

2016 CHANGES

Freshwater Regulation Changes

- All mountain trout water is now open to angling year round.
- Please see regulation changes to Georgia's designated trout waters pages 22 - 25.

Saltwater Regulation Changes

- Spotted seatrout minimum length limit has changed from 13 inches to 14 inches.



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RECREATIONAL FISHING

Fishing Licenses: See page 8 for information on license requirements.

- Licenses are required for hook and line fishing, castnetting, seining, crabbing, gigging, sport bait trawling, and harvesting shellfish.
- A Georgia Fishing license is required for anglers returning to Georgia ports or transiting Georgia waters with recreational catches from federal waters beyond the state's 3-mile territorial sea.
- Reciprocal agreements with Alabama, South Carolina, and Florida currently do not apply to saltwaters.
- Georgia saltwater fishing guides have the option of purchasing a blanket fishing license to cover their customers. Anglers booking a trip with a Georgia saltwater fishing guide should inquire if they will need a Georgia fishing license or whether they will be covered by the guide's license. Persons interested in purchasing a Saltwater Guide's License should call the DNR Coastal Regional License Office at 912-264-7237.

Saltwater Fishing Information

GEORGIA SALTWATER FISHING REGULATIONS

For information and updates on licenses, regulations, and fishing in Georgia's inshore and offshore saltwaters contact:

Georgia DNR Coastal

Law Enforcement
One Conservation Way, Suite 201
Brunswick, GA 31520-8687
912-264-7237 or fax 912-262-3166

Coastal Resources Division

Marine Fisheries Section
One Conservation Way,
Brunswick, GA 31520-8687
912-264-7218 or fax 912-262-2318
www.CoastalGADNR.org

FEDERAL SALTWATER FISHING REGULATIONS

For information and updates on recreational fishing regulations in federal waters (3–200 miles offshore), contact:

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

4055 Faber Place Dr., Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405
843-571-4366 or 866-SAFMC-10
www.safmc.net

For information and updates on federal regulations and required permitting for tunas, billfish, and sharks, contact:

National Marine Fisheries Service

HMS Management Division
1315 East-West Hwy
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-713-2347
www.nmfspermits.com

For information on the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary contact:

Gray's Reef Sanctuary Program

10 Ocean Science Circle
Savannah, GA 31411
912-598-2345
www.graysreef.nos.noaa.gov

WANTON WASTE

Sort or cull your catch on the water. Return undersized or unwanted wildlife to the water alive. When you throw away wildlife, you are not only wasting valuable resources, but you are also breaking the law!

ARTIFICIAL REEFS

Georgia maintains 15 inshore and 22 offshore artificial reefs located from inside the estuary to 80 miles offshore. The 19 reefs beyond 3 miles offshore are designated as federal Special Management Zones and as such, only allow hand-held hook-n-line and spear fishing gear. For more information, coordinates and updates go to georgiaoutdoormap.com.



**SHALLOW WATER
BLACKOUT PREVENTION**

For more information about shallow water blackout go to

shallowwaterblackoutprevention.org

BOATING SAFETY ZONES

Boating safety zones have been established off Jekyll, Tybee, St. Simons, and Sea islands. These zones extend from the northernmost point to the southernmost point of each of these islands and from the highwater mark to a distance 1,000 feet seaward. From May 1 through September 30, power boats, jet skis, and other motorized craft are prohibited in these zones.

Saltwater Finfish

LANDING REQUIREMENTS/TRANSFER PROHIBITION

All saltwater finfish (including sharks) under state or federal regulation must be landed with head and fins intact. Anglers must make catches available for inspection by government officials. Saltwater finfish subject to size and bag limits cannot be transferred to another person or vessel on the water. Commercial licenses are required to sell recreationally caught finfish.

GEAR

A **seine** may not be used as a gill net (a net constructed of single webbing attached to a float line and lead line and fished in a stationary manner to ensnare or entangle fish in the meshes).

Only flounder may be taken with a **gig** (any handheld shaft with single or multiple points, barbed or barbless).

All seasons, hours, creel limits, minimum size limits, and other regulations applicable to saltwater finfish apply regardless of the gear used.

Sharks: Recreational harvest of sharks is limited to hook and line gear only.

RELATED DEFINITIONS

Maximum Size: the specific size in length above which it is unlawful to take that finfish species.

Minimum Size: the specific size in length below which it is unlawful to take that finfish species.

Open Season: that specified period of time during which one may take certain finfish species from any waters of the state.

Daily Creel Limit: the lawful amount of a species of finfish that a person may take in one day.

Possession Limit: the lawful amount of a species of finfish that a person can legally have at any one time.

Bushel: 9.3 gallons or approximately 37 quarts.

Saltwater Demarcation Line

This line is established in this state as the separation point between saltwaters and freshwaters for commercial fishing and sport fishing. The saltwater demarcation line is defined below:

- The point at which U.S. Highway 17 crosses the following bodies of water and their tributaries shall be the line of demarcation for them: St. Mary's River, Satilla River, South Altamaha River, Champney River, Butler River, Darien River, Little Ogeechee System (except Salt Creek), North Newport River, Medway River, Big Ogeechee River, and the point at which Georgia Highway 25/South Carolina 170 crosses the Savannah River and its tributaries. All water seaward of these points shall be considered saltwater.
- The following streams and their tributaries are designated as salt water for their entire length: Crooked River, Little Satilla River, South Brunswick River, Turtle River, Sapelo River, South Newport River, Salt Creek (Little Ogeechee System), and all other rivers, streams, and tributaries in the six coastal counties which are not enumerated in this subsection.
- For purposes of crabbing, that portion of the St. Mary's River and the Satilla River System (including the Satilla River and White Oak Creek) which is seaward of the points at which the Seaboard Coastline Railroad crosses such streams and that portion of the Altamaha River System which is seaward of the points at which I-95 crosses the streams of that system shall be considered salt water. It shall be unlawful to place any crab trap in the waters of this state other than that described as salt water in Code Section 27-4-1 or by this subsection.

SEASONS, LIMITS, SIZES

All limits per person unless specified. FL = fork length, TL = total length (see "How to Measure a Fish," page 43)

SPECIES	OPEN SEASON	DAILY LIMIT AND POSSESSION LIMIT	MINIMUM SIZE (inches)
Amberjack*	All year	1	28 FL
American Eel	All year	25	9 TL
Atlantic croaker	All year	25	
Atlantic sturgeon	No Harvest		
Billfish (Blue marlin, White marlin, Sailfish)*	Catch and Release Only		
Black drum	All year	15	14 TL
Black sea bass*	All year	15	12 TL
Bluefish	All year	15	12 FL
Cobia*	All year	2	33 FL
Dolphin*	All year	10 (Not to exceed 60 per boat, except for headboats which are allowed 10 per paying customer.	20 FL
Flounder	All year	15	12 TL
Gag grouper*	All year	2	24 TL
King mackerel*	All year	3	24 FL
Red drum (Channel bass, Spottail bass, Redfish)	All year	5	14 TL (23 TL maximum)
Red porgy*	All year	3	14 TL
Red snapper*	All year	2	20 TL
Sharks (other than Hammerheads, SSC and Prohibited Sharks)*	All Year	1 per angler or boat, whichever is less	54 FL
Sharks: Hammerheads (Great, Scalloped, and Smooth)	All Year	1 per angler or boat, whichever is less	78 FL
Small shark composite (SSC)* (Atlantic sharpnose, Bonnethead, Spiny dogfish)	All Year	1 per angler	30 FL
Prohibited Sharks (NO HARVEST)	Sand tiger, Sandbar, Silky, Bigeye sand tiger, Whale, Basking, White, Dusky, Bignose, Galapagos, Night, Reef, Narrowtooth, Caribbean sharpnose, Smalltail, Atlantic angel, Longfin mako, Bigeye thresher, Sharpnose sevengill, Bluntnose sixgill, and Bigeye sixgill		
Sheepshead	All year	15	10 FL
Spanish mackerel*	All year	15	12 FL
Spot	All year	25	
Spotted seatrout	All year	15	14 TL
Striped bass (Saltwater)	All year	2	22 TL
Striped bass (Savannah River)	All year	2	27 TL
Tarpon	All year	1	68 FL
Tripletail	All year	2	18 TL
Weakfish	All year	1	13 TL

* These species are also federally managed from 3 to 200 miles offshore. Go to www.safmc.net for federal regulations.

Tagged Fish

Coastal Resources Division (CRD) biologists are conducting long-term studies on the growth, migration and fishing exploitation rates of red drum, tarpon, and tripletail. If you catch a tagged fish, please record and report the following information: 1) your name, address, and phone number, 2) fish species, 3) date caught, 4) tag number, 5) total length and location, and 6) whether the fish was kept or released. To report a tagged fish call (912) 264-7218. If released, please do not remove the tag.

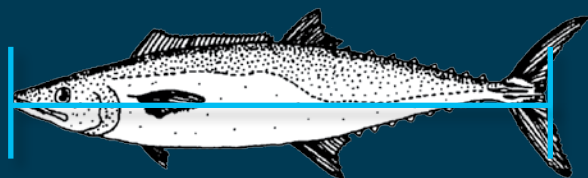
If kept, please return the tag to GADNR/CRD, One Conservation Way, Brunswick, GA 31520. If the tag number is not legible lightly scrape the tag with your fingernail or similar flat object.

Tripletail with tag ID beginning with the prefix "TT" contain surgically implanted acoustic transmitters. Anglers who catch these tagged fish are encouraged to release them with the tag intact, then call and report the catch.

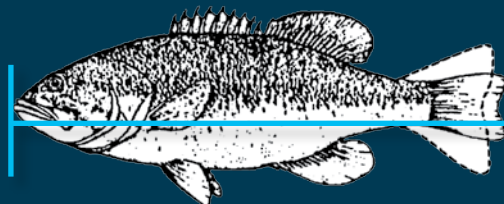
If you are an angler who practices catch and release and would like to become a cooperative angler please contact the Cooperative Angler Tagging Program at 912-264-7218.

How to Measure a Fish

Freshwater fish are measured as Total Length (TL). Minimum sizes for saltwater finfish are measured in two ways: Total Length (TL) and Fork Length (FL). Methods for measuring fish are described below:



Fork Length



Total Length

SHRIMP, CRAB, SHELLFISH & BAIT MINNOWS

A Georgia Fishing license is required to recreationally fish for any seafood, whether for personal consumption or bait. **It is illegal to sell any seafood or bait harvested with a recreational license!**

Shrimp

It is unlawful for any person to sell or otherwise dispose of, for human consumption, any shrimp taken as bait.

SHRIMP "BAITING" PROHIBITED

It is unlawful to place, deposit, distribute, or scatter any bait of any kind in, on, or over any waters so as to lure, attract, or entice shrimp toward the bait or to cause shrimp to congregate in the area where bait is placed. It is illegal to knowingly fish for shrimp in baited waters.

SHRIMPING SEASON

Unless otherwise designated, there is no closed season for the harvest of bait shrimp, regardless of the approved gear used. The season for the recreational harvest of food shrimp is the same as that established for commercial shrimping. The Commissioner of DNR may open the season from May 15 through the end of February; however, it is generally opened mid-June through mid-January. The opening and closing of the food shrimping season is announced via coastal media outlets, posted at marinas, and at www.CoastalGADNR.org.

TRAWL NETS (Sport Bait Shrimping)

Gear: Power-drawn trawl nets 10 feet or smaller may be used in saltwaters to harvest shrimp for bait. Information on the specific net dimensions for bait trawls is available from DNR offices in Brunswick.

Areas: Unless designated otherwise, a 10-foot sport bait trawl may be used at any season to take shrimp only in rivers and creeks or portions thereof that have been opened to bait shrimping by DNR. Charts of established "Bait Zones" are also available at georgiaoutdoormap.com.

Hours: Trawling for bait shrimp is legal only between the hours of ½ hour before official sunrise to ½ hour after official sunset.

Harvest Limit: A sport bait shrimper may not possess at any time more than two (2) quarts of shrimp, no more than ½ pint of which may be dead, and may not take more than four (4) quarts of shrimp within a 24-hour period. When two or more persons occupy the same boat, there may be no more than four (4) quarts of shrimp on board the boat at any time; no more than one pint of which may be dead, and no more than

eight (8) quarts of shrimp may be taken within a 24-hour period.

Commercial licenses are required to use trawl nets (power-drawn or hand-retrieved) to harvest shrimp for food. Trawling for food shrimp may only be conducted in the waters seaward of the sound boundary when those waters are open to the harvest of food shrimp.

SEINES

Gear and Areas: Seines equal to or smaller than 12 feet long, with a maximum depth of four feet, and a maximum stretch mesh of one (1) inch may be used throughout Georgia's saltwaters. The use of seines over 12 feet long in any inlet or tidal slough is prohibited. Seines less than 100 feet long and with a minimum stretch mesh of 1 ¼ inches may be used on sand beaches of any barrier island in Georgia. Seines from 100 to 300 feet long and with a minimum mesh size of 2 ½ inches may be used only on the oceanfront sides of beaches. Seines over 300 feet long are also prohibited. It is unlawful to use any seine in saltwaters such that it blocks more than ½ of the entrance of any tidal river, creek, slough, or inlet to the ocean.

Hours: Unless otherwise designated, seines may be used any time of day during the open season for bait shrimp and food shrimp.

Harvest Limits: Recreational seiners collecting bait shrimp are limited to two quarts per person at any time and no more than four quarts per person per day, or a maximum of four quarts per group at any time or eight quarts per day. No one person taking food shrimp solely by means of a seine, whether such person is acting alone or in a group of persons, may possess more than 24 quarts of shrimp with heads on or 15 quarts of tails taken by such seine in any 24-hour period. If any person or group of persons occupying the same boat is in possession of a cast net and a seine, such person or persons shall be subject to the limits imposed for shrimp taken by cast net.

CAST NETS

Gear: A cast net is a cone shaped net with a weighted circumference thrown and retrieved by hand without mechanical assistance. Two types of cast nets are defined: a "Bait shrimp cast net" having a minimum bar mesh of ¾ inch and a "Food shrimp cast net" having a minimum bar mesh of ¾ inch. Bait shrimp cast nets cannot be used to take shrimp for personal consumption; however, food shrimp cast nets may be used to take bait. There are no length restrictions on either net and cast nets can be

modified with the addition of duct tape or other materials to enhance performance.

Areas and Hours: During the open season and unless designated otherwise, cast nets may be used to harvest bait or food shrimp at any time of day in all of Georgia's saltwaters.

Harvest Limits: Recreational cast netters collecting bait shrimp are limited to two quarts per person at any time, provided that person may take a maximum of four quarts of bait shrimp per day. When two or more persons occupy the same boat, there may be no more than four quarts of bait onboard the boat at any time, and the persons occupying the boat may take no more than eight quarts of bait shrimp per day. Bait shrimp may be alive or dead when caught with a cast. No person taking food shrimp with a cast net may possess more than 48 quarts of heads-on shrimp or 30 quarts of shrimp tails in any day. When one or more persons occupy the same boat, there may be no more than 48 quarts of heads-on shrimp or 30 quarts of shrimp tails on board at any time. No vessel owner shall allow the vessel to be used to take more than the allowable catch limits in any day.

Stone Crabs

Georgia does not regulate the harvest of stone crab; however, the harvest of the whole crab is discouraged. It is recommended that only one claw measuring at least 2 ¾ inches from the elbow to the tip of the lower, immovable finger be removed. A properly removed claw should not have meat from the body attached.

Blue Crabs

AREAS, SEASONS, HOURS

Unless otherwise designated, the saltwaters of Georgia are open year-round for recreational crabbing at any time of the day.

GEAR

Traps: Up to six standard size crab traps (2 x 2 feet or smaller) may be used recreationally. Two unobstructed escapement rings (2 ¾ inch inside diameter) must be installed on an outside vertical wall. Each trap must be marked with a fluorescent green or lime green float bearing the owner's name and address in one-inch letters. Traps should be sufficiently weighted to prevent loss in strong tidal currents. It is unlawful to place or set crab traps in the channel of any stream with a lawfully established system of waterway markers. Disposal of crab traps in public waters is a violation of State and Federal laws.

Other Gear: Subject to other restrictions outlined in these regulations, legal crabs may be taken with other legal fishing gear such as seines, cast nets, hand-lines, and lift rings.

SIZE AND HARVEST LIMITS

It is unlawful to take or possess any crab less than 5 inches from spike to spike across the back (other than a "peeler" or a "mature adult female" crab). Peelers must measure at least 3 inches from spike to spike across the back. **No sponge (egg-bearing) crabs are allowed.** Recreational crabbers may take no more than one bushel of crabs during any 24-hour period. No more than two bushels may be taken recreationally or possessed during a 24-hour period.



on a boat with more than one person aboard.

Terrapins in Crab Traps: Recent studies have investigated the effectiveness of excluder devices for preventing the capture of diamond-back terrapins in commercial-style crab traps. Terrapins that enter crab traps cannot escape and often drown. To learn how to build your own terrapin excluder visit www.terrapinconservation.org.

Shellfish

SEASON AND HOURS

Saltwaters may be opened for taking shellfish between January 1 and December 31. Prior to harvesting any shellfish, check with the DNR-Coastal Resources Division (www.CoastalGADNR.org) for any seasonal closures that may be in effect during the calendar year. Shellfish must be harvested between the hours of ½ hour before official sunrise and ½ hour after official sunset.

GEAR

Shellfish may only be taken with handheld implements.

AREAS

Updated charts of approved public picking areas for shellfish should be obtained from Coastal Resources Division's Ecological Services Section or at georgiaoutdoormap.com. It is illegal to recreationally harvest shellfish except in designated public picking areas, unless authorized in writing by a private property owner with legal harvest rights to an area. Private property owners wishing to harvest recreational quantities of shellfish or to issue permission to others must notify and provide DNR with specific information. It is unlawful to give permission to take shellfish from a closed area. Harvesters taking shellfish from private property must have on their person proof of ownership or permission.

SIZE AND HARVEST LIMITS

Oysters must measure no less than three inches from hinge to mouth, unless the oyster cannot be removed from a legal-sized oyster without destroying it. For clams, the maximum depth from one shell half to the other must be at least ¾ inch thick. Recreational quantity limits are up to two bushels of oysters and one bushel of clams per person per day, with a maximum limit of six bushels of oysters and one bushel of clams per boat per day.

Whelk (conch)

Recreational harvest of whelk is limited to 1 bushel/person. There is no minimum size, closed season or closed area. A recreational fishing license is required, including hand harvest from the beach.

Bait Minnows

SEASON, HOURS AND AREAS

Bait minnows may be harvested year-round. **Bait minnows may not be trapped in freshwater.**

GEAR

No more than two traps may be used recreationally, except that a licensed saltwater fishing guide may use a maximum of four traps. Maximum dimensions for rectangular traps may not exceed 24 x 8 x 9 inches. Cylindrical traps may not exceed 24 inches in length and 30 inches in circumference. Recreational bait minnow traps shall have a mesh size of no smaller than ¼ inch bar mesh. The throat opening of the funnel shall not exceed ¾ inch in diameter. Each trap must have attached a tag or float bearing the name and address of the person using the trap. Subject to specific gear design criteria, sizes, time of day, and area restrictions outlined in these regulations, bait minnows may also be taken recreationally year-round in seines and cast nets.

Guidelines for Sea Turtle Protection

If you hook or entangle a sea turtle while fishing, contact Georgia DNR Hotline: 1-800-2-SaveMe.

- Keep hands away from turtle's mouth and flippers.
- Do not lift the turtle by the hook or by pulling on the line.
- Safely land the turtle using a net or by walking it to shore.
- Leave the hook in place as removing it can cause more damage.
- Keep the turtle out of direct sunlight and cover with damp towel.
- Use non-stainless, barbless hooks when possible.

If you cannot reach Georgia DNR, cut the line as short as possible and release the turtle.

POSSESSION LIMITS

No individual recreationally harvesting bait minnows may possess more than two quarts of bait minnows at any given time. A licensed saltwater fishing guide may possess not more than 10 quarts at any given time.



HANDLING & RELEASING FISH GENERAL GUIDELINES

Many marine fish have gas-filled organs called swim bladders. These organs control buoyancy and allow the fish to maintain depth. When some fish are brought quickly to the surface, the gas in the swim bladder can over-expand and rupture the bladder, a condition known as "**barotrauma**." Escaping gas fills the gut cavity which can lead to everted stomachs or intestines. If released in this condition, the fish cannot descend and may float away and die. Generally, fish caught deeper than 30 feet will suffer some effects of barotrauma.

- **Recompression.** The **best and first choice** for release should be to return fish to the depth from which they are caught, a technique known as recompression. A variety of recompression tools are on the market, including descender devices, release weights, and release baskets (see www.fishsmart.org). Fish should be returned to the depth of capture when practical. If catching fish at great depth, returning them to at least 60 to 100 feet will dramatically improve survival.
- **Venting.** If recompression is not possible, venting is a second option. Venting helps the gas escape and allows the fish to descend. A simple venting tool can be made by mounting a sharpened football needle in a 1" x 3" dowel rod with a hole drilled lengthwise through the rod to allow gas to pass. Hold the fish gently on its side. Insert a needle through the thin lower body wall below the rear end of the pectoral fin. Insert the needle only as far as needed to allow the gas to escape. Squeeze gently to help push the gas out.

- **Do not puncture a protruding stomach or try to push the stomach back into the throat. Remember a knife is not a proper venting tool!**

By developing a few simple habits, anglers can greatly increase the chances that the fish they release will survive. Try these tips the next time you go fishing.

- **Plan Ahead.** Before you go, decide whether you might release fish on your trip and prepare the equipment necessary to do so.
- **Avoid Encounter.** If catching fish that you don't want or cannot keep due to regulation, change your fishing depth, move to a different area, or use different bait.
- **Use Appropriate Gear.** Use non-stainless steel hooks that dissolve quickly. Use non-offset circle hooks when fishing with natural bait to avoid gut-hooking. Flatten barbs so they can be removed with less damage to a fish.
- **Don't Exhaust the Fish.** Use gear and line strength to minimize playing time, landing fish as quickly as possible. If possible, leave fish in the water rather than bringing them on board. If you must handle, use knotless rubberized landing nets, rubberized gloves, or wet towels or wet hands to avoid removing the slime layer. Make sure to wet your measuring board or boat deck. Don't put your fingers in the gills.
- **Support the Body When Lifting Large Fish.** The lower jaw is not meant to support the full weight of any fish.

Ranger Hotline

TO REPORT VIOLATIONS

Please refer to call out box on page 28.

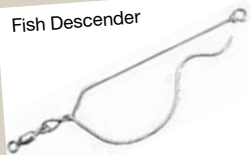
TO REPORT VIOLATIONS IN FEDERAL WATERS

- U.S. Coast Guard stations in Brunswick 912-267-7999 and Tybee Island 912-786-5440
- NOAA's toll-free, 24-hour Fisheries Enforcement hotline 800-853-1964
- DNR LE 800-241-4113

- **Time is of the Essence!** Release fish as soon as practical and do not keep them out of the water longer than necessary. Have your camera always on the ready.
- **Some Fish May Need a Little Assistance.** If the fish does not immediately swim away, support the fish horizontally in the water and gently move it back and forth so that water runs over the gills. Release the fish when it is able to swim away on its own.

Recompression Tools

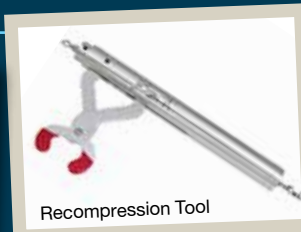
Fish Descender



Seaqualizer



Recompression Tool

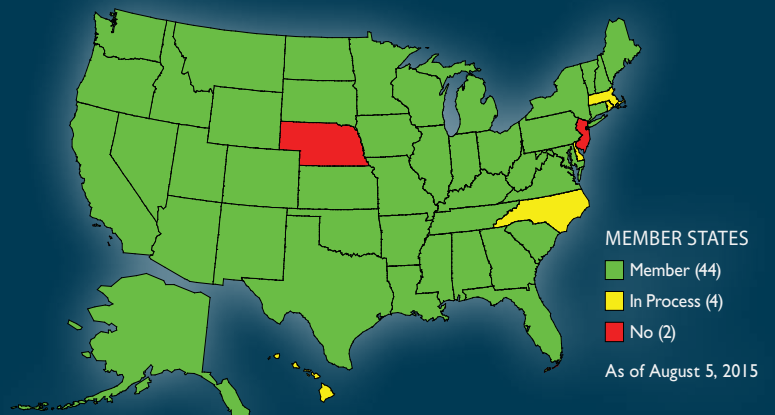


Weighted Milk Crate



Wildlife Violator Compact

Georgia, along with 44 other states, is a member of the Wildlife Violator Compact (WVC). This allows Wildlife Officers to treat non-residents hunting in WVC member states (shown below in green) as if they were a resident of that state in regards to wildlife violations. All wildlife law violators will be held more responsible due to the fact that their illegal activities in one state can affect their hunting privileges in all WVC member states.



For more information visit georgiawildlife.com