

Presentation 11: Jessi Halligan

At the water's edge: How sea level rise has shaped what we know about Florida's Paleoindians

Recent evidence from the Page-Ladson site in Northwestern Florida suggests that people were well-established in the southeastern US by at least 14,550 years ago, when sea levels were approximately 100 meters lower than present and Florida's peninsula was almost twice as large as it is now. Late Pleistocene-early Holocene sea level rise drowned much of the landscape that would have been available to these early Floridians and the evidence of any early coastal lifeways. At the same time, this inundation protected numerous freshwater Paleoindian sites, allowing for fabulous preservation of organic artifacts and paleoenvironmental proxies and much greater understanding of Paleoindian lifeways and technology than can be found elsewhere in the southeastern US. Sites that were not inundated suffer from stratigraphic conflation, bioturbation, and poor organic preservation. Therefore, in a very real sense, sea level rise has both hampered and enabled what we know about the first Floridians.