



THE PELICAN POST

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Protecting the Edges for 25 Years



Gulf Fritillary

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The Weeks Bay Foundation is a non-profit organization whose members work to protect the natural resources of coastal Alabama and to provide assistance and support for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's goals and programs.

Layout & Design by Kathy Hicks

Cover: Gulf Fritillary. Photo by Ben Raines

The future of Mobile Bay will be decided in the next few years



It will come down to whether we permanently protect the last, large and undeveloped chunks of marsh and maritime forest left on the Alabama coast, or we lose them to development. Here at the Foundation, we see our mission as “protecting the edges” of our natural places, and the marshes are the ultimate edges.

Straddling the divide between wet and dry, marshes like those fringing Weeks Bay are biological powerhouses. They are the places that grow the seafood we eat, from shrimp to crabs to fish. They hold the shoreline together against the perpetual washing of the waves. They filter and absorb excess nutrients. They are the most important piece of the coastal ecosystem. About 40 percent of our salty shorelines in Alabama are marsh, a remarkably high percentage. But that number is much lower than it once was. Our marshes are slowly being whittled away by development, both industrial and residential. In the place of those lost marshes are seawalls and heaps of rock rip rap, which are biological deserts by comparison.

Scientists say Mobile Bay and our portion of the Mississippi Sound still have enough marshland to perform the vital job of growing fish and shrimp. That’s important, because in an estuary system like ours we must grow our own when it comes to creatures such as shrimp and speckled trout. For instance, all of the shrimp caught each year in Mobile Bay grew up in our marshes. Without those marshes, we simply wouldn’t have any shrimp to harvest.

But we are also at a critical juncture, approaching a tipping point when the loss of any more marsh means the natural bounty that surrounds us will begin to diminish. To protect what we have, and ensure the productivity of our native waters, we must protect our marshes. In an era when sea levels are rising measurably every year, protecting our marshes means protecting the maritime forests that lie behind them on slightly higher ground. The marshes will need that higher ground to retreat to as the seas come up.



Marsh overview

In Alabama, an increase in sea level of even six inches would be enough to wipe out all of our marshland. Current predictions estimate the world’s oceans will rise between two and six feet in the next 100 years. It doesn’t matter if you believe man caused the Earth to warm by burning fossil fuels, or if you think climate change is a natural cyclical phenomenon. Either way, scientists around the globe agree sea level is increasing because proving it is as easy as looking at a ruler.

So, we are faced with the destruction of all of our marshes, likely within many of our lifetimes. But the solution is simple and attainable. We simply have to protect the existing marshes and the forests that lie behind them. If we do that, we guarantee the productivity of Mobile Bay for generations to come. Protecting those areas is not



hard. It will just take money, and the willingness of our state's leadership to recognize both how important our marshes are, and how real the threat of rising sea level is. In Mississippi, state officials understand the problem. Describing protection of the maritime forests and marshes as a top priority, Mississippi officials wrote, "These actions are needed to maintain native habitats and to provide appropriate transition zones for inland migration of coastal marshes in the face of sea level rise." Alabama needs to come to the same conclusion.

And that's where the BP money comes in. We will never have this opportunity again. Alabama is broke. Too broke to ever protect these places on its own. But we have this once in a lifetime windfall coming, thanks to the BP oil spill. Using just a fraction of that money will mean we protect the marsh we need to keep our coastal ecosystem thriving. It won't take much of the roughly \$1.5 billion Alabama is expected to receive at the minimum. If we pledge about a nickel out of every dollar of BP money, we'd have more than enough to protect our marshes. That's it. Just a nickel for the marshes.



Eroding Mobile Bay shoreline in Bon Secour

Surely those marshes, which are the engine that powers our multi-billion dollar coastal economy are worth that much.

See you on the water,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Nation".

Sweetbay Magnolia

by Fred Nation



Photo by Fred Nation

Sweetbay Magnolia, *Magnolia virginiana*, is a slow-growing, medium-to-large tree that is found on the wet, acid soils of coastal swamps and other wetlands of the southeastern coastal plain. At Weeks Bay Reserve large specimens are frequently seen in the blackwater swamps and other wetlands along Fish and Magnolia Rivers. The evergreen, elliptic leaves are about 4 inches long, chalky white, often with a pale bluish cast below. This distinctive feature makes them easy to identify even from a distance, on roadsides and from boats.

The handsome flowers of sweetbay are creamy white, fragrant, 4 inches across, and bloom in mid to late spring. The fruits are oblong, scaly "cones," about 3 inches long, which develop red, fleshy seeds in the fall. The seeds are important forage for many birds, including mockingbirds, robins, wood thrushes and vireos. Squirrels, voles, and mice feast on magnolia seeds to prepare for the lean days of winter. Birds and small mammals are valuable to the magnolias and other trees as they transport and deposit the seeds for colonization of new areas, away from the parent plants.

Sweetbays are sometimes seen for sale in nurseries, garden centers, and at local plant sales. Though considered wetland species, they are highly adaptable to the drier conditions in home and commercial landscapes. These interesting trees can be seen up-close on the boardwalk behind the Reserve's Otilie Halstead Visitor Center. One of these, 10 feet in circumference, 88 feet tall, was designated by the Alabama Forestry Commission from 2008 through 2010 as "the largest Sweetbay Magnolia, *Magnolia virginiana* known to exist in Alabama." Look for the Alabama State Champion tree sign on the boardwalk!



Swimming with the Fishes, Then and Now

by Rick Wallace, Foundation President



Emerging from the hatch of the 17 foot steel cylinder some 60 feet below the warm waters of St. Croix, I was struck once again by the beauty of the clear Caribbean water filled with colorful fish of every size and shape. After donning double air tanks, my dive partner and I embarked on another four hour excursion along the coral studded ridges of Salt River Canyon looking for fish infected with external parasites. It was just another day of a seven-day mission in the underwater habitat called Hydrolab.



The logistics, physics and physiology of living underwater for a week are either fascinating or dreadfully boring. In a nutshell, working from an underwater habitat allows scientists to accomplish in six or seven days what might take months using conventional methods. We regularly spent seven or more hours in the water at 60 to 90 feet every day. Divers working from the surface might get in two hours of dive time per day at these depths.



More than 30 years have passed since my first Hydrolab mission (I did three in the 1980s) but the memories of healthy coral formations and spectacular fish remain clear in my mind. Unfortunately, my Hydrolab colleagues who lived and worked in the Caribbean for over 40 years tell me of dying coral reefs and other habitats that have changed for the worse. It seems impossible that such relatively remote areas protected by vast quantities of ocean water could be so rapidly degraded. But warming ocean water, coral bleaching, polluted storm water runoff, and other environmental insults have taken their toll.



What does all this have to do with Weeks Bay and coastal Alabama? In the clear waters of the Caribbean the changes in coral reefs and fish populations are easily seen. In our productive estuarine waters it is more difficult to directly observe the fish and shellfish but we can easily see the life-giving edges – where marsh grasses, bald cypress, and fallen sweetbay meet the open water. This is the habitat that provides shelter and nourishment to the young of our most treasured fish and shellfish. This is the habitat that protects water quality and provides homes for a variety of terrestrial wildlife, including numerous species of birds.

Whether it's an oil spill degrading miles of marsh edge or the destruction of the marsh on a single waterfront lot, it all adds up. The one sure way to conserve the edges we have left is to protect them permanently through conservation easements or acquisition from donors and willing sellers. That's what we do at the Weeks Bay Foundation.



Coastal Wetland Restoration and Climate Change Research in Weeks Bay

by Eric Sparks, Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University
and Coastal Ecology Specialist at Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant

Over the last two and a half years, researchers from the Weeks Bay Foundation, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR), Dauphin Island Sea Lab, University of Alabama, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Mississippi State University, and Northern Michigan University have been working on a research project within the WBNERR. The grant for this research was funded by the National Estuarine Research Reserve Science Collaborative Program and is focused on determining the most cost-effective and sustainable designs for coastal wetland restoration projects. Additionally, the effect of sea level rise on the health and services provided by the restored wetland designs was also evaluated.

For this project, three wetlands were constructed off of the “Happy Harbor” canals north of the Fish River Bridge. In each of these wetlands, five different planting designs were used and compared with each other for plant health and wetland function. The planting designs differed in their initial planting density and included densities of 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100%. It is important to compare these planting densities to determine which one gives you the most “bang for your buck”. This type of research can then be used by environmental managers to design cost-effective restoration projects.

The effect of sea level on the health and functionality of these restored plants was also evaluated by raising the sea level in a subset of the restored wetlands. The devices used to increase sea level can be seen in the pictures to the right and consist of three white walls. In the bottom right picture (August 2014), you can notice the water level inside of the white walls is higher than outside of the walls. Since there is documented evidence of sea levels rising in the Gulf of Mexico, this type of research is important for setting realistic expectations and possibly modifying the design of future restoration projects.

Preliminary findings indicate that the 50% planting density is the most cost-effective planting density and sea level rise had a marginal impact on the functionality of the wetland plants. We used nutrient removal as a proxy for wetland functionality since it is arguably the most monetarily valuable service provided by wetlands and found that the 50% planting density removed similar levels of nutrients to the 75% and 100% planting densities and more than the 0 and 25% planting densities. These same patterns of nutrient removal across planting densities were evident at both the current sea level and elevated sea level; however, the magnitude of nutrients removed from these wetlands slightly decreased with higher sea levels.

The research team is currently analyzing their final samples and will compile these results into reports that will be submitted for publication in scientific journals. Applied research projects, like this one, are integral to pinpointing effective restoration designs that can be used to maximize the environmental benefits to our coast and ensure that we get the most “bang for the buck” out of the forthcoming restoration projects along the Gulf Coast.





What looked like it was going to be the wettest Bald Eagle Bash ever ended up as one of the best, with great music, a great crowd and more than enough to eat.

After last year's record crowd, the Weeks Bay Foundation decided to purchase about 1,000 pounds of shrimp this year, just to make sure we had enough no matter how many people showed up. Each restaurant was given more shrimp than ever before, and, with the help of Alabama Gulf Seafood, we also set up a low country shrimp boil and a crawfish station. We knew we would be ready for a big crowd.

Then came the rain. After a soggy week heading into the Bash, and a wet forecast for the day of the event, we were excited to see 700 hearty souls willing to risk a little rain come Saturday afternoon. With the entire event set up under tents and beneath the Tonsmeire Resource Center, we were set up to stay dry. But like magic, it never rained a drop until the last guests were headed home.

For the folks who came, the Bash was a shrimp feast on an epic scale. When it was all said and done, we had about a pound and a half of shrimp per person. Most people ate until they were full. At the end of the night, we still had a few pounds of shrimp left over at the low country boil stand. First time Bash participant Master Joe's cooked an incredible Thai-style shrimp curry. Big Daddy's Grill fried dozens and dozens of pounds of shrimp, while The Wash House Restaurant brought 20 gallons of an incredible shrimp bisque. Panini Pete's new Sunset Pointe served up Shrimp Isabella. There were lines for Sweet Olive at the Windmill Market's New York shrimp salad, and Blue Marlin Restaurant's seafood stuffed mashed potatoes. Locals brought an outstanding shrimp and grits with Conecuh sausage, and The Bluegill Restaurant stuffed everyone on jambalaya. Cobalt the Restaurant had a spicy firecracker fried shrimp that was a perfect complement to the cool lime and miso shrimp concoction from Dragonfly Foodbar. Camellia Café once again served up grilled shrimp with a delicious tangy sauce. Pinzone's Italian Downtown came through with a delicious shrimp and tomato dish.

As the night wound down, with The Modern Eldorados playing to a crowd of dancers as the sun set, we agreed that it might not have been the biggest crowd we've ever had, but it was definitely the best Party for Preservation we've ever thrown. We can't wait until next year. See you there!



Thanks to all of our sponsors, restaurants, & volunteers!



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Alabama's Marshes - Too Good To Lose

by Ben Raines, Foundation Executive Director

What follows is a list of the critical properties that we must secure if Mobile Bay is to have a future as a productive estuary 50 years from now. These are by no means the only valuable properties that deserve protection. And this list does not include property north of I-10, meaning the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and its wetlands are not included. But, this list includes some of the last major chunks of bay and sound shorelines that persist in their natural condition. Each measures in the hundreds or thousands of acres, meaning they are large enough to provide a stable and functioning ecosystem for marine and terrestrial creatures regardless of what happens to other parcels scattered along our coast.

Moreover, losing these areas to development will radically change the character of our waterways. Not only will we lose the vital function of the marsh shorelines, we will also lose the chance to see our native shores as they were before our modern civilization began changing them. We will lose the possibility of having a “wild” experience, for these are the last of our wild places.

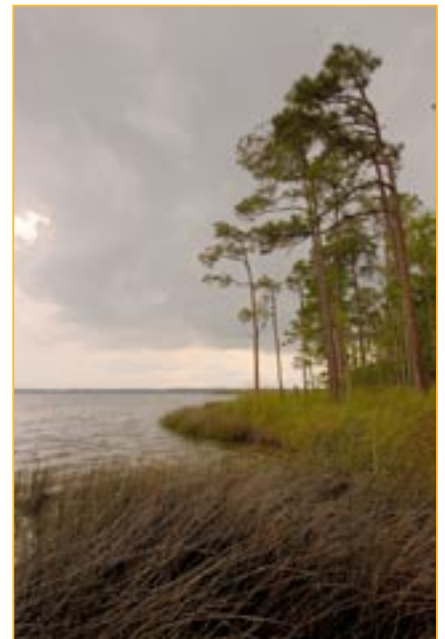


Mouth of Fowl River

Fowl River Corridor and Mouths – This might be the preeminent remaining prize in all our waters, a coastal river with two mouths, miles apart, each supporting vibrant marshes. Entering Fowl River at its mouth on Mobile Bay and traveling south to its other mouth on the Mississippi Sound, you pass through a corridor of marsh unrivaled in Alabama for sheer acreage and species abundance. Home to bald eagles, osprey, yellow-crowned night herons and precious few people, the marshes here are a biological powerhouse. Where Fowl River meets the Mississippi Sound you find an expanse of marsh that stretches as far as your eyes can see in all directions.

Behind this broad fringe of marshland sits a giant forest of slash pines, much of which hasn't been logged in so long that the trees are dying of old age. Only a tiny portion of this land has been protected. The rest is owned by a handful of property owners. If there were one chunk of marsh to save in Alabama, it would probably be this one. It is the engine that feeds the exceptionally productive waters of Portersville Bay, Heron Bay and much of Mobile Bay.

Weeks Bay Unit – While thousands of acres have been protected within the Weeks Bay watershed, several large tracts of undeveloped marsh shoreline still exist along Weeks Bay itself. These include huge parcels of marsh growing under a canopy of slash pine. Weeks Bay forms a bowl, with two rivers flowing in. The gently sloping forest floor is purpose made for retreating marsh to colonize. Once sea levels rise about two feet, Weeks Bay will become one with Mobile Bay. These marshes together represent one of the largest chunks of marsh anywhere in the system, and one of the most threatened by development. The area is pressured from all sides by the rapid expansion of subdivisions between Fairhope and Foley. A tour of the marshes today reveals an exceptionally rich habitat. In an area about 30 feet long, you can find multiple species of cordgrass, black needlerush, switch cane, three-square bulrush, sawgrass (like in the Everglades), millet, wild rice and swamp mallow hibiscus.



Weeks Bay Marsh



Oyster Bay and the mouth of the Bon Secour River – Much of the shoreline on Mobile Bay’s eastern shore between the mouth of Weeks Bay and the mouth of the Bon Secour is already protected thanks to the Alabama Department of Conservation, the Weeks Bay Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy. But, about a mile of marshy shores remain unprotected. The shoreline here is one of the most interesting in the area due to the close proximity of marsh and sandy beaches along Mobile Bay and a freshwater swamp that begins just a few feet inland. A forest fire in 2014 laid bare this thin divide, with a small berm of sand, perhaps 18 inches high and 10 feet wide providing the only separation between the salt loving species and the fresh. You

can find wild iris the color of ice flowering within 30 feet of armies of fiddler crabs patrolling the bay beach. With a quickly eroding shoreline, this berm is likely to disappear, hastening the demise of the freshwater swamp and its transformation to marshland. This appears to be one of the areas most likely to benefit from a living shoreline project. Meanwhile, about half of the marshy shores of Oyster Bay are in private hands, along with sizeable marsh acreage just inside the mouth of the Bon Secour River. These marshes, taken together with Weeks Bay, are the engine that grows shrimp, fish and crabs on Mobile Bay’s eastern edge.



Bon Secour between the freshwater and saltwater

Wolf Bay – The marshes in the upper portion of Wolf Bay are about all that’s left in a semi-natural state in this area that fingers off of densely developed Perdido Bay. Controlled by just a few landowners, the properties are surrounded by development on all sides. Uplands full of pitcher plant bogs growing beneath a canopy of mostly slash pines fall gently down to the water’s edge where broad marshes of needlerush and spartina alternate with white sand beaches. In some places, you can find pitcher plants within sight of the salty marshes. You’ll also see orchids, asters, shoestring lilies and amaranth. There is enough forest surrounding these marsh parcels to provide plenty of high ground as the seas come up, and enough beauty to create one of the most spectacular nature preserves in the state. Imagine gliding over crystal clear waters and grass beds in a boat, beaching in the sand, crossing the marsh and emerging in a meadow of big pink orchids growing under a shady pine canopy. That’s what this area offers.

Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island – The remains of an ancient river delta form a big fan of marsh on the backside of the Fort Morgan peninsula. Known as Three Rivers, the area includes thousands of marshy acres, and represents the largest and last chunk of marsh in south Mobile Bay. The fishing in the fan is dynamite, with speckled trout and redfish gorging on crabs and minnows. While much of the fan is already protected, two parcels totaling close to 1,000 acres of high quality marsh and bayous, remain on the market. As Gulf Shores and high rise condominiums creep down the peninsula, this marsh becomes ever more valuable, both financially, and ecologically, for it sits at the heart of the bird migration path. It is possible to sit in this marsh on a spring day and watch catbirds and painted buntings, kestrels and kites, dash by one after another on their way to the dense maritime forests just to the north at the mouth of the Bon Secour River.

And then there is the uninhabited portion of Dauphin Island. Stretching more than 11 miles long, this wild spit of sand is covered in creeping vines of morning glories, swales of saltwort and groundsel, and interior marshes home to all manner of shorebirds and ducks. It is Alabama’s only barrier island, and it remains one of the most remote and wild spots in the state. It seems a crime that it is privately owned instead of assuming its place as the crown jewel of Forever Wild’s holdings. With 11 miles of Gulf front beaches, it will command a hefty price, but one trip from one end to another will convince even the biggest skeptic that it should belong to the people of Alabama.



Five Years Later

By Jeff Dute, *Outdoors Editor, AL.com and the Press-Register*

Five years after the BP oil spill, there are many things we still don't know about how the oil affected species that fishermen target and, perhaps more importantly, the things on which those fish feed.



Oil in the waves at Fort Morgan during the BP oil spill.
Photo by Kathy Hicks

Effects on brown shrimp, menhaden, blue crabs, bay anchovies, mullet, red snapper, flounder, croaker and many creatures may not be known for years. We will have a better idea when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service completes its National Resource Damage Assessment process and the results are made public.

Commercial landings and anecdotal evidence suggest that after a year or two of decline post-oil spill, species such as white shrimp, brown shrimp, blue crab and flounder are rebounding to pre-spill levels.

Even those declines can only be ambiguously tied to the spill since freshwater influx across the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and Mobile Bay estuary has been heavy each spring since the

spill. Such flooding events have always affected the estuarine species and the numbers that migrate into coastal systems. Scientists warn that problems tied to the spill may still be lurking.

A major hurricane, for instance, could churn the Gulf to such a point that waves scrape the bottom and uncover remnant tar mats. Such hurricanes are not uncommon here, so it will be with focused interest that many will watch what happens when – not if – the next big one comes. Even small amounts of oil washing up will be bad for coastal economies, which have proven to be so reliant on the draw of the Gulf's natural resources and its inherent beauty.

If nothing else, the *Deepwater Horizon* tragedy opened a lot of eyes to the true aesthetic, commercial and recreational value of our coastal waters and marshes, everything that lives in them and every grain of sugar-white sand on the Gulf's beaches. Never again should they be taken for granted. Greater protection, preservation and conservation efforts should be and will be made at all levels of government.

Fully supporting the Weeks Bay Foundation "Nickel for the Marshes" campaign is a great way to ensure that no less than 5 cents of every dollar received from BP goes to buying critical habitats wherever they exist and wherever there is a willing seller.

The threat to our waters and lands made starkly apparent by the oil spill instilled in people all across the Gulf Coast a greater sense of ownership of where they live. Many of us, including myself, homesteaded here primarily for those reasons. Not only do we enjoy the bounty found in the water and on the land, we understand the importance of defending and fighting for their preservation.

Every day I make it a point to take just a moment to look around and think about what we have here. I remember with stark clarity how close we came to losing it that summer of 2010. Such a loss would simply be too much for those of us here on the coast.

I hope you'll join me in renewing the commitment to protect our precious natural resources large and small, and promise never to forget that our unique way of life is based on the natural world that surrounds us.



A Great Blue Heron stained with oil at Perdido Pass in Orange Beach. Photo by Kathy Hicks



2015 Alabama Coastal BirdFest Expands Focus on Our Natural Environment

by Fran Morley, BirdFest Nestkeeper

Changes are in store for the 2015 Alabama Coastal BirdFest, October 1–3. This year’s event—now being called “a birding and nature festival”—is expanding, with the addition of trips to new locations, more “adventure-oriented” canoe and kayak trips, and in general, trips based on more than just birds. “Of course birds will always be our focus as we are in a prime spot for migration, but we are excited to be planning trips that will let visitors see alligators, dolphins, wildflowers, and butterflies, and to explore some new areas,” said **John Borom**, BirdFest founder.

“We think this will help introduce more people to the idea of birdwatching. Once someone goes out on one of our trips—even if they are just going to see alligators or to paddle in a kayak, they’ll see how much fun it is to also notice and learn about birds. We have outstanding volunteer guides who lead our trips and we also work with others, such as 5 Rivers Delta Safaris and the new outfitter in Fairhope, 17 Turtles Outfitters, who have their own leaders who know a lot about our natural environment—birds and all. We’re hopeful that these new trips will appeal to people who want to see more of what is out there. In the process, they’ll learn about the birds and other creatures that share our home with us.”



The poster photographer for 2015 Alabama Coastal BirdFest is also a popular guide. Patsy Russo (center of photo in dark blue jacket) is shown here with a group of birders on one of last year’s birding trips



This year’s Friday night speaker for Alabama Coastal BirdFest should be familiar to birders. **Dr. Frank Moore** is a Distinguished Professor with the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg and heads up the Migratory Bird Research Group, which has studied migration along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico for more than twenty-five years. For BirdFest, he will focus on the behavior of migratory birds as they negotiate the Gulf of Mexico, including the application of technology designed to study the movement of migrants across the Gulf of Mexico.



On his website, Moore calls bird migration “one of the most fascinating of all behavior” and notes that although many land bird migrants are capable of flying great distances, “few actually engage in nonstop flights between points of origin and destination, rather they stopover periodically between migratory flights.” This stopover for birds heading across the Gulf of Mexico is what makes the Alabama Gulf Coast a prime spot for birding during migration.

This year’s poster photographer, **Patsy Russo** is an avid local photographer whose outstanding photos are often seen on the BirdFest Facebook page. Her work will be featured in the presentation, “Nature Through Our Lenses,” a slide show of the best of local bird and wildlife photos. The presentation is part of

Photos by Patsy Russo

BirdFest’s Wednesday night Opening Reception and has become a popular introduction to BirdFest over the past few years.

The schedule for this year’s BirdFest will be available by mid-July and registration will open in early August. Watch for more information on our website at www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com and ‘Like’ Alabama Coastal BirdFest on Facebook for up-to-the-minute news and information.



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BALD EAGLE BASH

Restaurants

Big Daddy's Grill
Blue Marlin Restaurant
Camellia Cafe
Cobalt the Restaurant
Dragonfly Foodbar
Locals
Master Joe's
Panini Pete's
Pinzone's Italian Downtown
Sunset Pointe
Sweet Olive at the Windmill Market
The Bluegill Restaurant
The Wash House Restaurant

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Become a part of the Weeks Bay Foundation!

Giving Levels

Legacy Circle	\$5,000 and up
Sustainer	.....	\$1,000 - \$4,999
Steward	.....	\$ 500 - \$999
Supporter	.....	\$ 250 - \$499
Friend	.....	\$ 100 - \$249
Member	.....	\$ 35 - \$99

**Join us by returning the enclosed
envelope or look for the link on
our home page at
www.weeksbay.org.**

**Donate to the Foundation through the Combined
Federal Campaign, Code 37621**



The 3rd annual Weeks Bay Foundation Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak race will be held on August 1, 2015



Last year, we had about 100 paddlers turn out for a spin around a 3.5 mile course in Weeks Bay that travels past an active bald eagle nest and some of the most pristine marsh left in coastal Alabama. We gave out 27 medals in nine categories, including first, second and third place for stand up paddleboards, non-traditional crafts, canoes, men's and women's kayak, and junior divisions, as well as a 7 mile pro division.

We will also include a more leisurely guided nature paddle around Weeks Bay this year, after last year's nature paddle proved exceptionally popular. The crew from 17 Turtles Outfitters will be on hand to serve as expert guides.

Thanks to the generous support of the Fairhope Boat Company, we are able to provide kayaks to racers who don't own boats. Those are available on a first come, first served basis, and must be reserved ahead of time (meaning before the day of the race!).

We've also decided to bring back our popular Pelican Paddle T-shirt, which we gave out to everyone who participated the first year, but not last year. With so many requests for the shirt, it seemed silly not to give the public what they want!

The race proceeds go toward our mission of Protecting the Edges of Alabama's coastal waters. That includes our maritime forests, marshes, and the wetlands along the rivers and creeks of Mobile and Baldwin counties.

Watch our website and Facebook page for more details.



Protecting Shorebirds



The Weeks Bay Foundation joins the Mobile Bay and Birmingham Audubon Societies in asking the public to give our waterbirds a break this summer. Numerous species, from oystercatchers to pelicans, herons and egrets nest in the summer.

Some of the birds, including terns and gulls, nest right on the sand near the edge of the water. With more folks on the water than ever before, everyone needs to help protect these vulnerable birds as they try to raise their young.

Boaters or beachgoers that approach nesting birds too closely may unintentionally cause the death of chicks and eggs. When parents are flushed from their nests, chicks and eggs are left vulnerable to opportunistic predators, overheating by the summer sun, being crushed underfoot (in the case of beach nesters), or falling and drowning in water beneath the nest (in the case of tree nesters). A single disturbance can destroy an entire colony.

“Even unintended disturbance can be deadly for fragile waterbirds,” said **Melanie Driscoll**, Audubon's bird conservation director for Gulf Coast Conservation and the Mississippi Flyway, adding, “We share the beach with birds.”

Citizens interested in learning about volunteer bird stewarding opportunities in Alabama are encouraged to email andycoleman@birninghamaudubon.org for more information.



TIPS FOR PROTECTING SHOREBIRDS:

- Respect posted areas, even if you don't see birds inside them. Birds, eggs and nests are well camouflaged within the beach environment, and a single disturbance can cause the abandonment of an entire colony.
- Give colony islands a wide berth, and when fishing, be sure not to leave any equipment behind.
- Avoid disturbing groups of birds. If birds take flight or appear agitated, you are too close.
- Refrain from walking dogs or allowing cats to roam freely on beaches during the nesting season.
- Don't let pets off boats onto posted islands or beaches.
- If you must walk your dog on beaches, always keep them on a leash and away from the birds.
- Do not bury or leave trash, picnic leftovers, charcoal or fish scraps on the beach. They attract predators of chicks and eggs, such as fish crows, raccoons, foxes, and laughing gulls.
- Leave the fireworks at home and attend an official display instead. Impromptu fireworks on Gulf Coast beaches and waterways can have catastrophic effects for vulnerable chicks and eggs.

SUMMER 2015 CALENDAR

JUNE

- 1 Snapper Season Opens!**
- 1 Jefferson Davis' Birthday Holiday***
- 10 Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.
- 14 Special Presentation: "Predatory Birds."** Free, for all ages. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- 27 Special Presentation: "Wildlife Photography."** Free, for ages 12 and older, bring a camera. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

JULY

- 3-4 Independence Day Holiday.***
- 4 July 4 Kids' Crafts.** Free for all ages. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- 6-10 Camp Swampy: Session 1, Grades 1-2.** Hands-on activities help children learn about the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. \$100 registration fee covers supplies and pontoon boat tour. For information, call (251) 625-0814. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 9:00 a.m. to noon.
- 7 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 6:30 p.m.
- 20-24 Camp Swampy: Session 2, Grades 3-5.** See description above.

AUGUST

- 1 Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race.** Call (251) 990-5004, or check out the Weeks Bay Foundation's website, www.weeksbay.org, or Facebook page for details.
- 24 Weeks Bay Foundation Annual Membership Meeting.** Open to the public. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 4:30 p.m. For more information, call the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004.

Trips and events for the John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest available for preview online mid-July, with registration opening mid-August. Look for updates at www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com.

** The Visitor Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.*



Weeks Bay Foundation

11401 US Highway 98
Fairhope, Alabama 36532
(251) 990-5004
www.weeksbay.org

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Photo by John Borom

Brown Pelican breeding adult
Pelecanus occidentalis

**" Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
Nothing is going to get better. It's not." - Dr. Seuss**

KIDS FISHING DAY



Sponsored by the Weeks Bay Foundation



Saturday, September 19, 2015

8am to 1pm

FREE!

Weeks Bay Reserve's Safe Harbor Pond
US 98, just west of the Fish River bridge

Join us for a day of **free fishing**
just for kids. The pond is stocked full!

For more information, call 990-5004 or
see us at www.weeksbay.org.

