Georgia Shellfish Program Update

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Topics to Address

• Program partners and regulatory roles
• Status of traditional shellfish fishery and current mariculture
• Challenges related to oyster mariculture implementation
• Moving Forward
• Program goals
Georgia DNR - Coastal Resources Division (CRD) is responsible for classification, sampling and laboratory analysis of shellfish growing areas.

- lease management/permitting, harvester education/permitting, and recreational area management

Georgia DNR Law Enforcement Division insures compliance with Georgia shellfish laws O.C.G.A. 27-4-190 thru 201.

Georgia Department of Agriculture, Consumer Protection Division, regulates handling and storage requirements, shucking, packing, shipping and/or sale of shellfish products within O.C.G.A. 40-7-12.

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP), program certification
Water Quality Monitoring

- Shellfish waters are analyzed monthly and classified as either Approved or Prohibited.
- CRD’s Shellfish Lab and staff are certified by the FDA and inspected every three years using NSSP standards.
- Precautionary fishery closures due to major weather events result in additional sampling. (Hurricane Matthew 2016 and Hurricane Irma 2017.)
Traditional (Wild) Shellfish Harvest

- **Oysters** naturally grow in clusters in intertidal zones.
- Harvest at low tide when oyster and clam beds are exposed.
- **Clams** are generally found in small remote creeks and harvested by hand.
- Obtaining skilled and trained labor for commercial operations can be a limiting factor.
- Wild shellfish leases generally require lower start up costs and overhead.
- Oyster beds are managed annually to meet cultch replenishment requirements.
- Continued interest to promote leases that support wild shellfish harvest to fill large demand for clustered oysters.
Clam farming is a proven industry in Georgia that requires minimal gear, maintenance and husbandry.

DNR inspects hatcheries and monitors the purchase of clam seed from out-of-state hatcheries.

Georgia farmed clams reach market size in 16 – 20 months.

More resilient to storms, crop grows submerged in sediments with minimal profile.

Minimal permitting requirements.

Farmed hard clams (Mercenaria mercenaria) are the same as the wild native species thus reproductively active and contributing to wild recruitment.
**2017 Shellfish Program Stats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shellfish Growing Acres</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Recreational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chatham</td>
<td>4,868</td>
<td>1,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan/Liberty</td>
<td>1,706</td>
<td>936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McIntosh</td>
<td>17,756</td>
<td>1,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glynn</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>4,856</td>
<td>2,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>29,186</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,532</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 17 commercial lease areas permitted
  - 8 private and 9 state leases
- 17 master collector permits
  - 107 individual harvester permits
- 7 recreational harvest areas
• Oysters and clams traditionally consumed raw or undercooked.

• Consumption of raw or undercooked shellfish is linked to severe illnesses and deaths.

• Oyster mariculture is predominantly designed to produce a single oyster intended for the raw half-shell market.

• Georgia is a member of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC).
Oyster Mariculture

- Oyster farming has been growing throughout many regions of the U.S. including the Southeast and Gulf coasts.
- The growth of this fishery has presented many challenges to both the entrepreneurs and regulators.
Current Challenges

• Shared allocation of the public domain.

• Georgia will need to develop an oyster mariculture siting tool.
  • Consideration given to natural and cultural heritage areas, proximity to other structures and live bottom, commercial and recreational uses, navigational channels.

• Threatened and Endangered Species.

• State and federal permitting.
Current Challenges

- Protocols for seed importation within the bioregion to ensure the safety of native populations.
- Storm mitigation plans.
- Summer harvest.
- Regulatory burdens in the NSSP:
  - Operational plans
  - Annual inspections and permitting of new facilities
Moving Forward

• Develop an efficient permitting process.
• Additional compliance and enforcement.
• Proper gear selection to reduce conflicts with endangered and threatened species and with other wildlife and birds
  • Additional water sampling stations may be required in proximity to mariculture gear.
• Code and Policy reform (Agency)
Policy reform

• Establish permitting requirements distinguishing wild harvest from aquaculture.

• Allow Board to regulate harvest seasons, seed importation and size requirements, gear types, methods of harvest and aquaculture siting criteria.

• Shellfish Management Plan to be developed and incorporated by reference in Board rule.
Program Goals

• Recruit new members to the shellfish industry by promoting new and traditional shellfish opportunities.

• Engage with future growers that have interest and knowledge to establish hatchery/nursery capacity within the state.

• Higher density/smaller acreage leases.

• Diversification to other native shellfish species (e.g. Sunray Venus clams, blood ark clams and native ribbed mussels).

• Special use areas for oyster mariculture and gear.

• Increased laboratory capacity for vibrio testing, biotoxin testing, and rapid testing for other pathogens (i.e. norovirus).

• Update and refine educational curriculum to educate industry on BMP’s for mariculture to increase compliance with current and future requirements.

• Increased enhancement of recreational shellfish harvest areas.
Thank you

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