Like so many artists, members of Core Dance of Atlanta were stunned by the beauty of Jekyll Island’s Driftwood Beach. Laden with ancient fallen live oaks, the expanse of trees and sand offers a landscape like few others.

That’s why, in 2018, the group decided to stage a performance along the shoreline as part of an initiative called National Water Dance.

The program is an artist-driven collective that features dancers, students, educators and community members who create simultaneous performances across the country in support of clean water, environmental protections and an answer to climate change.
The group’s spokesperson Susan Schmaeling says the dancers felt Jekyll Island was the perfect location to film their sequence.

“The ecosystem of the Georgia coast is enriching and restorative to all people, including the dancers of Core,” she said.

“They started working with the staff of the Golden Isles Arts & Humanities Association, Jekyll Island Authority and Glynn Environmental Coalition in 2018.”

The group of dancers joined others from around the country, across a variety of backdrops — snow, deserts, mountains and beaches.

And when Core Dance started planning its 2020 Water Dance program, they decided to venture, once again, to the Golden Isles’ coast.

“Our planning meetings began in August of 2019 for a community-wide project involving local elementary students, local theatre groups and coastal environmental organizations, among others, to bring attention to local concerns for safe seafood,” Schmaeling said.
“Then, in September, when the Golden Ray cargo ship capsized off Jekyll Island, the sensitive ecosystem was compromised even more. Our work became all the more urgent.”

Like so many things, that plan changed with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic. But they weren’t willing to shelve the project entirely.

As with other artistic programming, the National Water Dance moved online.

“Dancing for Our Lives” will be filmed from the homes of each individual as part of the livestream in a combined Zoom video, which will be broadcast at 4 p.m. Saturday.

“Every year, National Water Dance livestreams the performances from around the country. This year, everything had to go virtual due to COVID-19 and the shelter-in-place order,” Schmaeling said. “Core Dance will livestream their work, ‘Dancing for Our Lives’ on their Facebook page (Core Dance).”

For the group’s artistic director and co-founder, Sue Schroeder, the video is an opportunity to maintain a connection and share their message during difficult times.

“National Water Dance creates a platform which allows us to unite people from all over the country through movement to advocate for clean water for all,” she said.

While it won’t be quite the same as in the past, the dance troupe hopes that the public will still join to offer support for an important cause.

“We share the planet, it’s our home. This performance will share the need for all of us to protect Mother Earth,” Schmaeling said. “We hope that the people who join us to watch the livestream performance will be moved to advocate for clean water and clear air ... it’s a shared responsibility.”
Just The Facts

To water the National Water Dance, visit Core Dance Atlanta’s Facebook page at 4 p.m. Saturday. They will offer a live stream of the event.

Lindsey Adkison