

# American Fisheries Society -Georgia Chapter Newsletter



## The Bycatch - 2010 Edition

Editor: Brittany Trushel, UGA Fisheries Chapter

### We are on the web:

[www.uga.edu/ugafish/ga-afs/home.htm](http://www.uga.edu/ugafish/ga-afs/home.htm)

### Fun Factsoid:

- \* *The GA record smallmouth bass (7 lbs 2 oz) was caught in 1973 on Lake Chatuge in Hayesville, GA.*
- \* *The GA record Suwannee bass (3lbs 9 oz) was caught in 1984 on the Ocklocknee River in Thomasville, GA (see The Rarest Black Bass of Georgia, page 2, for more information on the Suwannee Bass).*

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## GA AFS President's Message

I am continually amazed at the excellent fisheries work that continues to be accomplished by Georgia AFS members even in these unstable economic times. I would also like to thank everyone for last year's AFS participation and outstanding talks, as well as everyone's contributions to fisheries science in Georgia and beyond.

The 2011 Georgia Chapter meeting will be held at the Georgia National Fairgrounds in Perry, GA on February 2-3. A pizza lunch will be provided on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and Raymond Graham will be back with another outstanding BBQ lunch on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. For those needing accommodations for the meeting, a block of rooms has been reserved at the nearby Microtel Inn and Suites (478-987-4004). Room rates are \$49 for singles, \$59 for doubles, and \$69 for suites. Although we will not hold the customary evening banquet, there will be a student social at 6:00 PM Wednesday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Questions regarding the student social should be directed to Brittany Trushel (trushelb@warnell.uga.edu.) The raffle will be held following lunch on Feb 3 and will offer some outstanding prizes as usual. **As it especially helps in the meal planning, please register early!**

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## A Brief Introduction to the History of Ichthyology in Georgia

Well, Joseph Kirsch (AFS subunit officer) said I could write about anything I wanted, so I decided to use this article as an excuse to learn a little more about the history of Ichthyology in Georgia. With assistance from Mieko Camp and Greg Krakow of the Nongame Conservation Section (GADNR-WRD), I have summarized information on scientific descriptions of all native freshwater fishes in our state. Not surprisingly, three out of four of our known fish species were described before 1900, with the peak number of descriptions occurring in the early and late 1800s (Figure 1). The rate of new species descriptions significantly wanes after 1900, but does not steadily decrease as you might predict if ichthyologists had exhausted available diversity. In fact, the number of species described per year is actually higher in the most recent decade (0.70 species per year) when compared to the previous 25-year period (0.56 species per year). This pattern suggests that additional taxonomic research on Georgia's freshwater fishes will be fruitful and indeed necessary if we want to properly catalog, conserve, and appreciate our fish diversity.

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# The Rarest Black Bass of Georgia

Did you know that six of the seven species of black bass are found in Georgia? These include the largemouth bass *Micropterus salmoides*, smallmouth bass, *M. dolomieu*, shoal bass, *M. cataractae*, red-eye bass *M. coosae*, spotted bass *M. punctulatus*, and Suwannee bass *M. notius*. The Guadalupe bass *M. treculi* of Texas is the only black bass not found in our state waters.

As a fisheries biologist, I have been fortunate enough to work in the only two states where the Suwannee bass is found, Florida and Georgia. The Suwannee bass is a relatively small but robust, deep-bodied, black bass species (Bailey and Hubbs 1949; Hurst et al. 1975) that can reach lengths up to 420 mm (16.5 in) (Bonvechio and Freeman 2009). It has a relatively large mouth and the upper jaw extends under the eye, but not past the eye. It has a shallow dorsal fin notch with about 12 unique diamond-shaped vertical bars found along both sides of the fish. Their most distinguishing characteristic is the bright turquoise blue that can be found on the cheeks, breast and sometimes ventral parts of mature fish. These characteristics appear to be more profound around the breeding season. The lateral line has 58 to 61 scales (Cailteux et al. 2002b).

Currently, it has the smallest range and geographic distribution of any of the black bass species (Koppelman and Garrett 2002), encompassing roughly 8,500 km<sup>2</sup> (Bonvechio et al 2010). Suwannee bass occur in the Ichetucknee, Santa Fe, St. Marks, Suwannee, Wacissa, and Wakulla rivers of Florida, as well as the Alapaha, Ochlockonee, and Withlacoochee rivers of Florida and Georgia (Hellier 1967; Hurst et al. 1975; MacCrimmon and Robbins 1975; Swift et al. 1977; Cailteux et al. 2002a, 2002b; Bonvechio et al. 2005; Bonvechio et al. 2010). Both Florida and Georgia consider the Suwannee bass a species of special concern (Gruver 2006, Georgia DNR 2010), mainly due its restricted geographic range. However, urban expansion and development, which have led to increased water withdrawals (Koppelman and Garret 2002), and an extensive history of industrial-related discharges, which have resulted in several fish kills (Keefer and Ober 1977; Bonvechio and Freeman 2009), continue to threaten the water quality of the rivers these fish inhabit. Furthermore, the introduced flathead catfish *Pylodictis olivaris* have recently been found to occur in the Ochlockonee River of Florida (Cailteux and Dobbins 2005). This invasive predator has been known to negatively affect other fish populations when introduced in Georgia rivers (Thomas 1993; Bonvechio et al. 2009). Fortunately, the flathead catfish has not been confirmed in the Georgia waters of the Ochlockonee but they may indeed exist.



The author holding a 406 mm TL Suwannee bass captured in the Ochlockonee River, Florida, in October 2001. Photo Courtesy of Galen Kauffman

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## "Sight sampling" off the Jekyll Island, GA coast for tripletail

Tripletail, also known as eddy fish, buoy bass and blackfish, is an interesting species that aggregates off Georgia's Jekyll Island coast. Little is known about the life history of this unusual fish, which can be seen leisurely floating at the surface on its side waiting for its next meal to arrive. A growing number of recreational anglers are discovering this tripletail aggregation that allows true sight fishing on the Georgia coast. Anglers stalk the floating fish and attempt to place a lure or natural bait directly in front of them, some even dare to attempt to fool the fish with fly fishing. Tripletail have a variety of reactions to the bait in front of them, some immediately crash the bait while others will slowly inspect the bait from all angles and simply swim away. The excitement does not end with the bait presentation because once a tripletail knows that it is hooked it will give long hard runs and even take to the air.

In response to the growing number of recreational anglers putting pressure on this aggregation, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Coastal Resource Division and the University of Georgia have partnered together to study this unique fish. The study focuses on age determination and reproductive status of the tripletail in the Jekyll Island aggregation.



*Landing a tripletail captured by researchers off the beach at Jekyll Island, GA in May 2010.*



*Spud and Chris Woodward scan the water in pursuit of tripletail off the Jekyll Island, GA coast. Anglers seek a high perch to allow them to see tripletail at a greater distance.*

The study uses otoliths (fish ear stones) and the first dorsal spine to determine the age structure of fish in this aggregation. The structures are cross-sectioned and aged just like counting rings on a tree section. Through comparing the two structures researchers believe they have found agreement. Aging tripletail via the first dorsal spine is preferred because it can be removed non-lethally. Tripletail off the Jekyll Island coast appear to grow rapidly, up to 16 inches in a year. The oldest fish found was 4 years old and weighed 24 pounds. Through understanding the age structure of the aggregation, researchers can better manage the population in the future.

Researchers also collected reproductive organs for histological examination to determine if the Jekyll Island aggregation consists of spawning tripletail. Blood plasma samples were also collected and sent to the University of Florida for vitellogenin, the egg yolk precursor, analysis. Elevated vitellogenin levels have been used as an accurate predictor of reproductive stage in many species of fish. Researchers are currently awaiting results from the vitellogenin analysis. Preliminary histology results indicate the aggregation off the coast of Jekyll Island is not a spawning aggregation.

Although the primary goal of the study was to determine if the free-floating tripletail aggregation off the Jekyll Island beachfront was a spawning aggregation, researchers were able to sample tripletail on structure within the St. Simons estuary. Fish sampled from the structure were typically larger and some were in more advanced reproductive stages.

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# The Rarest Black Bass of Georgia

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The Suwannee bass's diet consists mostly of crayfishes, but they are also known to eat fishes, aquatic insects (Schramm and Maceina 1986; Cailteux 2002b), as well blue crabs in estuarine areas (Warren 2009). It has been speculated by some biologists that the relative scarcity of Suwannee bass may be due to insufficient cray fish abundance. Like most bass, Suwannee bass spawn once each year, between February and May, when water temperatures range from 18-19°C (64-66°F). Nest preparation is similar to other black basses, where eggs are deposited and fertilized in circular depressions and the males guard the incubating eggs until they hatch. Suwannee bass do exhibit sex-specific growth rates, with females experiencing more rapid growth and attaining larger sizes than males (Bonvechio et al. 2005). Males rarely exceed 13 inches but females have been known to exceed 16 inches. Furthermore, females have been aged to 12 years but males have not been found to exceed 9 years (Bonvechio et al. 2005, Bonvechio and Freeman 2009, Warren 2009).

While in graduate school under the direction of Dr. Mike Allen at the University of Florida (2002-2003), I had the opportunity to assess the age and growth of several Suwannee bass populations (Bonvechio et al. 2005). More recently, I teamed up with my wife, Kimberly Bonvechio (A biologist/statistician for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) to develop a standard weight ( $W_s$ ) equation and standard length categories for Suwannee bass (Bonvechio et al. 2010). We published this work in honor of our dear friend and biologist, Rich Cailteux, who originally presented this idea to us several years before his passing. Rich was an exceptional fisheries biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, who discovered, characterized, conserved and /or managed many Suwannee bass populations including the Aucilla, St. Mark's, Wacissa, Wakulla and Ochlockonee River populations (Cailteux 2002b). He had a tremendous impact on my professional development as a fisheries biologist. Because of his genuine passion for fisheries work, Rich will be sorely missed by myself, my wife and many other fisheries professionals, but his legacy will live on in all of us honored enough to have crossed paths with him.

Based in part on Rich Cailteux's work on the upper and lower Ochlockonee, Suwannee bass are considered to be strictly a riverine fish (Cailteux 2002b; Bonvechio et al 2010). A Suwannee bass has never been collected in Lake Talquin, a reservoir on the Ochlocknee River, and is considered a barrier for movement in that system. Suwannee bass occupy a wide range of riverine habitats including shoals, runs, pools, springs, and spring runs and are often associated with woody debris. The species appears to be missing from more acidic portions of the river drainages where they occur. No Suwannee bass have ever been captured by the Georgia DNR in the Suwannee River during standardized electrofishing sampling since the program was established in the 1990's. The Okefenokee swamp is believed to limit the species upstream migration, and as the pH increases downstream, the species is found in higher numbers (Koppelman and Garrett 2002; Bonvechio and Freeman 2009; Bonvechio et al. 2010).

Conservation of the Suwannee bass is an on-going process that deserves attention. Georgia sections of the Suwannee (including the Withlacoochee) and Ochlockonee River drainages have received limited sampling effort due to poor accessibility during low water conditions. Recently, I and other Georgia DNR associates confirmed that Suwannee bass populations continue to persist at low abundances below the Statenville bridge in the Alapaha River (less than 2 fish per hour of electrofishing), but none were recovered north of the bridge.

*Continued on page 9.*



## "Sight sampling" off the Jekyll Island, GA coast for tripletail



*Continued from page 3.*

The connection between the fish free-floating off the beach and the fish on structure is poorly understood and research in this area will be critical in the understanding of tripletail behavior. Currently a cooperative study is underway with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Coastal Resource Division and the University

*Doug Haymans tagging a tripletail (left) and researcher drawing blood from the caudal sinus of a tripletail (right) captured off the coast of Jekyll Island, GA in May 2010.*

of Georgia to evaluate movement patterns in the Wassaw and Ossabaw estuaries near Savannah, Georgia.



*Russell Parr and Jay Shelton with a recently captured tripletail off the Jekyll Island, GA coast in June 2010.*

Preliminary data from the current age and reproduction project suggests that the tripletail are not spawning off the beachfront of Jekyll Island. Aging of the tripletail suggests that tripletail can grow very rapidly and agreement between structures may allow researchers to use non-lethal techniques to age the fish. Evaluation of the lethal and non-lethal techniques will allow researchers to continue studying this unique species without the need for large numbers of sacrificed fish. Understanding these basic life history characteristics will give researchers the data needed to properly and effectively manage this exciting sportfish off the Georgia coast.

*-Russell Parr*

*UGA Graduate Student*

### Did you know...

- Over past decade, Georgia's population has increased by 1.7 million, a 26% increase. Georgia's population has doubled over the past 50 years (1)
- In 1990, metro Atlanta measured 65 miles long and measured 110 miles by 2000. By 2018, suburban Atlanta is predicted to include neighboring Athens and Dalton. The Sierra Club has ranked Atlanta as one of the "most sprawl threatened" cities in the U.S. (1)
- The American Lung Association ranked Atlanta 19th (out of 25) most polluted city for ozone and 16th for year-round particle pollution. Also, Macon ranked 19th and Augusta ranked 23rd for year round particle pollution (2)

(1) Georgia's Dilemma: The Unintended Consequences of Population Growth. 2001. NPG Special Report. [www.npg.org/ga\\_poll/georgia.html](http://www.npg.org/ga_poll/georgia.html). Accessed 18 January 2010.

(2) American Lung Association. 2010. State of the Air. [www.stateoftheair.org/2010/](http://www.stateoftheair.org/2010/). Accessed 18 January 2010.

# A Brief Introduction to the History of Ichthyology in Georgia

Continued from page 1.

Many undescribed forms have already been provisionally recognized but await the meticulous efforts required for formal description. For example, the Fishes of Georgia Website currently lists over 20 undescribed species.

The last species described in the state, unless I am missing something, was the Gulf Coast pygmy sunfish (*Elassoma gilberti*) that

was described in 2009 (Figure 2). Other species described this decade include the Halloween darter (*Percina crypta*), Chattahoochee sculpin (*Cottus chattahoochee*), Tallapoosa sculpin (*Cottus tallapoosae*), bridled darter (*Percina kusha*), muscadine darter (*Percina smithvanizi*), and longjaw minnow (*Notropis amplamala*). Linnaeus described Georgia's first four fishes in 1758 from populations outside of Georgia.

Besides Linnaeus, who described Georgia's fishes? The work has been shared by many: 96 different authors and co-authors have described the species currently recognized in our state. David Starr Jordan leads the pack with 27 first-author descriptions, followed by Edward Cope (25 species), Constantine Rafinesque (25 species), Charles Girard (15 species), Charles LeSueur (12 species), and Samuel Mitchill (10 species). Much has been written about the contributions of these outstanding ichthyologists. I recommend Hubbs (1964), Myers (1964), and the introductory chapters of many state fish books. Not diminishing these historic efforts, it could be said that much of the low hanging fruit in Georgia ichthyology (i.e., the obviously distinct species) has already been picked. Most modern ichthyologists have described only a few or a single species, as it often takes years of careful morphological, genetic, and behavioral study for proper diagnosis.

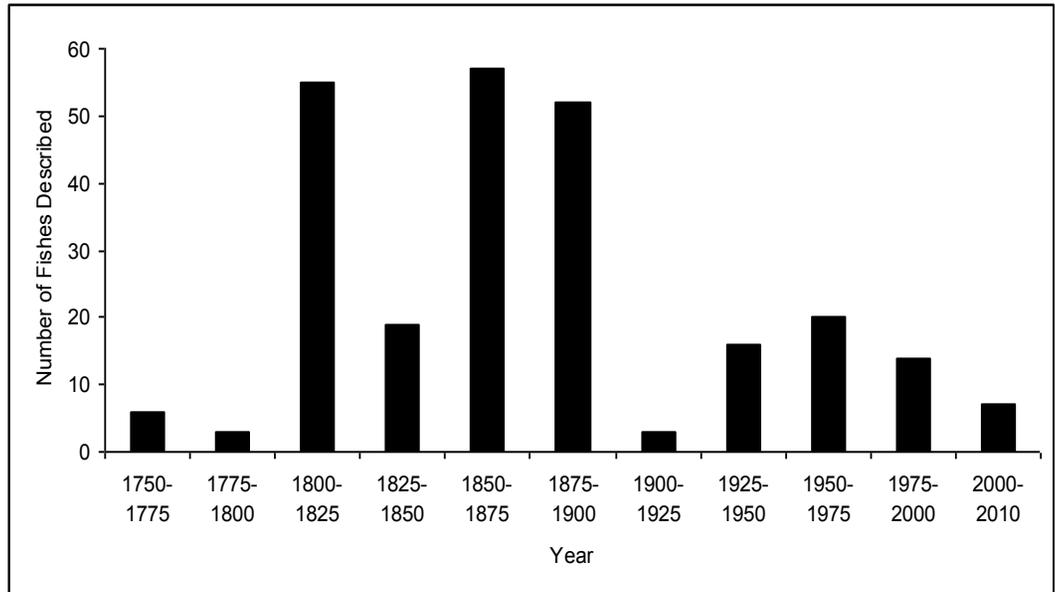


Figure 1. Number of native freshwater fish species described in Georgia every 25 years since 1750. Note that the last bar only represents a 10-year period.



Figure 2. The Gulf Coast pygmy sunfish (*Elassoma gilberti*) was described in 2009 by Frank Snelson, Trevor Krabbenhoft, and Joseph Quattro. Photo by Gerald Pottern.

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# A Brief Introduction to the History of Ichthyology in Georgia

*Continued from page 7.*

Since 1975, only three ichthyologists have authored or co-authored the descriptions of more than two species in Georgia: Jim Williams (6 species), David Etnier (4 species) and Rick Mayden (4 species).

Many of our fish species are wide ranging and consequently their descriptions are based upon few or no specimens from Georgia. This is another reason why I expect more careful analysis of our fishes to lead to the discovery of new taxa. Only 41 of the 252 species I included in this assessment have type localities in Georgia. We have to single out Jordan again, as he described 24 of these species. He traveled hundreds of miles on foot during the summers of 1876-1878 and collected in familiar places such as the Oconee and Chattahoochee rivers (Gilbert 2009). He collected in South Chickamauga Creek (Tennessee drainage) in northwest Georgia and described the harelip sucker (*Moxostoma lacerum*), which is presumed extinct. Most of his collecting, however, was in the upper Coosa River system where he described 12 new species. This is indicative not only of Jordan's efforts but of high endemism in the Coosa basin. Totaled across all authors, the Coosa basin contains the type localities of 18 species, and all other Georgia basins contain five or fewer type localities.

It would have been nice to have been around 150 years ago and been the first to see and begin to describe Georgia's amazing fish fauna. But with many new fishes to be described and more sophisticated methods of diagnosis, ichthyology will continue to be a dynamic and important discipline in the years to come. I believe that students of fisheries have an important role to play in future discoveries—not only as taxonomists— but in helping us understand the ecology, behavior, and conservation status of Georgia's fishes.

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*-Brett Albanese  
GA DNR Aquatic Zoologist*

## GA AFS President's Message

*Continued from page 1.*



New in 2011 and in addition to the usual technical presentation format will be a special non-technical session during the 2011 meeting that will provide a forum for professionals to exchange regional projects, activities and experiences. This will also increase student exposure to ongoing fisheries work throughout Georgia and broaden our understanding of our wide interests and disciplines. Rather than the standard 20-minute time slots for technical papers, there is no lower time recommendation for non-technical presentations. Questions regarding the non-technical session should be directed to Adam Kaeser (Adam.Kaeser@dnr.state.ga.us.)

Tight lines and see you in February!

*-John Kilpatrick  
2010 GA AFS President*

# The Rarest Black Bass of Georgia

Continued from page 4.

Georgia anglers seeking to check this species off their bucket list should be willing to devote a considerable amount of angling time to the cause. All three populations of Suwannee bass in Georgia can be characterized as having relatively low abundances (less than 10 fish per hour of electrofishing). In Georgia, Suwannee bass are most abundant in the Withlacoochee and Ochlockonee Rivers. Anglers are advised to use light tackle with plastic crayfish-like worms or small spinner baits. Anglers fishing for Suwannee bass on the Withlacoochee River should concentrate on areas south of Valdosta near the Clyattville area, and on the Ochlockonee River should concentrate on areas south of Thomsville.

Although I am an avid bass angler, I have only managed to catch three of the seven species of black bass so far. The shoal, spot, redeye and Guadalupe bass are still on my bucket list. How many have you caught? Don't you think it is time to get online and buy a fishing license, visit your local tackle store, load up the ole canoe or kayak and hit some of those truly breathtaking Georgia rivers and tackle one of God's greatest creations, the black bass?

-Tim Bonvechio

GA DNR Fisheries Biologist



Picture of a 320 mm TL Suwannee bass that was captured in the Wacissa River, Florida, in October 2002. Rich Cailteux is measuring the bass. Photo courtesy of Tim Bonvechio (UF).

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# GA AFS Student Presentations

We would like to acknowledge the students that presented their research at professional meetings and those students who won awards for their presentations. The following is a list of meetings and student presenters:

**National American Fisheries Society**: Pittsburgh, PA; September 12-16, 2010

Presenters: Michael Bednarski, Mark Fritts, Kelly Filer Robinson, and Paul Wilkes

**Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society**: Asheville, NC; February 25-28, 2010

Presenters: Bob Bahn, Michael Bednarski, Joseph Kirsch, Kelly Filer Robinson, Brittany Trushel, Paul Wilkes

**Georgia Chapter of American Fisheries Society**: Perry, GA; January 26-27, 2010

Presenters: Bob Bahn, Michael Bednarski, Andrea Fritts, Mark Fritts, Joseph Kirsch, Kelly Files Robinson, Brittany Trushel,  
Paul Wilkes

Awards: Andrea Fritts; 3<sup>rd</sup> place platform presentation, Kelly Filer Robinson: 3<sup>rd</sup> place poster presentation

**Southeastern Fishes Council**: Athens, GA; November 12, 2010

Presenters: Michael Bednarski, Duncan Elkins, Andrea Fritts, Mark Fritts, and Andrew Taylor

Awards: Andrea Fritts; 2<sup>nd</sup> place platform presentation

**Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**: Biloxi, MS; October 17-20, 2010

Presenters: Michael Bednarski and Jason Payne

**Warnell Graduate Research Symposium**: Athens, GA; March 4, 2010

Presenter: Andrea Fritts; 2<sup>nd</sup> place platform presentation

**Joint Meeting of the South Carolina Fishery Workers Association and the South Carolina American Fisheries Society**:  
Charleston, SC; February 9-10, 2010

Presenter: Kelly Filer Robinson

**Flint River Chapter Trout Unlimited**: Senoia, GA; October 19, 2010

Invited Speaker: Andrew Taylor

**2<sup>nd</sup> International Catfish Research Symposium**: St. Louis, MO; June 20-22, 2010

Presenter: Michael Homer

**University of Georgia Graduate Research Symposium**: Athens, GA; March 26, 2010

Presenter: Andrea Fritts

**Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry Conference**: Portland, OR; November 9, 2010

Presenter: Andrea Fritts

**2010 Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee**: Charleston, SC; September 7-9, 2010

Presenter: Will Pruitt

-Sara Duquette  
UGA AFS Secretary





# Georgia Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

## 2011 Annual Meeting Georgia National Fairgrounds Roquemore Conference Center Perry, Georgia February 2-3, 2011

**Pre-Registration Deadline: January 19, 2011** (saves \$5.00 over registering at the door)

Name To Appear On Name Badge: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Schedule:

Pre-Registration (\$35) \_\_\_\_\_; includes social, meeting, breaks, and lunches

Regular Registration (\$40) \_\_\_\_\_; includes social, meeting, breaks, and lunches

Student Registration (\$25) \_\_\_\_\_; includes social, meeting, breaks, and lunches

Retired Members (\$30) \_\_\_\_\_; includes social, meeting, breaks, and lunches

GA-AFS Dues (\$5) \_\_\_\_\_; included in your National Dues if you are a member

Extra Banquet Lunch **Only** (\$15) \_\_\_\_\_; banquet only (for spouse, friends, family, etc.)

**TOTAL DUE** \_\_\_\_\_; **Make Check Payable to: GA-AFS** (group check is okay)

Day(s) You Will Attend Meeting \_\_\_\_\_; Wednesday, Feb 2nd \_\_\_\_\_ Thursday, Feb 3rd

Will you be attending the Student-Professional mixer on February 2nd? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Fill Out One Form PER ATTENDEE (or include name, affiliation, and email for each person in group)**

Mail completed form(s) and payment (check only, no cash) to:

Patti Lanford  
GA DNR Stream Survey  
2065 US Hwy 278 SE  
Social Circle, GA 30025

Remember to make your own motel reservations! Microtel Inn and Suites: 478-987-4004  
Special rates for "GA AFS" group: Single - \$49, Double - \$59, Suite - \$69.