

## Senate Resolution 677

By: Senators James of the 35th, Davenport of the 44th, Orrock of the 36th, Ramsey, Sr. of the 43rd, Jackson of the 2nd and others

## A RESOLUTION

1 Creating the Joint Study Committee on the Preservation of Sapelo Island; and for other  
2 purposes.

3 WHEREAS, Greater Sapelo Island of McIntosh County, Georgia, is this state's fourth largest  
4 barrier island and the home of important endangered wildlife, treasured historical structures,  
5 and the vanishing culture of a significant community consisting of the Geechee Gullah  
6 people; and

7 WHEREAS, approximately 97 percent of Sapelo Island is owned by the State of Georgia and  
8 is managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, while the remaining 3 percent  
9 of the island is under private ownership; and

10 WHEREAS, the island also consists of the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research  
11 Reserve, the University of Georgia Marine Institute, and the Reynold's Mansion State Park;  
12 and

13 WHEREAS, the Geechee Gullah people are the direct descendants of the slaves of Thomas  
14 Spalding who was the original landowner of Sapelo Island, and following the conclusion of  
15 the Civil War, ownership of designated lands of the island were legally transferred to these  
16 original freed men; and

17 WHEREAS, in 1983, Georgia law established the Sapelo Island Heritage Authority for the  
18 purpose of preserving the culture in the endangered historical areas of Sapelo Island; and

19 WHEREAS, a severe erosion of Geechee Gullah culture and heritage has continued to the  
20 point that it is in a state of near extinction; and

21 WHEREAS, extensive, unregulated commercial development of the island, without ethical  
22 review or oversight, threatens not only the Geechee Gullah people but also the island's  
23 beautiful natural resources and wildlife; and

24 WHEREAS, such development has been for the personal, private gain of the few at the  
25 expense of all of Georgia's citizens; and

26 WHEREAS, title to lands of the island is a matter of legal dispute, and the state's current  
27 ownership may be the result of unjust enrichment at the expense of the Geechee Gullah  
28 people; and

29 WHEREAS, the island has an abundance of historical property that is in need of state  
30 funding for renovation and promotion as tourist attractions; and

31 WHEREAS, much of the island is composed of natural areas which need to be protected as  
32 habitats for wildlife, nesting birds, and turtles in order to protect the beauty and tranquility  
33 of this special state resource; and

34 WHEREAS, many concerned citizens, environmentalist groups, business and property  
35 owners, and the original Geechee Gullah residents are gravely concerned about the future of  
36 this beautiful island and the survival of its native people; and

37 WHEREAS, before it is too late and the important environmental and historical heritage of  
38 the island is lost forever, the State of Georgia needs to immediately undertake an extensive  
39 study and proposal development regarding the funding, governance, and future of Sapelo  
40 Island.

41 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF  
42 GEORGIA that there is created the Joint Study Committee on the Preservation of Sapelo  
43 Island to be composed of eight members, consisting of four members of the House of  
44 Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and four  
45 members of the Senate to be appointed by the President of the Senate. The Speaker of the  
46 House of Representatives shall designate one of the four members from the House and the  
47 President of the Senate shall designate one of the four members from the Senate to serve as  
48 cochairpersons of the committee. The committee shall meet at the call of the cochairpersons.

49 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee shall undertake a study of the conditions,  
50 needs, issues, and problems mentioned above or related thereto and recommend any actions  
51 or legislation which the committee deems necessary or appropriate. The committee shall  
52 review the following matters in particular:

- 53 (1) Building codes and zoning codes that may be needed for the protection of the  
54 environment and the historical heritage of the island;
- 55 (2) The need for ethical oversight, ethical statutory provisions, and conflict of interest  
56 restrictions relating to the governing and development of the island;
- 57 (3) The need for greater input or control in the public policy and governance of the island  
58 by the residents;
- 59 (4) The fairness and equality of property tax evaluations and assessments; and
- 60 (5) Access by and fair representation of the Geechee Gullah people in government public  
61 policy effecting the island.

62 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee may conduct such meetings at such  
63 places and at such times as it may deem necessary or convenient to enable it to exercise fully  
64 and effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes  
65 of this resolution. The legislative members of the committee shall receive the allowances  
66 authorized for legislative members of interim legislative committees but shall receive the  
67 same for not more than five days unless additional days are authorized. The funds necessary  
68 to carry out the provisions of this resolution shall come from the funds appropriated to the  
69 House of Representatives and Senate. In the event the committee makes a report of its  
70 findings and recommendations, with suggestions for proposed legislation, if any, such report  
71 shall be made on or before December 31, 2012. The committee shall stand abolished on  
72 December 31, 2012.