Georgia State Report
Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel Update
October 27-28, 2010

Satilla River Flathead Removal Project

Current Results:

- For the 2010 sampling season (May-October), the crew removed 6,289 flathead catfish totaling 11,101 pounds. Since the implementation of the full time flathead management program in 2007, more than 53,671 pounds of flathead catfish (19,761 fish) have been removed from the river in 4 years. The size structure of the flathead population has been affected with the average size fish removed dropping from 5.8 pounds in 2007, to 2.9 pounds in 2008, to 1.4 pounds in 2009, but slightly increased to 1.8 pounds in 2010. Biomass per effort showed a similar trend and had also declined from 57.1 kg/hr in 2007, to 23.6 kg/hr in 2008, to 19.9 kg/hr in 2009, but increased to 31.1kg/hr in 2010.

- Maintenance control of flathead catfish in the Satilla River may be possible given our reported changes in the size structure and biomass of the population, but intensive harvest needs to be maintained to prevent the flathead population from rebuilding, especially during high water years, where strong recruitment has been demonstrated by the introduced flathead population.

- The Satilla River is your typical floodplain driven ecosystem. Large amounts of beneficial nutrients enter the system during high water periods. Anecdotal fishing reports suggest that the redbreast sunfish has begun to make a comeback in the Satilla River, but there simply has not been enough time for the redbreast sunfish population to rebound. This spring and summer, favorable water conditions (high water) for redbreast sunfish production have persisted on the Satilla. Such conditions combined with continued efforts to reduce the flathead catfish population will hopefully result in the redbreast sunfish population rebounding to historical levels throughout the entire river.

State Surveys

- The DNR Commissioner has established an aquatic vegetation committee to survey all of DNR properties to inventory aquatic vegetation. The committee will identify hotspots and most importantly possible threats to Georgia's natural resources. The goal is to gather the information in a database in order to better manage aquatic vegetation on state property. This is the first committee established within GA DNR to identify these areas.

Apple Snail Projects

- First phase of the proposal from UGA to evaluate factors controlling the spread and distribution of apple snails is underway. Recalling the significance of this project, the channeled apple snail is currently classified as a Priority 1(a) species in the 2009 Georgia Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan (GANSMP). The proposed studies would assist agencies in Georgia with Objective 5 Action 3. Data concerning potential habitats would inform managers when planning surveys to investigate the occurrence of the species in Georgia. In addition, will synthesize information on existing locations, abiotic factors effecting growth, reproduction, survival and invasiveness, and ultimately use all this vital information to build a predictive model of the spread of the invasive apple snail within Georgia. The study will also initiate baseline monitoring in existing invasive snail locations and adjacent control sites to begin investigating impacts of the snail on aquatic ecosystems.

- GADNR is assisting Dr. Teem at the Aquatic Center Pond located in St. Mary's, GA. The pond is located near the St. Mary's River. The site was chosen due to the close proximity to the Okefenokee refuge (~ 50 miles upstream). Smaller in size and more easily managed were other factors used to select this pond. The Aquatic Center Pond is largely isolated from other drainage ditches in the area and is connected only during times of high water. In year 1, bi-weekly photographic records of the survey sites at the Aquatic Center Pond and nearby control sites will be made to provide a baseline assessment of the fertile egg masses being produced. Snail density will also be measured using baited traps. At this time, there will be no sterile snails released into the Aquatic Center Pond. Georgia will first require an evaluation of the efficacy of the sterile-release pilot study at the Orange Ave pond in FL before releasing sterile snails. Eggs will also collected at the Aquatic Center pond and transported to the USDA facility in Tifton for irradiation.

ANS Plan

- Georgia will be submitting its proposal to the ANS Taskforce to receive funding in 2011