be key players in protecting those resources. It's got to be about more than quarterly statements and how many dollars can be milked from each half-acre.
- The need for more education about the estuary, from children to retirees. If they know about it and experience it firsthand, they will care about it. And if they care about it, they will protect it. This must be a constant process because we have so many newcomers, and for many of them, the environment of Beaufort and Jasper counties is not at all like the environment back home.
- The need for individuals to act. Individual decisions on landscaping, water use, septic systems, boating behavior, lawn chemicals -- even cleaning up after the pet dog -- make a huge difference. Each individual in the watershed must contribute something positive each day.

Protecting the Port Royal Sound estuary first came to the fore in 1969 when a small band of local residents began to question plans for a mammoth BASF chemical plant on the Colleton River near Bluffton. It would have done untold damage to Port Royal Sound, but it was stopped against long odds.

After that fight, which was divisive in this community, people began to realize the rivers and sounds should be considered as more than a free septic tank.

The state government produced a groundbreaking report in 1972 that provides a rudimentary baseline of what the resource is and how our activities affect its health. Since then, real estate development attracting retirees has been the local industry, along with resorts, tourism and the service sector to support them. For 40 years, it has been up to us as individuals, businesses and governments to see that this alternative is indeed better for the estuary than a chemical plant.

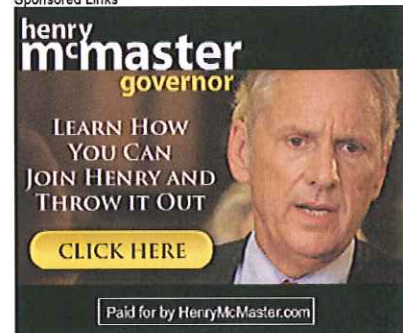
Much has been done, and all efforts need to be coordinated.

But much more remains to be done as development now encroaches more headwaters, wetlands, islands and marshes that together dictate the health of the estuary.



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Not everyone is able to give \$100,000 as the Stewarts have done, but everyone is able to do something every day to make a positive difference. We thank the Stewarts and urge others to act.

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Outstanding editorial. I know y'all act as a team of editors, but this was has David Lauderdate written all over it. He's our county Walter Edger. I like David's prose and discreet implied suggestions for change. Walter is awesome, David is better.

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