



SINERR, located along the western perimeter of Sapelo Island, is dedicated to research, education, stewardship, and sound management of coastal resources.

photo credit to Karekin Goekjian

(Partnership cont'd)

years now, our partnership with the Friends of Sapelo volunteer organization in particular, has been critical to accomplishing many of our habitat management, facility maintenance, repair and renovation, and public education and outreach projects on the Reserve. New projects will address priority issues like sea level rise, climate change, and living shorelines, among many others.

Ideal partnerships are based on common interests and goals, mutual respect and support, an equitable commitment of resources, shared responsibility and accountability, and fair distribution of the benefits when the collaboration is over.

The Reserve has been extremely fortunate over the years in having the opportunity to work with so many "ideal" partners here on the Georgia coast.

(Research cont'd)

After 30 years of exemplary service, Hurley retired in early 2015.

We expect to have a new Research Coordinator on board by March 1, 2016. This person will oversee our SWMP and Sentinel Site programs and facilitate field projects with scientists and will also establish new Reserve-led research projects, some in collaboration with long-time partners like Georgia Coastal Ecosystems Long Term Ecological Research, DNR Coastal Resources Division, and MAREX.

New projects will address priority issues like sea level rise, climate change, and living shorelines, among many others. Regardless, the new Research Coordinator will build on an impressive 60 year legacy of noteworthy scientific research and monitoring on Sapelo Island.

(Stewardship cont'd)

on the island. The next phase involved creating a tool to allow past research on Sapelo to be entered into the database, to create a comprehensive historical record.

The final phase, currently in progress, is to be able to map all the areas where research has been conducted within the Reserve and on Sapelo, which will be a practical and valuable tool for both researchers and Sapelo Island managers in the future.

Celebrate with us!
We have events planned throughout 2016. Please check www.sapelonerr.org or visit us on Facebook for details.



Letter From the Manager

A Time of Change

A 40th anniversary is a time to look back, to reflect on all your accomplishments over the decades. For the Reserve, there have been many milestones (see Timeline), especially during the 20-year period (1993-2012) when Buddy Sullivan was Reserve Manager. But anniversaries are also a time for new ideas, new ways of working, and new challenges. At the start of its fifth decade, the Reserve is entering a period of change. On paper, that takes the form of a draft new 5-year Management Plan, with new Vision and Mission statements and new overarching Goals. Under the new Plan, we will focus greater attention on the natural history of Sapelo, on the dynamic processes that shape the island, past, present and future, on new Reserve-led research studies, and on habitat restoration and management projects on the island.

People-wise, we have a new Research Program Coordinator for the first time since 1998. We thank our previous Research Coordinator, Dorset Hurley, for the many important and lasting contributions he made to the Reserve and to estuarine and coastal science. We see change, too, when we look to major partners. Both the University of Georgia Marine Institute (UGAMI) here on Sapelo and the UGA Marine Extension Service on the mainland have new directors, with ambitious plans for new projects, programs and initiatives. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with these longstanding partners going forward.

More broadly, major new challenges and uncertainties lie on the horizon for all of us. Ongoing sea level rise is eating away at private and public lands all along the Atlantic coast, and rates may rise in the future. And while the milder weather that climate change may bring to the Southeast will be welcomed by some, the side-effects may be harmful to both human and natural communities. Regardless, we will all need to learn to adapt to the new "normal" conditions.

Change can be exciting and terrifying at the same time. But the Reserve has four decades of success to draw from, a group of talented, experienced and dedicated staff, and dozens of professional, committed partners to work with. I have every confidence that we will have plenty of new achievements to celebrate when our 50th anniversary rolls around.

--Doug Samson, Reserve Manager

40 Years of Success Through Partnerships



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photo credit to Karekin Goekjian

Partnerships underlie a good deal of what the Reserve has accomplished over the last four decades. We exist because NOAA and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) have been committed partners since 1976. NOAA provides funding, strategic guidance and periodic evaluations, while GA DNR provides program administration, site management, staffing and additional funding.

We recently compiled a list of almost two hundred colleagues working at more than 50 agencies, institutions, and organizations with whom we've collaborated just in the last decade or so. Projects include everything from doing catchment system (aka rain barrel) workshops with DNR's Coastal Management Program, to sponsoring the annual GreenScreen film fest and science fair with the Jekyll Island Authority and

other partners. On Sapelo, the University of Georgia (UGA) Marine Extension Service (MAREX) helps us measure monthly water nutrient levels and the UGA Marine Institute (UGAMI) partners with us to measure weekly acid precipitation. Our water quality station at the ferry dock in Meridian is a partnership with both UGAMI and the US Geological Survey.

Education program collaborations include teacher training workshops (e.g., Green Eggs and Sand, Seeds to Shorelines) with Coastal Resources Division (CRD) and MAREX colleagues, middle school STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) projects with the US Navy, and exposing The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) LEAF (Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future) students to barrier island ecosystems.

The GA Living Shorelines Workgroup includes colleagues from CRD, MAREX,

TNC, St. Simons Island Land Trust, and Little St. Simons. Similarly, we join colleagues from numerous other agencies, NGO's and academic institutions at periodic meetings of the Climate Community of Practice, Sea Grant Advisory Board, Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, Gray's Reef Advisory Council, and Island Resource Managers Forum, to name just a few.

Last but not least, we have facilitated field research studies of fish, oysters, bacteria, moths, birds, hogs, ants, dune plants, marsh vegetation and many other species and natural communities. These studies occur on and around Sapelo with academic colleagues from colleges and universities like Georgia Southern University, College of Coastal Georgia, Savannah State University, and Georgia College and State University. For twenty

(cont'd on page 5)

10 Things You Need to Know about the Reserve

- 1 The tides of the Duplin River estuary have risen and fallen over **29,000** times since the Reserve was established.
- 2 Approximately **25,000** students have been served through the SINERR K-16 Education Program.
- 3 At **40** years old, SINERR is the second oldest Reserve in a **28** reserve network.
- 4 Approximately **350,000** people have visited the Sapelo Island Visitors Center since its opening in 1996.
- 5 There have been more than **2,000,000** water quality sampling events at our SWMP stations since 2000.
- 6 SINERR is a unit of GA Dept. Natural Resources, Game Management section. **70%** of SINERR's funding comes from NOAA, **30%** from GA DNR.
- 7 **4,244** attendees have participated in **129** decision-maker workshops.
- 8 **1,900** volunteer hours have been logged by the Friends of Sapelo.
- 9 SINERR is part of a nationwide network of **36,000** staff, partners, friends & volunteers.
- 10 Marsh Landing Dock, UGAMI, Reynolds Mansion and Sapelo Lighthouse all lie within the **6,110** acres of SINERR's boundaries.

Savannah Country Day Ecology Camp 1982-2016



Our History

1976
Designation as Sanctuary
2nd in USA

1986
Manager & Interpretive
Guide Hired

1987
CZMA reauthorization
Name changed to SINERR

1988
1st Education Coordinator
Hired

1992
Lighthouse tract acquired
206 acres

1993
1st Research Coordinator
Hired

1995
Friends of Sapelo
Established

1996
Sapelo Island Visitor
Center Opened

1997
SINERR Ecological Site
Profile Published

1997
SINERR admin moved
Wildlife Resources Division

1999
SINERR Education Laboratory
Established

2002
1st Stewardship Coordinator
Hired

2004
1st CTP Coordinator
Hired

2016
40th Anniversary

Research

SINERR's Research & Monitoring Program was first established on Sapelo and staffed part-time in the 1980's. Sapelo already had a long legacy of excellent estuarine research, thanks to biologists working at the University of Georgia Marine Institute starting in the 1950's.

In 1998 SINERR hired a full-time Research Coordinator, Dorset Hurley, who had been working on estuarine species in Georgia for 15 years. Hurley established the water quality monitoring program that is a standard part of every NERR around the country - the System Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP). Hurley also established a NOAA "Sentinel Site" to track how sea level rise is affecting marsh communities.

Our Research Technician, Patrick Hagan, expertly maintains and upgrades our SWMP network, downloads, reviews and then uploads the data to a national



database, and collects data at the Sentinel Site.

Over the years Hurley facilitated dozens of research projects carried out in the Reserve by visiting scientists, and advised numerous graduate students doing research projects on the island.

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Stewardship

Stewardship Programs within the national NERRS network have a wide variety of duties and responsibilities, because of each Reserve's unique coastal location throughout the U.S.

Some Stewardship Programs help translate research program results to the public via educational outreach. For the SINERR Stewardship Program, communication with the public and interested parties often relates to historical and cultural preservation for the island.

Our Stewardship Program also has long-term trend data collection as a primary responsibility. For example, Stewardship Coordinator Aimee Gaddis serves as the site operator for both the National Atmospheric Deposition (NADP) and National Mercury Deposition (NDM) programs, collecting and reporting data on precipitation chemistry as part of a network tracking long-term precipitation chemistry patterns across the U.S.



The Stewardship program also houses a large collection of historical and cultural resource materials for Sapelo and the Reserve. "Sapelo Island has a rich and diverse historical legacy," says Gaddis, "and we are dedicated to preserving this continuously growing collection so it can be made available for all to enjoy."

Recently, the Stewardship Program implemented an online research database for academic and public use. The initial goal was to develop an online template that would allow visiting researchers to submit new requests to conduct research

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The Reserve's Coastal Training Program (CTP) provides science-based information, tools, and training to coastal decision makers to foster stewardship of coastal resources at the local and regional levels. Acting as a bridge between the science, policy, and management communities, CTP also works to increase collaborative networking opportunities and information exchange, and to encourage collaboration among the many individuals, disciplines, and institutions that affect coastal and estuarine ecosystems.

"We are proud that the CTP has been established as a source of unbiased and up-to-date scientific information that helps communities protect their natural resources while planning for sustainable quality growth," says CTP Coordinator Suzanne VanParreren, who attributes the strength of the CTP to its effective partnerships with local, regional, state and

Coastal Training Program



federal agencies. One recent excellent example of such a partnership is the Practicum Series, developed by the CTP and the Coastal Regional Commission, where participants, primarily local and regional planners, receive valuable information about a variety of topics issues in order to advance policy reforms, share knowledge

of effective strategies and tools, build the capacity of key constituencies, and raise awareness about the interdisciplinary nature of coastal environmental issues.

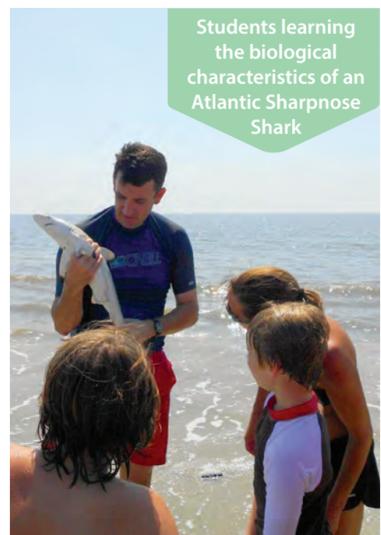
Priority topics covered by the Practicum Series, and addressed in other CTP programs, too, include land use and development issues, invasive species, low impact design, climate adaptation, water conservation, stormwater management, and habitat protection.

The Practicum Series will continue through 2016 and beyond. The CTP will also continue conducting needs assessments to determine what new programs and training opportunities will most benefit local planners and resource managers in the future. This assess will increase greater networking and collaboration with partners to maximize the conservation, protection, and restoration of Georgia's coastal resources.

Education

Too often in today's world, while schools do an exceptional job educating students on the fundamentals of science, biology and the environment, they are not equipped to expose students to the actual natural environments discussed in the classroom. Even in the case of Georgia coastal schools, students are often not exposed to the incredible natural habitats that surround them every day.

SINERR helps fill this void, strengthening and supplementing classroom lessons by taking students into the laboratory and field, and exposing young learners to the scientific research and environmental issues happening right in their back yard. As Adam Mackinnon, Education Program Coordinator, points out, the simple act of letting students touch a fish caught in a seine net they helped pull, or hold a periwinkle snail they plucked from a blade of marsh grass, can have lasting impacts on developing minds that go well beyond the traditional classroom.



SINERR Education Programs Provide a Living Classroom

K-16 programs on Sapelo give students a science based, hands-on opportunity to learn about and explore

complex estuarine, maritime forest and marine ecosystems, and the natural and human activities impacting them. The Reserve's teacher training program partners with other agencies. The Reserve's teacher training program partners with other agencies to provide valuable information and resources to educators.

The Education Program also conducts regularly scheduled public tours, which expose guests to the unique habitats, rich history, and notable cultural and scientific legacies of Sapelo Island. Typically led by our Interpretive Assistant, Yvonne Grovner, these tours are popular with visitors from far and wide.

The Reserve additionally offers occasional outreach events designed to educate the public about Georgia's economically and ecologically important species and dynamic coastal ecosystems and help participants make wise decisions about their impacts on the coastal environment, encouraging participation in its long term care and sustainability.



Visitors Center Hours of Operation

Tuesday-Friday, 7:30 am – 5:30 pm
Saturday, 8 am- 5:30 pm
Sunday and Monday – Closed

Contact Information:
1766 Landing Road, S.E.
Darien, GA 31305
(912) 437-3224

Visitors Center

Overlooking Hudson Creek and the expansive marsh between the mainland and Sapelo Island is the Sapelo Island Visitors Center. Part nature center, history museum, tourist information booth and gift shop, the Visitors Center serves as a clearinghouse for information about visiting the Reserve and Sapelo Island. For almost 20 years, the Center has been the first and last stop for guests of the Reserve and the other institutions on the island, as well as a destination in its own right.

Bill Merriman, manager of the Center since the day it opened says, "Our Visitors Center has something for everyone, whether that be to learn, explore, or just relax in our rocking chairs."

Merriman is joined by staff Pat Carson and Stacy Rowe, and the trio is as enthusiastic about the Reserve as they are

friendly and helpful. SINERR offers a variety of lectures, special programs and films in the Center's 40-seat conference room, which is available for public use at no cost. Popular summer science lectures draw people of all ages eager to learn more about the Reserve's natural resources and its plant and animal inhabitants.

The Center offers nature trails and picnic areas and is a fantastic location for bird watching. Anglers can take advantage of the fishing opportunities at the ferry dock at the end of the causeway.

Whether guests are passing through on their way to or from Sapelo Island and the Reserve, or are visiting to learn, shop or explore the property, the Sapelo Island Visitors Center is a must-see venue on any visit to the central Georgia coast.



Our Staff

Aimee Gaddis, Patrick Hagan, Suzanne VanParreren, Stacy Rowe, Adam Mackinnon, Yvonne Grovner, Doug Samson, Pat Carson, Linda Daniels and Bill Merriman

Friends of Sapelo

The Friends of Sapelo (FOS) is a nonprofit volunteer organization created in 1995 to support the research, education and outreach mission of the Reserve. FOS is dedicated to the protection of natural, cultural and historical resources on Sapelo Island. From beach sweeps and nature trail maintenance, to ecological monitoring and decorating for the holidays, FOS members support the work of the Reserve. FOS also provides support for occasional Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Resources Division projects on Sapelo Island.

Volunteers include both full-time and seasonal coastal Georgia residents. FOS holds regularly scheduled meetings at the Visitors Center, and educational, volunteer, and social events throughout the year. To get involved, please contact Linda Daniels, Volunteer Coordinator extraordinaire, who will make sure you work hard and have lots of fun doing it.