



Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) Update for Georgia



REPORTING PERIOD:
April 1, 2023 – October 31, 2023

Report Submitted By:

Jim Page, Senior Fisheries Biologist

STATEWIDE MANAGEMENT

Regulatory Changes:

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) is tasked with leading the creation, implementation, and enforcement of various laws, rules, and regulations pertaining to wildlife in our state. The Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.) identifies laws within Georgia, including providing regulatory authority to certain entities for establishing rules and regulations within the state. For the protection, sustainment, and management of our natural resources, much of this regulatory authority is provided to the Board of Natural Resources (Board).

The GADNR is tasked with periodically reviewing current laws, rules, and regulations being implemented across the state and update said rules and regulations as necessary via recommendations to the Board. In early 2022, the GADNR conducted a review and update of Board Rule 391-4-8 (Wild Animals). These rules “maintain and supplement the list of wild animals requiring a license, insurance, or both and prohibit certain species.” Based on that review, the GADNR recommended the following updates to the Board. These recommendations were approved by the Board in October 2022 and went into effect on December 4, 2022. Individuals having animals impacted by the new rule have been given until December 4, 2023 to properly tag and register those animals and come into compliance with the new rule.

Additional information and answers to Frequently Asked Questions can be found at:

<https://georgiawildlife.com/wild-animal-rules>

FRESHWATER SPECIES - MANAGEMENT

FISH and INVERTEBRATES

Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) Removal Project on the Satilla River:

The Satilla River is one of the premier sunfish fisheries in the state of Georgia and redbreast sunfish (*Lepomis auritus*) are a highly sought-after species. In fact, the new **WORLD RECORD REDBREAST SUNFISH** was caught in the Satilla River in 2022. Since the introduction of flathead catfish into the Satilla River in the mid-1990's, the impact of this non-native has been significant. In an effort to reduce their impact on redbreast and other native fish, GADNR staff initiated efforts to remove flathead catfish on a part-time basis in 1996 and full-time starting in 2007 to control their population.

Staff will soon be wrapping up 2023 removal efforts on the Satilla River and results will be included in the next report.

Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) Removal on the Satilla River:

In addition to removing flathead catfish in the Satilla River, GADNR staff continue to remove blue catfish from the river. Removal of this second non-native species occurs simultaneously during flathead removals. After removing a record number of blues in 2022, staff have seen over 1000 fish again in 2023. Final results will be available in the next report.

Flathead Catfish Discovery and Removal in the Ogeechee River

In December 2021, a commercial fisherman captured and reported the first confirmed report of a flathead catfish in the Ogeechee River. Since then, GADNR staff initiated increased efforts specifically targeting flathead catfish in the Ogeechee to sample and remove any observed specimens. Though no specimens were observed in 2022, GADNR staff observed 9 specimens in August 2023. Staff will continue monitoring the population through increased sampling and remove any flatheads seen.

Other Freshwater ANS Species:

Northern Snakehead Monitoring:

Following thorough eradication efforts in October 2019 after the discovery of Northern Snakehead in Gwinnett County, GADNR staff proactively continued monitoring the area to ensure these invasives were indeed eradicated. Since 2020, GADNR staff have teamed with USFWS staff to conduct eDNA sampling in waters adjacent to the discovery site. Sampling efforts in 2021 indicated two positive hits for snakehead eDNA, though follow up sampling in 2022 and 2023 found zero positive hits. Additionally, staff conducted multiple electrofishing efforts to assess any remnant fish. However, with zero positive eDNA hits for 2

consecutive years and no fish observed while electrofishing, staff have indefinitely suspended future sampling until otherwise warranted.

Triploid Grass Carp Utilization:

Triploid grass carp continue to be purchased and used by the GADNR, particularly for control of weeds at ponds located on GADNR Fish Hatcheries.

Once hatchery fish are harvested, grass carp are removed from hatchery ponds and utilized at other facilities, including for long term pond maintenance at ponds located on GADNR State Park lakes and federal properties. GADNR continues to assist the USFWS with stocking Banks Lake National Wildlife Refuge (BLNWR) to aid in control of *Cabomba* spp. and other vegetation, stocking 646 carp during this reporting period. So far, 3,000+ grass carp have been stocked into BLNWR.

ANS Reported During this Period:

GADNR staff continue to receive reports of ANS species being captured in our state. Below are captures reported during this reporting period.

Apple Snail (*Pomacea* spp.)

- 3 different reports
- Capture Locations: Alabama River; Pooler; Garden City
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff.



Oriental WeatherLoach (*Misgurnus anguillicaudatus*)

- Capture Location: Sweetwater Creek; Beaver Ruin Creek
- Observed during school sampling events.
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff.

Chinese/Japanese Mysterysnails (*Cipangopaludina* spp.)

- Capture Location: Lake Oconee
- Reported by private citizen.
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff



Pacu (*Piaractus brachypomus*)

- Capture Location: Lake Juliette
- Reported by private citizen.
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff



Zebra Mussels

GADNR staff continue to remain vigilant for voluntary reports of zebra mussels attached to boats. No reports of zebra mussels were made during this reporting period.

PLANTS

Giant Salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*)

- No reports of Giant Salvinia were received during this report period.

Water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

- Water hyacinth continues to be observed in several waterbodies within the state. No new reports were received during this reporting period.

Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillate*)

- No new reports of hydrilla were received during this reporting period.

OTHER PLANT SPECIES

- GADNR staff received a report of a private pond infected with Parrot Feather in May 2023. Staff advised the pond owner of treatment options.

MARINE SPECIES - MANAGEMENT

CRUSTACEANS

Asian Tiger Shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*)

Commercial fishermen continue to periodically report catches of Asian tiger shrimp in Georgia waters, though such incidences remain low. No reports were provided during this reporting period. GADNR will continue to monitor tiger shrimp occurrences.

In addition to potential catches of tiger shrimp by commercial fishermen, GADNR staff may potentially intercept tiger shrimp during monthly fishery-independent standardized sampling conducted coastwide by the GADNR, Coastal Resources Division. No tiger shrimp were captured in these surveys during the reporting period. Results of these surveys also suggest abundance of tiger shrimp in Georgia's waters are low.

Standardized Sampling Results – Ecological Trawl Survey

1976 – 2012: No Tiger Shrimp observed

2013: 3 tiger shrimp

2014 – 2022: Total of 3 tiger shrimp collectively

2023: None thus far

Blue Land Crab (*Cardisoma guanhumi*)

- 2 reports during this period.
- Capture Locations: St. Simons Island; St. Mary's)
- Positive ID verified by GADNR



FINFISH

Red Lionfish (*Pterois volitans*)

Lionfish continue to be found in deep waters along most of the eastern U.S. coast, including off of Georgia. GADNR has a reporting tool on our ANS website for anglers to report lionfish. No lionfish were reported during this reporting period.

DISEASE/PARASITES

General

- **Whirling Disease:** First documented in GA in 2021, no cases of whirling disease were found in trout during this reporting period.
- **Didymo:** Also known as “rock snot”, this freshwater diatom has reportedly been observed in the Hiwassee River in Tennessee just across the Georgia line as recently as May 2023. To date, no observations of the species have been made in Georgia waters.
- **Rat Lungworm:** The discovery of dead rats in Atlanta infected with rat lungworm between 2019-2022 was the first confirmed instances of the parasite in Georgia. To date, no additional cases have been reported. GADNR staff are hopeful to initiate monitoring efforts of apple snails in Georgia to assess the presence/absence of the parasite in these potential hosts.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

General

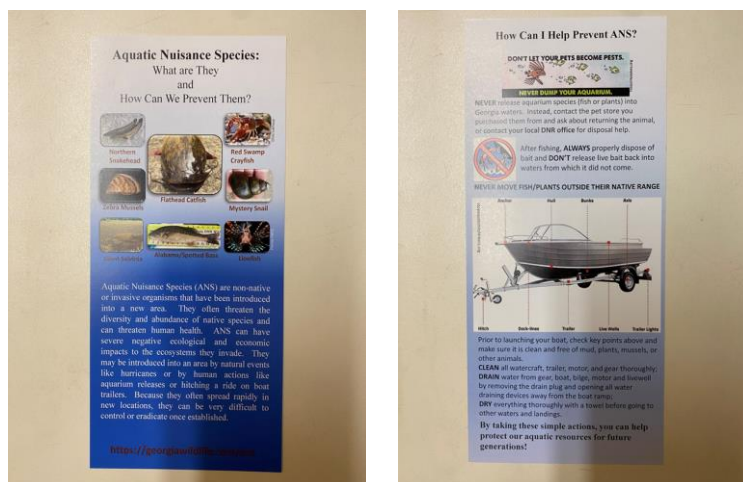
- Staff have continued to make additional updates to the GADNR Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) web page on our website (<https://georgiawildlife.com/ans>)
- Staff continue installing 2 new ANS signs at boat ramps/public access sites around Georgia to inform the public about how they can help prevent ANS introductions.



- Staff have continued setting up ANS display tables at various locations to help educate members of the public about ANS in Georgia and how they can help. These static displays thus far have proven very successful and staff continue to seek new locations to set up displays.



- Fisheries staff with GADNR continue to provide ANS rack cards to GADNR Law Enforcement for distribution to all participants taking Boater Education classes across the state. This will allow important ANS information to be provided to boaters to educate them on how they can help prevent transporting ANS.



Trainings

Staff continue to seek ways to train people on ANS, including partnering with the USFWS, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and other parties on in-person trainings. Staff conducted one (1) CLEAN/DRAIN/DRY training at the GA Chapter AFS Workshop during this period. Additionally, a new online training and certification tool, available at <https://georgiawildlife.com/ans>, was made available. This certification has been completed by several hundred people and will aid in educating the public on invasive species in and near Georgia.

Speaking Presentations

Conducting visits to schools and other educational outlets is a high priority for us, as we feel our best opportunity to prevent ANS introductions is to invest our time in helping inform and guide today's youth. We spoke to over 3,400 students and adults across 15 schools/civic groups during the reporting period.



Mobile ANS Aquarium/Education Trailer

Staff continue to utilize the ANS mobile aquarium/education trailer at various outreach events. This educational tool has been a great addition in our efforts to teach kids about ANS. During the reporting period, staff utilized the trailer at multiple events, including COASTFEST, a large outreach event in Brunswick attended by several thousand people, and the SWAMP SOIREE, a large outreach event in Augusta attended by 400 people. While the picturesque wrapping is popular and informative, the aquarium portion of the trailer continues to be a major attraction for spectators.

