

Georgia's 2017

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Scott Bridge Company

ALTAMAHA RIVER

Bridge Builder Protects Altamaha, Endangered Fish and Mussels

INTRODUCTION:

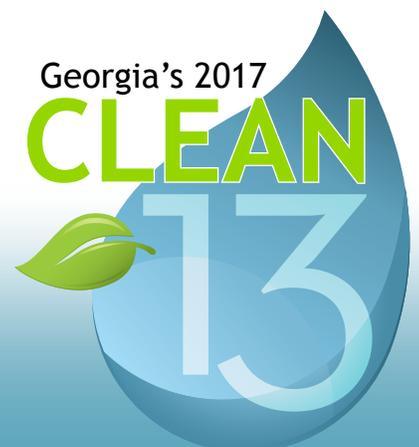
When the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) put out a request for bids for the new U.S. 1 Highway bridge over the Altamaha River near Baxley, it was a given that Opelika-based Scott Bridge Company would submit a proposal. After all, the business, now under its third generation of Scott family leadership, built the original steel and concrete span over the river in 1948. But, bridge building in the 21st century is a bit more complicated than it was in 1948. This time, the Scott family would have to consider the river and its federally protected fish and mussel species that could be adversely impacted by construction activities. Ike Scott and his crews met the challenge, not only developing a plan that was more protective, but fighting for it to convince DOT to accept it.

THE WATER BODY:

The Altamaha is Georgia's largest river and the third largest contributor of freshwater to the Atlantic Ocean on North America's eastern shore. It drains a 14,000-square mile basin stretching from Atlanta to Darien and is a place of unsurpassed beauty. Often called "Georgia's Little Amazon," The Nature Conservancy named it to its list of the 75 last great places on Earth. A treasure trove of wildlife calls the basin home, including 120 species of rare or endangered animals. Notably, it is home to the federally endangered short nose sturgeon and Atlantic sturgeon, prehistoric fish that spawn in the river, and the federally endangered Altamaha spiny mussel, found only in the Altamaha River system and nowhere else on Earth. The Altamaha system, which includes the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers, provides drinking water for communities from metro Atlanta to Middle Georgia. The Altamaha itself fuels two major industrial complexes—a nuclear power plant near Baxley and a pulp mill near Jesup. Its freshwater flow supports commercial shrimp and crab harvests and a rich recreational fishery on the Georgia coast.

THE CLEAN:

Building a \$25.9 million, 2.5 mile-long bridge across a major river is a daunting task. Throw in construction considerations to protect federally endangered fish and mussel species and the job becomes even more complicated, but for the Scott Bridge Co. project over the Altamaha River, some old-fashioned building techniques actually got the bridge built quicker at a lower cost to taxpayers and with increased protections for the federally endangered shortnose sturgeon, Atlantic sturgeon and Altamaha spiny mussel. But...it wasn't easy.





To avoid working during the spawning season of these species, the company was given just a three-month window to construct new bridge piers and deconstruct the piers from the abandoned bridge. Unfortunately, Georgia DOT's design specifications were such that building the piers during that window would have been impossible, forcing the company to work outside the period deemed safe for the endangered species.

Rather than follow DOT's design specifications, the bridge builders petitioned the state agency to use alternative designs that would save money and better protect the sensitive species. A year-long bureaucratic back and forth with a reluctant DOT ensued, but Scott Bridge Co., with support from Altamaha Riverkeeper and National Marine Fisheries Service,

finally won approval for their more "environmentally-friendly" design and construction plan.

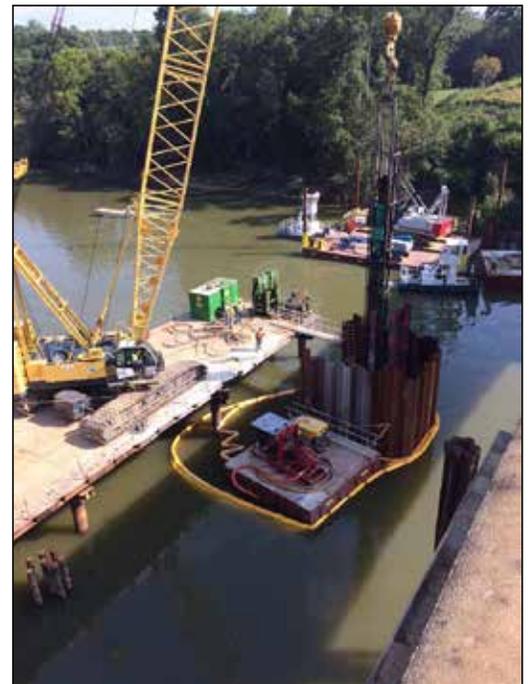
During construction, the company completed work on the piers in just six weeks and eliminated the possibility of bentonite slurry spilling into the river. The bridge's final footprint in the river is half of that envisioned in the DOT's original design specifications. The new bridge opened for business in March.

"It wasn't rocket science," said Ike Scott whose family business has been spanning rivers since 1933. "The rivers have been our home and we care a lot about rivers. In my opinion, its not hard to take a few extra steps to protect water."

Though the long-time bridge builder has never stepped on an Altamaha spiny mussel in an Altamaha slough or seen a mammoth 100-pound Atlantic sturgeon (few people have as they are very rare), he and his company have done their part to ensure their survival.

"God made them too," he said. "So, I figured he made them for a purpose."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates that only 343 adult Atlantic sturgeon spawn in the Altamaha River, down from historic populations in the thousands. The Altamaha spiny mussel is known in just five locations in the Altamaha River system and its populations have declined by more than 50 percent in the last 25 years.



Top: Ike Scott, CEO & President of Scott Bridge Company, at his company's U.S. 1 bridge project over the Altamaha River near Baxley. Left: Altamaha Spiny-mussels (Photo courtesy of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources). Above: Scott Bridge Company workers prepare one of the piers for the new U.S. 1 bridge over the Altamaha River.



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