

# Coastlines

## GEORGIA

June 2023 • Vol. 6, Iss. 2

# Coastal Georgia Seafood

How CRD helps bring your coastal favorites from the ocean to your table

Also inside:

**DNR Commissioner off to new challenge**

**Ask a Biologist: Fishing for Spotted Seatrout • Shrimp season kicks off**

**Two new state saltwater records set • 'Report Card' recap**

Magazine of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources • Coastal Resources Division

# Coastlines GEORGIA

June 2023 • Volume 6, Issue 2

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

Mark Williams,  
Commissioner

Doug Haymans,  
Director

Tyler Jones,  
Public Information Officer

Contributors  
Ryan Harrell  
Paul Medders  
Meghan Angelina

### 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

### Cover photo by Tyler Jones:

A low country boil is seen June 22 during a going-away luncheon for Commissioner Mark Williams.



COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

ONE CONSERVATION WAY  
BRUNSWICK, GA 31520

912-264-7218

WWW.COASTALGADNR.ORG



Tyler Jones/CRD

A mess of freshly caught blue crabs are poured into a steamer basket during a low country boil June 22.

*In this edition:*

# All about coastal Georgia seafood

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

When people think of the Georgia Coast, perhaps the most common things that come to mind are our pristine marshes, sandy beaches, and gently lapping waves. But for me, my mind goes straight to something even better: the food.

Living in coastal Georgia gives us the opportunity to have fresh shrimp, live blue crabs, and oysters picked straight from their beds. I am by no means the first person to discover the bounty offered here. Archaeologists have discovered oyster shell mounds, called "middens," on our barrier islands that date to the Late Archaic Period, 5,000 to 3,000 years ago left by Native Americans.

Tourists flock here in the summer months, inundating restaurants to order succulent, wild-caught Georgia shrimp. In the colder months, us locals can enjoy backyard oysters roasts, featuring the salty, briny, blade-shaped bivalves that dot our estuaries.

Seafood is also an important part of the coastal economy. In 2022, shrimpers alone brought in more than two million pounds of shrimp with a dockside value of about \$10.6 million.

That's why I'm happy to say this edition of Coastlines Georgia is dedicated to all things coastal seafood. We've packed this edition with interesting information about what CRD does to conserve the fisheries, how we collect our data, and maybe most importantly, a classic recipe. Bon appetit!

# Marine educator named EOQ

STAFF REPORT  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

CRD Marine Educator Cate Williams was named Employee of the Quarter for spring 2023.

She was chosen for her outstanding performance, said CRD Director Doug Haymans when he made the announcement April 10.

"This 'herder of cats' (also known as students), wrangler of volunteers, and possessor of bright and cheery personality works hard each week to ensure CRD's message is heard across the coast," Haymans said in his announcement.

Williams organizes many of CRD's outreach and education events, including the annual Kids Fishing Events, visits from leadership academy groups, school field trips both off and on campus, and coordination with other environmental conservation organizations like Georgia 4H. She started working for DNR in 2005 with State Parks and Historic Sites, serving at Unicoi Lodge, Stephen C. Foster, Amicalola, Reynolds Mansion, George L. Smith, Laura S. Walker, Tallulah Gorge, and Crooked River state parks. In 2017, she went to work for DNR's Environmental Protection



File photo/CRD

CRD Marine Educator Cate Williams speaks with students at Blackshear Elementary School on March 22 during Career Day.

Division and transferred to her current role with CRD in 2019.

Her husband Sam is a corporal with DNR's Law Enforcement Division. They have two daughters, Maggie and Mary Belle.

### NEW FACES AND ROLES

#### EPD staffer joins CRD in new role

CRD welcomed Jim Long as a Coastal Management Specialist in May 2023. He will be working with CRD Federal Consistency Specialist Kelie Moore and the Georgia Coastal Management Program team to build capacity in coastal management in multiple facets. Long previously worked for DNR's EPD as an Environmental Compliance Specialist. He enjoys the beach and exploring the outdoors, he is glad to be back on the coast.



Long

#### New permit coordinator joins CRD team

CRD welcomed a new Coastal Permit Coordinator, Cheyenne Osborne, in mid March. Cheyenne will assist with private recreational dock applications and bank stabilizations in northern counties. She previously worked in retail and merchandising while obtaining

her bachelors degree in Coastal Ecology. She interned with the EPD ambient water quality team in Brunswick before joining CRD. She enjoys the outdoors, especially on the Georgia coast where she has spent most of her life. She also enjoys hiking any where from the Appalachians to the Rocky Mountains.



Osborne

#### Field tech promoted to marine biologist

In March of this year, Kaylan Collins started her new role with the Shellfish and Water Quality Unit at CRD. After graduating from UGA in May 2017, Kaylan began working at the CRD with the Coastal Longline Survey. She was then hired full-time in June 2018 to work as a Creel Technician. A year later, she joined the Shellfish Water Quality Unit as a Lab Technician, moved into a Field Position role, and is now a



Collins

Marine Biologist assisting with the reconnaissance, sampling, data analysis, and GIS mapping activities in support of the program. Kaylan is excited to continue working with the unit and being a part of its development.

#### Lab tech moves to Compliance & Enforcement

Clayton Davis started a new role at the division in March. Originally hired in September 2020 as a marine technician for the Beach & Shellfish Water Quality lab assisting with sample collection and analysis. In his new role with the Compliance and Enforcement Unit, he will assist with monitoring permit conformity, responding to regulatory complaints, and managing marina waterbottom leases. Davis also previously interned with CRD during his undergrad program at College of Coastal Georgia.



Davis

– STAFF REPORT

# DNR Commissioner off to new challenge

## Williams to lead of Jekyll Island Authority

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

After years of dedicated service and exemplary leadership, the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Mark Williams, has announced he is leaving the department to take on a new challenge, effective June 30. Williams leaves behind a remarkable legacy of conservation, environmental stewardship, and public service.

He will begin his new position as executive director of the Jekyll Island Authority on July 1.

During his tenure with DNR, which began in 2010, Williams has played a pivotal role in shaping the direction of the department, working tirelessly to protect and conserve the state's natural resources, promote outdoor recreational activities, and ensure the sustainability of Georgia's ecosystems.

Under Williams' leadership, DNR has made significant strides in the areas of land and water conservation, wildlife management, and environmental education. His balanced approach and commitment to collaboration have strengthened partnerships with various stakeholders, including other

government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local communities.

Throughout his career, Williams has championed numerous initiatives to protect and enhance Georgia's natural resources. He has actively promoted responsible hunting and fishing practices, implemented effective wildlife management strategies, and fostered the restoration and conservation of critical habitats. Williams' unwavering dedication has not only benefited the environment but has also contributed to the economic vitality and quality of life for the citizens of Georgia.

Beyond his accomplishments within DNR, Williams has also been a prominent voice in regional and national conservation efforts. He represented the 178th district in the Georgia House of Representatives for two terms from 2006 to 2010 and is a former high school teacher and football coach. He is a veteran of the Army National Guard. Born in Valdosta, Williams received a bachelor's degree in biology from Georgia College and State University. He is a member of Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Altamaha Wildlife Association, the Satilla Riverkeepers, the Flint Riverkeepers, the



File photo/CRD

DNR Commissioner Mark Williams holds a plaque presented to him by CRD during a going-away luncheon June 22 at Coastal Regional Headquarters.

Georgia Wildlife Federation and the Piedmont Park Conservancy.

Williams and his wife Pam have two daughters, Mary Katelyn and Miranda. He is a proud grandparent to Mary Katelyn and her husband Troy's two sets of twins.

DNR is grateful for Williams' outstanding service and profound impact on the state's environmental landscape. His tireless efforts have left an indelible mark on the conservation community and will serve as an inspiration for future leaders in the field.

Williams' successor will be named by the Governor's Office at a future date. 🐾

### NEWS BRIEF

#### MARTA Board votes to donate retired railcars for reefs

The Board of Directors of MARTA, the Atlanta subway system, voted on June 8 to donate two retired subway cars to CRD to use at artificial reefs offshore.

The board approved a contract for a private company to clean the cars and remove grease, oil, and other chemicals to prepare them for

use as reef material. While MARTA has committed to two cars to begin with, it's possible that a total of eight could make their way to the coast.

Paul Medders, leader of the Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Unit, said he's glad to accept the cars on behalf of CRD.

"These will make excellent additions to our offshore reefs, providing a substrate for natural reef growth," Medders said.

-STAFF REPORT



Provided photo/MARTA  
MARTA cars, like the ones pictured here, are slated for donation to CRD to use at artificial reefs.



# SHRIMP SEASON 2023 OPENS

File photos/CRD

Shrimp trawlers drag their nets off Sapelo Island on opening day of shrimp season in 2022. This year's season opened on June 20.

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Georgia's commercial and recreational food shrimp season opened in the state's territorial waters at 8 a.m. June 20.

DNR Commissioner Mark Williams signed an administrative order in early June setting the opening date based on recommendations of CRD, which manages marine fisheries, and an advisory panel comprised of commercial and recreational shrimpers, independent scientists, and other stakeholders.

"Data collected during CRD's Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey indicate that shrimp populations may benefit from a short delay in the opening of Georgia's coastal state waters to the harvest of food shrimp," explained Eddie Leonard, a CRD marine biologist who oversees shrimp data collection. "Key measurements including the number of shrimp per pound and advanced female reproductive status for May 2023 indicate that the fishery could benefit from waiting until the latter half of June to open the season."

With the opening, commercial shrimp trawlers can operate in the state's territorial waters from shore to three nautical miles out to sea, where waters become federally



managed. Trawlers may operate in state waters from 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset. Trawlers may operate 24 hours per day in federally managed waters. All trawlers are required to use a certified bycatch reduction device and turtle excluder device in both state and federal waters.

Commercial and recreational license holders can also use cast and seine nets to harvest food shrimp. Recreational harvesters must obtain a Georgia fishing license and free Saltwater Information Program permit. License information is available at [www.CoastalGaDNR.org/RecreationalFishing](http://www.CoastalGaDNR.org/RecreationalFishing) and can be purchased at [www.GoOutdoorsGeorgia.com](http://www.GoOutdoorsGeorgia.com).

CRD reminds the public that all

#### More Online

Scan this code to see a YouTube video about the Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey and learn about data collection and more!



motorized vessels--both recreational and commercials--must be at least 1,000 feet from the shores of Jekyll, St. Simons, Sea, and Tybee islands from May 1 to Sept. 30. This restriction includes personal watercraft.

Anyone with questions may contact the CRD at 912-264-7218 or visit [www.CoastalGaDNR.org](http://www.CoastalGaDNR.org). 🐾

# COASTAL GEORGIA SEAFOOD

HOW CRD HELPS BRING YOUR COASTAL FAVORITES  
FROM THE OCEAN TO YOUR TABLE

By TYLER JONES  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Georgia's stunning coastline boasts not only breathtaking views and serene beaches, but also a diverse array of seafood that captivates the hearts and palates of locals and visitors alike. Among the treasures of the Georgia coast, three favorites stand out: blue crabs, shrimp, and oysters. These foods play an important role in the recreational and commercial significance of coastal Georgia culture, and are exceptional foods that have made them staples in the region's culinary scene.

### Bountiful Harvests and Sustainable Management

The Georgia coast offers a haven for recreational fishers and seafood enthusiasts who love the thrill of catching their own seafood treasures. Catching blue

crabs, seining the beaches for shrimp and picking oysters are time-honored traditions for many coastal residents, fostering a deep connection to the local environment and its bountiful offerings.

Dr. Carolyn Belcher, chief of CRD's Marine Fisheries Section, said the coast offers a wide variety of the recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.

"The estuaries along Georgia's coast are thriving ecosystems, serving as nurseries and habitats for various marine species," she said. "Blue crabs, shrimp, and oysters are not only important economically, but also provide recreational opportunities for people to connect with nature and engage in sustainable harvesting practices. At CRD, we conduct a variety of surveys that help us to better understand the local fisheries, and what we can do



Tyler Jones/CRD

Fresh wild Georgia shrimp are poured from a steamer basket during a low country boil June 22.

to conserve them for future generations and ensure the sustainability of our resources."

Shrimp season, for example, is opened and closed using data from CRD's Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey (EMTS). This survey is one of the longest uninterrupted and ongoing fishery-independent surveys on the Eastern U.S. coast. The EMTS is performed monthly using an otter trawl configured with a 40-foot net towed behind the Research Vessel *Reid W Harris*.

Six of Georgia's commercially important estuarine sound systems are sampled each month: Wassaw, Ossabaw, Sapelo, St. Simons, St. Andrew and Cumberland. Monthly catch-per-unit-of-effort values are compared with historical database averages to evaluate stock status and abundance and to prepare administrative fishery management recommendations for recreationally and commercially important species.

"Anyone that loves wild Georgia shrimp has a connection to this survey," Belcher said. "It's through the data gathered aboard the *Harris* that we can continue to successfully manage this important commercial fishery."

Likewise, these tasty crustaceans are a favorite for recreational beach seiners, who pull nets up and down the coast's beaches every summer. Setting recreational limits on how much seafood any one person or group can harvest helps ensure these activities will be enjoyed for decades to come.

"By implementing measures such as size limits, seasonal closures, and habitat restoration, we can safeguard the populations of blue crabs, shrimp, and oysters, ensuring their availability for future generations to enjoy," Belcher said. "It is crucial to strike a balance between interests and the conservation of these invaluable resources."

### Commercial Importance and Economic Impact

Beyond recreation, the seafood industry along the Georgia coast plays a vital role in the local economy, supporting numerous jobs and contributing to the region's economy. In 2022, shrimp and blue crab harvests in Georgia accounted for a dockside value of more than \$16 million, according to landings reported to CRD. These delicious treats are highly sought-after commodities, finding their way from the coastal waters to the tables of homes and restaurants throughout the low country and beyond.

Chef Tim Lensch, executive chef of Georgia Sea Grill on St. Simons Island, shared his perspective on the value of Georgia's seafood: "We have some of the best seafood on the Atlantic Coast here in Georgia," he said. "The white shrimp from Georgia are some of the sweetest you'll taste. Right now, our corn-fried shrimp are selling like crazy. I think when people look to Coastal Georgia, one of their initial thoughts is shrimp. It's always popular, especially our shrimp and grits."

**Keeping Seafood Safe**

The allure of Georgia's seafood is undeniable. Blue crabs, shrimp, and oysters are culinary staples, enriching traditional dishes and inspiring innovative creations that showcase the region's unique flavors.

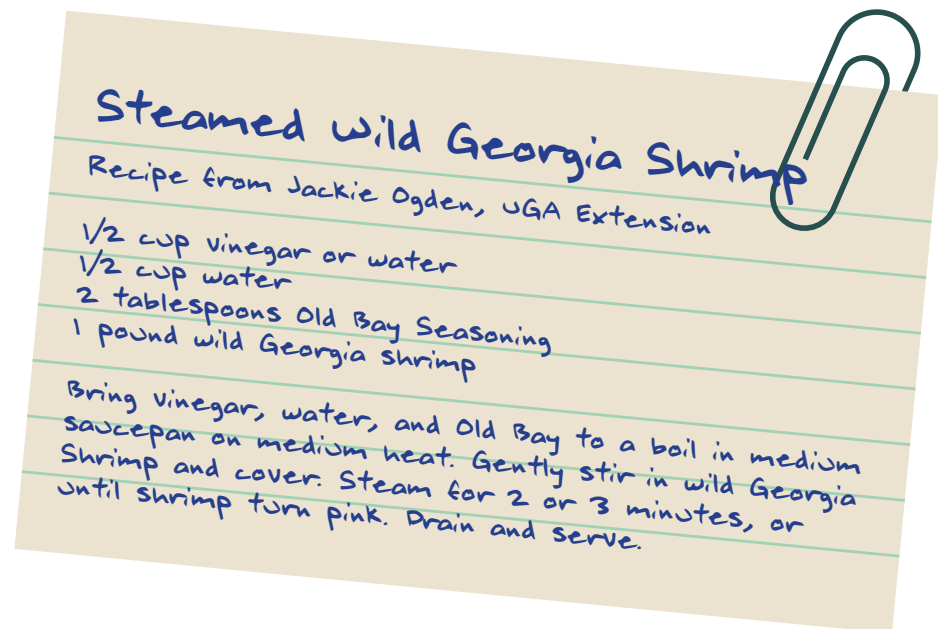
Perhaps one of the most highly prized seafoods from the Georgia coast are its blade-shaped, hand-harvested oysters. Described by many as the tastiest oysters around, they are used in backyard oyster roasts, chowders and stews, and eaten raw or steamed. Keeping these bivalves safe to consumers is at the forefront of CRD's Shellfish Sanitation Plan. CRD's Shellfish and Water Quality Unit monitors shellfish harvest areas, ensuring potentially dangerous bacteria levels stay below unacceptable levels.

"We monitor 82 water quality sites per month," said Dominic Guadagnoli, the unit's leader. "Our program is administered under the guidance of the Food and Drug Administration, and in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Agriculture."

Commercial shellfish harvesters are required to go through an education program at CRD, which recently expanded to offer a self-paced interactive course proctored at CRD. The new training is offered in English, and for the first time, now in Spanish. The three-module course was put together by CRD Marine Biologist Michael Mock, who also works in the Shellfish and Water Quality Unit.

"We saw a need to make sure Georgia shellfish harvesters are getting the most up-to-date, thorough training available," he said. "We had an existing training program, but this new version offers a more interactive approach, aimed at helping harvesters learn lasting and valuable information that can help keep themselves and the public safe."

The training includes information on safe harvest practices, time and temperature regulations, contamination prevention, and state and federal rules that govern shellfish harvest.



**Star of the Show: Blue Crabs**

One of the most iconic stars of the Georgia seafood scene, though, is undoubtedly the blue crab.

These hard-shelled marine animals are named for their bright blue claws, and are abundant in coastal Georgia rivers, creeks, sounds, and nearshore waters. An active swimmer, with its last pair of legs flattened like small paddles, its scientific name is *Callinectes sapidus*, meaning "beautiful swimmer."

Blue crabs can be found from New Jersey to Florida on the Atlantic coast, and along the Gulf coast to Texas. These crabs feed on most plant and animal matter available to them. During winter months, cooler water temperatures send them into semi-hibernation. However, they are available to fisherman year-round.

Blue crabs have a lifespan of about two to three years on average. Females can carry 700,000 to 2 million eggs on the abdomen for about two weeks until the eggs hatch.

When a blue crab outgrows its hard shell, it sheds that shell by backing out of it. After "molting," the new soft shell that was beneath the hard outer shell will begin to harden. Blue crabs are frequently harvested during this stage, which lasts just a few hours. These soft-shell crabs provide excellent eating without the trouble of picking the shell.

In Georgia, the commercial blue crab harvest is the second most

important seafood industry after shrimp, bringing crab fishermen an average of \$4.78 million annually. Georgia laws are very encouraging for the sport crabber. Unless otherwise designated, the saltwaters of Georgia are open year-round for recreational crabbing at any time of day.

**'Why wouldn't you?'**

The seafood treasures found along the Georgia coast represent more than just a delicious meal—they embody the unique connection between the region's people and its rich marine ecosystems. The recreational joy, commercial importance, and exceptional food value of these seafoods cannot be overstated.

Blue crabs, shrimp, and oysters hold a special place in the hearts and palates of Georgians and visitors alike. From the thrill of catching blue crabs and the joy of shrimp festivals to the culinary traditions surrounding oysters, the bounty of the Georgia coast continues to be a source of pride and sustenance. Whether you are a seafood lover, an angler, or a connoisseur of coastal cuisine, Georgia's seafood offerings are a true delight to be savored and celebrated.

Chef Lensch of Georgia Sea Grill summed it up: "My love for Southern cooking is connected to the low country," he said. "With all the incredible ingredients we have here, why wouldn't you use them?"

# CRD donates \$25K to endowment

**STAFF REPORT**  
 COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

CRD recently made its second of two \$25,000 donations to the Coastal Pines Technical College Foundation to fund a scholarship aimed at recruiting students to learn commercial fishing.

Funding for the endowment and scholarship comes from a 2019 U.S. Commerce Department's aid allocation for a fishery failure that occurred during Georgia's 2013 shrimp season. During that season, commercial shrimpers saw a 58 percent reduction in harvest, prompting then-Gov. Nathan Deal to request federal aid.



From left, CRD Director Doug Haymans, Coastal Pines Technical College (CPTC) Foundation Trustee Donna Poe, CRD Chief of Marine Fisheries Dr. Carolyn Belcher, CPTC President Lonnie Roberts, CPTC Executive Vice President Amanda Morris, and CPTC Executive Director of College Advancement Stephanie Robberts.

**RIBBON CUTTINGS AROUND THE COAST**

**Ribbon cut for Noyes Cut closure**



Coastal Regional Headquarters hosted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a joint ribbon cutting in May to mark the completion of the Noyes Cut Ecosystem Restoration Project. Commissioner Mark Williams, U.S. Army Corps Savannah District Commander Col. Joseph Geary, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jaime Pinkham all spoke about the project, which closed two man-made cuts in the Satilla River estuary made in the 1940s. The project was jointly funded with \$3.1 million in federal dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and \$1.7 million from the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program. It is among the first projects to be completed with both pools of money, nationwide and in the state.

The Village Creek boat ramp on South Harrington Road on St. Simons Island was closed for three months for DNR-funded repairs and improvements to enhance the overall user experience. The project involved the replacement of the 14-foot wide, 8-inch thick ramp surface and the installation of a new 9-foot wide courtesy dock. "We're excited to welcome back boaters to the newly renovated Village Creek boat ramp," said Paul Medders, public access leader for DNR's Coastal Resources Division. "The construction and upgrades were necessary to ensure the safety of all users, and we're thrilled with the outcome." The Village Creek ramp is a popular destination for recreational boaters, anglers, and kayakers. It re-opened April 4.

**Village Creek ramp improved**



Ask a marine biologist

Illustration by Dianne Rome Peebles

# Spotted Seatrout

A summertime favorite for coastal Georgia anglers



In this edition of Coastlines Georgia, we're talking with CRD Marine Biologist Ryan Harrell, who works with our Marine Sportfish Population Health Survey. Ryan samples recreational species and has worked with CRD for 11 years. He frequently enjoys fishing for spotted seatrout out of his small boat with his kids Anders (9) and Vera Kate (6). He agreed to share some of his favorite tips.

## Coastlines Magazine: What are the best months to fish for Spotted Seatrout?

**Ryan Harrell:** Spotted seatrout can be caught year-round in coastal Georgia but the absolute best months are September through November. During the fall, post-spawn seatrout move into the estuary and rivers to gorge on bait before the winter comes. In the winter, fish move into deeper holes seeking warmer water. As the temperature begins to warm in the spring, Spotted Seatrout will begin feeding more and moving into saltier areas along the beaches and in the sound to prepare for the spawning season which takes place mid-April through September.

## CM: What type of rods/reels and tackle do you need to fish for Spotted Seatrout?

**RH:** A 7 foot medium-light or medium spinning rod with a size 2500 spinning reel is a good all around setup for spotted seatrout. Most anglers use 15 to 20-lb. braided line with a 15 to 20-lb. fluorocarbon leader. If live bait fishing you'll need a slip bobber, a bobber stop, the appropriate sinker for your bobber, and a 1 or 1/0 kahle hook.

## CM: What are the most effective baits and lures for seatrout?

**RH:** The most common bait used around here is simply a live shrimp fished under a slip bobber. Other live baits that work well are mudminnows and finger mullet. Artificial lures are also very effective. Paddletails, shrimp lures, and curly tails fished on a jighead will produce bites. These lures can be fished under a popping cork or just using a slow retrieve. One of my favorite ways to fish for seatrout during the summer months is using topwater lures with a "walk the dog" retrieve. This can be effective early in the morning, late in the evening, or all day if it's overcast. One thing to keep in mind is that seatrout have very soft mouths. It's important to keep the drag loose or you're probably going to lose some fish.

## CM: What type of structure or habitat should people look for when fishing for seatrout?

**RH:** During the higher tides fish can typically be found near the grass line over submerged structure such as oyster beds. When fishing the falling tide I like to concentrate on creek run offs. Often time, seatrout will be waiting right near the rip waiting to attack baitfish moving out of the creek. Anywhere near oyster bars, docks, or rocks typically hold fish. You have to be flexible when trying to locate fish. If you're not getting a bite, keep moving. Often, I will drift or use my trolling motor and work the bank with a popping cork. When I find the fish, I'll anchor for a while and move on when the bite turns off.

## CM: Do I have to have a boat to catch seatrout?

**RH:** There are many boatless spotted seatrout anglers out there. Just

Illustration provided by Georgia SeaGrant  
A popping cork rig, seen here, can be useful in attracting and landing spotted seatrout.



Ryan Harrell/CRD

Anders, son of CRD marine biologist Ryan Harrell, holds his first-ever saltwater fish, a spotted seatrout, caught all by himself.

about any public fishing pier or dock in brackish and saltwater will hold seatrout at some point. The beaches will hold fish during the spring and summer months. The bridges and banks of the St. Simons causeway are popular areas to check out spring through fall.

## CM: What is the typical size range of seatrout in the area?

**RH:** Most seatrout caught will be between 12 and 18 inches but 20 inch plus fish isn't uncommon. The men's Georgia state record is 9-lbs., 7-oz. while the women's record is 7-lbs., 8-oz. Both fish measured 30.5 inches. The Georgia minimum size to harvest a Spotted Seatrout is 14 inches (Total Length) and anglers are allowed up to 15 per person/per day.

## CM: What other species might you catch while targeting Spotted Seatrout?

**RH:** The fun thing about fishing saltwater is you really never know

what you might catch. When fishing for Spotted Seatrout you might catch other recreational species such as red drum, flounder, black drum, or gray (mangrove) snapper. Then again you might catch Ladyfish, sharks, Silver Perch, or other less desirable fish.

## CM: What is the best way to prepare and cook Spotted Seatrout once it is caught?

**RH:** There really is no wrong way to cook seatrout. Fried, baked, broiled, or grilled with your seasoning of choice are all great options. The meat is a bit softer than other fish so it's important not to over cook them or they get a bit mushy. Also, they don't freeze as well as other fish so I prefer to only keep enough for dinner and eat them fresh.

## CM: Is there anything you'd like to add or say?

**RH:** Seatrout are a blast to catch. They are plentiful, can be caught on

## Want to find places to catch spotted seatrout?

CRD can provide fishing maps of coastal Georgia counties. Stop by our office at 1 Conservation Way, Brunswick, GA 31520 and pick up a free copy. You can also find the same maps available online at [www.CoastalGaDNR.org/FishingMaps](http://www.CoastalGaDNR.org/FishingMaps)

many different baits and lures, and they are tasty too. I guess that's one of the reasons they are one of the most targeted species along the Georgia coast. Also, bobber fishing for seatrout is a great way to take kids fishing.

Learn more about common saltwater fish species online at [MarineFishesofGeorgia.org](http://MarineFishesofGeorgia.org)



Jayne Gaskin/CRD

The new living shoreline at Coastal Regional Headquarters in Brunswick serving as a demonstration site for the continuous education of living shorelines in Georgia.

## Living shoreline added to Coastal HQ

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

A living shoreline was constructed in mid June to replace 160 feet of a wooden bulkhead at DNR's Coastal Regional Headquarters (CRH).

Living shorelines are an erosion control technique that maintains or enhances the natural connectivity and processes between the land-water interface and is constructed using the strategic placement of mostly native materials to protect estuarine shorelines, absorb wave and tidal energy, and enhance coastal habitats.

Although living shorelines are best suited for areas of low to mid energy and may not be best in every situation, we have learned of some potential disadvantages of hardened structures, including habitat loss and further erosion on each side of the structure.

The CRH Living Shoreline

has a dual purpose – protecting infrastructure behind the upland and serving as a demonstration site for the continuous education of living shorelines in Georgia.

Although high tides typically touch the new living shoreline, oyster cultch material was not used for this project due to the proximity of the creek.

The living shoreline is 160 linear feet and separated into four, 40-foot sections, where two have a two-tiered design and the other two were graded to a 3:1 slope.

Dividing the shoreline into four sections allows for the demonstration of various methods and materials that can be used to construct a living shoreline. One of the tiered sections and one of the sloped sections use natural coir fiber erosion control mats and straw double layer jute mats where the others have no mats.

To further support sediment and materials on the shoreline, fiber coir

logs and Sox were placed at the “toe” of the shoreline, as well as at the bases of the top and middle tiers.

Existing storm drains that run through the shoreline were maintained and supported with rip rap at the inlets and outlets. All four sections include native vegetation; 750 *Spartina alterniflora* plugs were planted along the intertidal and a variety of approximately 1,500 plants like Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*), sea oxeye daisy (*Borrchia frutescens*) and dune sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*) were planted behind it.

A stone infiltration trench was constructed along the top of the shoreline to absorb stormwater runoff. Diamondback terrapins have already used the living shoreline for upland access and nesting habitat.

CRD staff will continue to monitor the living shoreline as a part of a coastwide monitoring effort to move living shorelines forward in Georgia. ▀

# Annual Report Card released

This year, coastal Georgia scored ‘B’, or moderately good

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

CRD recently released its annual Coastal Georgia Ecosystem Report Card, highlighting the current health and condition of the region's ecosystems.

The report card provides valuable insights into the state of Georgia's coastal environment and serves as a tool for decision-makers and community members to better understand the impacts of their actions on the local ecosystem.

This year's report scored a “B,” or moderately good health. The report card assesses various aspects of the coastal environment, including water quality, habitat condition, and the overall health of key species. The report is based on data collected by DNR biologists and technicians over the past year, and provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the ecosystem.

The report highlights both positive and negative trends in the region. While there have been some improvements in water quality and habitat condition, there are still areas of note, including the drop in metrics for species.

“Of note this year, we saw increases in the quality of water, along with sea turtle hatching,” said Jan Mackinnon, a program manager with DNR's Coastal Resources Division who oversees the report's compilation. “The overall scores for this year of ‘B’ is slightly down from last year's ‘A-,’ and we can attribute that to a marked drop in the blue crab score within the report's Fisheries Index and bald eagle-related scores.

“This drop in scores is likely due to estuary salinity changes caused by decreased rainfall in locations where DNR biologist sample blue crabs,”

Indicator	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
fecal coliform	92%	92%	92%	80%	90%	98%	90%	95%	99%
enterococcus	82%	91%	94%	94%	96%	78%	72%	78%	83%
dissolved oxygen	79%	85%	87%	84%	84%	87%	90%	85%	75%
shrimp	100%	100%	96%	84%	84%	75%	92%	100%	86%
red drum	83%	69%	100%	100%	91%	100%	40%	100%	100%
blue crabs	22%	62%	47%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	18%
spotted seatrout	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	70%
American oystercatchers	47%	61%	28%	13%	78%	78%	66%	47%	40%
wood storks	67%	70%	64%	84%	81%	78%	59%	68%	70%
bald eagles	NA	66%	46%	57%	62%	51%	57%	62%	48%
sea turtle hatching	77%	69%	64%	47%	44%	64%	60%	59%	73%
sea turtle nesting	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

<p><b>A</b> 80-100%</p> <p>All water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be very good, most often leading to preferred habitat conditions.</p>	<p><b>B</b> 60-79%</p> <p>Most water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be good, often leading to acceptable habitat conditions.</p>	<p><b>C</b> 40-59%</p> <p>There is a mix of good and poor levels of water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators. Indicators in these locations tend to be fair, leading to sufficient habitat conditions.</p>	<p><b>D</b> 20-39%</p> <p>Few water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be poor, often leading to degraded habitat conditions.</p>	<p><b>F</b> 0-19%</p> <p>Very few or no water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be very poor, most often leading to unacceptable habitat conditions.</p>
---	--	---	---	---

Mackinnon continued. “While these sampling locations stay the same, the blue crabs migrate to different parts of the estuary seeking favorable salinity and water conditions. This movement of the blue crab populations can have an impact on the overall report card score.”

Likewise, bald eagles saw a lower score than the last report, likely driven by lower numbers of eaglets fledging. There were also more failed nest than expected and some test results revealed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Virus in deceased bald eagles.

“The annual Coastal Georgia

Ecosystem Report Card is an important tool for understanding the state of our coastal environment and the impact of our actions on it,” said Mackinnon. “We hope that this report will inspire individuals, organizations, and governments to take action to conserve and protect our valuable coastal resources.”

The report card is available to the public online at CoastalGaDNR.org/ReportCard. Members of the public are encouraged to read the report to learn more about the state of the coastal ecosystem and how they can get involved in conservation efforts. ▀

GAME FISH RECORDS

# Two new state saltwater records set

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

A Richmond Hill man and a Brunswick woman are the newest additions to Georgia's state saltwater game fish records.

Spencer N. Schutte, 27, caught a pinfish weighing 2-pounds, 3.2-ounces and measuring 14 and a half inches total length in Kilkenny Creek in Bryan County on March 12, and Stacey T. Pope of Brunswick on April 7 caught a vermillion snapper weighing 5 pounds, 5.56 ounces.

Both catches were certified by CRD recently, and the anglers received certificates of accomplishment signed by Gov. Brian Kemp, along with other mementos from CRD.

"It's definitely a good feeling to break that record that's stood for almost six years," said Schutte. "But the biggest thing is the Georgia waters. I know the last (men's record pinfish) was caught 40 miles offshore, so that goes to show there's plenty of opportunities to get out there, enjoy it, and do everything the Georgia waters have to offer."

Schutte's catch was weighed on certified scales at Fort McAllister Marina in Richmond Hill. This is the second standing record for pinfish to be weighed at Fort McAllister Marina in recent years, joining Nicole Starnes of Richmond Hill as the women's record holder with her 1-pound, 14.39-ounce pinfish from 2020.

Pope caught the vermillion snapper while fishing offshore near Artificial Reef DW approximately 70 miles east of Sapelo Island. She was bottom fishing with a 7-foot Eureka Charter Special rod and Avet SX G2 reel terminating with a knocker rig baited with menhaden. She was accompanied by licensed



Provided photos/CRD

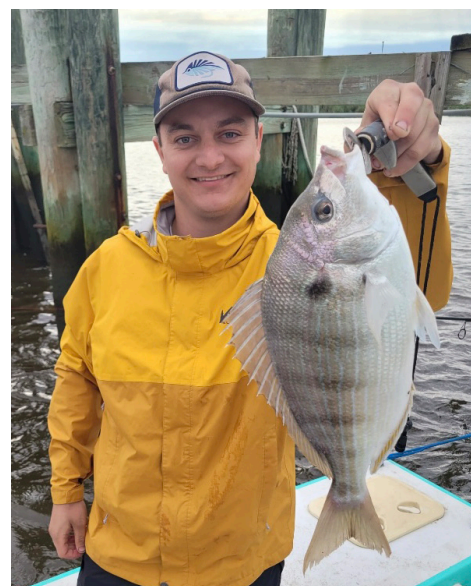
**Above**, Stacey T. Pope holds her record-setting vermillion snapper. **At left**, Spencer Schutte poses with his new record pinfish.

charter guide Capt. Quentin Van Heerden of Eureka Charters. Her catch was weighed on a certified scale at City Market on Gloucester Street in Brunswick.

According to Pope, she was surprised to catch such a large fish and was thrilled when she learned that she had set a new state record.

"It was amazing to catch the fish," said Pope. "It was a little scary, but it was exciting. We just bought a boat in December, and this was only our third time offshore fishing. It's a lot of fun, I love it."

Anglers in Georgia are required to have a valid recreational fishing license, free Saltwater Information Program permit, and to follow



size and possession limits for various species. State saltwater record rules and regulations can be found at [CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords](http://CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords).

## GEORGIA SALTWATER GAMEFISH PROGRAM

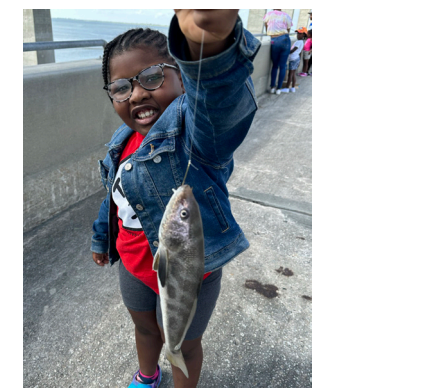
For the current list of saltwater fishing records,

as well as information on how to submit a catch, visit [CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords](http://CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords).

# A look around ...

## Photos from the Golden Isles Kids Fishing Event

CRD hosted the Golden Isles Kid's Fishing Event at Liberty Ship Park in Brunswick on June 3. Guests participated in various educational classes, fished, and ate hotdogs for lunch. Each student took home a fishing pole, tackle box, and some swag. Approximately 120 people attended the event.





COLUMN

Seasons of the Saltmarsh

# The 'Dog Days' of Summer

By PAUL MEDDERS

MARINE BIOLOGIST  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Throughout time, cultures around the world have told stories to remind us how to treat each other, to tell us about past events, and even to educate us about the natural world. Words and pictures have been used to remind future generations why they should care enough to turn the stories into actions.

This episode of the story is all about summer in the Georgia saltmarsh. The saltmarsh is one of the dominant landscape features of the coastal zone of Georgia. The 368,000 acres of saltmarsh are bordered on the east by the barrier islands and Atlantic ocean. The western border is commonly an expansive freshwater swamp or one of the five inland rivers bringing required fresh water to the estuary. The open sounds or bays is where freshwater and saltwater mix forming coastal estuaries.

This time of year is jam packed with celestial events that we distill down, misunderstand or take for granted. The dominant driver of the saltmarsh is the ever present ebb and flow of the tides. These tides would not exist if it were not for the push and the pull of the celestial bodies and precise location of the moon and the sun.

We just passed what we call the first day of summer. In coastal Georgia some years it feels like the first day of summer can come in early April.

That first day of summer (June 21) indicates more than just the longest day of the year in the northern hemisphere, but it is a time when the Earth's poles have the maximum tilt towards the sun. This maximum tilt towards the sun means not only long days with daylight well towards 9 p.m., but it also means our warmest of days.

Just after the summer solstice, we move right into what we call the "dog days" of summer. Many people in the south believe that the dog days of summer describe a time when even your old coon dog won't come out from under the shade of the front porch because it is so hot outside. Although a coon dog splayed out on the porch seems quintessentially southern, the truth is "the dog days of summer" has a celestial origin too. The dog days of summer are actually from July 3 to August 11 every year, and it has to do with the time of year when Sirius the "Dog Star" of the constellation Canis Major occupies the same region of the sky with the sun.

These extremely warm days have the saltmarsh maximizing productivity. From primary productivity of green plant growth to the warm waters of the estuary being a perfect home for phytoplankton like dinoflagellates to thrive, summer is a very active time. The saltmarsh is often talked about as being a nursery for many commercially and recreationally important

species. Many of these species are cold blooded animals and experience their fastest growth rates during these extreme warm months.

Keep in mind though that warmer is not always better. One of the main concerns when coastal water temperatures rise is the decrease in oxygen. Warmer water holds less oxygen needed by fish and crustaceans. Oxygen levels can bounce around changing very rapidly making the saltmarsh the harshest of environments from time to time.

## WHAT TO SEE

One of the purposes of this series is to encourage the reader to slow down and take a walk by the saltmarsh and look for small changes that are often missed in our fast paced digital world. So what do you see? If we start by the creek bank you will see smooth cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora*, in all of its glory. By the creek bank, at the lowest elevation, you will see smooth cordgrass represented in its tall form. You will notice the emerald green color and the long stems with alternating (hence *alterniflora*) long leaves reaching for the sun.

These long stems of the tall form of smooth cordgrass is what remains after the dying of winter. These long stems of last year's tall smooth cordgrass often form dense mats of what is commonly referred to as marsh wrack.. Marsh wrack that ends up on

the beach can collect enough wind driven sand to cause dune formation.

As you move up the marsh in elevation you will see the medium and short forms of smooth cordgrass that do not grow as tall because of the elevation change of the marsh soils below. Looking over the marsh while riding up U.S. Hwy. 17, it all looks like it grows to the same height and it does because of the twice daily inundation of saltwater. The varying heights of the plant is dictated by the elevation below.

The last notable thing about the saltmarsh overall this time of year is the color. With the first breath of spring the saltmarsh was still wearing its winter brown. As the weather warmed the base of the smooth cordgrass starts to show signs of green representing rebirth. By mid May, of most years, and into June the saltmarsh is as green as Catherine the Great's famous emerald necklace. Now if you look closely at the saltmarsh you will see hues of green with patches of yellow-golds and orangey-browns. The greens are still there but it is almost as if the saltmarsh is telling us to enjoy the dog days of summer with a foreshadowing of the impending fall and the bleakness of winter.

As always we encourage you to get out there and enjoy our unique coastal environment. Have experiences, make memories and tell stories. ▀

# Et Cetera ...

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Darien boat ramp receives upgrades

The Darien River boat ramp service dock received some much needed repairs. This popular small boat ramp is located at the end of Screven Street in downtown Darien. The floating dock was rebuilt with new floats, whaler boards and rub rails. Also, a new longer gangway was installed to keep the floating dock from sitting on the bottom at low tide.

### CRD staff helps remove one ton of trash along highway

CRD staff partnered with Keep Golden Isles Beautiful (KGIB) and eight other agencies and organizations for the 2023 Marsh Madness litter cleanup on March 21. Marsh Madness is a month-long event organized by KGIB, sponsored by Georgia-Pacific Brunswick Cellulose Mill, that is part of the National Great American Cleanup effort. Our salt marshes are a vital natural resource providing food and shelter to marine life, plus storm surge protection. The targeted area was the roadway along U.S. Highway 17 and adjacent marsh from the F.J. Torras Causeway to the Sidney Lanier Bridge. A total of 47 volunteers picked up more than one ton of trash along this section.

### Exchange Club hosts CRD permit coordinator for lunch-n-learn

Permit Coordinator Paul Tobler was the guest speaker for the Exchange Club of Brunswick recently. He did a short presentation on the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act (CMPA) and how CRD uses it as a regulatory tool, as well as our revocable license (RL) authority. He gave them a quick overview on the Superfund site remediation project at Terry Creek in Brunswick, as well as some GDOT projects, and explained how we



**Above:** CRD staff learn how to safely enter a life raft during a safety drill conductor training course in Brunswick. **Below:** New sand fencing has been installed on Tybee Island to help conserve the beach.

authorize other CMPA exempt entities through our RL authority. He also had a question and answer portion after his presentation.

### Boat crewmembers learn to be safety drill instructors

CRD staff completed a fishing vessel drill conductor training course. Crewmembers of both of CRD's research vessels refreshed their training on emergency signaling, onboard firefighting, flood/damage control, abandon ship procedures and the ingress of life rafts.

### CRD helps conserve Tybee beach

CRD Marsh & Shore Permit Coordinator Deb Barreiro partnered with City Of Tybee Island to coordinate a stewardship event for Georgia Conservancy on the beach April 27. Twenty-five volunteers installed sand fence segments at the toe of the recently created sand dune that was permitted by the Shore Protection Committee on Dec. 4, 2019. Wrack was collected by hand and placed at the



base of each new sand fence segment in an effort to enhance accretion. The 5.54 acre resiliency project at the island's erosional node is located in the area of Center Street north to East Gate. It included the placement of approximately 36,000 cubic yards of sand that was sculpted to create an 8 foot tall continuous sand dune that was then planted with Muhly Grass, Spartina patens, Sea Oats, Beach Morning Glory, Marsh Elder, Bitter Panic Grass, Salt Meadow Cord Grass in an effort to stabilize the sand dune and minimize storm surge impacts to the island community.

—STAFF REPORTS

# A look around ...

## Photos from the CoastFest on Earth Day

CRD hosted CoastFest on Saturday, April 22, at Mary Ross Waterfront Park in Brunswick. Returning in-person for the first time since 2019, the event drew about 6,000 people. CRD hosted a "Coastal Experience" pavilion that showcased our mission and programs, along with 40 other exhibitors who represented nonprofits, other government agencies, and conservation-minded groups. CoastFest featured live programs with wildlife, a climbing wall, archery, the Georgia Agricultural mobile classroom, black powder demonstrations from State Parks and Historic Sites Division, and more. The Georgia Natural Resources Foundation provided funding for the "Hawg Trough" giant aquarium, and Friends of Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites generously provided funds for lunch for all DNR staff.



# DRIVE GEORGIA WILD



**Registering your tag with your new address?** Upgrade with a specialty plate from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and show your new neighbors you support wildlife conservation.

To learn more, scan the code or visit

**DRIVE GEORGIA WILD.COM**



COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION  
ONE CONSERVATION WAY  
BRUNSWICK, GA 31520