



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



REPORTING PERIOD:
November 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024

Report Submitted By:

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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 were 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:

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 WORLD RECORD REDBREAST SUNFISH was caught in the Satilla River in 2022. While large redbreasts still roam the river, redbreast abundance has certainly been negatively impacted since the introduction of flathead catfish into the river in the mid-1990's. 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.

Despite frequent rainy conditions and ongoing high-water levels, staff completed over 141 hours of electrofishing in 2023 to remove these non-native catfish. Overall catches were unusually low, with only 681 flatheads being removed. Nonetheless, staff are committed to minimizing the impacts of these non-native catfish and will again resume removal efforts in Spring 2024.

Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) Removal:

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 again saw high numbers of blue catfish in 2023, with 1,127 fish being removed. Staff will resume removal efforts in Spring 2024.

Other Freshwater ANS Species:

Northern Snakehead Monitoring:

While thorough eradication efforts were done in October 2019 to prevent the spread of Northern Snakehead found in Gwinnett County, GADNR staff took a proactive approach to continue monitoring this site and subsequent nearby downstream waters to ensure these invasives were indeed eradicated. Starting in 2020, GADNR staff teamed with USFWS staff to conduct eDNA sampling in waters adjacent to the discovery site. Following zero positive hits over a 3-year sampling effort (2021 – 2023), staff have suspended sampling as of 2024 with no plans to resume unless 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 1,150 carp during this reporting period. Thus far, 4,225 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.

Mystery Snail (*Cipangopaludina* spp.)

- Capture Locations: Lake Lanier and West Point Lake
- Report for Lake Lanier is first for that waterbody.
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff.



Oriental WeatherLoach (*Misgurnus anguillicaudatus*)

- Capture Location: Beaver Ruin Creek
- Report provided by UGA Warnell School students.
- Fish continue to be observed during school sampling events.
- Positive ID verified by UGA/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.

MARINE SPECIES - MANAGEMENT

CRUSTACEANS

Historically, Asian Tiger Shrimp have been the primary non-native crustacean reported in Georgia. However, in recent years Blue Land Crab sightings have significantly increased. Together these make up the 2 most commonly reported marine crustaceans, though staff remain vigilant for other reports.

Asian Tiger Shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*)

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

Though infrequent, GADNR staff have intercepted tiger shrimp during fishery-independent standardized sampling (a.k.a. Ecological Monitoring Trawl Survey) conducted monthly at 36+ sites coastwide by the GADNR, Coastal Resources Division. These monthly monitoring events utilize a 40' trawl net and are designed to assess Penaeid shrimp and blue crab populations but can capture tiger shrimp as well. 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 sampled waters are low.

Standardized Sampling Results – Ecological Trawl Survey

1976 – 2023: Total of 6 Tiger Shrimp observed

2024: None thus far.

Blue Land Crab (*Cardisoma guanhumi*)

- Capture Locations: Chatham County; Glynn County
- Reports provided by private citizens
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff



Bocourt Swimming Crab (*Callinectes bocourti*)

- Capture Location: St. Mary's River
- Report provided by private citizen
- Positive ID verified by GADNR staff



FINFISH

Red Lionfish (*Pterois volitans*)

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

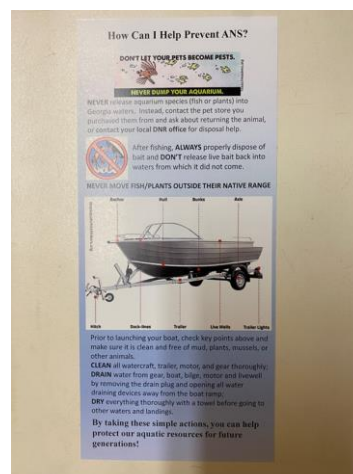
EDUCATION AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

General

- Staff have continued to make additional updates to the GADNR Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) web page on our website. The reporting tool on our website continues to be used by the public as a way of informing us of new discoveries. The new website can be accessed at: <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.



- Fisheries staff with GADNR have provided ANS rack cards that GADNR Law Enforcement will distribute 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 partner with the USFWS and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to offer trainings pertaining to ANS. No trainings were conducted during the reporting period.

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 the public, young and old. We spoke to over 500 students and adults across 6 schools/civic groups during the reporting period.



Mobile ANS Education Trailer

Staff continue to utilize the ANS education trailer at various outreach events. This educational tool has been a great addition in our efforts to teach kids about ANS.

