



James Stevenson (Jim) Franks Jr.

December 11, 1942 - April 15, 2026

Jim Franks was born on December 11, 1942, to James, Sr. and Agnes Franks in Newport, Tennessee, where he spent his childhood and teenage years before earning an undergraduate degree in biology from Tennessee Wesleyan College. Inspired by Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea", Jim moved to Mississippi in the mid-1960s for graduate studies at the University of Mississippi in pursuit of his dream job in marine biology. He conducted his graduate research at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where he would work and reside for almost the entirety of his adult life. A tireless and passionate scientist who relished being on the water and interacting with the fishing community, Jim established himself as a leading authority on cobia, tripletail, tarpon, billfish, tunas, and Sargassum in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond. He was ever-present at fishing tournaments, where he would collect samples and talk with anglers, and was always in high demand for speaking to fishing clubs and civic groups. The awards and accolades Jim received throughout his career are too numerous to list, but his selection as recipient of the American Fisheries Society President's Fishery Conservation Award, the Mississippi Chapter of the American Fisheries Society's Lifetime Achievement Award and C.A. Shultz Conservation Award, the Mississippi Wildlife Federation's Conservationist of the Year Award, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Southern Mississippi are examples of the recognition he received over the years for his contributions to science and the fishing communities in Mississippi and across the

southeastern U.S and Caribbean. Throughout his six decades in fisheries science, Jim mentored multiple generations of marine biologists, and his work with the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute as a long-time Board Member and supporter of its Ron Schmied Scholarship expanded the reach of his mentorship. The immeasurable impact of his influence on young scientists has literally stretched across nations. In 2024, Jim retired as a Senior Research Scientist from the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory but continued his involvement in ongoing research and publications until his final days. The vast scope of Jim's contributions to his profession and his community is matched only by the immense respect he earned from his peers, the fishing community he served, and those fortunate to have known him. Jim's spirit and love of studying the ocean will live on through the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory's 60-foot research vessel R/V Jim Franks, built and named in his honor in 2016 to conduct research and educational field trips on Gulf Coast marine waters. His legacy will remain in the hearts of his colleagues, community, and friends who were a large part of his coastal family.

A memorial service will be held on Friday, May 8, at 4:00 p.m. at St. John's Episcopal Church (705 Rayburn Avenue, Ocean Springs, MS), with a Celebration of Life to be held immediately thereafter at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (703 East Beach Drive, Ocean Springs, MS). In honor of Jim's spirit of life, attire for both events will be coastal casual (e.g., wear your favorite fish/fishing shirt).

In lieu of flowers, donations are requested to the newly-established GCFI Jim Franks Memorial Fund at <https://www.gcfi.org/jim-franks-memorial-fund/>.

COMPLIMENTARY POSTING OF OBITUARY by Manes Funeral Home, Newport, TN

Upcoming Events

Memorial service

MAY 8. 4:00 PM.

St. John's Episcopal Church