

# Annual Report Card released

This year, coastal Georgia scored ‘B’, or moderately good

**By TYLER JONES**  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

CRD recently released its annual Coastal Georgia Ecosystem Report Card, highlighting the current health and condition of the region’s ecosystems.

The report card provides valuable insights into the state of Georgia’s coastal environment and serves as a tool for decision-makers and community members to better understand the impacts of their actions on the local ecosystem.

This year’s report scored a “B,” or moderately good health. The report card assesses various aspects of the coastal environment, including water quality, habitat condition, and the overall health of key species. The report is based on data collected by DNR biologists and technicians over the past year, and provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the ecosystem.

The report highlights both positive and negative trends in the region. While there have been some improvements in water quality and habitat condition, there are still areas of note, including the drop in metrics for species.

“Of note this year, we saw increases in the quality of water, along with sea turtle hatching,” said Jan Mackinnon, a program manager with DNR’s Coastal Resources Division who oversees the report’s compilation. “The overall scores for this year of ‘B’ is slightly down from last year’s ‘A-,’ and we can attribute that to a marked drop in the blue crab score within the report’s Fisheries Index and bald eagle-related scores.

“This drop in scores is likely due to estuary salinity changes caused by decreased rainfall in locations where DNR biologist sample blue crabs,”

Indicator	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
fecal coliform	92%	92%	92%	80%	90%	98%	90%	95%	99%
enterococcus	82%	91%	94%	94%	96%	78%	72%	78%	83%
dissolved oxygen	79%	85%	87%	84%	84%	87%	90%	85%	75%
shrimp	100%	100%	96%	84%	84%	75%	92%	100%	86%
red drum	83%	69%	100%	100%	91%	100%	40%	100%	100%
blue crabs	22%	62%	47%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	18%
spotted seatrout	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	70%
American oystercatchers	47%	61%	28%	13%	78%	78%	66%	47%	40%
wood storks	67%	70%	64%	84%	81%	78%	59%	68%	70%
bald eagles	NA	66%	46%	57%	62%	51%	57%	62%	48%
sea turtle hatching	77%	69%	64%	47%	44%	64%	60%	59%	73%
sea turtle nesting	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**A** 80–100%  
All water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be very good, most often leading to preferred habitat conditions.

**B** 60–79%  
Most water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be good, often leading to acceptable habitat conditions.

**C** 40–59%  
There is a mix of good and poor levels of water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators. Indicators in these locations tend to be fair, leading to sufficient habitat conditions.

**D** 20–39%  
Few water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be poor, often leading to degraded habitat conditions.

**F** 0–19%  
Very few or no water quality, fisheries, bird, and sea turtle indicators meet desired levels. Indicators in these locations tend to be very poor, most often leading to unacceptable habitat conditions.

Mackinnon continued. “While these sampling locations stay the same, the blue crabs migrate to different parts of the estuary seeking favorable salinity and water conditions. This movement of the blue crab populations can have an impact on the overall report card score.”

Likewise, bald eagles saw a lower score than the last report, likely driven by lower numbers of eaglets fledging. There were also more failed nest than expected and some test results revealed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Virus in deceased bald eagles.

“The annual Coastal Georgia

Ecosystem Report Card is an important tool for understanding the state of our coastal environment and the impact of our actions on it,” said Mackinnon. “We hope that this report will inspire individuals, organizations, and governments to take action to conserve and protect our valuable coastal resources.”

The report card is available to the public online at [CoastalGaDNR.org/ReportCard](https://CoastalGaDNR.org/ReportCard). Members of the public are encouraged to read the report to learn more about the state of the coastal ecosystem and how they can get involved in conservation efforts.