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Local filmmaker creating documentary on coastal issues

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Sam Ghioto, left, is working on a documentary about conservation in coastal Georgia. He's partnered with Glynn Environment Coalition to create the film, and last week he took a flight over Glynn County Superfund sites with GEC executive director Rach Thompson, center, and volunteer pilot Mason Gaines, right, who flies for SouthWings, a conservation nonprofit.

Provided photo

Sam Ghioto grew up in coastal Georgia but didn't learn the term "Superfund site" until a few years ago.

The recent College of Coastal Georgia graduate felt he should have learned much earlier about these federally designated hazardous sites where toxic waste has been detected. Glynn County has four.

Ghioto is closely familiar with the natural beauty of his home. He also works as a kayak tour guide for Southeast Adventures, and he frequently spends time in local waterways, at beaches and out on hiking and biking trails in the area.



Yet he had little idea about these major threats to coastal Georgia’s environment, wildlife and residents.

“I remember one paragraph on it in school, like in sixth grade,” he said. “It’s not really talked about that much. I think, though, that it’s a topic that everybody should know about. Raising consciousness on environmental issues is imperative because it affects the livelihood of everyone around it, right?”

Ghioto has taken this question from a philosophical query to a personal call to action and has begun work on a documentary that he hopes will fill in the gaps on what he didn’t learn growing up.

“Not many people know how unique this area is and how important our waterways and marshes are to the vitality of not only plant and animal life but human life as well,” he said.

The documentary will feature information about the area’s conservation history and ongoing efforts to protect and preserve the coast.

Ghioto began work on the documentary during a filmmaking course last year at CCGA. He graduated in December and now runs his own filmmaking business, Sam Ghioto Studio.



To create this film, he's enlisted the help of Glynn Environmental Coalition, and last week he and the organization's executive director, Rachael Thompson, took a flight with SouthWings, a nonprofit conservation organization that connects groups and individuals with volunteer pilots.

Ghioto's flight went around the perimeter of Glynn County so he could get an aerial view of the four local Superfund sites.

Thompson said she hopes the documentary will be part of a larger education campaign to help people understand the history of the Superfund sites and the risks they pose.

"(GEC has) never really had anybody offer to facilitate filming a documentary, and of course this is a passion project for him," she said. "We're not paying him to do any of this work. This is just something that he's really passionate about."

Film can be a powerful way to share this kind of story, Thompson said. GEC posts technical reports on its website and works to keep the public informed on these issues, but these are complex issues that those without a background in science may not fully understand with ease.

"Being able to present this information in a more artistic way will definitely help people retain that information and comprehend that information," she said.

Cinematic story-telling has long fascinated Ghioto, he said, even when he was a child.

"I think it's one of the most powerful tools for learning," he said. "Most people don't want to read something that is technical. However, film is something that everyone will watch and understand. So it's important to be responsible on a scientific and historical level while writing a documentary."

To see more of his work, follow Ghioto on Instagram at @samuelghiotostudio and @samghiotostudio.



Lauren McDonald