In the REGION

Planning and GIS Create Ecotourism Web-Based Mapping Tool

The SGRC Planning and GIS staff recently created a web-based mapping tool for residents and visitors to promote ecotourism destinations within the region. This task is a work plan item in the 2018 Regional Plan Work Program.

The entire SGRC region is blessed with vast natural resources – from the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR) in the southeastern portion of the region to the Milton "Buddy" Hopkins Nature Preserve in Fitzgerald.

Dr. B. Bynum Boley and Dr. Gary T. Green, both of UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, make a strong case for conserving natural resources, "...ecotourism destinations benefit in the form of enhanced tourism competitiveness from the protection of quality natural resources while the conservation of these natural resources is increasingly valued because these resources are realized as the foundation of the ecotourism industry and the

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Stephen C. Foster State Park, Fargo Georgia
(Photo credit: ExploreGeorgia.org)

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission proudly serves Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties.

sgrc
SOUTHERN GEORGIA
REGIONAL COMMISSION

In This Issue:

⇒ *A Guide for Southern Georgia Residents on Watersheds*

⇒ *SGRC You-Tube Channel is One Year Old*

⇒ *SGRC-IT Offers Information on Website Security*

Planning and GIS Create Ecotourism Web-Based Mapping Tool (continued)

driver of all economic benefits associated with ecotourism." Solely looking at the ONWR, it is estimated that greater than 700,000 visitors generate an economic impact in Charlton, Clinch, and Ware Counties of approximately $88 million each year. Identifying and recognizing the intersection between environmental and economic goals in the Regional Plan, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and in Comprehensive Plan updates is a huge step towards the preservation and stewardship of natural resources for their long-term survival.

Aside from the economic benefits of natural resources, there are health and

Banks Lake, Lakeland, GA (Photo credit ExploreGeorgia.org)

wellness benefits from enjoying restful and relaxing activities outdoors. The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has presented numerous challenges and stressors. Enjoying time in nature enables the maintenance of physical distancing while also supporting fitness and recreational pursuits.

Now that the process of completing the mapping tool is complete, staff are looking into methods of promoting the tool. The site can be accessed either from the Regional Commission website or directly from this site: www.sgrcmaps.com/ecotourism. SGRC welcomes and encourages promotion of the tool on Chamber of Commerce, tourism, economic development, Main Street, and/or local government websites.

In looking at the upcoming year, planning staff is proposing to add an Agritourism mapping tool as well. This item is anticipated to be reviewed at a public hearing during the August 27, 2020, Council meeting as an addition to the Regional Plan Work Program.

For additional details on the Ecotourism map, website, and/or brochure, SGRC Planning and GIS staff are available by phone at (229)-333-5277.

Planning and GIS Create Ecotourism Web-Based Mapping Tool
(continued)

SGRC Ecotourism Brochure

References:

1 B. Bynum Boley & Gary T. Green (2015): Ecotourism and natural resource conservation: the 'potential' for a sustainable symbiotic relationship, Journal of Ecotourism, DOI: 10.1080/14724049.2015.1094080

2 U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Division of Economics. 2019. The Economic Contributions of Recreational Visitation at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

A Guide for Southern Georgia Residents on Watersheds

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), a watershed is an area of land that drains all the streams and rainfall into a common outlet such as the outflow of a reservoir, mouth of a bay, or any point along a stream channel. The term "watershed" is often interchanged with river basin, drainage basin, and catchment. The mountains, ridges or hills that separate two watersheds are called "drainage divides." Waterbodies located within watersheds include surface water (streams, lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands) and all underlying groundwater (aquifers). Watersheds may also contain many smaller watersheds, depending on outflow points.

The SGRC serves an 18-county region and 45 municipalities. Those counties and municipalities are located in 5 major watersheds: St. Mary's, Ocmulgee, Satilla, Suwanee, and Ochlockonee. These areas are vital for the region as the land area above the watershed outflow point can directly affect stream flows and water quality. Many counties in the region wish to improve water quality to promote outdoor recreation and provide resources for economic development.

One of the ways the SGRC is working to improve the health of the watersheds in the region is through funds received from a grant awarded by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to conduct a Regional Water Quality Assessment Project that will identify fecal coliform impaired water bodies throughout the region. Fecal coliform is a type of bacteria found in the intestinal tracts of warm-blooded animals, and is a prevalent form of impairment for this region (a major species of this bacteria being Escherichia coli (E. coli). Out of the region's roughly 1,500 miles of waterways, 1,178 do not support their designated use (e.g. fishing, swimming). Non-point source pollution is believed to be the largest contributing factor in the presence of these bacteria in the waterways, originating at sources such as failing septic systems, municipal runoff, and waste from pets, livestock, and wildlife.

Once the sites of highest concern have been identified, the SGRC Environmental Project Manager will work with municipalities, conservation district representatives, and environmental groups to find future partners for water quality improvement grant funds to implement best management practices (BMPs) to reduce impairment levels. This will be achieved through data analysis, water testing, and public education and involvement. Volunteers for water testing will be needed. Those interested should contact Environmental Project Manager Megan Parker by email at mparker@sgrc.us, or by phone at (229)-333-5277.

A Guide for Southern Georgia Residents on Watersheds (continued)
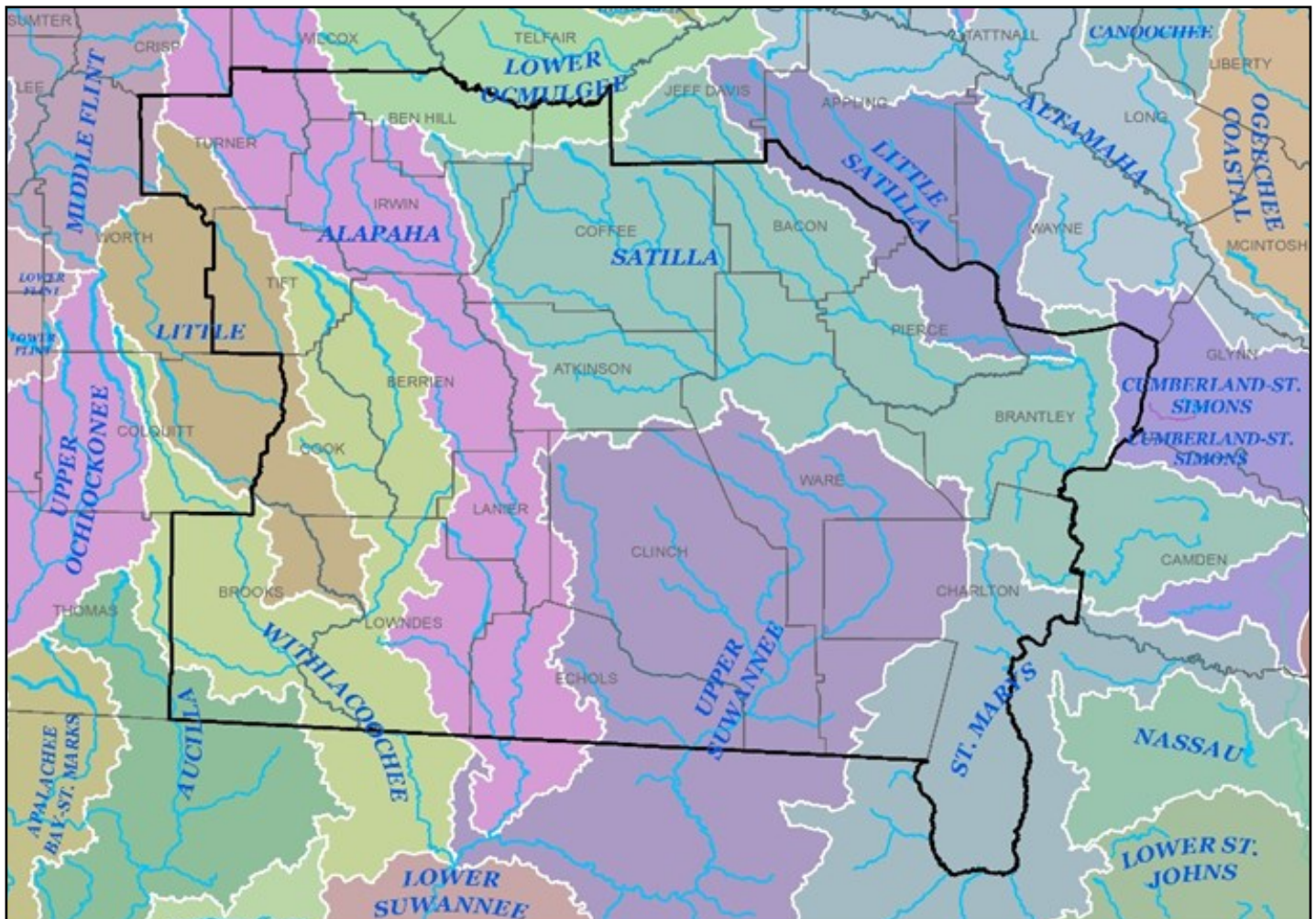
"The map above shows the 5 major watersheds in the Southern Georgia area, they are: St. Mary's, Oc-mulgee, Satilla, Suwanee, and Ochlockonee.

In support of our friends at the Altamaha Riverkeeper, the SGRC is sharing the link to a survey for the Altamaha River. The purpose of the survey is to gather information of how residents and visitors use the Altamaha River for recreation. Please follow the link below to participate. Altamaha Riverkeeper Survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GRQ572Y

In support of our friends at the Satilla Riverkeeper, the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) is sharing the link to a survey for the Satilla River. The purpose of the survey is to gather information of how residents and visitors use the Satilla River for recreation.
Satilla Riverkeeper Survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Satilla

The GIS Team is Virtual!

Improved access was needed for this division because the SGRC-GIS is headquartered in Valdosta and in-person training and support was often too costly for many communities. While the SGRC-GIS division would prefer to visit communities in person, the travel time was often an issue. So the SGRC-GIS team researched the issue and developed a multi-pronged solution. In July 2019, the SGRC-GIS team launched a new initiative to make GIS training and tech support more accessible to communities across the region.

One part of the solution was to continue using Go-To Assist as a means to view the computer screens of clients, remotely, while clients remain at their own worksites. Go-To Assist is helpful when the client's computer screen needs to be viewed to determine the exact nature of the issues. The SGRC-GIS has used this software for several years to improve access and continues to do so with great success.
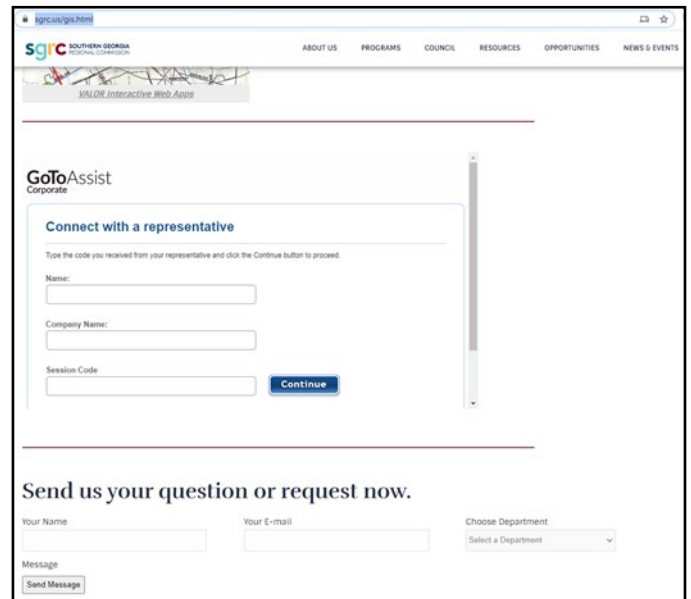
The SGRC-GIS Go-To Assist screen

Secondly, SGRC-GIS staff created training videos on the SGRC YouTube channel. Staff started this task by translating PowerPoint presentations received from conferences, next they recorded GIS staff interviews, and finally they created general videos on how to use the latest software by ESRI, ArcGIS Pro. The process then led to staff creating videos on how to use select SGRC-GIS interactive web maps. Currently, videos are available on how to use the ReCOP map site – SGRC-GIS's free region-wide mapping resource for disaster situations, the GIS Holiday photo map created for last holiday season, and even a video on how to get started using the VALOR interactive map. Staff have also created specific, instructional videos for regional users who request specific topics.
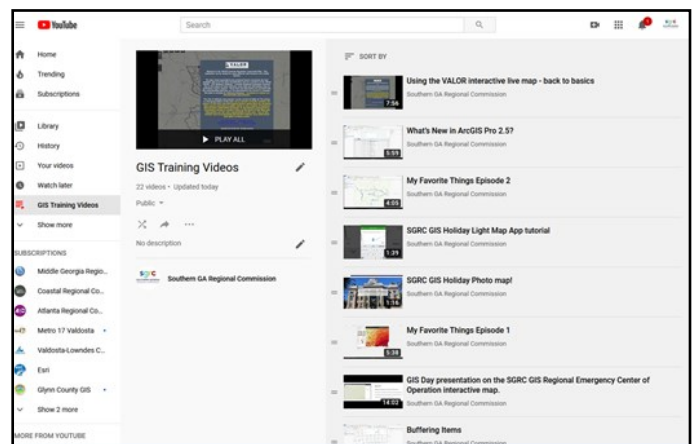
YouTube Videos created by the SGRC-GIS staff and available for free online.

The GIS Team is Virtual! (continued)

Finally, the SGRC-GIS staff employed Cisco WebEx to provide virtual meeting options. Last November, staff rolled out this option by hosting a virtual GIS day event/training on how to use the previously mentioned ReCOP web map. Staff facilitated several other meetings over the last year, including a presentation at the GARC Annual Conference, and recorded the sessions. The videos are now available to the SGRC staff and local communities on the SGRC YouTube channel.

Looking back, there could not have been a better time for the SGRC-GIS staff to focus on improved accessibility. More specifically, no one knew when this initiative started in July 2019, that before the end of the fiscal year, we would all be living through a pandemic which required social distancing. In reality, the SGRC-GIS division was preparing for the "new normal" that would come into being with the arrival of COVID-19. The virtual training and tech support initiative allows GIS staff to continue to provide the same level of service, to which clients are accustomed, while it respects clients with social distancing. The SGRC-GIS division remains available for clients, more accessible than ever, and ready to help. Please contact Rachel Strom by email at rstrom@sgrc.us for more information.

The SGRC YouTube Channel Turns One Year Old!

One year ago, SGRC began offering training and informational videos via its very own YouTube channel. It began with a PowerPoint presentation, and has expanded to include department specific training videos and the SGRC 101 training series. Several video upload images can be seen in the picture below and the link to the SGRC YouTube Channel is here: www.sgrcmaps.com\sgrctv.
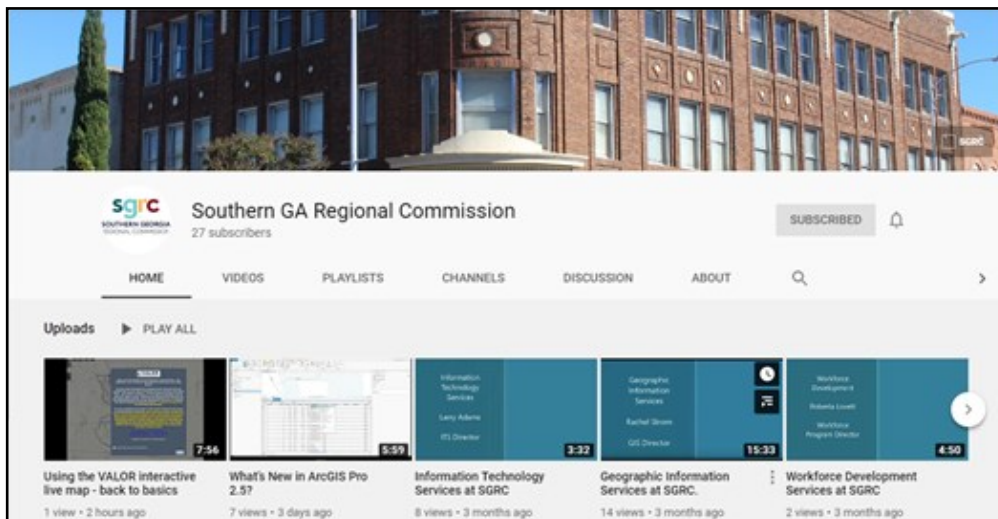
It's CDBG Planning Time

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs will be accepting applications for its Annual Competition for 2021 Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) on April 1, 2021, and the time to begin planning those applications is NOW! Threshold requirements implemented by DCA have necessitated getting an early start on CDBG applications in order to be eligible to submit an application.

CDBG funds are federal dollars allocated to the State of Georgia by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and are earmarked to benefit primarily low to moderate income people. In fact, the beneficiaries of a CDBG project must be at least 70% low to moderate income.

Examples of eligible public facilities and improvements activities include, but are not limited to: water and sewer facilities, flood and drainage improvements, streets, and neighborhood revitalization. Other activities may include the development of shelters/facilities for homeless, elderly, mentally ill, abused, and impaired persons. Public facility activities may also include the development of medical, community, senior, and handicapped centers, or centers for literacy training.

The maximum funding amount for a single-activity public facilities grant is $750,000. Local governments are required to provide a 5% cash match of amounts from $300,001 to $750,000 in CDBG funds (not required for single-activity housing grants). Multi-Activity projects are eligible for up to $1,000,000 in CDBG funds; a 10% cash match is required for amounts from $750,001 to $1,000,000.

Keep in mind that development of a quality, competitive, and eligible CDBG application is time consuming, and therefore the process should begin immediately. If your community is interested in applying for CDBG funds and you would like to discuss a potential project, please contact Kimberly Hobbs at (229)-333-5277, or by email at kkhobbs@sgrc.us.

Neighborhood Revitalization

It's CDBG Planning Time (continued)

Street, Flood, and Drainage Improvements

Public Facility Improvements

SBA Announces New Round of Funding for Economic Injury Disaster Loan Emergency Advance

As of July 3, 2020, Georgia has had 93,367 EIDL loans approved for a total dollar amount of $4,884,880,055.

On June 15, the Small Business Administration (SBA) began accepting new Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and EIDL Advance applications from qualified small businesses and U.S. agricultural businesses. The EIDL loan advance will provide up to $10,000 of economic relief to businesses that are currently experiencing temporary difficulties. The new eligibility for U.S. agricultural businesses is made possible as a result of the latest round of funds appropriated by Congress in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Applicants who have already submitted applications will continue to be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. For agricultural businesses that submitted an EIDL application through the streamlined application portal prior to the legislative change, SBA will process these applications without the need for re-applying.

Small business owners and qualified agricultural businesses in all U.S. states and territories are currently eligible to apply for a low-interest loan due to Coronavirus (COVID-19). Agricultural businesses includes those businesses engaged in the production of food and fiber, ranching, and

raising of livestock, aquaculture, and all other farming and agricultural related industries (as defined by section 18(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 647(b)).

SBA is encouraging all eligible agricultural businesses with 500 or fewer employees wishing to apply to begin preparing their business financial information needed for their application. Please note, businesses apply directly to SBA for these loans. Please follow the link below to find out more information and to submit an application.

https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/coronavirus-relief-options/economic-injury-disaster-loan-emergency-advance

For more information on the SGRC Lending Programs contact: Rex Dorsey, Director, at rdorsey@sgrc.us or Michelle Frey, Sr. Lending Officer, at mfrey@sgrc.us or (229)-333-5277.

The SGRC-IT Division Offers
Information on Website Security

The internet makes it easy to pay bills, make purchases, and conduct business or communicate quickly. Unfortunately, it also creates more opportunities for cybercriminals and scam artists to prey on unsuspecting victims. For example, criminals may set up fake websites that mimic legitimate ones, hoping people will enter personally identifiable information they can steal, such as credit card and social security numbers. Anytime someone puts sensitive information in a website, they need to be able to identify if it is secure or not. The ability to recognize a secure web connection is extremely important.

It is necessary to discuss what is meant by the word "secure." When viewing a website, information is sent from the viewer's computer to the web server and then from the web server back to the computer. The transmission of this information is normally sent in plain text, meaning a hacker could potentially read it with little effort. Each piece of information transmitted travels across many computers (servers) to reach its destination; therefore, it is important to think twice when typing in a password or credit card information. When a site is secure, it uses Secure Sockets Layer, otherwise known as SSL. SSL uses a complex system of key exchanges between the web browser and the server it is communicating with in order to encrypt data before transmitting it across the web. All websites asking for sensitive information should be secured using SSL. Following are some ways to determine if a website is secure:

- Over a secure connection, the address displayed should begin with "https." So, before purchasing anything online, typing in a password, or entering other sensitive information, verify the web address begins with "https."

- Most web browsers display a lock icon somewhere in the browser window (not in the web page display area). It is also possible to click on the icon to see details of the site's security. This is important to know because some fraudulent sites are built to imitate the lock icon. If everything looks valid when clicking the icon, the company or individuals running the website have provided a safe means of communicating sensitive information.

- In addition to the "https" in the address bar, many e-commerce sites that collect personal or credit card information on their site display a security certificate seal such as VeriSign on the checkout page to indicate the site is secure. Some websites may process information/payments via a third party site like PayPal; therefore, if there is no security certificate seal, be sure to look for the "https" before entering any information.

For more information about secure websites, please contact Larry Adams by email at ladams@sgrc.us, or by phone at (229)-300-0901.

SGRC-AAA Partners with Second Wind Dreams and Heart of Georgia AAA to Deliver Rural Caregiver's Virtual Conference

The 2020 Resources for Rural Caregiver's Virtual Conference: Finding the Hidden Treasures was a great success. The SGRC-AAA staff had the opportunity to partner with a group of outstanding professionals on this project and to enhance their skills with virtual training/session implementation.

Leading the conference planning and implementation was Gwenyth Johnson, CEO of Second Wind Dreams (SWD), with a great deal of support from two well known and knowledgeable AAA Aging professionals — Scott Courson, Aging Director for the SGRC-AAA and Lisa Livingston, Aging Director for Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission's AAA. The Georgia Division of Aging Services was also well represented by staff members Thom Snyder and David Watkins. Finally, the American Association of Retired People (AARP) Georgia sponsored the virtual conference and made it possible for the over 200 conference participants to access the event free of charge.


Scott Courson, SGRC Aging Services Director, is pictured above welcoming participants to the virtual conference.

The focus of the conference was providing person-centered care and resource connections to individuals living with dementia and their families and/or caregivers, identifying the gaps that exist in services, and sharing the strategies in the aging network that are available to support those in need.

Most sessions in the conference were pre-recorded and available on demand. There were four live roundtable discussions to receive feedback on available services, gaps in the service delivery process, and general experiences of professionals and caregivers.

For more information on aging services, please contact the AAA's Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) at (912)-287-5888 or 1-888-732-4464; view the AAA website at: www.sgrc.us/aaa.html; and please like the SGRC-AAA Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/SouthernGeorgiaAreaAgencyonAging.
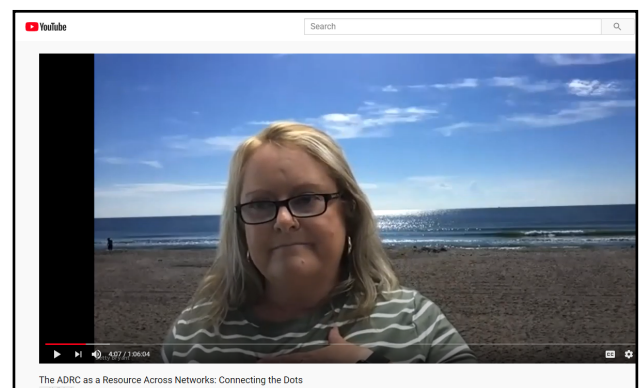
Betty Bryant, Certified Options Counselor, is pictured above discussing ADRC services and how to access care.

SGRC-Workforce Development Division
Offers On-the-Job Training Program

WorkSource Southern Georgia offers an On-the-Job Training (OJT) program for the 18-county SGRC service area. WorkSource Southern Georgia is proud to partner with the companies listed below for the OJT program. OJT is a contractual agreement in which the employer agrees to:

- Pay the trainee wages and provide benefits

- Commit to continued employment upon successful completion of the training

- Provide substantive on-the-job training

- Submit trainee evaluations and payroll records

Interested employers who want to learn more about how this program could benefit their company, as well as potential and current employees, may contact Amy Jones by email at abaldwin@sgrc.us, or by phone at (912)-285-6097 to learn more.

SGRC 2020 Council
Meetings Schedule

August 27, 2020 – 11:00 am – Location TBD

September 24, 2020 – 11:00 am – Location TBD

Area Officials Appreciation Dinner —
October 22, 2020 (date subject to change)

December 10, 2020 – 11:00 am – Location TBD
(date subject to change)

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

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There is still time to respond...

United States Census 2020

For more information or to respond, visit: https://2020census.gov/

Counting everyone in the 2020 Census can help communities receive funding for health care, education, emergency services, infrastructure improvements, and more. Over the next decade, lawmakers, business owners, and many others will use 2020 Census data to make critical decisions for communities nationwide.