



DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

BRIAN KEMP
GOVERNOR

WALTER RABON
COMMISSIONER

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

BY THE COMMISSIONER

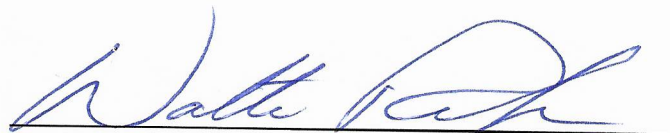
- WHEREAS:** O.C.G.A. Section 27-4-195 authorizes the Commissioner of Natural Resources to open or close for the purpose of taking shellfish any or a portion of the salt waters of this state at any time between January 1 and December 31, provided that he has determined that such action in opening or closing said waters is in accordance with the current, sound principles of wildlife research and management; and
- WHEREAS:** O.C.G.A. Section 27-4-197(a) mandates that the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture conduct a shellfish program sufficient to be certified by the United States Food and Drug Administration for interstate shipment of shellfish produced in Georgia; and
- WHEREAS:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference is requiring state shellfish programs to implement a *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) control plan should conditions in Georgia so warrant; and
- WHEREAS:** Based on average monthly water temperature calculations, the months of June to September exceed the 81- degree Fahrenheit critical temperature mark, requiring the development and implementation of a Vp control plan for Georgia's oyster harvest; and
- WHEREAS:** The FDA Vp control plan guidance document provides for implementing a closure for the harvest of oysters as an option for addressing Vp management; and
- WHEREAS:** Members of the Georgia commercial shellfish fishery agreed with an annual closure of oyster harvest between the months of June through September as a measure in good faith to adequately address the annual Vp management requirements for oyster harvest within the state; and
- WHEREAS:** Based on a new vibrio control plan and new rules promulgated in 2026 to establish regulations for harvesting maricultured oysters during the otherwise closed season, eligible Master Harvesters of subtidal oyster farms may petition the Department of Natural Resources for permission to harvest oysters during the closed season.

- WHEREAS:** The authorization to harvest oysters during the closed season will be limited only to maricultured oysters cultivated on subtidal oyster farms that meet rigorous handling and operation requirements; and
- WHEREAS:** Beginning in 2008 and through 2026, the Commissioner of Natural Resources closed the salt waters of this State to the commercial and recreational harvest of oysters for human consumption from June through September of every year to address Vp management requirements; and
- WHEREAS:** Based on September shellfish growing area surveys, water temperatures remained above 81-degree Fahrenheit causing the closure to be extended; and
- WHEREAS:** Based on recent observations, water temperatures have declined and are nearing the 81-degree Fahrenheit threshold. With a seven-day coastal forecast showing a significant cooling trend, water temperatures are anticipated to be below threshold levels by October 8th, 2026; and
- WHEREAS:** The Commissioner has determined that reopening the salt waters of this State to the commercial and recreational harvest of oysters for human consumption effective October 8, 2026 would be consistent with current sound principles of wildlife management.

NOW, THEREFORE, BY VIRTUE OF THE POWER VESTED IN ME AS THE COMMISSIONER OF NATURAL RESOURCES, IT IS HEREBY

- ORDERED:** That the salt waters of the State of Georgia from the Georgia-South Carolina state boundary line in the vicinity of the Savannah River navigational channel south to the Georgia-Florida boundary shall reopen to the commercial and recreational harvest of oysters effective 6:00 a.m., Thursday, October 8, 2026 as stipulated in the *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* control plan and as determined by the Department.

This 8th day of October 2026.



WALTER RABON
COMMISSIONER OF NATURAL RESOURCES