SAPELO SOUNDING Partner Newsletter



Manager's Message

This quarter, the Reserve has continued to face challenges related to uncertain federal funding through NOAA, which has required us to pause the hiring process for a new Research Coordinator. The lack of clarity around the FY2025 budget makes long-term planning difficult and has begun to impact staffing and program capacity. Despite these constraints, we are moving forward with several key initiatives. The Estuarine Fish Monitoring Cooperative remains active, supporting regional data sharing and collaborative research. Additionally, the What's My Bait? NERRS Science Collaborative Knowledge Sharing project has been completed, and a new website (whatsmybait.com) now shares a comprehensive identification guide and highlights the importance of juvenile and non-game fish in Georgia's estuaries. Repairs and upgrades to the Island's Nature Trail are underway, including the addition of a new boardwalk section to improve accessibility and resilience. We have also launched efforts to develop an island resilience plan focused on public infrastructure. We are also working on an overhaul of the SINERR website to make it more accessible, informative, and user-friendly. Finally, be on the lookout for a Film Festival in August for which we partnered with the McIntosh/Darien Chamber of Commerce and Georgia Conservancy, where three of our films will be highlighted along with others. While the funding outlook remains uncertain, we remain committed to advancing projects that support our estuarine ecosystems and the coastal communities that depend on them

-Dr. Rachel Guy



Discover more about Reserve and its impact on our local economy by clicking the photo below!



SWMP REPORT

-Dylan Bedortha

The System-Wide Monitoring Program at SINERR has finished collecting and processing water quality and weather data for calendar year 2024. After data collection, the data is sent into the Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO) for an automated quality check. The CDMO intakes all SWMP data from across the reserve system. This checked data is sent back to SINERR for another round of quality checks where problem data is flagged and compiled into larger datasets. Each site generates over 35,000 data points per year, for a total of over 140,000 data points across our four water quality sites!



Look for our new SWMP informational signs (above) around the island! We are excited to share the great work that SWMP is doing with visitors and residents of Sapelo!



Check out the variations in water temp and dissolved oxygen at our Lower Duplin site since Jan! Visit_https://cdmo.baruch.sc.edu/_to create your own data tables from our sites and other SWMP sites across the country.

PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD







Calendar Highlights

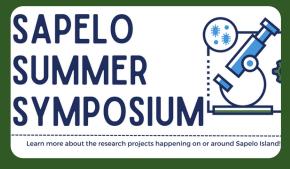
5.14 | Feral Hog Workshop Ludowici, Ga



6.24 | Surface Elevation Table
Workshop
Virtual



7.10 | Sapelo Summer Symposium
Sapelo Island



8.07 | Darien Marsh Film Festival Darien, Ga



Our Edu Coordinator, Adam Mackinnon recently went iris hunting along the Altamaha River with the Altamaha Riverkeeper, Maggie and Kat with the Darien-McIntosh Chamber of Commerce for a fun and educational afternoon!

STEWARDSHIP UPDATES

-Colby Peffer

The Stewardship Program is focusing on two major projects in Summer 2025. In February, we broke ground on the last part of our major renovation of the Sapelo Interpretive Nature Trail. This portion of the trail renovations include replacing all existing boardwalks west of Dean Creek, repairing the boardwalk going onto Nannygoat Beach, and building a new ~500-foot boardwalk crossing over the Dean Creek saltmarsh. The existing earthen causeway running through the salt marsh will be removed at the end of construction to restore hydrological flow in the salt marsh and be replanted with rescued Spartina alterniflora and transitional marsh-to-upland plants where appropriate. This construction is due to run into mid-late summer 2025. In the meantime, the nature trail will be closed to all island residents, guests, and researchers. This project culminates over 2 years of planning, seeking permits, and acquiring funding for this project. The total cost of the project was funded through various NERR system grants, including the annual competitive Purchasing, Acquisition and Construction (PAC) grant, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's NERRS Capacity Building funding, and the Inflation Reduction Act NERRS Resilience funding.





The second project will be the pilot planting of over 200 southern live oak trees, all of which were propagated from Sapelo Island acorn stock, and half of which were raised in the Reserve's restoration greenhouse. These trees will be planted by students and volunteers through April and monitored for 5 years. Dependent on funding, the stewardship program plans to continue yearly restoration plantings of southern live oak in Airstrip Field. The stewardship program is also beginning to form a working group focused on increasing native heritage plant visibility and accessibility on the island, using on and off island partnerships. This work will complement the existing restoration efforts in the Airstrip Field as the program grows.



-Brittany Dodge

The Collaboration & Training Program continues to work with local professional groups, municipalities, and communities through training and technical assistance relating to coastal issues! Please reach out if you would like to partner on any of the CTP's upcoming or on-going projects.







The CTP held a student presentation, 'Journey through the Water Cycle' with Georgia Southern University students who have been conducting research on Sapelo. The event was held both on the island and at the Visitor Center, taking visitors and residents to the field sites and exploring ways that water impacts us on the barrier island.







- SINERR's CTP Program hosted an Estuarine Fish Monitoring Cooperative Training for volunteers and college professors interested in joining us in the program!
- SINERR CTP also held 2 Invasive Species Training for Municipalities and Public Works personnel for Camden and Glynn/McIntosh Counties in partnership with GA Coastal CISMA. More trainings will be held for Liberty/Long and Bryan/Chatham counties.
- The Coastal WildScapes Symposium was held at the Richmond Hill City Center and featured numerous guest lecturers on topics about our coastal invertebrates. To learn more, click here.

The <u>SASMI Project Identification Survey</u> is a questionnaire to identify and gather information about potential conservation, protection, restoration projects occurring or are being planned along the Georgia Coast. Please enter your information today to help them document the amazing efforts going on along our coast!

RESEARCH UPDATES

-Rachel Guy

We are currently on pause for our search for a new research coordinator. Until then, Rachel is running double duty as both the manager and Research Coordinator.

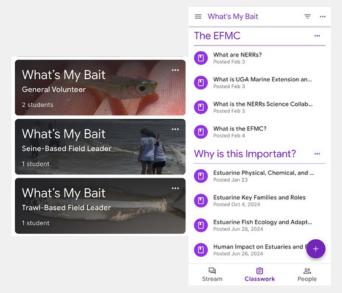
We are very proud to have completed our <u>What's My</u>

<u>Bait website</u>, a wonderful resource for estuarine fish identification, promoting estuary conservation, and environmental education. Check it out and read some of our regularly updated blog posts!

The Estuarine Fish Monitoring Collective (EFMC) trawls have been going well, and we expect to see an increase in juvenile fish coming up this summer. The trawling team got a surprise visit from a juvenile red drum during their February trawl around Sapelo Sound. While adult red drum are very common in our estuaries, it is quite rare to encounter a juvenile of this size (pictured to the right). Some other recently encountered fish include southern stargazers, chained pipefish, bighead searobins, and of course more commonly found species like Atlantic croaker and spot. If you are interested in volunteering to lead join us on a trawl, or have your own boat that you would like to become a Crew Leader with your own sites, please contact Rachel Guy at Rachel.guy@dnr.ga.gov to take our new online training.









What Research Is Going On At The NERR?

<u>Click here</u> to see an up to date list of all the approved research applicants and their projects going on at the NERR.



The Education team partnered with the Georgia Aquarium to conduct the "Rivers to Reef" teacher workshop. This high-quality multiday workshop followed the waters of the Oconee and Ocmulgee rivers to the confluence. The teachers then focused on the Altamaha watershed all the way to the Sapelo Island, where SINERR Edu staff informed the teachers of the valuable resource that is our estuaries. Teachers were given a mix of hands instruction, presentations, field experiences and curriculum.





The Edu team hosted a booth at both the 2025 Blessing of the fleet in Darien Georgia and Coastfest in downtown Brunswick! The SINERR table had a broad assortment of biofacts and information on the Reserve including games and identifications to engage and teach others about the incredible value of our estuaries to Coastal Georgia.

We're excited to announce our new Sapelo Adventure
Days Camp! This summer the education department
has partnered with the Friends of Sapelo to host a 3day summer camp for ages 8-11. Visit
friendsofsapelo.org to learn more or to sign up for any
McIntosh County residents.







♦ LISTEN TO OUR LATEST PODCAST EPISODES!







