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Coastlines

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GEORGIA



Navigating the Waters

*How fishery management agencies
shape the future of Georgia's coast*

Also inside:

**New mariculture leases planned for Glynn County • Holiday gift ideas
Pro tips for winter fishing • DNR responds to Helene**

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

Coastlines GEORGIA

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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:

ASMFC - Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

CRD - Coastal Resources Division

DNR - Georgia Department of Natural Resources

NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

SAFMC - South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

WRD - Wildlife Resources Division

Cover photo by Ashley Alexander.



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OPINION EDITORIAL



File photo/CRD

Kathy Knowlton, a programmatic and support specialist with the Marine Fisheries Section of CRD gives a presentation during a town hall on a saltwater angler satisfaction survey June 6, 2022, at the Armstrong Atlantic Campus of Georgia Southern University in Savannah.

Speak up for fisheries

By Doug Haymans
CRD DIRECTOR

The health and sustainability of our fisheries are vital not just for coastal economies and recreational opportunities, but also for the broader marine ecosystem. Decisions about how fish stocks are managed and protected shape the future of our waterways and the communities they support. Yet, these decisions aren't made in a vacuum—they depend on public input to be truly effective and representative. Organizations like the SAFMC, ASMFC, and CRD play pivotal roles in overseeing fisheries in our region. Through public comment periods, workshops, and hearings, these agencies invite stakeholders—everyone from commercial fishers and charter captains to conservationists and coastal residents—to weigh in on key issues.

By sharing local knowledge, personal experiences, and innovative ideas, the public helps shape management plans that balance ecological health with economic needs. For example, input from anglers

might reveal trends in fish populations or habitat changes that data alone might not capture. Similarly, feedback on proposed regulations can highlight unintended consequences and suggest practical alternatives.

Public involvement also fosters accountability and transparency, ensuring that management decisions reflect the needs of those who rely on the fisheries the most. Participation builds trust and promotes shared responsibility, reminding us that we all have a stake in sustaining our natural resources.

Engaging in these processes is easier than many realize. Attend a meeting, submit a comment online, or join a community discussion. Your voice matters—and it could make the difference in conserving our fisheries for future generations.

Together, we can ensure the long-term vitality of our waterways and the communities that thrive because of your participation. To stay up-to-date on opportunities to get involved, sign up for the CRD emailing list at CoastalGaDNR.org/MailingList. ▀

Wetlands biologist earns EOQ

Staff Report
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

CRD is proud to announce wetlands biologist Meghan Angelina as the Employee of the Quarter for Fall 2024. Angelina was selected for her contributions protecting Georgia's coastal resources and her dynamic presence both in the field and on national stages.

CRD Director Doug Haymans praised Angelina as a “lively protectress of the shoreline” and a “nationally renowned scientific presenter.” In his remarks, Haymans humorously highlighted her unique talents and personality: “Weirdly, she is an accomplished weed whacker with an uncanny eye for art. This angel truly has wings, drone wings that is, just don't ask her to catch it,” he joked, nodding to a time when a drone's blades nipped

her hand. “She is a former fine fellow with a positive, upbeat attitude and a can-do spirit,” Haymans added, noting she came to CRD originally as a Georgia SeaGrant Fellow.

Angelina's work has been instrumental in advancing CRD's mission to conserve and protect Georgia's coastal ecosystems. As a wetlands biologist, she combines cutting-edge technology, including drone surveys, with hands-on expertise to protect fragile habitats. She is also known for her ability to translate complex scientific findings into engaging presentations, inspiring both her colleagues and audiences nationwide.

Beyond her professional achievements, Angelina is celebrated for her creative problem-solving, artistic flair, and infectious enthusiasm that uplifts those around her.

CRD congratulates Angelina on this



File photo/CRD

Wetlands biologist Meghan Angelina attended Restoring America's Estuaries' 2023 Living Shorelines Tech Transfer Workshop on Oct. 24-25, 2023, in Galveston, Texas, where she presented a poster that summarized current living shoreline initiatives across coastal Georgia.

well-deserved recognition and thanks her for her dedication to safeguarding Georgia's coastal environment. ▀

NEW FACES & RETIREMENTS

New Marine Educator Joins CRD

CRD welcomed a new marine educator on Oct. 16.

Brooke Vallaster fills a vacancy left by Cate Williams, who left CRD over the summer to teach high school.



Vallaster

Vallaster comes to CRD most recently from the Georgia Sea Turtle Center on Jekyll Island.

Prior to that, she worked as a marine educator in the Ocean Science Lab at St. Simons Elementary School.

This is not Vallaster's first stint with DNR. From 1999 to 2011, she worked at the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve as an education coordinator.

In her role as the CRD marine educator, Vallaster will lead fishing

clinics for youth and adults, visit schools to teach about marine science and recreation, and assist with CRD outreach and communications initiatives.

In her free time, Vallaster enjoys traveling, hiking and biking, and visiting with her family. She lives in Brunswick.

Second-Generation CRDer Joins Public Affairs Staff

The son of long-time CRD employee Paul Medders came to work at CRD in October.

Fisher Medders was hired as a part-time public affairs assistant and will work alongside CRD's public information officer and marine educator.

In his role, he will help gather and edit video and photos of CRD activities, aid in graphic design,



Fisher Medders

outreach and educational programs, and website management.

He is a graduate of Brunswick High School and in his free time plays guitar in the “funk and funk-adjacent jam band” The Maple Street Band.

Compliance & Enforcement Unit Lead Retiring After 25 Years

Buck Bennett is retiring Dec. 31 after 25 years with CRD and more than 35 with the State of Georgia. Prior to CRD, Bennett worked at the Department of Labor as an outreach educator and veterans counselor. After retirement, he plans to do more hunting and spend quality time with his family.



Bennett

Note: Fisheries Statistics Technician Cindy Smith also retired at the end of November. A profile of her can be found on page 19. ▀

— STAFF REPORTS.

Lane snapper added as new record

By Tyler Jones

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

CRD on Nov. 21 certified a Savannah man as a new state-record holder for a lane snapper (*Lutjanus synagris*).

Marcus M. Hannon, 24, landed a lane snapper weighing 2 pounds, 15.8 ounces on Nov. 18 after bottom fishing at the Savannah Snapper Banks, approximately 30 miles east of Wassaw Sound. The fish measured 18 3/8 inches in total length with a girth of 12 1/2 inches.

This lane snapper not only earns a place in Georgia's record books, but also establishes a new species in the Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program.

Using a 7-foot, 6-inch Ugly Stik rod paired with a Penn Fierce IV 5000 spinning reel spooled with 60-pound braided line, Hannon relied on a fiddler crab as bait and a chicken rig featuring two circle hooks and a sinker. He caught the fish aboard a recreational vessel captained by Zach Hollick, also of Savannah.

The catch was weighed by DNR staff using Georgia Department of Agriculture-certified scales at the Richmond Hill Hatchery on Nov. 18.

"Setting a state record is a milestone few anglers achieve, and establishing a new species for the record program makes this accomplishment even more remarkable," said Tyler Jones, coordinator of CRD's Saltwater Game Fish Records Program. "Congratulations to Marcus on his new state record."

Hannon's record-setting catch will be celebrated with a certificate signed by Gov. Brian Kemp, DNR Commissioner Walter Rabon, and CRD Director Doug



Provided photo

Marcus Hannon, 24, of Savannah, poses with his record-setting lane snapper Nov. 18 after he caught it offshore at the Savannah Snapper Banks, about 30 miles east of Wassaw Sound in Chatham County.

Haymans. Hannon's name will be featured in the next Georgia Hunting and Fishing Regulations Guide and online at CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords as long as his record stands.

CRD congratulates Hannon on his catch and emphasizes the importance of sustainable fishing practices and the role of anglers in conserving marine resources. In particular, offshore anglers are reminded that descending devices and the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks are federally required when fishing for snapper-group species in federal waters offshore. These devices, which must be rigged and

ready to use in federal waters, have been shown to reduce mortality in fish experiencing barotrauma.

Anglers in Georgia must have a valid recreational fishing license, a free Saltwater Information Permit (SIP), and adhere to size and possession limits for various species.

The Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program recognizes anglers who land exceptional catches in saltwater and encourages the conservation of marine resources. Detailed state saltwater record program rules and regulations are available at CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords. 🐟

Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program

The Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program exists to recognize the outstanding and record-setting accomplishments of the state's saltwater anglers.

The program's full rules

and regulations, as well as an application for a new record, can be found online at CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords or by calling 912-264-7218. Individuals must

have a valid Georgia fishing license and Saltwater Information Program permit. Anyone with questions may contact the program's coordinator, Tyler Jones, at tyler.jones@dnr.ga.gov.



Brooke Vallaster/CRD

Wetlands biologist Meghan Angelina presents on living shorelines during the visit.

CRD hosts Coastal States Organization

Staff Report

COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

CRD hosted the Coastal States Organization (CSO) on St. Simons Island from Nov. 18 to 21.

The CSO is a nonpartisan non-profit organization that represents the governors of the nation's coastal states and territories on coastal management issues. Topics of discussion included federal legislation, regulatory issues, CSO project updates, and work group updates.

CRD arranged for the attendees to take tours and learn about the Jekyll Island sand-motor regional sediment management process, permitting artificial dunes and rip-rap erosion prevention measure, and coastal resiliency and sea-level rise planning.

The group also visited Coastal Regional Headquarters to view the campus and meet with students from Coastal Outreach Soccer, a youth program partnering with CRD on managing the challenges of sea-level rise at Howard Coffin Park in Brunswick, where the group plays soccer.

CSO helps states and territories to maintain their leadership role in the development and implementation of national coastal and ocean policy. It works to shape federal legislation and regulations and advocates for increased funding for coastal and ocean programs functioning. 🐟

Finfish AP hears red drum stock assessment results

By Tyler Jones

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

The ASMFC's recent Red Drum Stock Assessment was discussed during CRD's Finfish Advisory Panel meeting Nov. 20.

This stock assessment will be used by the ASMFC when it makes potential regulation change recommendations to Georgia at its upcoming spring 2025 meeting.

Dr. Jared Flowers, CRD's Research and Surveys Unit Lead, presented the findings, which focused on evaluating the health of the southern red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*) stock in Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida. The assessment relied on data through 2021 and evaluated various life stages, including juveniles, subadults, and adults, to provide a comprehensive population status.

Key findings revealed a concerning trend: red drum are both overfished (not enough fish in the population to reproduce at sustainable levels) and experiencing overfishing (too many fish being caught). Overfishing was determined based on a spawning potential ratio (SPR), which measures the reproductive capacity of the stock.

The target SPR for sustainability is 40 percent, with a threshold of 30 percent defining overfishing. Recent estimates show SPR below the threshold, indicating overfishing is occurring. Similarly, spawning stock biomass (SSB), which measures the total reproductive stock, has declined, placing the population in the overfished category.

Trends show juvenile red drum recruitment has been highly variable, with a general decline since the 2000s. This decline may result from environmental factors or changes in spawning success. While juvenile data is robust, the model struggled

To read the Red Drum Stock Assessment report, visit CoastalGaDNR.org/RedDrumStock



David Cannon/Provided photo

An angler holds a red drum while fishing in Georgia's estuaries.

to estimate adult population trends due to limited data. This shortfall highlights challenges in assessing a species where only a small portion of its 40-year lifespan is targeted by anglers. Most red drum in Georgia's slot limit are around 3 years old.

Fishing mortality has increased over time, driven by higher effort and removals. Discard mortality also plays a role in total removals, but current estimates may underrepresent its impact. Notably, Florida's recent regulatory changes have led to reduced catches in that state, while South Carolina and Georgia have shown relative stability in removals.

The study emphasized the need for proactive management to prevent further population declines. The long lifespan of red drum means recovery could take decades if biomass levels fall too low. Management strategies will likely focus on reducing fishing pressure and improving monitoring of adult red drum populations.

The assessment underscores the importance of maintaining sufficient spawning stock biomass to ensure long-term sustainability. Enhanced data collection, especially for adult red drum, and collaborative regional management will be crucial in addressing the challenges posed by the current overfished status. 🐟

Mariculture Zone proposed in Glynn

New leases set for Jointer Creek near Jekyll Island

By Tyler Jones

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

CRD hosted a public meeting Nov. 13 to discuss a proposed mariculture zone in Glynn County.

The meeting focused on the recent introduction of subtidal oyster mariculture in Georgia, a growing industry that could have significant environmental, economic, and social benefits to Georgia.

The proposed mariculture zone in Glynn County, located in Jointer Creek, will cover approximately 31 acres and include three 7.5-acre leases. Initially, three leases will be offered through a lottery process set to begin this month. The area will be designed with a 100-foot easement for navigation, ensuring that vessels can safely pass through the zone at low water levels. As part of CRD's due diligence process, public feedback was gathered to help determine the best possible site for this new mariculture zone.

Georgia's Shellfish Program, managed by CRD, is designed to ensure sustainability through careful management of growing areas, harvest methods, and water quality monitoring. This program works in close collaboration with other state and federal agencies to maintain the integrity of the shellfish industry, particularly in regulating commercial harvests of oysters and clams.

Georgia's Shellfish Industry and Water Quality Monitoring

CRD's Shellfish Program is responsible for maintaining water quality standards in the state's shellfish growing areas. Through regular sanitary surveys and monthly water sampling, the program ensures



Provided photo/Tybee Oyster Co.

Floating cages belonging to the Tybee Oyster Co. are seen in an existing mariculture zone in Chatham County's Bull River. CRD is proposing to add a new mariculture zone to Jointer Creek in Glynn County.

that the water in these areas remains safe for shellfish harvesting. The water samples are tested at CRD's in-house laboratory to monitor bacteria levels, which must meet specific thresholds for shellfish to be harvested for human consumption.

In addition to maintaining water quality, CRD is also tasked with identifying suitable areas for commercial shellfish farming. This includes leasing state-owned water bottoms where harvest operations can take place. These leases are subject to annual permits, which ensure that operations follow both state and federal regulations. CRD encourages the use of best management practices to ensure that these areas are used in a safe, sustainable manner.

Shellfish Harvesting and Education

As part of the regulatory framework, all commercial shellfish harvesters in Georgia must complete an education program that teaches proper harvesting and handling techniques. This training is designed to ensure the safety of shellfish products intended for human consumption. CRD works with DNR's Law Enforcement Division

to prevent illegal harvesting and ensure that only authorized harvesters are collecting shellfish.

Recreational harvesters are also supported by CRD, which oversees the maintenance of recreational harvesting areas. Maps of these areas are available at CoastalGaDNR.org/ApprovedRecHarvestAreas, allowing the public to locate safe and legal places for harvesting shellfish.

The Rise of Oyster Mariculture

In recent years, Georgia's shellfish industry has seen a rise in clam mariculture, with landings of farm-raised clams increasing significantly since the early 2000s. The introduction of oyster mariculture is expected to follow a similar trajectory, with the state hoping to see the same growth in oyster farming as was seen in clam production.

Oyster mariculture refers to the farming of oysters in controlled environments, either on the water bottom or suspended in the water column using various types of gear. This method is labor-intensive but can produce high-quality oysters that are sought after by high-end retailers and restaurants. One of the key advantages of oyster mariculture

is that it can be conducted using floating gear, which allows farmers to work in more flexible conditions, without being as dependent on tides as traditional intertidal oyster farming.

Floating gear has another key benefit: it protects the oysters from predators and can promote faster growth. Additionally, oysters in mariculture operations act as natural filter feeders, removing excess nutrients and bacteria from the water. This process not only benefits the oysters but also improves water quality in the surrounding areas, supporting the health of local ecosystems.

Environmental and Economic Benefits of Mariculture

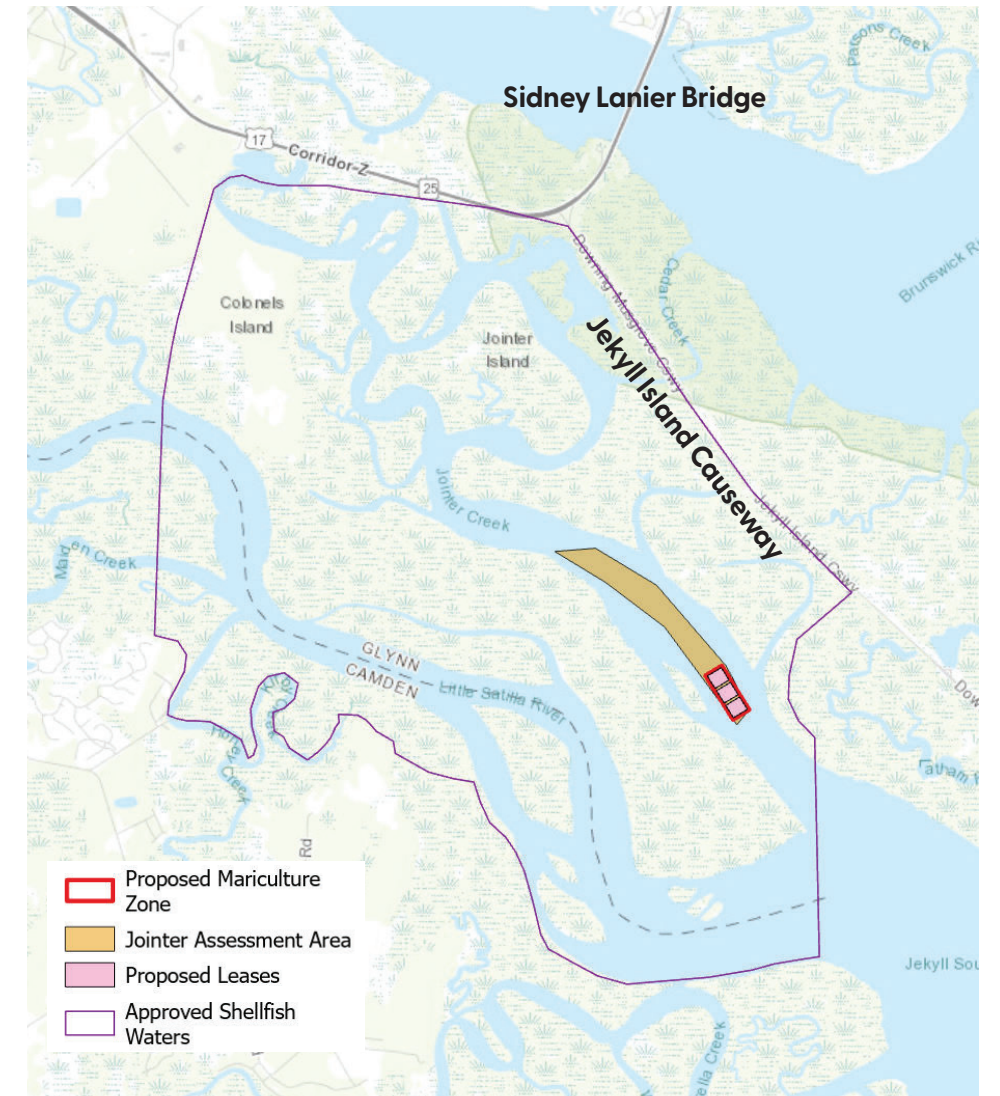
The environmental benefits of oyster mariculture are substantial. It's estimated that a single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day, which helps to improve water clarity and reduce nutrient pollution.

As oysters filter the water, they also reduce the levels of harmful bacteria, making the water safer for other marine life. Furthermore, oyster mariculture can help restore wild oyster reefs by providing spawning oysters that can enhance natural populations.

Beyond the environmental impact, oyster mariculture also provides significant economic benefits. It creates jobs, supports local economies, and offers a sustainable source of low-impact protein. The growing popularity of oyster farming can also lead to increased tourism, as visitors flock to areas known for their oyster farms, providing a boost to local restaurants and farm-to-table markets.

Challenges and Regulatory Considerations

While oyster mariculture offers numerous benefits, it also presents challenges. One of the primary concerns is the allocation of public water bottoms for private use, which can create conflicts with other waterway users, such as boaters and recreational fishers. Additionally, the use of floating gear in mariculture operations can potentially impact



GIS Map/Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS

This map of southern Glynn County shows the proposed new mariculture zone in Jointer Creek near Jekyll Island. The new mariculture zone is set to be 37.5 acres and initially include three leases that will be offered through a lottery system.

threatened or endangered species and their critical habitats.

To address these challenges, CRD has established a set of rules for siting mariculture operations. Leases for subtidal oyster farming must adhere to specific distance requirements from federal projects, commercial docks, and shorelines. Additionally, proposed mariculture sites must be compatible with critical habitats for marine species and other uses, such as shrimping zones and heritage preserves.

CRD is also using the concept of mariculture zones, where multiple leases are concentrated in a single area. Two mariculture zones already exist: one on the Bull River in Chatham County, and another in Sapelo Island's Mud River. These zones

reduce potential conflicts with other waterway users and help minimize navigational hazards.

Mariculture zones are clearly marked on navigational charts to help boaters avoid accidents. By grouping operations together, CRD also hopes to streamline the permitting process and improve compliance and enforcement, as more visible, concentrated operations are easier to monitor.

The development of mariculture zones represents an exciting opportunity for the expansion of oyster farming in Georgia. With careful planning and community involvement, the state is poised to establish a sustainable and profitable oyster industry that benefits both the environment and the local economy. ▀

THE ULTIMATE BEGINNING ANGLER

GIFT GUIDE



By Brooke Vallaster
MARINE EDUCATOR
and
Ryan Harrell
MARINE BIOLOGIST

Does holiday gift giving have you floundering? Are you fishing for holiday gift ideas? The countdown to the holiday season is on, and while the temperatures have cooled and daylight hours are slim, it's a perfect time to make fishing plans for 2025. Even better? Invite a new angler to join you next year by giving the gift of fishing and hook them up with all the items they'll need on the water.

As you consider the perfect gift for your friend or family member, here are some gear suggestions for targeting trout and drum species on the coast.

1. Rod/Reel Combo:
7-foot rod with 2500 to 5000 spinning reel

2. Hooks: Light wire Circle Hooks (2/0 or 1/0) for bottom fishing red drum & black drum; Kahle Hooks (2/0 or 1/0 for red drum or spotted seatrout using a float

3. Line & Leader: 15 - 20 lb braid mainline, 15 - 20 lb fluorocarbon leader

4. weights: 1/2 oz to 1 oz egg sinkers for bottom fishing, 3/8 or 1/2 ounce trolling sinkers for float fishing



You may opt for natural bait (shrimp or fish). If you prefer to stock them up with artificial lures, soft plastics such as paddletails, curly tails, and shrimp imitations are effective for trout and reds. And don't forget jig heads for artificial lures.



Keep in mind, weights and gear may vary depending on tidal conditions and the size of the targeted fish. But this starter kit is Santa-approved for those on the good angler list.

Before you head to the fishing gear aisle at your local sporting goods store, be sure your new angler properly outfitted with a fishing license and free Saltwater Information Permit (SIP) for Georgia's coastal waters. Consider giving them the gift that keeps on giving: A Lifetime Fishing License! Anglers 16 and older will need a Georgia fishing license.

Best wishes to you and yours this holiday season. And let us know if you reel in a big one in 2025!

Scan this code with your phone for information about buying a fishing license



Navigating the Waters

How three fishery management agencies shape the future of Georgia's coast

By Tyler Jones

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

If you've ever enjoyed a fishing trip off Georgia's coast or indulged in a seafood feast of shrimp and fish, you've experienced the direct benefits of thoughtful fishery management.

Behind every regulation, from size limits to seasonal closures, are agencies working tirelessly to keep fish stocks healthy while ensuring fishing opportunities remain available. Three important players in Georgia's marine fishery management are the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Coastal Resources Division (CRD), the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

These organizations may seem like they're doing

the same job, but each has a unique role, focus, and jurisdiction that shapes how they manage fisheries in Georgia and beyond.

Let's explore what each of these groups does, how they work together, and why their collaboration is critical for the future of South Atlantic fisheries.

Coastal Resources Division: Protecting Local Waters

As a state agency, CRD focuses primarily on Georgia's waters, particularly its inshore and estuarine areas. Georgia's coastline may be just 100 miles long, but its marshes, tidal creeks, and estuaries form one of the most biologically productive ecosystems in the country. These habitats serve as nurseries for many important fish and shellfish species, including spotted seatrout, red drum, blue crab, and shrimp.

DNR's authority—and by extension, CRD's—comes from Georgia law, which gives the agency the power to manage marine resources within state waters—defined as the area up to three nautical miles offshore. The Division's mission is to balance conservation with economic development, managing Georgia's coastal and marine ecosystems for long-term sustainability, ensuring that both current and future generations can enjoy these resources.

To achieve this, CRD proposes fishing regulations that are carefully tailored to local needs. The Board of Natural Resources, a 19-person panel appointed by the Governor in staggered, 7-year terms to oversee DNR, has authority from the General Assembly to implement those proposals.

For instance, spotted seatrout, one of the most popular game fish in Georgia, is managed through size and bag limits that protect juvenile fish while allowing anglers to enjoy a healthy population of adults. Similarly, red drum—another inshore favorite—are managed with a slot limit to ensure the species can spawn successfully.

CRD's efforts also go beyond just setting rules for fishing. Habitat restoration is a major part of its mandate. Projects like oyster reef restoration and marsh conservation help rebuild critical habitats that support a wide range of marine species. What makes CRD unique is its deep connection to Georgia's local communities. The Division works closely with anglers, commercial fishermen, and other stakeholders to gather input and ensure its policies are both effective and practical. CRD uses citizen advisory panels and public hearings to learn from citizens on a variety of topics. Through this localized approach, CRD addresses the specific challenges and opportunities of Georgia's coastal fisheries.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)



The ASMFC unites Atlantic coast states in managing shared fishery resources. Through state-federal partnerships, it ensures sustainable fish populations and economic benefits, supporting 1.7 million U.S. jobs in 2016. Funded by state dues and federal grants, its collaborative approach promotes conservation and economic impact.

Founded: 1942

Office: Arlington, Va.

Website: ASMFC.org

Process: The ASMFC's Interstate Fisheries Management Program oversees Atlantic coastal fisheries conservation, promoting science-based management and public involvement. The Policy Board administers programs, monitors stock performance, handles state appeals, and sets policies, comprising representatives from 15 states, DC, Potomac River, NOAA, and USFWS.

Georgia Delegation: Doug Haymans (CRD), State Rep. Trey Rhodes (Legislator), Spud Woodward (Gov.'s appointee)

Species managed by ASMFC

- American eel*
- American lobster
- Atlantic croaker*
- Atlantic herring
- Atlantic menhaden*
- Atlantic striped bass
- Atlantic sturgeon*
- Black drum*
- Black sea bass
- Bluefish*
- Coastal sharks*
- Cobia*
- Horseshoe crabs*
- Jonah crabs
- Northern shrimp
- Red drum*
- Scup
- Shad and river herring*
- Spanish mackerel*
- Spiny dogfish
- Spot*
- Spotted seatrout*
- Summer flounder
- Tautog
- Weakfish*
- Winter flounder

* Indicates a species in which Georgia has a declared interest.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission: Building Bridges

While CRD focuses on distinct ecosystems along Georgia's coast, the ASMFC exists to encourage cooperative management of species that migrate up and down the east coast. Founded in 1942, the ASMFC is an interstate compact that coordinates the management of shared fishery resources along the Atlantic Coast. Its members include representatives from all 15 Atlantic coastal states.

The ASMFC's statutory authority comes from the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, which allows it to develop

management plans for species that migrate between state waters, such as red drum, Atlantic menhaden, and horseshoe crabs. These species are often called "interjurisdictional" because their life cycles take them through the waters of multiple states.

The ASMFC's mission is to promote the sustainable use and conservation of these shared resources, ensuring that no single state overfishes a species at the expense of others. To achieve this, the ASMFC develops coastwide management plans that establish tailored regulations across state lines.

One benefit of the ASMFC's structure is that it allows states the opportunity to propose regulations

that will achieve fishery management goals, but through unique, state-specific action. Called “conservation equivalency,” this approach allows states to develop their own management plans, rather than the ASMFC setting strict coast-wide regulations.

For example, the ASMFC in 2019 placed restrictions on the harvest of bluefish. Georgia would have been required to reduce the daily limit of bluefish from 15 to 3 per recreational angler. Instead, Georgia developed a conservation equivalency plan that simply closes the fishery in March and April every year. This closure achieves the goal of reducing the annual catch without lowering the daily bag limit for anglers during the open season.

Fish stocks and fishing practices often vary along the Atlantic Coast, so this flexibility allows states to address local conditions, such as differing fishing seasons or gear types, while still meeting shared conservation targets.

The ASMFC does not have direct enforcement authority. Instead, it relies on the cooperation of its member states to implement its plans. This cooperative agreement obligates member states to comply with ASMFC regulations or risk federally enforced closures of their fisheries. This cooperative framework has been highly effective in managing species like striped bass, which rebounded from dangerously low levels in the 1980s thanks to coordinated efforts by the ASMFC and its member states.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council: Regulating the Deep

While CRD handles inshore waters, the SAFMC oversees the vast federal waters beyond, stretching from three to 200 nautical miles offshore. Established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery

Conservation and Management Act (MSA) of 1976, the SAFMC is one of eight regional fishery management councils in the United States. Its jurisdiction covers federal waters off the coasts of Georgia, east Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina, and its mission is to manage fisheries in these waters to prevent overfishing and rebuild depleted stocks.

Unlike CRD, which focuses on a relatively small geographic area, the SAFMC must address the needs of an entire region. Its mandate is to develop Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for a wide variety of species, including snapper and grouper, which are highly prized by recreational and commercial fishers alike. The SAFMC uses eight FMPs to manage 64 species of fish. The plans set annual catch limits, establish quotas, and impose restrictions on fishing gear to protect both fish populations and their habitats.

The SAFMC’s authority is rooted in the MSA, which sets up a regulatory structure in federal waters three to 200 miles offshore. The SAFMC proposes federal fishing regulations, which are then reviewed and can be approved by NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Ultimately, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce approves or denies these regulations.

Regulations are especially important for species like red snapper. Managing these species requires a delicate balance between conservation and economic interests, as evidenced by the SAFMC’s controversial restrictions of red snapper fishing seasons in recent years. While such measures have frustrated many anglers, they have also been critical in allowing red snapper populations to recover from decades of overfishing.

The SAFMC has a total of 17 members, with 13 voting members including eight citizens from the four southeastern states. Appointed

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)



The SAFMC oversees the conservation and management of fisheries in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida’s east coast. It develops regulations to ensure sustainable fishing practices, protect marine habitats, and balance economic and ecological needs in the South Atlantic region.

Founded: 1976

Office: North Charleston, S.C.

Website: SAFMC.net

Process: The SAFMC meets four times each year. Before final action on any proposed rule change is taken, the SAFMC gathers public input. Proposed rule changes are then sent to NMFS for further review, public comment, and consideration by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce before being implemented.

Georgia Delegation: Dr. Carolyn Belcher (CRD), Charlie Phillips (Commercial), Judy Helmev (Recreational)

members serve three-year terms and are appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce from lists of nominees submitted by the governors of each state. Appointees are limited to three consecutive terms.

The SAFMC engages with stakeholders from across its jurisdiction, including recreational and commercial fishers, conservation groups, state agencies like CRD, and federal agencies including the U.S. Coast Guard, NMFS, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. By working at the regional level, the Council ensures that its policies consider the interconnected nature of marine ecosystems and the economic realities of coastal communities.



Provided photo

DNR Deputy Commissioner Trevor Santos holds a freshly caught cobia in July at Reef HLHA about 23 nautical miles east of Little Cumberland Island. Cobia is one of the species managed by the ASMFC.

Comparing and Contrasting the Three Organizations

While CRD, SAFMC, and ASMFC all share a common goal of sustainable fishery management, their roles, jurisdictions, and approaches differ significantly.

CRD is a state agency with a hyper-local focus on Georgia’s waters, making it uniquely positioned to address the specific needs of its estuaries and inshore fisheries. In contrast, the SAFMC operates at a regional level, proposing management techniques for federal waters across four states and addressing the broader challenges of offshore fisheries. Meanwhile, the ASMFC serves as a coordinating body for species that cross state boundaries, ensuring equitable management practices along the entire nearshore Atlantic Coast.

These differences are reflected in the species each organization manages. CRD’s focus is on inshore species like shrimp, spotted seatrout, and blue crab, while the SAFMC is responsible for offshore

species such as snapper-grouper, Spanish and king mackerel, dolphin, and wahoo. The ASMFC, on the other hand, oversees migratory species like red drum and cobia, which require cooperation between multiple states.

The approaches of these agencies to fishery management also vary. CRD emphasizes habitat restoration and localized regulations, working closely with Georgia’s communities to balance conservation and fishing opportunities. Both the ASMFC and SAFMC rely heavily on scientific assessments and regional collaboration to develop comprehensive FMPs, and implement conservation measures like catch limits. The ASMFC focuses on interstate coordination, developing coastwide plans that align the interests of its member states while addressing the needs of migratory species.

Why Collaboration Matters

Despite their differences, these organizations frequently collaborate to achieve their shared goals. For

example, CRD and ASMFC are working together to manage red drum and cobia, with CRD enforcing state regulations that align with the ASMFC’s coastwide plan. Similarly, the SAFMC and ASMFC coordinate on issues like bycatch reduction in shrimp trawl fisheries, ensuring that both offshore and migratory species are protected.

Such collaboration is essential because fish don’t adhere to jurisdictional boundaries. A Spanish or king mackerel spawned off Georgia might migrate to South Carolina as it matures, while a snapper caught off Georgia’s coast may have spent part of its life in Florida waters. By working together, these organizations ensure that fish populations are managed holistically, benefiting ecosystems, communities, and economies across the region.

Looking Ahead

As climate change, habitat loss, and shifting species distributions continue to impact fisheries, the work of CRD, the SAFMC, and the ASMFC will become even more important.

These organizations will need to adapt their policies to address emerging challenges while maintaining the delicate balance between conservation and economic interests.

Locally, data show Georgia’s top five sought-after fish continue to be the inshore species of red drum, spotted seatrout, flounder, sheepshead, and whiting, also known as southern kingfish, with the order fluctuating annually. Additionally, dockside and telephone surveys indicate inland and nearshore fishing trips in Georgia’s state waters account for 92 percent of all fishing trips. Only about 8 percent of all fishing trips are beyond Georgia’s territorial waters up to three miles off shore. These trips are typically bottom fishing for snapper-grouper or trolling for mackerel and dolphin fish.

Offshore species such as red snapper, with their extremely limited seasons, have commanded massive amounts of attention as of late, with public calls for the SAFMC member states to wrest management from the NMFS, “like the Gulf states did” a few years ago.

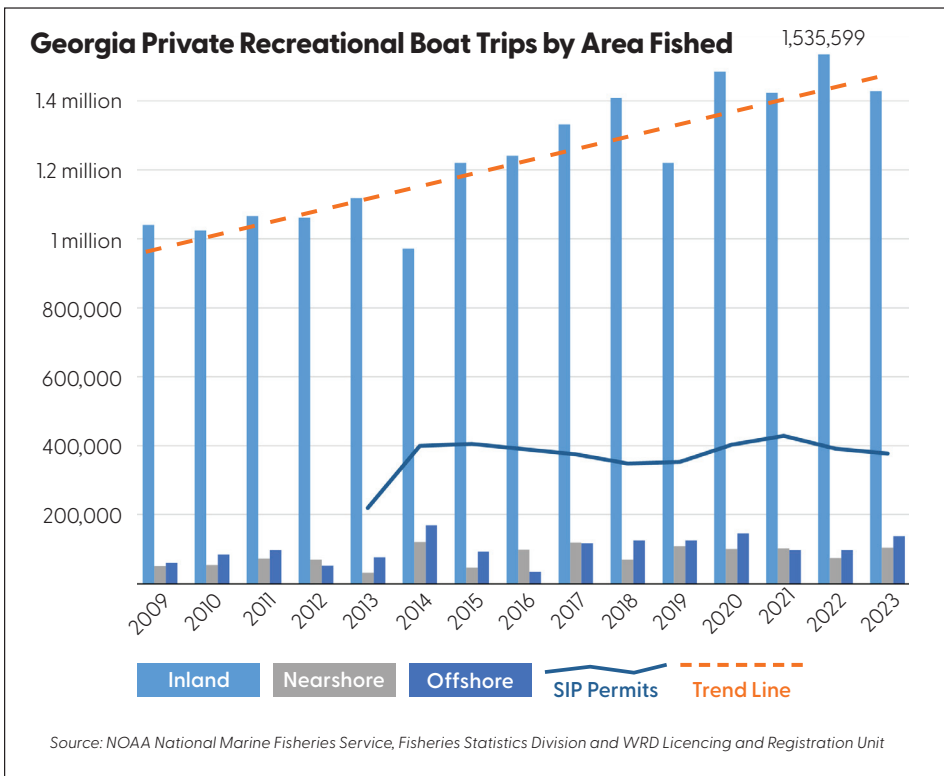
CRD leadership has—along with its counterparts from the Carolinas and Florida— met with national recreational fishing interests and manufacturers to discuss management options and research needs of this iconic offshore species. Not to be lost in this discussion is the Gulf States Marine Fishery Management Council’s annual harvest limit of nearly 8 million pounds, compared to the SAFMC’s 446,000 pounds.

CRD is currently evaluating additional data-collection methods with an eye toward improving offshore species data, and will continue to meet with its counterparts until a solution is found; however, when prioritizing the limited resources available, it is apparent that inshore species, such as the top five, demand the most attention.

With a regional overfishing and overfished status for red drum recently announced (*see page 4*), it behooves CRD to maximize its efforts towards its recovery. The ASMFC Red Drum Technical Committee is currently developing recommendations for South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

In addition, declining flounder availability is of concern regionally, with North Carolina recently implementing a total moratorium and South Carolina reducing their creel while increasing the minimum size. Georgia has very little information on flounder, a fact that needs immediate attention.

Even though spotted seatrout



minimum size limits were bumped up in 2016, constant study is required to manage this species properly. All this is on top of Georgia’s annual requirements for monitoring shrimp, blue crab and shellfish harvest.

CRD will continue its commitment to both the SAFMC federal and the ASMFC interjurisdictional fishery management processes, working together to recover red snapper, and to ward off impending challenges for species like black sea bass, Spanish mackerel, and cobia.

The challenges of managing fish populations across multiple jurisdictions are significant, but through science-based policies, collaborative efforts, and adaptive management strategies, these organizations are working together to ensure that the southeastern U.S. remains a place where fish, anglers, and coastal communities can thrive for years to come.

Whether you’re casting a line off the Georgia coast or enjoying a seafood dinner, it’s important to remember that the health of our



File photo/CRD
CRD staff collect otoliths from red snapper during a mini-season in 2022. Collecting otoliths, or “ear bones,” provides data about the age of fish, which along with other information can help inform fishery managers about population health..

fisheries depends on the hard work and dedication of these organizations.

By continuing to collaborate and adapt to new challenges, we can help keep our oceans full and our fishing traditions strong.

— DOUG HAYMANS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ARTICLE.

CATCH. RELEASE. REVIVE.

As an offshore angler, you know the thrill of the catch at our vibrant reefs. But did you know that many reef fish experience barotrauma, a condition caused by rapid changes in pressure when they’re brought to the surface?

When you release fish, help keep them alive by using descending devices. Federal law requires you to have them onboard and ready to use when fishing for or possessing snapper-grouper species in South Atlantic federal waters. They quickly return fish to the depth where they were caught, allowing fish to recover. Reducing fishing mortality due to barotrauma conserves fish populations and ensures the future of your favorite sport.

Join the Coastal Resources Division and Return ‘Em Right in making a positive impact. Equip your boat with descending devices today and be a responsible steward of the sea. Your catch—and the ocean—will thank you. Scan the code to learn more.





Above, DNR crews work to clear roads at Di-Lane Plantation WMA in Waynesville. Inset, before and after a road is cleared by DNR crews in Soperton. Next page, top, a task force chainsaws downed trees in Hazelhurst. Middle, DNR Incident Command holds a hybrid meeting in Social Circle. Bottom, crews clear the entrance to Mistletoe State Park in Appling.

DNR responds to Hurricane Helene with unmatched coordination

Staff Report

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Hurricane Helene's wrath swept through Georgia in late September, leaving behind unprecedented destruction. In the face of adversity, DNR mounted a swift, multifaceted response, combining efforts from all Divisions to safeguard lives, restore order, and assist communities.

Statewide Preparation and Leadership

Under Gov. Brian Kemp's leadership, DNR worked in partnership with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia Forestry Commission, Department of Public Safety, and local agencies. On Sept. 25, DNR began staffing multiple employees at the State Operations Center in Atlanta

to ensure seamless coordination with other response teams. Across the state, DNR staff fueled vehicles, sharpened tools, cleared drainage systems, and implemented evacuation plans for seven key state park sites. Internally, an Incident Command Post was established at WRD headquarters in Social Circle.

"Preparation was key," said DNR Commissioner Walter Rabon. "We staged 12 Task Force Teams around the state, each comprising six personnel—including chainsaw operators, traffic control game wardens, and skid steer operators. Additionally, 22 three-person strike teams equipped with ATVs, chainsaws, and rescue boats were scattered across Georgia to ensure a rapid response."

Immediate Actions Post-Landfall

As Hurricane Helene made landfall, state parks outside the storm's

path opened their doors to displaced citizens, even accommodating pets and horses. Once the storm cleared, DNR crews deployed to affected areas. When the hurricane veered east unexpectedly, many staff members were displaced, including resources staged at Little Ocmulgee State Park in McRae-Helena.

Despite these challenges, DNR prioritized safety and accountability, successfully confirming the wellbeing of its more than 2,700 employees within 48 hours. The storm left 25 parks closed, 40 state park sites without power, and widespread damage to park facilities, WMAs, and PFAs. Helene's damage at state parks extended to 25 cottages, 18 picnic shelters, and over 400 campsites. Nonetheless, recovery operations were underway immediately.

At daybreak on Friday, Sept. 27, teams began clearing roads, transporting critical supplies, and

ensuring citizen safety, particularly in the hard-hit corridor between Valdosta and Augusta.

DNR teams played a crucial role in freeing residents trapped in homes and rescuing visitors and staff stranded at state parks.

Coordinated Recovery Efforts

DNR strike teams demonstrated exceptional coordination, exemplifying teamwork and resilience. Armed with chainsaws, heavy equipment, and unwavering resolve, park rangers, game wardens, and WRD staff worked tirelessly to clear roads and reopen DNR facilities. CRD team members delivered meals to strike teams and ran communications platforms statewide.

Over the course of two weeks, more than 350 DNR personnel participated in recovery operations, responding to requests for assistance in over 20 counties. This monumental effort amounted to over 18,400 hours of work, including 3,000 hours using chainsaws and 7,500 hours operating heavy machinery. Teams focused first on clearing major roadways to enable first responders and power companies to access affected areas. Once roadways were cleared, efforts shifted to state parks, where campgrounds and recreational areas were restored. By mid-October, all but four parks had resumed operations, with plans for the remaining sites underway.

State Parks as Sanctuaries

As recovery continued, Georgia's state parks welcomed over 2,000 Floridians fleeing Hurricane Milton, which made landfall shortly after Helene. "Our parks played a dual role—providing refuge for evacuees while undergoing their own recovery," Rabon explained.

This dual role of recovery and sanctuary underlines the critical importance of the DNR's preparedness and resilience.

Parks Director Angie Johnson highlighted the unity and dedication displayed by the entire department, saying, "Every team member showed



extraordinary commitment to the recovery mission. Their determination brought critical sites back to life and reaffirmed our dedication to Georgia's people and natural heritage."

Resilience Amidst Personal Loss

Despite their critical role in recovery, many DNR employees were not immune to Helene's devastation. Power outages and property damage affected countless staff members, yet they left their homes and families to aid communities. Commissioner Rabon expressed deep gratitude: "Our employees' dedication exemplifies what it means to serve. I am beyond thankful for their tireless efforts."

In addition to DNR's extensive on-the-ground efforts, support from the community and leadership underscored the Department's resilience

Rabon thanked the DNR Board and the Georgia Natural Resources



Foundation for contributions to aid employees in need, emphasizing, "Your generosity shows we are truly a family."

As Georgia rebuilds, DNR's efforts serve as a testament to teamwork, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to the state's people and natural resources. Rabon concluded, "Hurricane Helene was a test of our readiness and resolve, and I am proud to say Georgia rose to the occasion." ▀

— ANGIE JOHNSON, (PARKS), CLINT PEACOCK (WRD), AND MARK MCKINNON (LED) CONTRIBUTED TO REPORTING IN THIS ARTICLE.

CRD photo illustration

Ask a CRD Pro:

Winter Fishing

By Ryan Harrell
MARINE BIOLOGIST

and Sean Tarpley
MARINE TECHNICIAN

With the chill of winter settling over Georgia's coast, the dynamic world beneath the waves transforms. Cooler waters usher in a shift in the species anglers can expect to find, with summer favorites like tripletail and tarpon heading south, replaced by the seasonal abundance of red drum, black drum, spotted seatrout, sheepshead, and other wintertime residents. Whether casting lines inshore or venturing to nearshore reefs, winter offers unique opportunities to connect with nature and reel in impressive catches.

Winter fishing isn't just about the catch—it's also about preparation. From selecting the right bait to layering up against the cold, understanding seasonal patterns and safety practices ensures anglers make the most of this rewarding time on the water.

What species can I expect to catch inshore during the colder months?

As the water begins to cool, species compositions in our inshore waters being to change. Sharks move out of the sound. Popular warmer water sportfish such as tripletail and tarpon begin their annual migration back to Florida. During winter, Georgia anglers can expect to catch red drum ("reds"), black drum, sheepshead, spotted seatrout, bottom fish such as whiting, and the occasional flounder.

Where can these fish be found during the winter months?

Red drum school up in large numbers this time of year, commonly working shallow mudflats and oyster banks. Water clarity also improves during the winter, making this a great time to sightcast for them. Spotted seatrout will start to move away from the sound looking for thermal refuge, finding deeper holes upriver and in creeks. Sheepshead will truly start to school up and begin feeding heavily as they prepare to travel nearshore

to spawn in the late winter. Flounder numbers tend to decrease inshore as water temps drop along the coast.

What are the key factors influencing where fish congregate during the winter months?

During the winter, fish are focused on three things: food, warmth, and protection from predators.

Finding a creek that holds bait in the winter can provide great success. Fish such as sheepshead and black drum are very structure oriented and feed off the crustaceans that grow and inhabit various structures. Anglers should focus on bridges, piers, and trees that have fallen into eroded estuary banks for these black-and-white striped species.

Finding warmer water temps during the cooler months can also help your success. Mudflats, oysterbeds, and shallow creeks retain heat during the low tides of the winter season. As the tide comes into these areas, fish can be found staging

by these warmer landmarks.

There are also outflows during outgoing tides, releasing warmer water that was trapped during a high tide. Finding these spillways can often lead to landing more fish. Seatrout and bottom fish seek warmth in deeper holes.

What are the best types of baits to use for saltwater fishing in the winter?

Bait can become scarce during the winter months, but it's still possible for people to castnet shrimp and trap mudminnows. Bait shops also carry live shrimp and mudminnows throughout the winter, which are always great options for red drum, seatrout, and flounder. Dragging these baits on a jighead can be effective for reds and flounder. Live baits can also be fished under a slip bobber to get your bait down to the appropriate depth for reds and seatrout. Fiddler crabs and oysters work well for sheepshead.

If you don't mind bottom fishing, fiddler crabs and frozen shrimp on

a circle hook can be effective on red drum and black drum. Whiting, spot, and croaker can be caught bottom fishing with shrimp or squid in deeper holes in creeks.

Soft plastics such as paddletails, curlytails, shrimp imitations, and fluke-style baits fished with a jighead can be effective on both reds and seatrout. Twitchbaits and jerkbaits can also entice a strike. On warmer days, don't be afraid to break out a popping cork for either species. One of the most underrated artificial lures for reds is a spinnerbait (designed for saltwater) and has produced many fish during the winter months.

What conditions should I look for inshore to provide the best opportunity to catch fish?

Lucky for us, many of coastal Georgia's average daytime highs in the winter are in the 60s, with overnight lows in the 40s. Our water temperatures typically sit in the 50s. During cold fronts when air and water temperatures drop, fish can become tight lipped, making bites harder to come by. Focus on warmer days following a front for best success. As mentioned earlier, finding outflows that contain warm water is usually a good way to find a congregation of fish.

What type of fish can be found at the nearshore reefs during winter?

During the colder months, our nearshore reefs ranging from 20 to 40 feet deep can produce great days on the water. Species like black sea bass and triggerfish are great targets for bottom fishing anglers. Small strips of squid work the best for these fish.

Schools of bull reds can also be found on these reefs as they leave the sounds and beaches after spawning in the fall. If you are lucky enough, you may see these masses of redfish on the top of the water, working schools of bait. Please remember the slot limit for red drum in Georgia is 14 to 23 inches, meaning you can't keep these bull reds. Additionally, if you're at a nearshore reef, you're probably in federal waters where the harvest of



Provided photo

Angler Nelson Iglasias holds a spotted seatrout while winter fishing. Soft plastic paddletail, curlytail, and shrimp imitation lures can be effective on spotted seatrout while fishing in the colder months.

red drum of any size is prohibited.

Bull reds play an exceptionally important role in the reproduction of this species. To be honest, it may be best not to target them for conservation's sake. But if you do choose to fish for them, handle bull reds with the utmost of care. If you want to snap a photo, don't hang the fish vertically. Support its body and use fish grippers. Reduce mortality rates and gut-hooking by using non-stainless steel circle hooks. Revive the fish by placing them gently in the water and allowing the current to run through its gills before releasing it. Find more tips and best practices for releasing bull reds at CoastalGaDNR.org/RecFishing.

What safety tips should anglers keep in mind when fishing in colder weather conditions?

First and foremost, wearing a personal flotation device (PDF or "life jacket") and using your killswitch is always important when boating during any season. Don't just bring

them for a ride, *actually wear them*. Everyone who works for DNR always wears PFDs on the water. For us, it's standard practice. Regarding winter, they do make jackets that have built-in PFDs. Keeping yourself warm and dry is important for both safety and comfort during cold weather. Dressing in layers and waterproof outerwear is important. Having a change of clothes and a towel can help avoid hypothermia if you get splashed or hit a pocket of rain on your way out to your favorite honey hole.

Any other tips or recommendations?

Most of what we discussed are general guidelines however conditions can change fast during the winter. Adjusting your tactics, such as where you're fishing or the speed of your retrieve, may be necessary depending on water temperatures. Where fish are one day does not necessarily mean they will be there tomorrow. Lastly, get your fishing license, your free SIP Permit, a reg book and just go fishing. 🎣



Staff Report
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

In this edition of *Coastlines Georgia*, we are doing something a little different. Each edition of our quarterly magazine includes a “Retiree Spotlight,” in which we interview a former employee who (in most cases) retired several years ago.

This time, we’re doing something special, because it’s an opportunity we couldn’t pass up. One of the longest-serving CRD employees, Cindy Sapp Smith, is retiring from CRD after spending 15,962 days with the agency. For those of you who aren’t “Rainman” mathematicians, that’s 41 years, 8 months, and 11 days. Or 383,088 hours. Or 22,985,280 minutes.

But who’s counting?

Smith was working for DNR when the agency moved its coastal region headquarters from 1700 Glynn Ave. (the building now occupied by Marshside Grill), to our present location near the Sidney Lanier Bridge in 1990. In her time, we’ve gone from typewriters to computers, the R/V Anna to the R/V Glynn, and a plethora of other changes. One constant has been her personable attitude and ever-present smile.

We asked Smith to sit down and answer a few of our questions as one of her last “other duties as assigned” at CRD.

When did you start your career with CRD and how did you come to the agency?

I started working for Coastal Resources Division on March 16, 1981. I was hired as a YACC. YACC (Young Adult Conservation Corp) was a yearlong program that Jimmy Carter implemented to give young adults a head start on their careers in conservation. I was hired full time hourly by CRD on my one-year anniversary.

A friend of my family who was a LED Ranger at the time recommended that I apply for the YACC position. His name was Mike Evans.

Looking back on your 40 years, what are the most significant changes you’ve witnessed in coastal fisheries management and data collection?

Introducing computer technology into the field significantly changed the ability of field personnel to collect more complete and correct information in a more timely manner.

Can you share a memorable or proud moment from your career that stands out?

I set up the first shellfish laboratory here at Coastal Resources between 1994 and 1996. The lab made collecting water quality samples and testing those samples so much easier for the

program. It was a proud moment for me when the lab was up and running.

How has technology transformed the way fisheries data is collected and analyzed since you started?

Technology has made getting information collected in the field 100 times faster that it can be analyzed and used so much faster. When I used to work on the back deck of the R/V Anna in the 80s and early 90s, all data was collected by pencil and paper.

What drew you to this career, and what has kept you passionate about it for four decades?

To be honest, I was an 18-year-old

girl looking for a full-time good job. The job wound up working into me. My family was big outdoors people and working in the fisheries programs was a great fit for me.

Are there any specific challenges you encountered, and how did you overcome them?

I was very nervous when I first started working in the Commercial Stats Program. At the time we creel agents were required to go to each seafood dock to collect their landings data, I had heard some real horror stories. On my very first day out on my own I had a gentleman completely bless me out. In fact, he told me that DNR was “the devil.” I figured if I made it through that ordeal unscathed I could pretty much handle anything they could throw at me. I take pride in the fact that I have learned to be thick skinned and can pretty much turn a hostile conversation around.

What advice would you give to someone just starting out as a fisheries statistics technician?

Always remember that you are working and communicating with Commercial fishermen and women, what you are discussing with them is their livelihood. They will be looking for you to give them sound advice that will help them to make the best decisions to continue working in their given fishery.

You also need to be patient and take your time when entering landings data. Know it is OK to get up and walk away any time you need a mental break. You will be sitting in front of a computer 80 percent of the time.

What aspects of your work have had the most impact on Georgia’s coastal resources and communities?

I believe the work that I assisted with during the relief funds distribution after COVID 19 helped a lot of our fishermen and women get some much needed financial relief. I was glad that I was part of helping them.



Provided photos

Above, Cindy Smith, right, helps out at a CRD Kids Fishing Derby in 1996 on the Mackay River pier. Below left, Smith speaks on the phone in her office next to Marine Technician Paulette Crawford circa 1995 when the two worked in the newly formed shellfish water quality lab. Below right, Stuart Stevens, left, and Smith pull a seine net near Eulonia in the late 1980s.



It was always my pleasure to help with our annual CoastFest event. I have watched for years as young children’s faces lit up with excitement at seeing just a little taste of the natural resources our state has to offer.

How have relationships with colleagues, stakeholders, or the public influenced your career?

Over the last 42 years, I have worked with five different programs within the Coastal Resources and Wildlife Resources divisions. I have made some amazing friendships during my time here with all that I mentioned above. I believe that I have influenced their careers with advice and they in turn did the same for my career. You can learn many things from others if you listen to them and keep your communications open to them.

What do you plan to do in retirement, and will it involve staying connected to Georgia’s natural resources?

I am the proud Nonnie of eight grandchildren. I hope to spend as much time with them as possible.

I plan to be out in nature as much as possible be it gardening, hunting, fishing or just sitting on my backyard swing and listening to the sounds of it. It does the soul good to step back and enjoy the beauty of our great outdoors! 🌿

Et Cetera ... *News Briefs from Across CRD*

Marine Fisheries Staff Join Gray's Reef Sanctuary Programs

Marine fisheries staff recently participated in two separate programs hosted by Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) in Savannah. CRD representatives attended a three-day GRNMS workshop sponsored by the Georgia Aquarium from Nov. 13 to 15. Participants from state and federal agencies, as well as numerous NGOs, discussed challenges to researching and conserving the South Atlantic Bight by identifying threats, needs that will mitigate them, and drafting potential strategies to support those needs moving forward. Additionally, on Nov. 19, Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Unit Lead Paul Medders gave GRNMS and other attendees an update of Georgia's Artificial Reef Program.



Georgia Attends NEAMAP Gear Workshop in Virginia

Research and Surveys Unit Lead Dr. Jared Flowers and Marine Biologist Britney Hall attended the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) and ASMFC Gear Workshop Nov. 12 to 14 at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in Gloucester Point, Va. Attendees from state agencies from Georgia to Maine, federal agencies, commercial fishermen, private industry, and universities gathered to discuss techniques, materials, and advances in fish sampling gear.

Practices and technological advances in using long-lines, gill nets, and trawls were topics of discussion.

Coastal Hazards Specialist Highlights Resilience Efforts

Coastal Hazards Specialist Jennifer Kline presented to the members of Georgia Senate Natural Resources & the Environment Subcommittee on Disaster Mitigation and Resilience the week of Nov. 7. The presentation covered CRD's resilience efforts, hazard projects, local government assistance and funding. A presentation to the House of Representatives Subcommittee is scheduled for Nov. 21 in Savannah.



Brunswick First Friday Features Live Horseshoe Crab with CRD

Marine Educator Brooke Vallaster and Public Information Officer Tyler Jones hosted an outreach and education booth Nov. 1 at Downtown Brunswick's First Friday event. The booth featured a live horseshoe crab touch tank, educational displays, and informative giveaways. Vallaster educated the public about horseshoe crabs as a keystone species while Jones fielded questions from the public about CRD and DNR's mission, activities, and regulations.

CRD Biologists Address Habitat Concerns at ASMFC meeting

Biologist Cameron Brinton represented CRD at the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

(ACFHP) Steering Committee meeting on Oct. 21-22 and the ASMFC Habitat Committee on Oct. 23-24 in Annapolis, Md. The ACFHP Steering Committee discussed current and future habitat restoration projects funded by the Partnership, administrative tasks, and Submerged Aquatic Vegetation. The ASMFC Habitat Committee discussed Oyster Shell Recycling and Fishing Gear Impacts to EFH.



Virtual Reef Dive Wows Skidaway Marine Science Day Crowd

Public affairs staff Tyler Jones and Fisher Medders attended the University of Georgia Marine Extension's Marine Science Day at Skidaway Institute of Oceanography on Saturday, Oct. 12. The CRD booth included a virtual reality "dive" to Reef CCA-JL, in which visitors donned VR goggles to see a 360-degree video of the sunken 72-foot fishing vessel Frank and Maria. The booth also included educational materials and give-aways, along with displays on habitat enhancement and the Sport Fish Restoration Act. Approximately 1,200 people attended. CRD was positioned next to the Law Enforcement Division's booth with Game Warden Justin Jackson, which enabled us to answer a wide variety of constituents' questions.

Mangroves' Movement Discussed at Georgia Colloquium

The Coastal Management Section hosted the bi-annual Coastal Georgia Colloquium of the Georgia Coastal Research Council Oct. 15-16 at the

Skidaway Institute of Oceanography in Savannah. The purpose of the Colloquium is to connect coastal managers with researchers and subject matter experts to foster mutually beneficial partnerships. Staff members from both Coastal Management and Marine Fisheries sections presented on their subject areas of expertise and shared areas of potential collaboration with researchers. Biologists from Florida and Texas shared their experiences with mangrove habitat expansion and potential management considerations as mangroves become established in Georgia's salt marshes. CRD staff also facilitated a group discussion on mitigating the impacts of future hurricanes on coastal communities.

Fishery Leaders Tackle Research Topics at Committee Meeting

Chief of Fisheries Dr. Carolyn Belcher and Research and Surveys Unit lead Dr. Jared Flowers attended the SAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting Oct. 22-24 in Mount Pleasant, S.C. Topics discussed included the South Atlantic Tilefish Stock Assessment, Black Sea Bass population projects, South Atlantic for-hire fisheries reporting, and other various fisheries management and research issues. Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Unit lead Paul Medders represented CRD at the SAFMC's Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (AP) Oct. 28-30 in North Charleston, S.C. The AP discussed food web policy, offshore wind infrastructure coverage and artificial reef footprint, effects of fishing gear on artificial reefs, and more.

Living Shorelines Highlighted at Saltmarsh Initiative Meeting

Meghan Angelina, Jan Mackinnon, Jaynie Gaskin, Tyler Cooper-Kolb, Sydney Pratt and Harrison Faulk participated in The Georgia Conservancy's South Atlantic Saltmarsh Initiative (SASMI) public meetings to discuss CRD's living shoreline and hydrological barriers work. SASMI is working to identify opportunities to protect and restore

coastal marshland with historical, cultural, and/or spiritual significance to local communities.



CRD Experts Present at Environmental Conference

Three CRD staff members presented at the Georgia Environmental Conference on Jekyll Island. Green Growth Specialist Kelly Hill spoke about stormwater management, Chief of Coastal Management Jill Andrews presented on ethics and environmental regulations, and Wetlands Biologist Meghan Angelina participated in a panel on living shorelines. The Annual Georgia Environmental Conference is the largest, most comprehensive and diverse educational opportunity in Georgia, and is typically attended by 750-plus local, state, and federal government officials, business and industry leaders, attorneys, consultants, engineers, developers, land owners, architects, agribusiness leaders, energy experts, water planning districts, universities, public health officials, solid waste, enviro-tech, and recycling experts, and many, many others with a strong interest in environmental activities in Georgia and the Southeast region.



VFW Honors CRD's Buck Bennett

Compliance and Enforcement Program Manager Buck Bennett, also the Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4092 St. Simons

Island, was recently honored with "All-American Status" by Veterans of Foreign Wars District 7. To earn the status, posts must meet membership requirements, conduct Voice of Democracy and Patriots Pen essay contests among area schools, hold fundraisers to benefit veterans and their families, nominate an educator of the year and perform community service projects. Bennett and his Post were honored for building wheelchair ramps for disabled veterans, construction work on the veterans village, providing backpacks with toiletries and other items to homeless veterans, sending packages to deployed troops, food drives for the needy, and other efforts.

CRD, LED partner for shellfish hazards training at MAREX

CRD's Shellfish and Water Quality Program staff and staff with the LED participated in a cooperative Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) Training course hosted by the University of Georgia Marine Extension staff on Nov. 18.

The focus of the training was to provide a general overview of the HACCP principles for molluscan shellfish and to better understand the time and temperature record keeping strategies to ensure shellfish is harvested and distributed safely in commerce. This training was one of several valuable steps that CRD and LED has committed to in preparation for sanctioning the commercial harvest of subtidal oysters using restricted controls during the warmer months of the year when vibrio levels are at their highest. The training covered several topics including the identification of various hazards, critical control points, record keeping, enhanced harvester education, and restricted time/temperature protocols.

— STAFF REPORTS & CRD PHOTOS

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