

Coastlines

GEORGIA

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Tarpon tips

Learn how to handle one of Georgia's most exciting game fish like a pro



Also inside:

Coastal Georgia scores 'A-' on report card
Biologist explains shrimp season • Reducing runoff
Things to remember before hurricane season

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Coastlines Georgia is a quarterly publication of the Coastal Resources Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

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Common Acronyms

Throughout Coastlines Georgia, we have shortened the use of certain names of organizations to avoid repetition. The following acronyms are used for brevity:

CRD - Coastal Resources Division of DNR

DNR - Georgia Department of Natural Resources

EPD - Environmental Protection Division of DNR

NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

WRD - Wildlife Resources Division of DNR



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Photo by Tyler Jones/CRD

A boater navigates an estuary in the marshes off Sapelo Island on opening day of Georgia's shrimp season June 8, 2021.

Welcome (back) to Coastlines

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



When James Oglethrope landed on Yamacraw Bluff in present-day Savannah on Feb. 12, 1733, he'd been entrusted to establish the 13th colony with a spirit of selflessness. The motto of the original trustees that oversaw this new colony of Georgia was "Non sibi sed aliis"--a Latin phrase meaning "Not for self, but for others."

Nearly 290 years later, Georgia remains a state of dedicated individuals who continue that tradition of service.

Since its creation in 1972,

Georgia DNR has attracted employees who have devoted their lives to conserving our natural resources for present and future generations.

This magazine is a nod to that history of service. Coastlines Georgia was originally published by CRD in 1978, and ran until approximately 1985. Today, we are reviving it in hopes of honoring those who served the state before us, and continuing that heritage of dedication to others.

We hope you will enjoy reading this new edition, and that it may inform you of the important work done by hardworking DNR employees across the coast. ▀

JOHN M. PAFFORD SR.

I N M E M O R I A M

1 9 4 7 - 2 0 2 2

In Coastal Georgia, what do boat ramps, Kids Fishing Events, and the stomach contents of spotted seatrout all have in common? An amazing biologist, mentor, and friend named John Pafford.

Certainly, many folks can accomplish a great deal during a 34-year career. But John's covered an astounding breadth and variety that consistently highlighted his passion for Coastal Georgia and the opportunity to personally experience it.

Within just a few years of being hired as a marine biologist with CRD, he and a colleague completed a seminal 382-page report on movement, age and growth, maturity, and food preferences of eleven Georgia marine finfish species. The report provided detailed data from 1979-1982 that has served as a benchmark for generations of students and fishery managers since its publication.

His enthusiasm was not limited just to the technical aspects of data collection and analysis. He wanted everyone, regardless of age or economic status, to experience--and have access to--the wonder and abundance of marine life in Coastal Georgia.

Growing up in Glynn County, John knew first hand the challenges of getting from the high ground above the marsh to the water below. For the public



to access the water, you have to build a structure that can prevail in the pluff mud, withstand our 6- to 9-foot tides and harsh marine environment, and allow for the convenience and safety of anglers, whether fishing from an offshore vessel, inshore john boat, kayak, or wheelchair on a fishing pier. He was involved in every step of creating that public access, including teaching himself to draft the engineering plans needed for construction.

Thanks, in part, to his efforts in the mid-1990s, more federal funds were allocated to CRD for this public access development, as well as increasing the number of staff and marine fishery projects conducted at CRD.

John was the heart and soul of a Kids Fishing Events that will celebrate its 30th anniversary later this summer.

If you come to the Brunswick DNR property and enjoy walking around and observing the wildlife along the Earth Day

Nature Trail, you can thank John for its design.

Throughout his career, John would see a need, and either directly solve it, or lead the group effort. He had the same answer whether we needed a new fish measuring board, bookshelves, or an add-on structure for our outdoor fish ageing lab ... "I'll built it."

Though, at 6-feet, 4-inches, John was a very tall man, he carried himself with humility and quiet grace, always leading by example, and being an incredible advocate for his staff.

Long before the phrase "team meeting" entered our professional vocabularies, John would randomly gather his staff to go out for breakfast and talk about the projects we were working on. Before we started calling it "work-life balance," he intrinsically understood the importance of working hard, while reserving time for family and community.

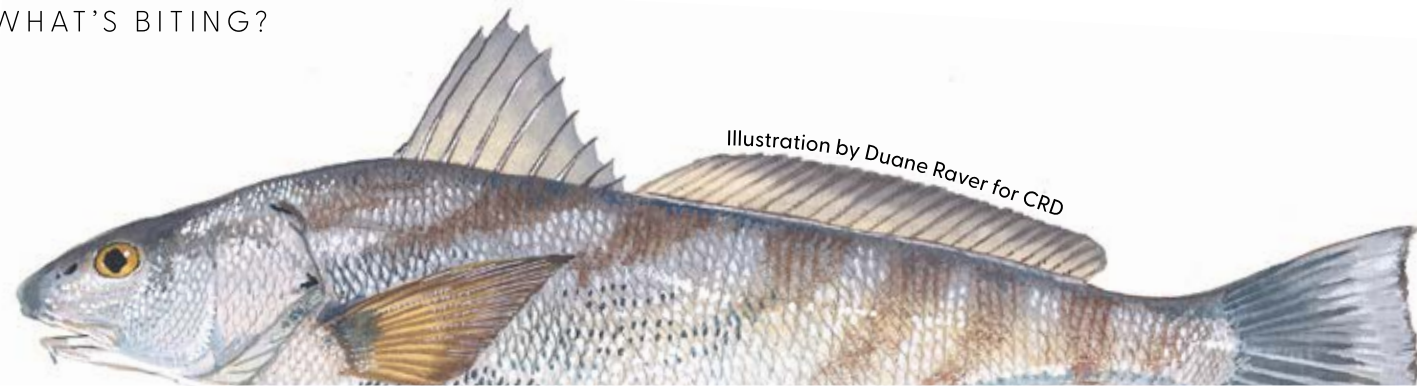
He let us know it was OK to stumble and make a mistake, always saying, "if you're not making mistakes, you're just not working."

John was funny, loyal, and kind. His impact on our understanding of and ability to access the coast was significant.

So, it is only fitting that we dedicate the first reissue of "Coastlines Georgia" in John's honor. ▀

- Kathy Knowlton, DNR/CRD

WHAT'S BITING?



SURF FISHING FOR WHITING

You don't need a boat to catch this tasty and abundant fish

By **RYAN HARRELL**

MARINE BIOLOGIST
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



Southern Kingfish (*Menticirrhus americanus*), is often called many names, such as southern kingcroaker or sea mullet—but in Georgia, most people simply call them whiting. As the water temperature rises in Coastal Georgia, these fish become abundant in the rivers, sounds, and surf.

Throughout the spring and summer months, you'll see boats congregated around some of Georgia's well-known whiting holes, such as the oceanside of East Beach off St. Simons Island, or in front of Back River Beach just southwest of Tybee Island.

Here's a little secret if you weren't aware: You don't need a boat to catch these tasty fish.

LOCATION

Unlike most saltwater fish species targeted in Georgia, whiting do not associate with structure. If I had to associate

them with anything, it would be a sandy substrate. Anywhere you can find sand and a little bit of depth, you're bound to find whiting. The beachfronts along Tybee, St. Simons, and Jekyll islands are all easily accessible and popular places for surf anglers. Anglers fishing multiple rods will often cast them at various distances until they find the fish and then focus on that depth. The location of whiting in the surf often changes with the tide.

GEAR

If you start Googling surf fishing, you'll see specialized 10- to 14-foot rods and reels that hold hundreds of yards of line. You don't need that for whiting.

Some of the most successful whiting anglers around use 7- to 8-foot spinning rods with 3,000- to 5,000-series reels, often times the same ones they use for bass or catfish. The only requirement for surf fishing is having a rod and reel that can cast between 2 to 4 ounces of lead. A fish finder rig (pictured) or a bottom rig that utilizes two or more hooks are popular among surf fishers. Both



Illustration/CRD

A fish finder rig, illustrated here, can be used to target whiting along Georgia's beaches.

rigs allow you to change your pyramid sinker as the tide and wind dictate. A size 1/0 or 1 circle hook helps to complete the rig. Throw your rod in a sand spike and sit back as these hooks set themselves.

Always remember when fishing in saltwater to hose your gear off with freshwater when you are done.

BAIT

If I had to choose bait for surf fishing for whiting, it would be fresh or frozen shrimp. A piece

about the size of your thumbnail is all you need to entice these fish. Squid also works well and tends to stay on the hook better. One of the best "new" baits to come about is the brand Fishbites. These strips come in a multitude of colors and scents and the best thing about them is you can store them in your tacklebox. Although these baits can be fished by themselves, many anglers add a small piece to their natural baits. This allows more scent in the water while also allowing you to keep fishing if your natural bait washes off the hook in the surf.

This is a great way to introduce kids to saltwater fishing, as the attention span and focus needed for other types of fishing doesn't apply here. Simply wait for the rod to bend over, hand it to a kid, and tell them to hold on.

Often, small sharks are caught—and let's be honest: What kid doesn't want to tell all their friends they caught a shark at the beach? If your kids are anything like mine, I bet that small shark grows each time the story is told.

Whiting can be found in the surf from spring through fall. There is no minimum size limit for whiting in Georgia, however most anglers opt to only keep fish that are 10 inches total length and above.

If you're fishing Georgia's coast, don't forget to purchase a fishing license and get your free Saltwater Information Program (SIP) permit.

So next time you're heading to one of Georgia's beaches, bring a rod, and have fun catching these abundant fish. ▀



File photo/CRD

Marine technician Alex Cummins, left, holds a spotted seatrout at the 2019 Kids Fishing Event in Brunswick. The event returns this year at Sidney Lanier Park on June 4.

Kids Fishing, CoastFest return as in-person events

By **TYLER JONES**

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



Some of CRD's most popular events are returning in-person this year across the Georgia coast.

Kicking off the summer is the return of CRD's "Kids Fishing Event," a free clinic and fishing opportunity for youth and families.

The event, set for 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, June 4, will be held at Liberty Ship Park (1 Coach Williams Way, Brunswick, GA 31520) under the Sidney Lanier Bridge.

Youth ages 5 to 12 can be registered for participation at CoastalGaDNR.org/KidsFishingEvents.

Registration will stay open until May 30, or when full. Participants will receive a free fishing pole and

basic fishing lessons. CRD Director Doug Haymans will serve up his world-famous hot dogs.

Also returning this year is CRD's most popular event, and everybody's favorite--CoastFest!

Mark your calendars for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 1, at Mary Ross Waterfront Park (100 Gloucester St., Brunswick GA 31520) for this family-friendly event.

In-person CoastFest returns this year after two years of being held virtually, and will feature live performances, touch tanks, exhibitors from across the coast and an art contest at the Brunswick library.

Sign up for CRD event notifications direct to your email by visiting CoastalGaDNR.org and clicking the "Sign up to receive news and information" on the bottom right hand side of the homepage. ▀



SHRIMP SEASON

... is on the horizon as CRD celebrates 20,000 trawls

By **EDDIE LEONARD**
MARINE BIOLOGIST
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



CRD marked a milestone in April when the division's Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey (EMTS) pulled its 20,000th trawl.

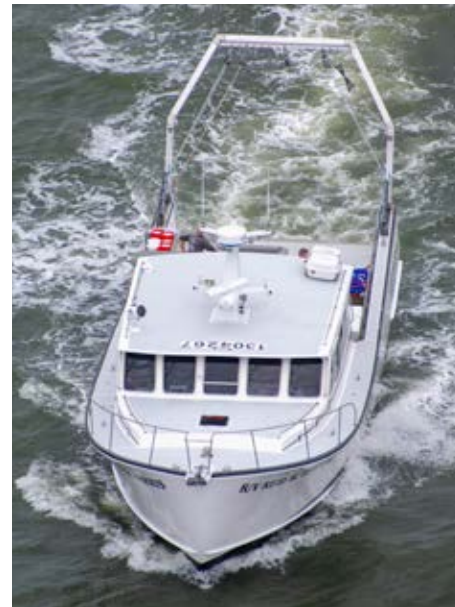
The ETMS, formerly conducted aboard the now-retired Research Vessel Anna, and continuing aboard the 2020-christened R/V Reid W. Harris has been gathering data about shrimp, blue crab and finfish populations on the Georgia Coast since 1976, and represents one of the longest-running datasets of its kind on the East Coast.

Wild-caught shrimp are the most economically important of Georgia's commercial fisheries and, many would argue, the most delicious shrimp on the market.

The long-term viability of this fishery is critical to the well-being of many harvesters and coastal communities, and CRD is responsible for the management of this important fishery. To best accomplish management goals, the EMTS conducts direct sampling of coastal waters, independent of the commercial fisheries' landings.

This data gives biologists a look at target populations before they are vulnerable to harvest. This provides a holistic and unbiased view of the animals' population.

The EMTS samples 36 pre-determined locations along the Georgia coast once per month, 12 months per year. Six sites are sampled within six of Georgia's estuary areas or "sounds", (Wassaw, Ossabaw, Sapelo, St. Simons, St. Andrew, and Cumberland Sounds). The sample sites were selected to represent

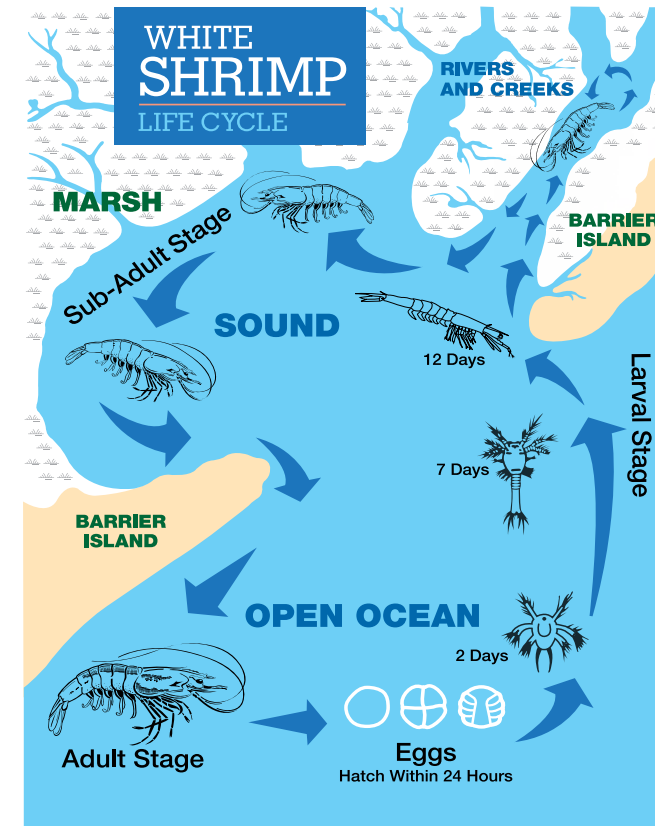


Photos by Tyler Jones/CRD

Above, commercial shrimpers trawl on opening day of shrimp season June 8, 2021. **Below**, the Research Vessel Reid W. Harris in Wassaw Sound in 2021.

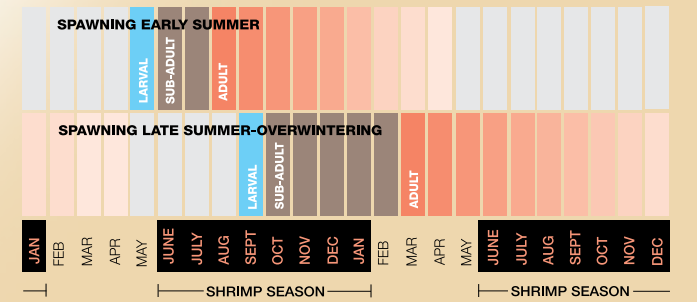
three "sectors" of each estuary: rivers and creeks, sounds, and offshore within state waters.

At each of these locations, the R/V Reid W. Harris pulls a 40-foot net, called a flat otter trawl, along the seabed for 15 minutes. The net is then hauled aboard the vessel and the contents are placed in a large sorting area. All animals in the catch are identified, separated by species, measured,



GEORGIA WHITE SHRIMP

- Spawn from May to September with peak spawning in May and June
- Can spawn up to four times in one season
- Average life span is less than 12 months (maximum is 18 months)
- Grow on average one inch per month during warmer months
- The number of shrimp per pound is known as count size
- Season opening and closing is determined by count size, stage of maturity, abundance, and water temperature
- In general shrimp season is mid-June to mid-January
- White shrimp make up nearly 80% of the landings annually at nearly 1.9 million pounds
- Shrimp is the #1 seafood product consumed in the U.S. with about 90% being imported. Ask for Georgia wild caught shrimp at markets and restaurants



weighed, and cataloged in a database.

The primary data collected for shrimp are abundance, size, and reproductive condition. While shrimp and crabs are the primary targets, all species captured are recorded. This "bycatch" data collection was permanently added to the sampling effort in 2003, and provides information on several species of interest to commercial and recreational fishers.

The data are also a very useful tool for monitoring general estuary health. Once the data are collected and stored in the database, they can be used for a variety of purposes from informing management decision making, inclusion in federal compliance reporting, and more.

The most immediately impactful use of the data is in helping to decide on the annual

opening and closing date for the commercial and recreational food shrimp harvest in Georgia's state waters. According to Georgia law, the fishery may be open in the spring as early as May 15 and will close on Dec. 31, unless extended.

The actual opening and closing dates must be established by the Commissioner of DNR. The Commissioner receives a recommendation from CRD on when to open and close the fishery from the Shrimp Advisory Panel (SAP). The SAP is a group of citizens from the commercial fishing industry, academia, and other representative user groups who meet on at least a biennial basis to review and discuss current conditions and make a recommendation to the Commissioner for the spring opening and winter closing.

The Commissioner's decision is constrained by law to shrimp of a certain size range, but reproductive status and shrimp abundance are also considered.

The EMTS survey provides the only scientific data considered by the SAP, who also discuss industry forces and other observations.

Each May, CRD closely evaluates and characterizes the status of the shrimp population as harvesters prepare for the spring opening. This May is no different.

With a relatively warm winter and no major rainfall or drought conditions at hand, we should see a good harvest in the spring in Georgia's state waters. Preliminary data from the EMTS for March and April are showing white shrimp in good numbers and early spawning condition.

To learn more about the EMTS, visit CoastalGaDNR.org/EcologicalMonitoringSurvey. ▀



Photo by Mark McKinnon/LED

Georgia DNR Game Warden Ryan Locke patrols Lake Sidney Lanier, Georgia's busiest lake. Game wardens will be out on fresh and salt waterbodies this summer ensuring public safety.

Let's make a deal:

'Our best for your best this summer'

By **MARK MCKINNON**
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION



There are a lot of great things about boating in Georgia. Great weather, plenty of outstanding boat ramps to put in, top-notch marinas, quiet little coves to drop anchor and relax and an outstanding group of DNR Law Enforcement game wardens to enforce the state's boating laws.

"Wait a minute! Aren't the

game wardens just out there to ruin my fun and possibly cost me money?" you may ask.

Certainly they are there to stop unlawful activity and to remove those individuals from the lake or river who pose a danger to themselves and others. Contrary to popular belief, their goal is not just to make arrests, but rather to ensure that everyone gets home safely at the end of the day.

DNR game wardens are well-trained officers and want nothing

more than for everyone to enjoy a fun and safe day on the water. They are the best at what they do.

And, since we give Georgians our best, let's make a deal - we want anyone who enjoys our state waterways in any way this year to give us your best. Our best for your best.

First and foremost, we want your best by not operating your vessel while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Drunk boaters quite often become drunk drivers. Even when boaters get off the water safely after a day of drinking, they often park or trailer the boat and hit the roadways, just as drunk as they were in the boat. Please don't risk ruining yours, or someone else's life. Even prescription drugs can

impair your ability to operate safely. You don't get a warning for operating while impaired. Our game wardens cannot take the chance that you will get home without hurting yourself or someone else, so just don't do it.

We want your best when it comes to having the proper safety equipment in your vessel.

Be sure that you have a properly sized, U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket for each person in the vessel. We recommend that everyone wear them - all of our game wardens do. Children under 13 must be wearing it if the boat is under power or drifting.

You also must have a properly charged fire extinguisher. It is a good idea to have it in an easily accessible location. I don't think you want to be crawling around under the dash looking for it if your motor catches fire and begins to melt into the lake. The law says you must have navigation lights for operating after official sunset. This does not mean when it is completely dark. Dusk is one of the most difficult times of day to see other vessels so turn on those lights if you want to avoid a collision.

Finally, we want your best at practicing courtesy to other users of the lake or river and following all laws and regulations.

Remember the 100-foot law that says that you must operate your vessel at idle



Photo by Mark McKinnon/LED

Game wardens patrol the Port of Brunswick as part of their regular duties.

speed when you are within 100 feet of anything - the shore, swimmers, other vessels (unless legally passing), and docks.

For skiers, don't buzz docks or swimmers and don't jump the wakes within 100 feet of a boat, or we will be pulling you over for a pow-wow and an opportunity for you to help provide additional funds to your local government, and possibly lose your boating privileges. Boaters are also subject to this law.

As mentioned above, you must turn on navigation lights after sunset.

Before turning the boat keys over to the teenagers be sure they are in compliance with the mandatory boater education law which says

all persons born on or after January 1, 1998 must complete a boat education course approved by DNR prior to operating any motorized vessel on state waters. More knowledge, at any age, is a good thing so we recommend that everyone take a course. Please be courteous to others as they are there to enjoy the day just as you are. A little courtesy goes a long way.

Our commitment to you is that we will do our best to keep you safe this summer but you must do your best if we are to be successful. If we all do our part, it will be the best summer ever!

Visit the Law Enforcement Division online at GaDNRLE.org or visit our Facebook page [Facebook.com/GaDNRLE](https://www.facebook.com/GaDNRLE) for more information. ▀

'A-' for Georgia Coast on annual report

By **MEGHAN ANGELINA**
WETLANDS BIOLOGIST
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



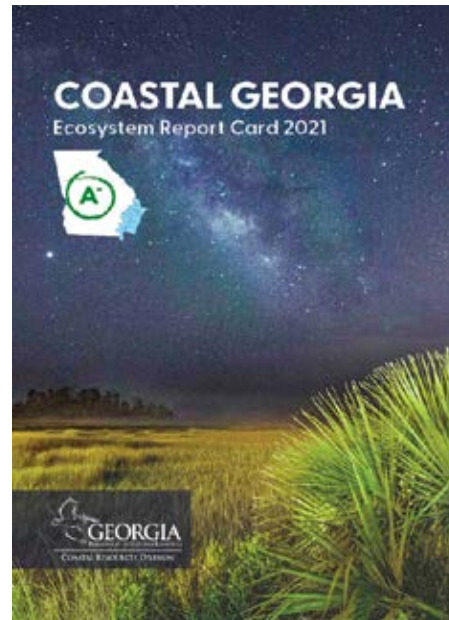
An annual report measuring the health of Coastal Georgia's ecosystem released on Earth Day, April 22, shows an increase from last year in overall scores, particularly in fisheries and bird indices.

The Coastal Georgia Ecosystem Report Card scored the state's coastal environment at a "A-", or 81 percent, a four-point increase from last year, according to CRD, which commissions the report.

"This year's annual report card—released on Earth Day—shows Coastal Georgia's ecosystems continue to thrive, in large part because of thoughtful stewardship, science-based decision making, and striking that careful balance between conservation and development," said Jan Mackinnon, a CRD wetlands biologist who oversaw the report. "Positive increases in red drum population, wood storks, and bald eagles all contributed to higher scores over last year, and everyone who cares about our natural resources can be proud of that."

CRD biologists attribute the increase in red drum abundance to environmental factors that may have decreased juvenile mortality.

"Factors ranging from wind direction, to salinity, to water temperature can all play significant roles in the survival rates of red drum," said Jared Flowers, CRD's research and



surveys unit leader. "Red drum scores in this year's report card are actually more in line with what we generally see. Last year's score was a relative abnormality, but we do see cyclical patterns in this fishery with highs and lows. CRD's Marine Sportfish Population Health Survey monitors this gamefish and will continue to gather data to help inform any future management decisions."

Likewise, bald eagle health increased five points from last year, showing estuaries and the coastal environment are supporting a food web necessary for this important predator.

Bald eagle nesting results for 2021, including the number of occupied territories, the percentage of successful nests, and the number of eaglets fledged, were almost identical to the 2020 figures, which was an above average year on the coast for the species.

The death of nesting

trees, primarily from saltwater exposure, and eagle mortalities from car collisions while the birds feed on roadkill continue to be worrisome, said Bob Sargent, a bird biologist with the Wildlife Conservation Section of WRD.

"Interestingly, surveys detected an increased number of eagles nesting or exhibiting behaviors associated with the establishment of nesting territories on relatively small lakes in the midst of extensive development, especially along the margins of Savannah," Sargent said. "As a rule of thumb, most eagle pairs in Georgia avoid nesting near man-made structures and human-associated disturbances."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates there are 316,000 bald eagles in the lower 48 states, a fourfold increase since 2009. Georgia nest totals grew from about 100 in 2007 to 200-plus in 2015 and appear to have remained above 200 every year since.

The report card scores 12 different indicators on a zero to 100 percent scale, with an "A" being between 80 and 100 percent, a "B" being 60 to 80 percent, and so on. This scale is accepted for ecosystem health report cards worldwide and provides a clearer picture of overall health. The scoring criteria were developed in 2014 by the Integration & Application Network, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, which also compiled the report card for CRD. ▀

Georgia shellfish farming:

From concept to table

By **ALEX METZ**
MARINE BIOLOGIST
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



Georgia's shellfish industry is on the move. House Bill 501 became effective March 1, 2020, and created new laws to expand the industry by allowing floating oyster farms and promoting increased usage of other techniques.

CRD's Shellfish and Water Quality Program has been hard at work creating new rules, regulations, and policies to properly manage new opportunities for the continued growth and diversification of the industry.

Public safety is the primary concern for the program, as the consumption of shellfish can pose a serious health risk, particularly when consumed raw and by individuals who are immuno-compromised. With the potential for serious health risks, Georgia uses regulatory standards that have been established in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program's model ordinance to ensure shellfish are safely harvested and in compliance with other state and federal agencies.



Photo by Dominic Guadagnoli/CRD
A crew installs pilings and signage marking the Chatham County Shellfish Mariculture Zone on April 28. These pilings and signs will help notify boaters of potential hazards associated with floating aquaculture gear within the newly established commercial mariculture zone in Bull River just north of Pa Cooper Creek.

In addition to public safety concerns, ensuring that impacts are minimized to other wildlife, the estuarine environment and other public uses of the areas has also been a program priority in the implementation of this new industry.

This process has resulted in the production of the Shellfish Policy Manual, created to ensure that Georgia's shellfish industry remains safe and sustainable. The manual outlines all the requirements and expectations for commercial

shellfish operations and is useful for current industry members, prospective farmers, and other stakeholders including other governmental agencies and citizens who wish to learn more about the industry. A full copy of this manual is available at CoastalGaDNR.org/CommercialShellfishHarvest.

With a general framework in place, CRD has contracted six new leases for floating oyster farms, three in McIntosh County on Mud River and three in Chatham County on Bull River.

The new leaseholders are enthusiastically awaiting state and federal permits to begin a new chapter in the Georgia shellfish industry.

In other news, five new intertidal harvest areas have also been leased since the effective date of HB 501, and plans are in motion to lease new intertidal and subtidal leases before the end of 2022.

An updated leasing process should guarantee leasing opportunities for years to come. For more information on obtaining a shellfish lease or to view the new shellfish leasing dashboard, please visit: CoastalGaDNR.org/ShellfishLeasing. ▀

Fishing guide shares TARPON TIPS

for a sustainable future

Words by TYLER JONES
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Photos by AARON ADAMS
DIR. OF SCIENCE & CONSERVATION
BONEFISH AND TARPON TRUST

It may be safe to say tarpon had Greg Hildreth hooked long before he hooked a tarpon. Years before he became a successful Georgia fishing guide and charter captain, Hildreth was a wide-eyed high schooler with a copy of the magazine Florida Sportsman and a few fishing buddies.

“I saw an article about tarpon fishing, and my friends and I thought it looked cool,” he said. “We wanted to try it.”

He and his friends took a john boat to Apalachicola Bay to try their hand, not sure what they were getting into.

“We were just high school kids with no money, and we didn’t really know what we were doing,” he said. “We pulled into West Pass (an area in the bay), and I saw a guy hook one. It jumped out of the water, and I thought, ‘I’ve got to do that.’”

While Hildreth would eventually do just that, his fishing trip in 1979 was not the day.

“Three years later, I still hadn’t hooked one, so I called the guy who wrote that article,” he said. “He agreed to take me out, and we still didn’t catch any tarpon that day, but he showed me everything I was doing wrong.”

The next day, Hildreth finally got his goal.

“We must have hooked about 15 that day with artificial lures,” he said. “It was one of the most thrilling things I’ve ever done. I always tell people that God must love duck hunting, turkey hunting and tarpon fishing, because none of those seasons overlap, so you don’t have to choose which one to do.”

Several decades after that first unsuccessful tarpon trip with the Florida Sportsman writer, Hildreth has managed to turn one of his favorite activities into a career. As a Brunswick-based charter captain, he specializes in taking clients tarpon fishing when the season comes around in late summer.

“I love to catch them,” he said. “But they are hard and tricky to figure out, especially

here. Even though you might see them, you won’t catch them every time. People love to catch them—they come from all over.”

Over the years, though, Hildreth has learned a lot about conservation and what it takes to keep tarpon populations healthy for future generations. These massive game fish can grow up to 100 inches in length and take a decade to reach maturity. Although the state men’s record in Georgia is 161 pounds, tarpon have been known to grow well over 200 pounds. Keeping the tarpon population healthy means fish must be able to reach reproductive adulthood. One way anglers can

help ensure a healthy tarpon population is by handling them properly, Hildreth said.

“I try to encourage people to leave them in the water,” Hildreth said. “I carry two gloves, and I’ll bring the fish boat side, and once he’s sideways in the water, you pretty much have him. I’ll let people hold the lower jaw and get a photo from above with the fish in the water.”

Removing the fish from the water can present plenty of problems, not the least of which is trying to handle a massive, unpredictable animal. Taking the fish out of the water can also seal its fate and result in its untimely death, Hildreth cautioned.

“Once you start trying to pick that fish up out of the water, that’s

when you have problems,” he said. “If you pick it up by the lower jaw, you’re going to break that throat latch. He may swim off, but he’s not fine. He’s going to die. The best thing is to leave them in the water.”

Hildreth recommends handling tarpon in the water and using your hand to hold the fish’s lower jaw. When it’s time to release the fish, turn it upright in the water with the mouth facing toward the front of the boat, directly into the current.

“The current will get oxygen into his gills,” Hildreth said. “He will let you know when he’s ready to go. He’ll shake his head, wag his tail, and swim off.”

It’s tips like these Hildreth has learned in his years as a charter captain. Over the years, the importance of conservation has grown in his mind, and he’s hoping

TARPON HANDLING BEST PRACTICES

Use **CIRCLE HOOKS**. Cut line of deep hooks

MINIMIZE fight time and handling

Keep tarpon **IN WATER**

Grasp with **HANDS**, not gaff

Avoid **PREDATORS** and **REVIVE** tired tarpon



the best practices he teaches his clients will catch on among other anglers.

“Tarpon are a renewable resource,” he said. “That fish can grow to an age of 60 or 70 years old, and there’s no need to kill a creature like that. Nowadays, it goes a lot further to release that fish so it can be caught again and stay a renewable resource. Years ago, people just didn’t know any better. They thought there

were so many fish that it didn’t matter if you killed it and hung it up at the dock. But we know that’s not true anymore.”

Ryan Harrell, a CRD marine biologist who works with the Marine Sportfish Population Health Survey, echoed Hildreth and said anglers don’t necessarily need to cause the death of a fish to have a trophy.

“The days of bringing tarpon to the dock are no longer celebrated,” Harrell said. “For anglers wanting a trophy, fiberglass reproductions are now available. All you need is the length, girth and a photograph of your catch, which can all be accomplished without removing the fish from the

water. Online calculators are also available to estimate the weight of a fish without having to hang them on a scale.”

Harrell isn’t alone in the scientific community with his advice on proper handling.

Aaron Adams, director of Science and Conservation with the Miami-based Bonefish and Tarpon Trust, said conservation today means fishing tomorrow.

“If anglers want to ensure they can go out and catch tarpon in 10 years, they better start treating them right in handling and be involved in other aspects of conservation,” he said. “There are not as many tarpon today as there were 50 years ago, and the only way to have them around in abundance is to follow best practices that we find appropriate. It’s not just about the fish and the fishery—it’s about behaving responsibly.”

Illustration by Susan Rieckmann/Bonefish & Tarpon Trust

Grasping tarpon with your hands, and not a gaff can help the fish recover once released. You can also help increase survival chances by leaving the fish in the water.



MAKING A SPLASH



Photo by Tyler Jones/CRD

CRD staff, along with volunteers from No Shoes Reefs, the Reef Ball Foundation and the Coastal Conservation Association Georgia pose for a photo during a recent reef deployment on the Ogeechee River near Fort McAlister State Park in Richmond Hill.



CRD Photos

Top: A contractor places reef darts at offshore artificial reef CDH in late March. **Middle:** The donated Tug Randy Spell is prepared for sinking at offshore artificial reef F. **Bottom:** Concrete miniature reef balls are placed in the Ogeechee River near Fort McAlister State Park

CRD leverages partnerships for new reefs

By **TYLER JONES**
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



CRD continued its habitat enhancement and restoration mission this quarter, deploying donated materials both inshore and offshore.

Of note, the family of late Capt. Randy Spell donated a 40-foot steel tug to CRD for placement at artificial reef F.

Spell, founder of MarineCo marine construction firm and a native of Brunswick, passed away 17 years ago, but was well known in the Golden Isles community for decades.

Spell’s daughter, Carly Spell, was on hand for the sinking and joined CRD staff at reef F when the

tug went down.

“The reef will be a positive addition to the marine ecosystem in the Golden Isles, which my dad called home,” Carly Spell said. “It was an honor.”

In addition to the deployment of the tug Capt. Randy Spell, CRD placed concrete culverts and reef darts at offshore artificial reef CDH. The reef darts are a new endeavor for CRD, and aim to create vertical structure, which provides essential habitat for fish.

The reef darts were made and deployed by Continental Heavy Civil with pilings donated by the Sea Island Co.

“This is the first time CRD has done a deployment like this,” said Cameron Brinton, a CRD marine biologist. “Reef darts provide a lot of vertical relief that will create habitat for different fish than low-relief items like culverts or pilings alone, which tend to be flat.”

Although reef darts are new to Georgia, they have been used successfully in Florida.

On the inshore front, a CRD partnership with country music star Kenny Chesney’s “No Shoes Reefs” foundation, along with the Reef Ball Foundation and the Coastal Conservation Association Georgia, deployed 400 miniature reef balls to the Ogeechee River reef near Ft. McAlister State Park in late April.

You can support artificial reef creation with the “Support Fish Habitat” license plate. Learn more about conservation plates at DriveGeorgiaWild.com.



Photo by Ben Galland/PROVIDED

Surf is seen rolling on a Georgia beach in an undated photo provided by Ben Galland. The Coastal Resources Division of DNR tests beach water quality at the state's major beaches every week during the summer months, looking for the presence of potentially harmful bacteria.

Beach program

READY FOR SUMMER

STAFF REPORT

COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Coastal Georgians know the summer sun means more than a rise in the mercury and number of visitors; it also means beach water temperatures are on the rise, too.

While these higher temperatures may make for more enjoyable swimming, it can also mean higher levels of bacteria in coastal waters. DNR, through its Beach Water Quality Program run

by CRD, helps keep folks safe and informed while visiting the Peach State's 105 miles of coast.

"As part of the Beach Act Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, we monitor and notify the public to changing water quality conditions along the coast," said Ed Zmarzly, CRD's Beach Water Quality Program coordinator. "Our team monitors bacteria levels on St. Simons, Tybee and Jekyll islands year-round, and during the summer, we increase the

frequency from monthly to weekly due to higher numbers of visitors to beaches."

The monitoring is a partnership between CRD and Georgia's Department of Public Health, which issues beach advisories based on data gathered by CRD.

At each site, CRD technicians use equipment to measure water temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, salinity and conductivity of the surf-zone water, Zmarzly said. Technicians also collect water samples that are taken back to CRD's water quality laboratory in Brunswick.

"At the lab, we test the water samples and count bacteria levels using a filtration method," Zmarzly said. "The process takes about 24 hours, and we're looking for one important type of bacteria: Enterococcus."

Enterococcus is a bacteria found in all warm-blooded animals including birds, dogs, dolphins, manatees and humans, Zmarzly said. Coming into contact with--or

ingesting--this bacteria can lead to an upset stomach, ear, bladder and wound infections.

While enterococcus is a warning sign that fecal matter may be present in the water, it can also be a harbinger that more dangerous bacteria, viruses and protozoans may also be present, increasing the risk of swimming for young people and the immunocompromised.

After the bacteria is cultured in CRD's laboratory for 24 hours, the lab technicians count the colonies of bacteria. If the count is higher than 70, the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) will issue a beach advisory for the segment of beach where the sample was collected. This advisory will be posted on DPH's website along with CRD's website. Beach advisory signs will also be opened notifying the public to the advisory.

"It is important to note two things when an advisory is issued," Zmarzly said. "First, the beach segment is not closed. CRD does not close beaches. Folks can still use the beach for swimming if they choose, but they should be aware there is an elevated risk associated with going into the water. Folks might want to consider visiting another segment of beach or confining their beach activities to non-water related activities, like beachcombing, sunbathing and sandcastle building.

"Second, the advisory is only issued for the specific segment of beach where the water was collected, not the whole island," Zmarzly added. "Many times, it is as easy as moving up or down to the next beach access. Beach



Photo by Tyler Jones/CRD

CRD's Water Quality Lab tests samples from across Georgia's coast for the presence of bacteria that can indicate potentially hazardous swimming conditions.

segments can be easily found using our newly created Beach Map App."

The new app can be found at GaHealthyBeaches.org using a smartphone or computer, Zmarzly said. The app shows water testing locations, the most recent results of beach-testing segments, parking areas, bathrooms and lifeguard stations.

While Georgia's beaches are generally some of the most pristine

areas on the East Coast for bathing and visiting, Zmarzly reminded the public that they can help keep the beaches at their best by doing a few simple things.

"As a final note, Georgia beaches are special places for everyone," said Zmarzly. "When you go, please pack out whatever you have packed in. Please pick up after your pets -- and remember to have a great visit to Georgia's Healthy Beaches." ▀

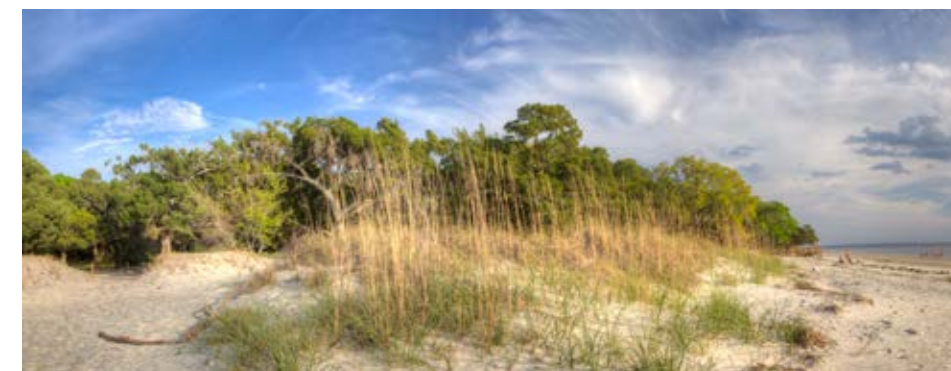


Photo by Ben Galland/PROVIDED

Georgia is home to 105 miles of sandy beaches, and CRD tests its most popular areas throughout the year for water quality.

Storm surge inundates the intersection of U.S. Highway 17 and the F.J. Torras Causeway in Brunswick during Hurricane Irma in 2017.



Hurricane season is coming. Now is the

TIME TO PREPARE

By **JENNIFER KLINE**
COASTAL HAZARDS SPECIALIST
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



The beginning of May marks the annual National Hurricane Preparedness Week-- and not a moment too soon. June 1 starts hurricane season, and peak season generally happens in Georgia between September and October.

National Hurricane Center describes a hurricane as a tropical cyclone in which the maximum sustained wind is, at minimum, 74 mph. That's faster than the maximum speed limit on any road in Georgia.

The term "hurricane" is used for Northern Hemisphere tropical cyclones east of the international date line to the prime meridian. "Typhoon" is used for Pacific tropical cyclones north of the equator west of the International Dateline.

Hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean form between June and November, with the peak of hurricane season occurring in the middle of September. Hurricane

intensities are measured using the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, a 1 to 5 categorization based on the hurricane's intensity at the indicated time.

Hurricanes bring a complex set of impacts. The winds from a hurricane produce a rise in the water level at landfall called "storm surge." Storm

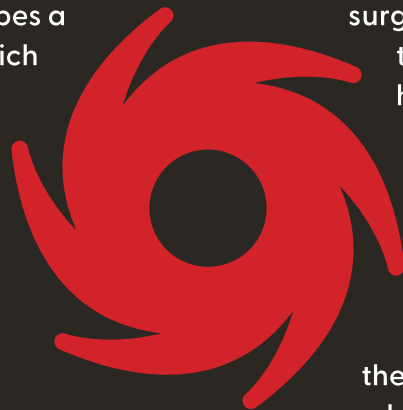
surges produce coastal flooding effects that can be just as damaging as the hurricane's winds.

Hurricanes can also bring very intense inland riverine flooding, and even produce tornadoes that can add to wind damages inland.

Georgia's hurricane history along its coast was much more turbulent in the 19th Century. In total, 14 hurricanes made landfall on the Georgia Coast, six of which were major hurricanes (Category 3 or greater) in 1898, 1893, 1854, 1824, 1813, and 1804.

These infamous hurricanes ravaged the coast, causing widespread damages and thousands of fatalities.

A major hurricane made landfall on the



Georgia Historical Society/PROVIDED

This photograph, believed to be one of the first to record the impact of storm surge, shows the impacts of a 1892 unnamed hurricane on Newcastle Street in Brunswick near Jekyll Square.

southern Georgia Coast on Oct. 2, 1898, before continuing inland through Brantley County.

The first known pictures of storm surge were taken in Brunswick, following the landfall of that storm. The Cumberland Island Pilot Boat Maud Helen was left 20 feet above sea level on a bluff at High Point, and a storm surge of 16 feet was recorded in Brunswick.

On Aug. 27, 1893, another major hurricane made landfall on the northern Georgia Coast. This devastating hurricane is responsible for causing more than 2,500 fatalities and is one of the worst weather-related disasters in Georgia history.

More recently, Georgia has felt the impacts of hurricanes Matthew in 2016, Irma in 2017 and Michael in 2018. These hurricanes did not make landfall in the state, but did cause significant damage, economic impacts, loss of life and displacement of people.

These storms are reminders to be vigilant in hurricane preparedness. To better prepare for hurricane season, here are a few tips, courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:

DETERMINE YOUR RISK

Find out today what types of wind and water hazards could happen where you live, and then start preparing how to handle them. Know if you live in an area prone to flooding and if you're safe to remain in your home.

DEVELOP AN EVACUATION PLAN

Find out if you live in a hurricane evacuation zone. You may also need to leave if you live in a flood prone area or in a mobile home outside a hurricane evacuation zone. Now is the time to begin planning where you would go and how you would get there.

You do not need to travel hundreds of miles. Your

destination could be a friend or relative who lives in a well built home outside flood prone areas. Remember, your safest place may be to remain home. Be sure to account for your pets in your plan.

ASSEMBLE DISASTER SUPPLIES

Have enough non-perishable food, water and medicine to last each person in your family a minimum of 3 days (store a longer than 3-day supply of water, if possible). Electricity and water could be out for at least that long. You'll need extra cash, a battery-powered radio and flashlights. You may need a portable crank or solar-powered USB charger for your cell phones.

STRENGTHEN YOUR HOME

Whether you're evacuating, or planning to ride out the storm in your home, make sure it is in good repair and up to local building code. Trim trees, secure loose items and move your car to a secure location.

Have the proper plywood, steel or aluminum panels to board up the windows and doors. Remember, the garage door is the most vulnerable part of the home, so it must be able to withstand the winds.

HELP YOUR NEIGHBOR

Many people rely on their neighbors before and after a disaster, and there are many ways you can help them

Help vulnerable neighbors prepare their homes and help them evacuate if necessary. Check in with your neighbors after the storm passes. ▀

Runoff reduction targets pollution

CRD's Coastal Management Program aims to improve the quality of Georgia's waterways

By **SHANNON MATZKE**
GEORGIA SEA GRANT FELLOW
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION



When we think about pollution, we may think of trash, chemicals that enter waterways, or toxins in the air from factories. But pollution can take many forms, including what is referred to as nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. NPS pollution consists of contaminants that do not come out of a pipe. Unlike point sources that come from a single identifiable source—like discharge from a factory or sewage plant—NPS pollution comes from many scattered sources. Some examples of NPS pollution include:

- excess pesticides and fertilizers from agriculture or residential areas;
- oil, grease, or chemicals from vehicles on roadways;
- sediment eroded from construction sites, crop and forest lands, and streambanks;
- bacteria and nutrients from livestock, pet waste, and faulty septic systems.

NPS pollution can lead to fish die-off, cloudy and discolored water, poor water quality, beach advisories and unsafe drinking



Photo by Shannon Matzke/DNR
Kelly Hill, right, a green growth specialist with Coastal Resources Division's Georgia Coastal Management Program, helps a woman create her own rain barrel during a recent workshop at DNR's Coastal Regional Headquarters in Brunswick.

water. This can potentially cause environmental and human health problems and can spoil the beauty of the healthy and clean waters of the Georgia coast.

CRD's Georgia Coastal Management Program (GCMP) works to reduce polluted runoff entering coastal waters. GCMP promotes using and preserving native vegetation, protecting sensitive and erosion-prone habitats, and encouraging alternatives to impervious surfaces. Impervious surfaces are hard areas that do not allow water to seep into the ground. Things like pavement and roof tops are considered impervious, and when it rains, rainwater runs off these surfaces, picks up pollutants along the way and carries them into nearby bodies of water—this is what we call stormwater runoff.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

One of the GCMP's initiatives to address stormwater runoff is to encourage Low Impact Development/Green Infrastructure (LID/GI) practices. These practices utilize or mimic natural processes to provide stormwater management, helping to maintain coastal hydrology and protect water quality and our coastal marine habitats. To help demonstrate the applicability of LID/GI for storm water management, the GCMP is working with partners at UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant and Goodwyn, Mills & Cawood to create, and now update, an inventory of LID/GI practices in coastal Georgia. Techniques such as rain gardens or bioretention areas, permeable pavement (that allows for water infiltration rather than the

runoff associated with traditional concrete), cisterns and rain barrels, green roofs, and bioswales are examples of LID practices on the coast that you can virtually explore through this inventory.

RAIN BARRELS AT HOME

Rain barrels are an LID practice actively promoted by GCMP that can be implemented by business- and homeowners. GCMP partners with Coca-Cola United to provide Make-Your-Own Rain Barrel Workshops for coastal Georgia residents. Rain barrels collect water that can be used for watering gardens, washing cars, and other outdoor purposes, and they reduce stormwater runoff from properties. These workshops occur year-round, and all coastal residents are invited to register. Workshops include a brief presentation on water conservation and rainwater harvesting followed by construction of a rain barrel that can be taken home that day.

HELPING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

GCMP has also directed a study that was funded by NOAA to explore the practicality and cost effectiveness of green infrastructure to mitigate impacts from coastal and riverine flooding and wind. Hinesville and the City of Tybee Island were used as pilot communities, and GCMP worked with research partners to model current and future flood and wind scenarios to demonstrate damage and economic loss with and without mitigation (e.g., building codes that will enhance resiliency and shuttering ordinances) and green infrastructure (e.g., constructing coastal sand dunes, rainwater



Photo by Shannon Matzke/DNR
Stormwater runoff buffers, like the one seen here at a marina on Skidaway Island in Chatham County, can help protect coastal waters from pollution.

harvesting, bioswales, permeable pavement, and bioretention). This study found that implementing green infrastructure and mitigation practices in Hinesville would lead to a 36% reduction in future flooding damage costs to the city and residents. Additionally, Tybee Island is estimated to save \$181 million in damages from future flooding scenarios with the implementation of mitigation and green infrastructure practices.

WORKING WITH MARINAS

Along with beaches like those on Tybee Island, a main attraction of coastal Georgia for both residents and visitors is the ability to get out onto the water, experience marshlands and creeks, and see marine life. This is commonly done by boat, and coastal Georgia has ample marinas at which to dock your boat. These marinas are right on our marshes and lead directly into our waterways, so it is extremely important that they are minimizing their NPS pollution. GCMP worked with UGA Marine Extension and

Georgia Sea Grant and Georgia Marine Business Association (GAMBA) to create a Georgia Clean Marina Program. This is a voluntary program for coastal marinas to learn more about and implement clean practices. GCMP is currently working with UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant, UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government, and GAMBA to update this program and invite more marinas to earn their Clean Marina certification.

As a resident of coastal Georgia, you can take advantage of some of the NPS solutions offered by the GCMP. Visit our LID inventory to see examples of LID practices near you. Participate in a rain barrel workshop to harvest rainwater at home, both to conserve water and to reduce stormwater runoff. Support local ordinances and green infrastructure practices that enhance resiliency in your community. Visit marinas that implement clean practices. Learn more about these programs and others that GCMP supports by visiting our website at CoastalGaDNR.org. 🐾

COLUMN

Seasons of the Saltmarsh

Cordgrass & spartina

By PAUL MEDDERS

HABITAT ENHANCEMENT & RESTORATION UNIT LEADER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

My grandfather used to say, "When I moved to coastal Georgia after World War II, you could buy all the property on that saltwater swamp you wanted, real cheap."

Our understanding of the economic and ecological importance of the saltmarsh has certainly changed since then.

This column, "Seasons of the Georgia Saltmarsh," is an attempt to get visitors and locals alike to slow down, put away the electronic devices, and notice the subtle annual changes in Georgia's 368,000 acres of saltmarsh.

Spring is a time of rebirth, from the Judeo-Christian beliefs in the resurrection of the Christ to Easter eggs and baby chicks. The live oak understands all things anew as the young afresh budding leaf

forces out the old making the falling leaves of yesterday sound like a light rain.

So, put on your favorite sear sucker suit and muddy boots and venture down to the marsh to see just what spring brings.

If it is early in the spring, the obvious thing you will notice is the holdover from winter's bleak brown saltmarsh. The marsh is full of decomposition. The winter marsh, on the surface, seems like a dismal place, but the truth is the dying marsh provides nutrients which are the basis of the food web.

Stop and look closely and you will see at the base of the dead winter marsh grass something is happening; you need to watch closely because it happens fast. From the rhizome, or underground horizontal root, this year's marsh grass is starting to grow. First a few small--only a few inches tall--dark green leaves appear in the early

spring. Then, when you go about your life and finally slow down in a few weeks to take another look, the entire saltmarsh is full deep emerald-green grass growing as far as the eye can see. "Primary production," it's called.

The plant responsible for all this growth is smooth cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora*. Now plant people, like most people with "-ologist" behind their job title, come in lumpers and splitters.

Some like to categorize things by lumping like things together and some like to split them all apart. Back in 2014, there was a taxonomic revision proposing *Spartina* be changed to *Sporobolus*. The only thing harder than teaching someone something is un-teaching them something you already taught them. Hence my continued use of "*Spartina*."

Back to smooth cordgrass, this grass is a perineal found in

wetlands all up and down the East Coast, and even grows on the West Coast (but on that side of the continent they consider it invasive). Smooth cordgrass can grow in fresh water, but its superpower is it out competes most all other plants in brackish waters because of an adaptation that allows it to expel salt through specialized salt glands on the underside of the leaves.

Sometime late in June, walk out to the edge saltmarsh and turn a blade of marsh grass over in the noonday sun. You will see the accumulation of salt crystals shimmering like tiny diamonds. The truly brave will use a second sense and lick it to taste and verify it is indeed salt.

Again, "primary production."

Now, we are taking you back to biology in high school--or if you have not made it to high school, consider this a sneak preview. Primary production is the basis of life on earth. Quite simply, it is fixing the energy from the sun into green plant matter through a

"Blow up your TV, throw away the paper, go to the country, build you a home, plant a little garden, eat a lot of peaches ..."

JOHN PRINE

process called photosynthesis.

Why is this important? Glad you asked. Through photosynthesis not only do we get the byproduct of the oxygen we breath, but we get the green smooth cord grass of the salt marsh.

Smooth cordgrass is the keystone species of the saltmarsh and is the main environmental

engineer holding it all together. This engineering by nature provides a habitat in the form of a nursery ground for all the ecologically, recreationally, and commercially important species within coastal Georgia. Later in the year, the saltmarsh grass will die off and rot, producing what folks call "dead organic matter," which is the basis for the food web. Sometimes, however, it is best not to think about the cyclic things in life like the inevitability of death and just slow down and enjoy the now. The now is the saltmarsh being reborn. The now is green and anew.

So, in the immortal words of John Prine, "Blow up your TV, throw away the paper, go to the country, build you a home, plant a little garden, eat a lot of peaches," and every once in a while, take a little stroll in Georgia's saltmarsh. ▀

GAMEFISH RECORDS

GAMEFISH RECORDS

Man sets new record for dolphin

STAFF REPORT
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

A 53-year-old Midway man is the new state record holder for dolphin fish (*Coryphaena hippurus*), also known as mahi mahi, after DNR certified his catch April 29.

James Roberts of Midway landed the 68-pound, 1.6-ounce dolphin April 26 while fishing over Deli Ledge approximately 80 miles east of St. Catherines Island, according to CRD, which administers the Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program.

Roberts' catch replaces a tie record between anglers Will Owens of St. Simons Island and Michael Sheppard Jr. of Savannah. Owens landed a 67-pound, 9.6-ounce dolphin in 2019, and Sheppard landed his 67-pound, 6-ounce fish in 1997. The rules of the Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program require fish over 20 pounds to weigh 8 ounces more than the current record to break it—a feat satisfied by Roberts' landing.

"The last fish we caught that day was that mahi mahi," Roberts told DNR by phone. "It

wore me out. I couldn't hardly breathe. ... It was a blast, the best time of my life. I haven't hardly been able to sleep since."

Roberts, who has been fishing offshore for about 20 years, caught his mahi mahi aboard Capt. Michael Bell's boat Salty Intentions. He used a 6-foot Star stand-up rod with a Penn Squall 16VS reel spooled with ballyhoo. It took Roberts about 30 minutes to land the record-setting fish.

"This achievement recognizes not only the size of the catch, but Mr. Roberts' skill as an angler and the sportsmanship he displayed in landing a record-setting game fish," said Doug Haymans, director of CRD.

DNR staff weighed Roberts' fish on a state-certified scale at the Georgia DNR Richmond Hill Fish Hatchery the same day it was caught.

Dolphin are prized for their food value and colorful markings. They are common up to 30 pounds, but can grow as large as 80 pounds, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. They live for about five years, are highly migratory and are found from Florida to Massachusetts.

Roberts will receive a certificate signed by Gov. Brian Kemp acknowledging



Provided Photo James Roberts of Midway holds his record-breaking dolphin after weighing it at DNR's Richmond Hill Hatchery on April 26.

his accomplishment, and his record will be added to the list published annually in the Georgia Saltwater Regulations Guide and at CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords. ▀

Vermilion snapper has new record

STAFF REPORT
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

DNR recently announced a new men's state saltwater gamefish record for vermillion snapper (*Rhomboplites aurubens*), also known as beeliners.

Mark Brandon Neville of Richmond Hill landed the 5-pound, 11.68-ounce vermillion snapper on April 11 at Artificial Reef DW, about 70 nautical miles east of Sapelo Island.

Neville's catch beats the previous 3-pound, 11-ounce record of Scott Funderburk of Guyton from 2018.

Neville, 34, caught the fish while jigging in about 160 feet of water. His catch was weighed at DNR's Richmond Hill Hatchery using a certified scale.

Vermilion snapper are found in the Atlantic Ocean from Cape Hatteras, N.C., to southeastern Brazil, including the Gulf of Mexico.

They can live up to 15 years and grow to be as long as 2 feet and weigh 7 pounds. In 2020, recreational anglers landed approximately 2.5 million pounds of vermillion snapper, according



Provided Photo Mark Brandon Neville of Richmond Hill holds his record-breaking vermillion snapper after weighing it at DNR's Richmond Hill Hatchery on April 12.

to the NOAA Fisheries.

Neville will receive a certificate signed by Gov. Brian Kemp acknowledging his accomplishment, and his

record will be added to the list published annually in the Georgia Saltwater Regulations Guide and at CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords. ▀

GEORGIA SALTWATER GAMEFISH PROGRAM

For the current list of men's and women's saltwater fishing records, as well as information

on how to submit a catch to the Georgia Saltwater Gamefish Record, please visit CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords. Applications should include

color photographs. There are minimum weights for several species.

For more information on the Georgia

Saltwater Gamefish Program, contact CRD's public information officer, Tyler Jones, at tyler.jones@dnr.ga.gov or 912-262-3140.

Et Cetera ...

NEWS BRIEFS

Marine Fisheries staff presents at American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting on Jekyll

Marine Fisheries staff attended the annual meeting of the Georgia Chapter of the American Fisheries Society on Jekyll Island. CRD staff gave presentations on various aspects of Red Drum management and surveys, former CRD Director Susan Shipman gave the keynote address.



DNR Photos

Above. CRD Marine Biologists Eddie Leonard, top left, and BJ Hilton, second from top left, speak to members of Leadership Georgia aboard the Research Vessel Reid W. Harris as part of a tour. **Below.** CRD's Tyler Jones, left, and Kathy Knowlton hold pieces of a weather balloon that landed at the Brunswick DNR office recently.

Georgia saltmarshes highlighted in CAC meeting

The Georgia Coastal Management Program (GCMP) recently held its spring meeting of the Coastal Advisory Council, a 20-member board of representatives from local, state, and regional governments, environmental organizations, research and universities and coastal residents.

Staff presented updates on the various programs of the GCMP and Cameron Jaggard of the Pew Charitable Trust gave a presentation on the Trust's "South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative," which aims to protect one million acres of marsh from North Carolina to Florida. The meeting was held virtually, and plans are in the works to return to in-person meetings this summer.

Weather balloon travels from Tallahassee in hours, lands at Brunswick DNR Office

A National Weather Service (NWS) weather balloon landed on the Coastal Regional Headquarters earlier this quarter. Staff made a few quick phone calls and discovered it had been launched about four hours earlier from the NWS Station in Tallahassee, Fla. The balloon reached a height of 102,000 feet and speeds up to 140 mph, according to data gathered by NWS. A St. Simons Elementary School teacher saw CRD's social media post about the balloon and invited staff to bring the balloon to the school for a show-and-tell. The fourth graders were thoroughly



intrigued, and the visit was also an opportunity to introduce students to DNR's mission and talk about CRD.

CRD funds resiliency network

Staff attended the Coastal Empire Resiliency Network (CERN) partnering organizations kickoff meeting in Savannah. This effort is funded through CRD's Coastal Incentive Grant. This two-year grant will allow for local leaders to collaborate

and look for ways to prepare their communities by adapting and responding to short and long-term climate and weather-related changes.

Leadership Georgia brings more than 100 to Brunswick DNR Office

The Coastal Regional Headquarters hosted the Leadership Georgia class of 2022 for an open house and lunch presentation. Throughout the day, more than 100 visitors toured stations hosted by CRD, WRD, LED and Parks. Parks demonstrated historic weapons and CRD presented on wetlands, habitat, sportfish population survey, and shellfish units. WRD's Game Management and Wildlife Conservation sections spoke about their respective missions and showed visitors various specimens and exhibits.

CRD director, staff meet with Ossoff to discuss Tybee beach renourishment

CRD Director Doug Haymans and Marsh and Shore Permitting staff attended a roundtable discussion with U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff on Tybee Island to discuss new legislation that will ensure Tybee Island can continue to implement coastal storm risk management projects for at least 50 more years. Partners attending the event hosted by the city of Tybee Island included Savannah Mayor Van Johnson, Chatham Co. Commission Chairman Chester Ellis, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Georgia Conservancy.



Photo by Tyler Jones/CRD

CRD Marine Technician Sean Tarpley pulls a seine net on Great Dunes Beach on Jekyll Island on April 21 as part of an educational display for C.B. Greer Elementary School students from Brunswick.

Survey crew shows off seining skills to elementary schoolers

Marine Sportfish Population Health Survey (MSPHS) staff demonstrated seine netting on Jekyll Island for approximately 40 pre-K students from Brunswick's C.B. Greer Elementary School. MSPHS staff pulled a 300-foot seine for the students, and caught several species, including blue crab, spotted seatrout, and whiting. The students had the opportunity to see the species up-close and touch several specimens.



Provided photo

Participants construct rain barrels during a recent workshop.

Coastal residents attend CRD Rain Barrel workshop

Georgia Coastal Management Program staff hosted a Build Your Own Rain Barrel Workshop. Participants learned the importance of water conservation and rain water harvesting before constructing their very own rain barrel to take home. CRD

partners with Coca-Cola United, which donates their used syrup concentrate drums to be used in the workshops. Learn more about upcoming rain barrel workshops at <https://bit.ly/36ckamw>.

—Staff Reports

Sign up for news releases at CoastalGaDNR.org.

DRIVE GEORGIA WILD



'Drive Georgia Wild' with this specialty license plate from the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources.

For just \$25 more, you can help build artificial reefs and essential fish habitat.

Ask your county tag office or learn more at

DRIVE **GEORGIA** WILD.COM