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Coastlines

GEORGIA

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Return *to the* Reef

Divers document growth
on MARTA railcars six months
after deployment

Also inside:

CoastFest returns to Mary Ross Waterfront Park on Oct. 5
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Family lands 'troutzilla' at Jekyll pond • A guide to beachcombing

Coastlines GEORGIA

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Common Acronyms

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

CRD - Coastal Resources Division of DNR

DNR - Georgia Department of Natural Resources

NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

WRD - Wildlife Resources Division of DNR

Cover photo by Cameron Brinton

The trucks from a retired MARTA subway car are seen at Artificial Reef L during a July dive by CRD.



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OPINION EDITORIAL



File photo/CRD

Young people fish during the CRD Golden Isles Kids Fishing Event at Liberty Ship Park in Brunswick on June 4, 2022.

Angling ethics ensure future

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Saltwater fishing is not just a sport; it's a deep connection with the ocean and its intricate ecosystems. As anglers, we have a responsibility to uphold ethical practices that conserve marine life for future generations. Angling ethics are not merely guidelines; they are fundamental principles that ensure the sustainability of our oceans, the well-being of marine species, and the enjoyment of fishing as a recreational activity.

One of the key aspects of angling ethics is the practice of catch and release. This method allows fish to be returned to the water unharmed, reducing the impact on fish populations. However, it's not enough to simply release a fish; knowing how to handle it properly is crucial. Using barbless hooks, minimizing handling time, and reviving the fish before release are essential steps that increase the chances of survival. This practice reflects respect for the species and a commitment to conservation.

Another vital component of

angling ethics is adherence to regulations, including size and bag limits. These rules are in place to protect vulnerable species and ensure that fish populations remain robust. Overfishing not only depletes specific species but also disrupts the entire marine ecosystem, affecting other species and the overall health of the ocean.

Anglers must also be mindful of their impact on the environment. This includes proper disposal of fishing line, avoiding damage to habitats and respecting marine environments. Litter and habitat destruction are significant threats to marine life, and responsible anglers can play a role in mitigating these risks.

In essence, ethical saltwater fishing is about more than catching fish; it's about stewardship of the ocean. By practicing responsible angling, we contribute to the conservation of marine ecosystems, ensuring that the thrill of the catch can be enjoyed by future generations. It's a responsibility we all share, and one that must be taken seriously. ▀

Compliance specialist earns EOQ

STAFF REPORT
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

CRD is pleased to announce that Hunter Jackson, a compliance and enforcement specialist, has been named Employee of the Quarter for Summer 2024.

This recognition highlights Jackson's outstanding dedication, positive attitude, and unwavering commitment to his role and the broader mission of CRD.

Doug Haymans, director of CRD, shared his enthusiasm in a recent announcement: "Hunter seems to always have the right attitude, and he consistently goes above and beyond his normal duties, especially in educational projects. Despite the challenges he faces in his regular tasks, Hunter remains positive, always with a smile on his face."

Jackson's role in compliance and enforcement often involves difficult situations, but his professionalism and good nature never waver. Whether tackling the most demanding tasks or assisting with team efforts, Jackson approaches his work with enthusiasm and a can-do attitude that has earned



File photo/CRD

Hunter Jackson, far right, speaks with students from the 2022 DNR Career Academy on Jekyll Island as he leads a beach walk.

him the respect and admiration of his colleagues, Haymans said.

As the Summer 2024 Employee of the Quarter, Jackson will receive a certificate of recognition, a prime parking spot, and a \$25 cash award. This honor reflects Jackson's exceptional contributions to CRD and his commitment to excellence in

every aspect of his work.

Jackson came to CRD in November of 2020 and first worked as a permit coordinator before moving into his role with Compliance and Enforcement. Unfortunately for CRD, Jackson has decided to accept a new position near Mobile, Ala., so he can be closer to loved ones. His last day is August 31. ▀

Staff receive State of Georgia Faithful Service awards

Five CRD staff members received their Georgia Faithful Service awards during a luncheon for the 2024 DNR Career Academy at Coastal Regional Headquarters on July 25.

Cindy Smith, a fisheries statistics technician was recognized for **25 years**



Smith

of full-time public service to the state, although it's worth noting she joined CRD in 1981 under the Young Adult Conservation Corps. She became a full DNR employee in 1982 and helped set up CRD's Shellfish Lab in 1994. Smith

briefly transferred to WRD from 1997-1999 before returning to CRD in her present job.

Kathy Knowlton, a programmatic support specialist with CRD's Fisheries section, was recognized for **25 years** of service. Knowlton, in her current position, plays a critical role in helping CRD coordinate with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.



Knowlton

Eddie Leonard, a marine biologist, was recognized for **10 years** of full-time public



Leonard

service. Leonard came to CRD after working for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. He currently leads the Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey, which collects data to aid in the management of shrimp and blue crab populations.

Eli O'Cain, a marine technician with CRD's Marine Recreational Information Program, and **Tyler Jones**, CRD's public information officer, were both recognized for their **five years** of service.



O'Cain



Jones

— STAFF REPORT

Private dock stakeholder committee begins work

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

A stakeholder committee of coastal residents, environmental nonprofits, dock builders, and academics began its work recently to make recommendations regarding new rules for private recreational docks.

The Private Dock Stakeholder Committee's 12 members met July 30 to start the process of making recommendations for new regulations governing the construction, maintenance, and modification of private docks on state-owned tidal water bottoms. These proposals will aim to ensure the protection of coastal marshlands and tidewaters while providing reasonable access to waterfront property owners.

The proposal follows the expiration of a programmatic general permit (PGP0083) in July 2022, previously issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The permit had allowed CRD to issue dock permits on behalf of the Corps. With the permit no longer in effect, applicants now need separate authorizations from both the Corps and the state. The new proposed rules will seek to codify the standards from the expired permit, clarifying the expectations for dock construction and maintenance.

"The goal of this stakeholder committee is to have input from a broad range of constituencies," said Doug Haymans, director of CRD. "The ultimate goal is to come up with a proposal that will help the Board of Natural Resources set clear, consistent guidelines for private recreational dock construction going forward."



Mark McKinnon/DNR-LED

CRD Marine Biologist Ryan Harrell shows off a blue crab caught during a seine net demonstration on Jekyll Island during the 2024 DNR Career Academy.

CRD hosts Career Academy

By **JAYNIE GASKIN**
WETLANDS BIOLOGIST
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

In July, twenty-four high school students from across Georgia participated in DNR's third annual Career Academy, a program designed to introduce students to careers in natural resources and conservation. The week-long camp allowed students to work alongside DNR employees from all four divisions, earning dual enrollment credit from Ogeechee Technical College.

The students stayed at Charlie Elliot Wildlife Center in Mansfield for the central part of the program and Camp Jekyll 4-H on Jekyll Island for coastal activities. They visited twelve DNR state parks, historic sites, public fishing areas, and educational centers, engaging in hands-on field and lab activities that highlighted various career paths in conservation.

The program also featured a college fair, where representatives from eleven technical schools, colleges, and universities across Georgia discussed degree programs in natural resources. Career Academy graduates



Mark McKinnon/DNR-LED

The students and counselors of the 2024 DNR Career Academy.

from previous years were invited back for a reunion event, where they shared their professional experiences with current students. Notably, two graduates from the first year of the program returned in 2024 as camp counselors and seasonal technicians with DNR.

Over one hundred DNR staff members contributed to the planning and execution of Career Academy, fostering mentorship connections between students and professionals in the field. The program continues to be a valuable opportunity for students to explore and pursue careers in natural resource management.

Divers document growth on railcars

CRD divers take stock of MARTA railcars sunk at Reef L in December, find promising growth

NEWS RELEASE
MARTA PUBLIC AFFAIRS &
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

Two Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) railcars deployed into the Atlantic Ocean seven months ago as part of a CRD reef are gradually developing into reef habitats for marine wildlife.

Last December, the decommissioned railcars were stripped of hazardous materials and inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard before being transported by barge to Artificial Reef L, an established reef about two square miles in size, located approximately 23 nautical miles east of Ossabaw Island and deployed in about 55 to 65 feet of water.

In the first dive since the deployment, CRD staff witnessed a good amount of soft coral beginning to grow on the railcars and nine species of game fish.

"MARTA is proud to be part of repurposing old railcars in this environmentally responsible way," said MARTA General Manager and CEO Collie Greenwood.

While the substrate for the reef is manmade, the organisms that grow on it are entirely natural and beneficial for the environment. Fish and other marine life such as

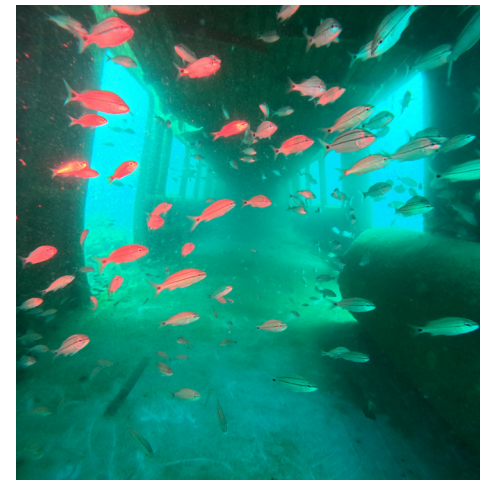


Cameron Brinton/CRD

Submerged MARTA railcars are seen at Artificial Reef L during a dive July 30.

sea turtles were likely the first to investigate the railcars when they were deployed. Corals, sponges, and other encrusting organisms are taking hold now and will continue to grow and improve the longer they are in the ocean. SCUBA divers and anglers have also been using the reef.

"The artificial reef is looking great, and we are encouraged by the amount of coral growth and marine wildlife activity," said Cameron Brinton, a marine biologist with CRD. "You'll notice one of the railcar roofs has collapsed, which is typical, and we'll see more changes to the railcars over time as they become part of the essential marine habitat for sea creatures, including popular sport fish and endangered sea turtles."



Artificial Reef L was first created in 1976 as part of a network of 32 offshore reefs that CRD has been building and improving for more than 40 years.



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Click or scan code to see current job postings

Ask a marine biologist

Beachcombing

A guide to the Georgia coast

By **JENNY PHILLIPS**
AND
SUSAN SHIPMAN
ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE IN
THE MAY-JUNE 1980 COASTLINES



Georgia's beaches, shaped by a gentle continental shelf and offshore sandbars, may not collect as many shells as other coastal states, but they still offer diverse marine life and debris for beachcombers. The shoreline provides enough variety to satisfy most collectors, featuring frequently washed-ashore marine animals and various plants and animals living on the beach. While combing Georgia's beaches, please remember to check shells for wildlife and leave animals undisturbed. Likewise, please refrain from entering the beaches' fragile sand dune systems.

ANIMALS

The following "beach creatures" have been grouped according to their most basic characteristics. These groups are technically referred to as phyla, the most general scientific classification.

CLAMS, SNAILS: Phylum Mollusca

Molluscs are perhaps the most familiar beach finds, especially in the wake of a storm. They are available in many body forms but almost all have some type of external shell. These shells come in all shapes and sizes: coiled, bivalved (two-piece), tubular, or formed of overlapping plates. Most molluscs come equipped with a muscular foot, a mouth complete with rasplike tongue that scrapes food, and fleshy lobes that contain shell-secreting glands.

Knobbed whelks are often cast up on Georgia beaches. As you might expect, the shell is covered with knobs. The side opening of this



Knobbed whelk

spiraled creature reveals a smooth orange interior. Whelks feed mainly on other molluscs and are considered a delicacy in the West Indies and Europe.

If you look carefully along the wrackline, you may happen upon a **lettered olive** shell. This cylindrical mollusc usually has a light colored, very glossy shell with distinctive markings. The olive, a rare find on most Georgia beaches, can grow to 2 1/2 inches in length.

Much more common is the **moon snail**, also called a shark eye. The



Lettered olive

spiraled shell is usually tan or gray and has a soft sheen. Abandoned moon snail shells are often claimed by wandering hermit crabs in search of a new home.



Moon snail

The **angel wing** is aptly named, not only because of its radiating



Angel wing

ribbed shape, but also because of its pure white color. The shell is extremely brittle, so you'll have to search to find one that is not broken. This bivalve is large -- up to 7 inches long. It lives in the subtidal zone.

The **great heart cockle** is a resident of southern beaches. This shell, with its pronounced ribbing, looks somewhat like corduroy. When viewed from the side, the two hinged valves of this cockle form a heart shape, giving the organism its name.



HORSESHOE CRAB, MUD SHRIMP: Phylum Arthropoda

The phylum Arthropoda is the largest in the animal world and includes an enormous variety of crustaceans, insects and spiders. All arthropods have a hard shell and jointed legs.

Most marine arthropods are



Horseshoe Crab

crustaceans, but the **horseshoe crab** is an exception. Despite its name, this tank-like creature is more closely related to spiders than to crabs. A very primitive animal, the horseshoe traces back its ancestry more than 350 million years. This "crab" scuttles through the shallow intertidal waters with amazing speed, twitching its long tail spike. Although its appearance is somewhat awesome, the horseshoe is harmless to man. At one time, this organism was harvested for fertilizer, but now its blue blood is extracted and used in the pharmaceutical industry for testing human blood for bacteria.

Short-browed **mud shrimp** or **ghost shrimp** are much less familiar to tidal flat enthusiasts than are their burrows, which are often surrounded by shrimp feces resembling chocolate shot. Mud shrimp burrows dot the flat landscape, you have to dig quickly to find the occupants. This mud shrimp looks somewhat like a miniature lobster, due to the large pincers on its front pair of legs.



Mud shrimp feces

SAND DOLLARS, SEA CUCUMBERS: Phylum Echinodermata

All echinoderms are marine animals, characterized by an external skeleton of calcium-like plates often covered with spines and a body form based on a five part pattern.

If you find a **five-hole sand dollar** fresh from the sea, you may not recognize it, for it has a mosslike covering of green spines. As the sand dollar dries on the beach, this outer layer disappears and the plated skeleton bleaches to its familiar white color. This flat disc-shaped skeleton has five keyhole slots near the outer



Sand dollar

(Dead)

(Alive)

edge of the shell.

Although **sea cucumbers** may look like a sponge or sea anemone they do have the skeletal plates characteristic of every echinoderm. These plates have simply degenerated and embedded themselves in the cucumber's fleshy body. This animal's tubed feet are a common characteristic of echinoderms.



Sea Cucumber

PLANTS

The elements of salt spray, constant wind, intense light, and high temperatures combine to make the dunes a harsh place for plants to grow. Unlike their animal neighbors, plants cannot burrow to escape climatic extremes. The soil itself is a problem: sand is not noted for its ability to hold moisture. You won't see a large variety of vegetation along the beach, but those plants you do encounter are indicative of site conditions. Grasses and vines dominate the foredunes, just back of the wrackline. Dunes further from the waterline are older and have, over time, become more stable because of the network of plant roots holding the sand in place. On these dunes you'll find additional herbs and a few woody plants.

Here are a few species common to Georgia's dunes and interdunes.

Sea Oats (*Uniola paniculata*) may be the best-known dune stabilizer. Protected by law from the ravages of



Tyler Jones/CRD

The Tybee Island beaches and fishing pier on Tybee Island, Ga. As one of Georgia's three beaches accessible by car, Tybee is a crowd favorite for beachcombing.

dried plant collectors, this grass can reproduce either by sprouting seeds or by sending out underground runners, called rhizomes. Sea oats are not alone in this regard. Many beach grasses reproduce by sending out such new stems, with nodes that root and form new plants. These grasses depend on soil undisturbed by foot or vehicle traffic to allow their rhizomes a chance to spread and take hold. If these rhizomes and

roots are destroyed, so is the dune, for a healthy network of stems and roots is the key to stabilizing sand.

Sea oats are valuable stabilizers of sandy soil for another reason: They can withstand burying by sand drifts, sending up new shoots from the submerged plants.

Saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*), a relative of the widespread marsh plant, smooth cordgrass, grows in wispy bunches in the dunes. Its habitat is not confined to beaches, but includes brackish and salt marshes along the coast from Maine to Texas. If you look at a salt meadow cordgrass leaf, you'll notice that it is not flat, but the edges curl up into a U-shape.



If you're one who frequents the coastal regions, **beach pennywort** (*Hydrocotyle bonariensis*) is no doubt a familiar sight. This plant, whose scalloped, round leaves poke above the sand in profusion, is related to many other species of *Hydrocotyle* commonly found in coastal areas. Some species crop up in lawns and flower beds, much to the frustration of conscientious gardeners.

This article was adapted from a May/June 1980 edition of **Coastlines Georgia**. To view other previous editions, visit CoastalGaDNR.org/Coastlines.

Additions made to 3 offshore reefs

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

CRD recently completed three significant additions to Georgia's offshore artificial reefs.

The Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Unit conducted these deployments to enhance marine habitats and support local biodiversity. All materials were thoroughly cleaned and inspected by the U.S. Coast Guard prior to deployment.

The 62-foot tug Sarah Katlin was deployed to Reef JY on May 31, situated 17 nautical miles east of St. Catherines Island. This deployment aims to create new habitats for marine life and support the local fishing community. The vessel sank in 68 feet of water at 31.60667°N, 80.79922°W (31°36.400'N, 80°47.953'W).

Following this, on June 5, approximately 63 tons of concrete blocks previously used by the U.S. Coast Guard to anchor aids to navigation were added to Reef SAV about 6 nautical miles east of Tybee Island. These materials provide essential structure for various marine species, promoting ecological diversity and sustainability. The blocks were placed by the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Willow (WLB-202), a seagoing buoy tender, in 41 feet of water at 31.92138°N, 80.78621°W (31°55.283'N, 80°47.173'W).

The final deployment occurred June 6, when the 50-foot tug G.A. Franklin was added to Reef HLHA, 23 miles east of Little Cumberland Island. This addition further expands the available habitats for fish and other marine organisms, contributing to the overall health of Georgia's coastal ecosystems. The Franklin went down in 76 feet of water at 30.98958°N, 80.95315°W (30°59.375'N, 80°57.189'W).

The Savannah ABC affiliate WJCL-TV joined CRD for the deployment of the G.A. Franklin. The station aired an informative story highlighting



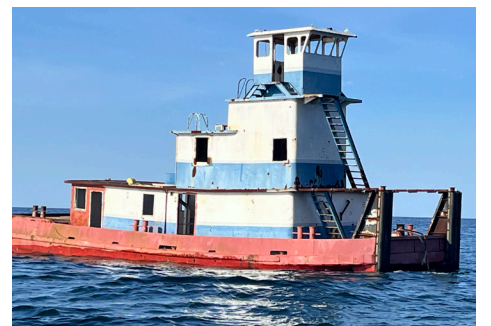
Tyler Jones/Cameron Brinton/Brian Cedars/CRD

Above, the 50-foot tug G.A. Franklin goes down. **Below**, the 62-foot tug Sarah Kaitlin. **At bottom**, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Willow deploys 63 tons of concrete rubble.

the meticulous process of cleaning and preparing reef materials for deployment, ensuring environmental safety and effectiveness.

"We are very happy with the success of these reef deployments," said Paul Medders, CRD's Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Unit lead. "Artificial reefs play a crucial role in enhancing marine habitats, supporting fish populations, and boosting recreational fishing opportunities. These additions will provide long-term benefits for our coastal environment and community. While the reef materials are man-made, the organisms that will find a home here are totally natural."

The Coastal Conservation Association Georgia, a CRD partner, provided financial support to make the reef deployments possible. Members of the public can also show their support for artificial reef creation by purchasing the "Support Fish Habitat" license plate (Code "NR") at their local tag office. This eye-catching tag features




the state saltwater fish, the red drum, and costs just \$25 more annually than a standard tag.

CRD remains committed to conserving and enhancing Georgia's coastal resources for present and future generations. For more information about the artificial reef program and other conservation initiatives, please visit CoastalGaDNR.org/HERU.



Coastal tradition continues:



COASTFEST

set to make waves in Brunswick

As the fall's first cooler breezes sweep across Glynn County, they bring with them more than just the eventual promise of relief from the summer heat. They mark the return of one of the Golden Isles' most beloved traditions: CoastFest.

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 5, CRD will once again welcome thousands to the annual event, transforming Mary Ross Waterfront Park in historic downtown Brunswick into a vibrant celebration of our region's natural beauty and rich maritime heritage.

For nearly three decades, CoastFest has been more than just an event—it's become a cornerstone of our coastal community. What started as a small gathering of dedicated CRD staff and curious locals has grown into a full-scale festival that attracts visitors from across the region and beyond.

It's a day where the bonds between people and place are strengthened, and where the youngest among us can learn the value of stewardship and the joys of discovery.





Bobby Haven/CRD photo

CoastFest attendees check out the “Uplands to the Ocean” CRD Pavilion at Mary Ross Waterfront Park in 2023.

“CoastFest has always been about education through entertainment,” says Doug Haymans, CRD director who has been involved with the event for more than two decades. “We want people to have a great time, but we also want them to walk away with a greater understanding of the coastal environment and what they can do to help protect it.”

This year’s CoastFest promises to be the most engaging yet, with new exhibits, interactive experiences, and a few surprises that are sure to delight attendees of all ages. Among the most anticipated new features is the Colonial Corner, which will showcase DNR’s State Parks and Historic Sites re-enactors. Visitors will have the opportunity to step back in history and learn about Georgia’s rich heritage from period actors.

Another new addition are live programs on the main stage from DNR’s Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center (CEWC) and State Parks



and Historic Sites. CEWC will lead ecology programs with live animals, while Parks will show off their black powder cannons and muskets for the crowd to see (and hear!). Returning this year to the stage is also the ever-popular Center for Wildlife Education from Georgia Southern University, with their menagerie of raptors, snakes, and critters.

For those with a taste for fishing, the Kids Catfish Rodeo will return, offering youngsters the chance to

lasso live catfish with WRD Fisheries staff from the Richmond Hill Hatchery. And if you love fish, be sure to visit “Hawg Trough” giant aquarium, funded through a generous donation by the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation.

A crowd favorite is also returning: The Scouts America Climbing Wall. Young people can scale the 40-foot wall while trained safety staff belay the ropes. And if heights aren’t for you, be sure to stop by the WRD Archery Corner and try your aim.

Something out of the ordinary will also be featured this year. To celebrate the Georgia coast’s rich tradition of shrimping, and to raise awareness of the industry, representatives from each division of DNR will compete in Wild Georgia Shrimp Eating Contest. Five staff members from across DNR will have two minutes to peel and eat as many shrimp as they can, with the winner claiming bragging rights and a giant shrimp hat to mark the occasion.

As always, CoastFest will be



Bobby Haven/CRD photos

Top left, Lea King-Badyna, right, an early coordinator of CoastFest before she became executive director of Keep Golden Isles Beautiful, speaks with a student at CoastFest in 2019. **Top right,** A boy rappels on the Scouts America climbing wall at CoastFest. **Below,** Georgia Southern University’s Center for Wildlife Education shows off a snake during one of their programs at CoastFest.

packed with activities designed to engage the whole family. The Exhibitor’s Row is set to be a hive of activity, featuring crafts, games, and interactive exhibits that teach children about the importance of protecting our natural resources.

This year, more than 40 exhibitors have signed up, from federal government agencies like the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, to the Tybee Island Marine Science Center.

The CRD “Uplands to the Ocean” Pavilion will also be a hub of activity, with interactive exhibits highlighting how CRD conserves the coast through science. Crowd pleasers include the 360 virtual reality dive to an artificial reef, the wave tank, and resiliency demonstrations.

And of course, no CoastFest would be complete without the Touch Tanks, a perennial favorite where kids (and adults) can get up close and personal with stingrays, starfish, and other marine creatures.

While learning and exploration are at the heart of CoastFest, there’s plenty of fun to be had as well. A variety of food vendors will be on hand, offering everything from classic



festival fare like funnel cakes and corn dogs to fresh seafood that showcases the best of the coast.

At its core, CoastFest is a celebration of community—a chance for locals and visitors alike to come together in appreciation of the unique environment that makes our region so special. It’s a day when the DNR’s mission to conserve Georgia’s natural resources comes to life in the most engaging way possible.

“We’re incredibly fortunate to live in a place with such a rich natural heritage,” says Jennifer Kline, a

coastal hazards specialist with the CRD. “CoastFest is a way to bring people together to celebrate that heritage, and to inspire the next generation to care for it.”

So, as October approaches and the marsh grasses turn golden in the late summer sun, make plans to join the thousands of others who will gather at Brunswick’s Mary Ross Waterfront Park for CoastFest 2024. It’s more than just a day of fun in the sun—it’s an opportunity to connect with the coast, and to become part of the effort to conserve it for future generations. ▀

SALTWATER RECORDS

Almaco jack record broken again

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

A St. Simons Island man is the new state record holder for almaco jack (*Seriola rivoliana*).

James W. Thompson, 21, landed a remarkable 27-pound, 8-ounce almaco jack while fishing offshore near Navy Tower R4 on Sunday, July 28.

This impressive catch surpasses the previous record of 23 pounds, 15.04 ounces, established in May 2024 by Jason H. Rich of McRae-Helena.

Thompson's achievement marks the third time this year the state record for almaco jack has been broken, highlighting the exceptional fishing opportunities in Georgia's waters. Thompson's dedication and skill have earned him a distinguished place in the state's record books.

"Mr. Thompson's new record showcases Georgia's coastal waters as an exciting and unique opportunity for anglers of all ages," said Tyler Jones, coordinator of the Georgia Saltwater Game Fish Records Program. "We've had more than half a dozen new state saltwater records in 2024 alone, and that goes to show the health and diversity of Georgia's waters, along with the importance of science-based fishery management to ensure their availability for future generations."

Thompson's record-breaking catch will be celebrated with a certificate signed by Governor Brian Kemp, Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Walter Rabon, and CRD Director Doug Haymans.



Tyler Jones/CRD

James W. Thompson, of St. Simons Island, holds his record-setting almaco jack after having it weighed at Coastal Regional Headquarters on July 29.

Thompson'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 Thompson on his record-breaking 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 are federally required when fishing for snapper-grouper 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 targeting

snapper-grouper must also use non-offset, stainless steel circle hooks.

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. Detailed state saltwater record program rules and regulations are available at CoastalGaDNR.org/SaltwaterRecords.

Almaco jack are found globally in tropical and subtropical seas. They are pelagic fish, meaning they utilize the entire water column and are frequently found inhabiting reefs and other structures underwater. They typically feed on small fishes, shrimp, and squid. They are known for their stamina and strength. ▀

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.



Provided photos

Sammie Kuhn, 4, of St. Simons Island, poses with a 32.5-inch spotted seatrout she caught with her family at a pond on Jekyll Island. Below, the Kuhn family poses with their catch.

Family catches 'troutzilla' at Jekyll pond

By TYLER JONES

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

A St. Simons Island family may have hooked a record-breaking spotted seatrout during a Cub Scout fishing activity, much to the delight of their children and the surprise of their parents.

Andrew Kuhn, an active member of Cub Scout Pack 227, organized the event for the scouts at the pond behind the Tideland Nature Center on July 20.

The fishing trip started like any other, with the Scouts, including Kuhn's 4-year-old daughter Sammie, reeling in small pinfish, whiting, and croakers. Sammie, beaming with pride, reeled in a rod with two croakers, perfect bait size for bigger fish.

Kuhn, well-prepared for the day, had brought two adult-sized rods along with the children's fishing gear. He decided to use the croakers as bait, casting one out on a bottom rig with a circle hook and the other



under a popping cork on his 8-foot surf rod. What happened next was entirely unexpected.

"I thought it was a small bull red at first," Kuhn recounted. "But as we got it closer to the dock, we realized it was something much bigger."

The fish turned out to be a massive spotted seatrout. As the group quickly reeled in the smaller lines to avoid tangles, Kuhn and the other adults worked together to bring the fish in. The

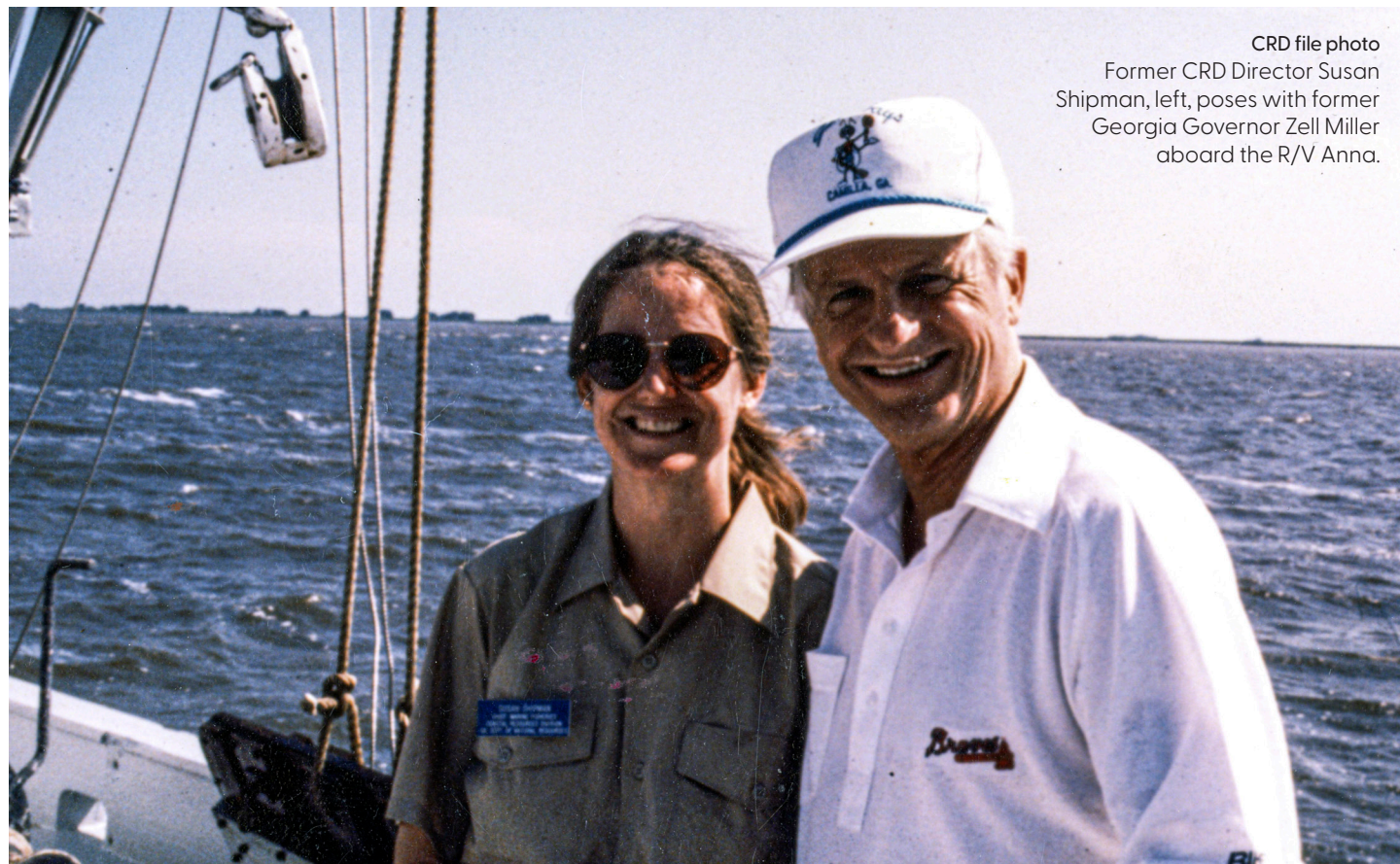
excitement of the catch, however, led to a misreading of the regulations. Thinking the fish was oversized, Kuhn released it after a brief struggle to revive it.

Back home, the family realized they might have just caught a fish that could rival the current spotted seatrout record. Using AutoCAD, Kuhn, an engineer by trade, measured the fish at an estimated 32.5 inches long, possibly surpassing the existing record.

The family's catch, while not officially weighed or measured on-site, was an unforgettable experience, especially for the young scouts who witnessed it. CRD issued a certificate of Outstanding Catch to the Kuhn Family and congratulated them on their achievement.

"It was pretty neat to catch a monster trout from the new wheelchair-accessible dock," Kuhn said, reflecting on the day. "Even if it doesn't break the record, the memory of that catch and the look on my kids' faces is something we'll cherish forever." ▀

RETIREE SPOTLIGHT



CRD file photo
Former CRD Director Susan Shipman, left, poses with former Georgia Governor Zell Miller aboard the R/V Anna.

Former director still leads in community

Susan Shipman holds a degree in Zoology from UGA, with further studies in marine sciences at UNC Chapel Hill. She joined the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Coastal Resources Division in 1979 as the first female marine biologist. Over her career, she led the Commercial Fisheries Program, served as Chief of Marine Fisheries, and represented Georgia on several fisheries management councils. In 2002, she became Division Director, overseeing fisheries, coastal habitats, and permitting. Susan retired in 2009 after a distinguished career marked by significant contributions to marine biology and coastal resource management. Coastlines Magazine recently caught up with her to see what she's been up to in her latest chapter of life.

Coastlines: What initially drew you to a career in coastal resource management?

Shipman: I am a native of West Tennessee and grew up near the Mississippi River, north of Memphis. Visits to my maternal cousins on the North Carolina coast drew me to marine science as a career. As a child, I was fascinated by saltmarshes and fiddler crabs. I first attended Mary Baldwin College which had a summer course at the Duke University Marine lab. I participated in that program in between my freshman and sophomore years, and was a teaching assistant

for the class the second summer. That hooked me on marine science, and I transferred my junior year to UGA.

Coastlines: Can you share a memorable moment or project from your time as Director of the Coastal Resources Division?

Among my most memorable projects was assembling the manual about coastal resources and hazards for the visiting staff and security teams for the G-8 Summit held on Sea Island in summer 2004. Seeing missile launchers on the decommissioned remnant bridges by the newer Causeway Bridges, and at Jekyll's fishing pier, was

surreal. I can't imagine what security would look like today.

Coastlines: What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during your tenure, and how did you overcome them?

A challenge in my very early career was being accepted in a profession which had been predominately men. The agency biologists were very accepting of me, but some of the vessel captains were skeptical as were fishermen I interacted with. I was one of the first women coastal biologist working in DNR. I overcame resistance by

working every bit as hard as the men, and washing the dishes on the research vessels.

Coastlines: How did you see the field of coastal resource management evolve during your career?

The use of technology revolutionized marine work. Computers replaced typewriters, GPS replaced LORAN C, barcode tags replaced plastic streamers for fish, and cell phones revolutionized communications. Population estimates were revolutionized with sophisticated, complex stock assessment modeling. Citizen science became an important source of data. Drones are now used.

Coastlines: Which accomplishment are you most proud of during your time with the Division?

Initially, DNR's work with marine protected species (threatened and endangered species) was in Coastal Resources Division. It was transferred to Wildlife Resources Division where the other protected species work was being conducted. Among our proudest accomplishment has been the collaborative work with WRD to protect sea turtles and reverse that decline. It thrills me to see sea turtle nesting numbers in recent summers. The contentious interactions with shrimpers over Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) was worth the anguish. I remain very concerned over dire status of the right whale population.

Coastlines: What advice would you give to young professionals entering the field today?

Be as versed in technology as you can be, but don't rely solely on it. Have high aspirations, but do not shun lower level work that enables you to get your foot in the door. As you advance in the field do not be above doing the work you ask subordinates to do. Jump in there and do the less than pleasant work alongside your colleagues.

Coastlines: How did you balance the need for environmental protection with the demands of economic development along the coast?

In whatever management setting



CRD file photos

Above, Susan Shipman, center, sorts through a catch on the culling table aboard the R/V Anna. **Below,** CRD staff pose with a sign set to mark the trawling boundaries for sound systems in Georgia.

you find yourself, the economic impact of conservation strategies you are considering for implementation must be taken into consideration. Abundant sustainable natural resources are extremely important to the coastal economy and to eco-tourism on the coast—sportfishing, boating, kayaking, birding, beach-going, eco-lodges, etc. support many jobs on the coast. The commercial fishing industry is part of this coast's heritage. The landscape alone—our extensive marshes, is important to our real estate market.

Coastlines: What do you think are the most critical issues facing coastal resources today, and how should they be addressed?

Unbridled growth and the associated demands that are being put on the Floridan aquifer; loss of freshwater wetlands, declining working waterfronts, climate change. Resiliency planning is imperative.

Coastlines: How do you plan to stay connected to the field or the Division in retirement?

I am an active Board member for the St. Simons Land Trust, which manages 1200+ acres on St. Simons Island. I have the pleasure of working on management plans with several DNR professionals from both CRD and WRD on our Stewardship Committee. I also work with several



colleagues on collaborative projects such as the Living Shoreline Task Force. I handle permit requests for the Land Trust. It is interesting to be a client seeking a fishing platform permit for the Land Trust. Without exception the current CRD staff are consummate professionals.

Coastlines: What have you been doing in this most recent chapter of your life?

I am a hobbyist beekeeper and take my bees into schools, scouting events, garden clubs and other organizations to educate our community on the importance of pollinators to our food production.

I represent apiarists on the Glynn County Farm Bureau Board, am active with the Land Trust in technical matters, and chair the Golden Isles Youth Orchestra Board. I coordinate Christ Church's hunger outreach program for children in our local school system, Backpack Buddies. ▀

Et Cetera ...

NEWS BRIEFS

Beach Week returns to Tybee, Jekyll, St. Simons islands

CRD hosted its annual Beach Week celebration June 26-28 on Jekyll, Tybee, and St. Simons islands. This year's theme focused on encouraging the public to reduce sea turtle hatchling mortality by filling in holes dug on beaches and flattening sand castles. Staff also had live wildlife including horseshoe crabs, and sand dollars so the public could learn the difference.

CRD aids shrimpers in facing economic challenges

Dawn Franco and Julie Califf from CRD's Fishery Dependent Statistics Unit partnered with the Georgia Commercial Fishermen's Association and UGA Marine Extension to hold workshops aiding Georgia shrimpers with complicated International Trade Commission questionnaires. The first workshop was on July 9 in Thunderbolt. The ITC is collecting data to support countervailing duty and antidumping investigations of shrimp from Ecuador, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia. This data will help determine if duties will be imposed on these countries. Georgia's shrimp industry faces economic challenges due to low dockside prices from cheap imports, dropping from \$12.00/pound in the late 1980s (adjusted for inflation) to \$3.61/pound in 2023.

Church group helps built novel oyster recruitment tools

Youth group volunteers from Canaan United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., built experimental oyster modules July 18 at Coastal Regional Headquarters, as part of their mission trip to Epworth-by-the-Sea UMC Conference Center on St. Simons Island. The



CRD photo

CRD Marine Biologist Cameron Brinton helps a volunteer from Canaan United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., build novel oyster modules. The new modules will soon be tested in estuaries to see how well they recruit oysters.



Tyler Jones/CRD

An invasive blue land crab was spotted in Brunswick by a keen eyed resident. The woman reported the crab to CRD and brought it to Coastal Regional Headquarters where it was handed over to WRD.

oyster modules will be tested as potential oyster recruitment habitat in estuaries. The modules were made out of wire mesh that was folded and clipped together to restrain the oyster shell. The volunteer event was organized by CRD Marine Biologist Cameron Brinton.

Biologists, staff collect carcasses from red snapper miniseason

Along the South Atlantic coast, recreational anglers were allowed to harvest one Red Snapper per

person on July 12. CRD staff visited three locations that day to collect biological samples and there were 15 freezer locations along the coast where anglers could donate their carcasses. The tally for total number of donated red snapper carcasses is still in progress. The commercial season opened July 8 and closed Aug. 6 when the quota was met.

Invasive blue land crab spotted in Brunswick

Several reports of invasive blue land crabs were reported on the coast in August, likely due to high levels of rainfall regionally. Reports came from Glynn and Chatham counties, with one person bringing a specimen to the Coastal Regional Office. CRD worked with WRD to educate the public about why blue land crabs are considered invasive and how they can be destroyed. The crabs, which look like fiddlers but much larger, are native to Brazil to South Florida and are known to cause extensive property damage due to the capacity for burrowing. They can grow as large as 5 to 6 inches.



CRD photo

Marine Technician Chasen Carpenter holds an oyster toadfish while a curious youngster looks on during the 2024 Golden Isles Kids Fishing Event at Liberty Ship Park in Brunswick. Seventy-seven young people and 57 adults participated.

Kids Fishing Event reels in the fun

CRD hosted its annual Golden Isles Kids Fishing Event in Brunswick on June 1. The free event, held at the Sidney Lanier pier, was attended by 77 young people and 57 adults. Each student received basic fishing instructions including knot tying, casting, and tackle configurations, and was about to fish from the pier for about three hours. Lunch was also provided.

SAFMC holds Mackerel Port Meetings

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council hosted a King and Spanish Mackerel Port Meeting at the Sapelo Saltwater Fishing Club. Unlike public hearings which specifically address an upcoming potential regulatory change, the Council designed these meetings to afford fishermen the opportunity to discuss their perspectives and

specifically address how the fisheries may be changing over time and in response to changing environmental conditions. Participants commented on increased tournament fishing in Florida in terms of more tournaments with more vessels, as well as new tournaments in waters closer to shore and increased commercial fishing pressure. Conversely, Georgia fishermen are having to go farther offshore than in the past to fish for king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel are no longer commonly seen.

New faces at CRD: Three hired full time

CRD has welcomed three new full-time staff in recent months.

Brittany Hall came on board as a marine biologist working with the Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey in July. She is a graduate of College



Hall

of Coastal Georgia and previously worked on CRD's Coastal Longline Survey in 2019.

Megan Graham joined CRD on Aug 16 as an administrative assistant in the Admin Section. She previously worked in finance with an RV dealership in Cleveland, Ga. She has played bagpipes for almost three years and has a 13 year old cat named Lewellyn.



Graham

Eric Stamm also joined CRD on Aug. 16. He holds a Bachelor's in Wildlife and Fisheries from Clemson University and will be working as a marine technician with CRD's Beach Water Quality program. He previously worked as a fisheries tech with Clemson.



Stamm

— STAFF REPORTS

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