2015 Weeks Bay Photo Contest
First Place, Habitat
by Harry Surline
Summer on Weeks Bay

Spring is rolling into summer here on the Gulf coast. The humid air is laden with the sweet scent of flowering shrubs and the calls of nesting birds. We are entering that time of the year when the beaches and waterways fill with happy families boating, swimming, and fishing.

We live in an amazing place for these activities. Our rivers and bays are home to an outstanding variety of fish, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. Whether by kayak, canoe, or powerboat, exploring these waterways is a privilege for everyone living in, or visiting, coastal Alabama.

The Weeks Bay Foundation strives to ensure that these areas are protected for future generations through a combination of strategic land acquisition, conservation easements, and education for the public on the importance of these resources. To achieve these objectives, we work hand in hand with the Weeks Bay Reserve, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. We recently had our 7th annual Bald Eagle Bash, featuring local food, local music, and local conservation. As the year marches on, join us for the Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race and Alabama Coastal BirdFest. These events highlight our great waterways and everything that lives and thrives within them.

We hope you will get out into the southern Alabama sunshine this summer, and watch fish flick through the lily pads, herons glide over the marsh, or turtles slowly slide into the water. And, when you feel again how special this place is, we hope you will continue to stand with the Weeks Bay Foundation in working to protect these areas, now and forever.

Weeks Bay Watershed Management Plan

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) is seeking public input on the Weeks Bay Watershed Management Plan. The MBNEP contracted with Thompson Engineering to oversee development of the plan, and identify projects to be considered for funding to improve the quality of the watershed in the face of increased population and business growth in Baldwin County. On March 2, stakeholders met to discuss their thoughts on the plan.

The next step in the process is to obtain broader public input. Please visit www.mobilebaynep.com/news/weeks_bay_community_input_survey to complete a three-minute survey to provide your input on the ideas presented at the workshop – and a chance to add a few thoughts of your own.

For more information on our watersheds, go to www.mobilebaynep.com.
Sweet Gum \textit{(Liquidambar styraciflua)} is a large, handsome, deciduous hardwood tree that is frequently seen throughout the Weeks Bay Reserve. It is a generalist, occurring in most of the natural and populated areas in Baldwin County and throughout Alabama. The range is large, down the Atlantic coast from Connecticut to central Florida; west to eastern Texas, up to Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Isolated populations occur in Mexico and Central America. The largest growth of Sweet Gum is seen in wet, rich alluvial soils, where it can attain a height of 150 feet or more. The Alabama State Champion Sweet Gum, in Marengo County, is 10 feet in circumference and 163 feet tall.

Our new Weeks Bay Foundation T-shirt was designed exclusively for us by local artist \textbf{Melissa Smith}. Melissa’s creation shows Weeks Bay with all its major tributaries, surrounded by the native plants and animals that make this area so special.

Not a T-shirt sort of person? That’s okay! We also have the design as a beautiful full-color 12x16 print. Each print is signed by the artist and would make a great gift for the art lover, Weeks Bay enthusiast, or environmentalist in your life. You can purchase your shirt or print today at the Weeks Bay Reserve Ottilie Halstead Visitors Center, or on the Foundation web site at www.weeksbay.org/shopping_cart.

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Flora of the Weeks Bay Reserve - Sweet Gum  
\textit{by Fred Nation}

\begin{image}[h]
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{sweet_gum_photo}
\caption{Sweet Gum is a valuable eastern forestry tree. The wood is used for crates, pallets, barrels, cabinet frames, pulp, and thin sheets are glued together for plywood. The genus, \textit{Liquidambar}, by the way, denotes the resemblance of the clear, yellow sap to amber, the fossilized sap of ancient trees.}
\end{image}

Sweet Gum is a valuable eastern forestry tree. The wood is used for crates, pallets, barrels, cabinet frames, pulp, and thin sheets are glued together for plywood. The genus, \textit{Liquidambar}, by the way, denotes the resemblance of the clear, yellow sap to amber, the fossilized sap of ancient trees.

Flat, corky wings on most of the twigs are distinctive. The leaves are sharply five-lobed, star-shaped, with a length and width of 4 or 5 inches, and they superficially resemble maples. Each year they are larval hosts to two or three generations of the spectacular Luna Moth. With the shortened days and cool nights of autumn the brilliant red, purple, and yellow fall colors of Sweet Gum leaves are extraordinary.

The most infamous attributes of Sweet Gum are surely those hard spiny, woody seed balls. They are produced by the thousands in the fall and they drop steadily throughout the winter and into spring, creating a painful nuisance on driveways and sidewalks when they are stepped on barefooted! On the other hand, the seeds are foraged by doves, quail, finches, sparrows, and wild turkeys. Mammals, including squirrels and chipmunks, also depend on the seed production. Sweet Gum trees are important members of our habitats at the Weeks Bay Reserve and throughout the South, and they are a joy to encounter in the forest, particularly during the fall.
Carl Floyd is renowned as a modern sculptor focusing on environmental subjects. He is an issue-oriented artist and seeks to focus awareness on the vulnerability of the environment. Carl’s latest work for the Weeks Bay Reserve is a Metal Butterfly, cast in bronze, depicting a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, a fragile specimen coming into a new phase in today’s world. This sculpture, placed at the Reserve’s Ottilie Halstead Visitor Center, celebrates the Reserve’s 30th Anniversary and a new phase of conservation and support for the Weeks Bay estuary.

Carl describes his latest sculpture as “a tribute to the Monarch Butterfly and its struggles in a changing environment. The bottom portion is geometric, representing man-made problems that impact the butterfly, the top portion is organic, symbolizing the challenges of the Monarch trying to survive. It depicts metamorphosis being both beautiful and sad at the same time.” Carl is also a volunteer extraordinaire of the Weeks Bay Volunteers. His projects and support have been greatly appreciated at the Reserve and the Weeks Bay Arboretum. An earlier work for the Reserve is the ‘chiseled in stone’ sign that marks the Weeks Bay Arboretum.

Carl is known mostly for environmentally-appropriate sculptures meant to be used and admired by the general public. His works are architectonic in character and dominate a site as only architecture can. This is not surprising in the case of an artist who was trained in engineering and architecture. Carl has taught at the University of Kentucky and the Cleveland Institute of Art, retiring from that institute in 1998. He has left a trail of large outdoor sculptures, receiving special recognition from the 1989 Cleveland Arts Prize for visual arts. He has lived in Alabama since 2002.

On your next trip to the Weeks Bay Reserve, take time to view this new sculpture. The bronze butterfly is located in a garden of native plants that attract butterflies.

The “What’s in a Name?” Series will return in the Fall issue of The Pelican Post, with “Algae vs. Plankton”
Wet and Wild: Plant Identification Class Braves the Elements  
by Yael Girard, Foundation Stewardship and Outreach Coordinator

On a rainy day in Alabama, most folks scurry from one building to another as fast as they can, never really looking around at all the amazing things that grow right in our back yards. The students of the Weeks Bay Reserve Plant Identification workshop are not that kind of people. Dressed in slickers and rain boots, 15 students followed teachers Fred Nation and Gena Todia through the downpour for three days in the pursuit of botany.

When deciphering the 2,000 species of sedges within the genus Carex it helps to have a good teacher. This class was lucky enough to have two! Fred Nation is a field botanist and freelance writer. He has developed nature trails and field guides throughout Baldwin County. His book, Where the Wild Illicium Grows highlights historic plants of the Gulf and shares amusing stories from his youth working in southern forests. Fred has hosted plant identification courses for the USDA Forest Service and the Cooperative Extension Service. Gena Todia, a wildlife biologist and wetlands specialist, has over 30 years of experience in natural resource management. Through her company, Wetland Resources Environmental Consulting, she specializes in wetland identification and delineation, wetland permitting, natural resource management, and development and presentation of training courses such as this plant identification workshop.

During the course, students had the opportunity to visit several unique habitats including a pitcher plant bog, an emerging dune, a wet mesic forest, and a maritime upland forest. The group spent time at Graham Creek Nature Preserve, Gulf State Park, the Weeks Bay Reserve Pitcher Plant Bog, Blakeley Park, and Village Point Park Preserve. During these site trips, students had the chance to see amazing natives, such as a Spiranthes, which is a genus of spiraling orchids often called lady’s tresses.

As if learning the scientific and common names for dozens of native plants wasn’t enough, the class also covered invasive exotic plants and some restoration techniques. Invasive exotics are plants that have been imported from other regions that have since taken over and are outcompeting our native species. Some of the most common invasive plants in our area include Cogon grass, kudzu, privet, and Japanese climbing fern. These pernicious weeds can often be handled with controlled burning, manual removal, or selective herbicide application.

The participants came from a variety of backgrounds, some working for state agencies, some from environmental consulting firms, and some just interested in the plants of the area. The Weeks Bay Reserve Plant Identification course provided a unique opportunity for everyone. A special thanks to Mike Shelton of the Weeks Bay Reserve for managing all the logistics of the class and handling registration, supplies, and transportation.

Through the Coastal Training Program, the Weeks Bay Reserve offers workshops on everything from Sea Level Rise and Blue Carbon to Low Impact Coastal Development and Erosion Control Methods. Visit www.gulfcoastaltraining.org for more information.
This year, the Weeks Bay Foundation put on the largest Bald Eagle Bash in the seven-year history of the event. With beautiful weather, great food, and excellent music, it is no wonder that nearly 1,200 folks decided to come out to support the Foundation.

On April 23rd, at the confluence of Fish River and Weeks Bay under a bright blue sky, we celebrated THE Party for Preservation on the Alabama Gulf Coast. Thirteen area restaurants came together to provide dishes based around Gulf-caught shrimp. There was everything from classic fried shrimp to shrimp curry to shrimp and grits. Something for every kind of eater! We also had drinks for every age, including beer from Budweiser and Fairhope Brewing and a homemade sangria.

After eating and drinking, it was time to be merry! Luckily, we had a great band to put everyone in a toe-tapping good mood. The Mulligan Brothers is a quartet that formed in Mobile and has since gained popularity throughout the southeast. They recently toured through Ireland and the Netherlands. The group rocked the Bash with a combination of original songs and classic covers that everyone could sing along with.

This celebration of local food, local music, and local conservation is the Foundation’s largest fundraiser of the year. All the proceeds go towards furthering the Weeks Bay Foundation’s mission of protecting the edges. That means protecting the places where our shorelines and riverbanks meet the water. These are sensitive habitats that are home to amazing plants and animals. The Weeks Bay Foundation has been working for 26 years to make sure that these areas stay intact for future generations.

The Bald Eagle Bash would not have been possible without the help of our incredible sponsors, restaurants, and volunteers. This is a community event and it takes the entire community to make sure that it goes well. These businesses and individuals have made the commitment to support the Weeks Bay Foundation and the success of the Bald Eagle Bash is thanks to them!
Thanks to all of our sponsors, restaurants, & volunteers!

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Photos by Sherry Stimpson Frost and Kathy Hicks
Absolutely Alabama, a weekly program hosted by Fred Hunter, highlights the people, places, and things that make the state of Alabama special. Fred recently traveled to Baldwin County to explore the unique habitat at the Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog. The episode will air in July, with footage of his trip to the bog, showing the distinctive plant species found there. See more information about Absolutely Alabama at absolutelyalabama.com.

Fred Hunter was born in Alabama in the historic town of Ft. Payne. He has lived, attended school, raised his family, and worked in the South all his life. A graduate of Fyffe High School, Fred went on to attend college at the University of Alabama. He finished with undergraduate and graduate degrees in Broadcast-Film, Journalism,
and Public Relations. Fred then graduated from the meteorology program at Mississippi State University and became certified by the National Weather Association. Fred is a meteorologist at WBRC, Fox 6 News in Birmingham.

Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog episode schedule:

July 15 at 10:30 p.m., Fox 6 Birmingham
July 16 at 5:30 a.m., WSFA 12 Montgomery
July 17 at 9:30 p.m., WDFX Fox 34 Dothan
July 17 at 10:30 p.m., WAFF 48 Huntsville
July 17 at 11:05 p.m., Fox 6 Birmingham

2016 Alabama Coastal BirdFest
By D. Fran Morley, BirdFest “Nestkeeper”

For the 13th year, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest welcomes birders to witness the fall migration of birds from all over North America. Since 2004, BirdFest has had participants from Canada and across the United States, from as far away as Maine and California, who have come for a chance to see local and migrating birds. This year’s BirdFest is Wednesday through Saturday, October 5–8.

BirdFest, a birding and nature festival, features more than 30 expertly guided tours to spots all around Mobile Bay giving participants a chance to see local and migratory birds as well as other creatures who share our world, such as dolphins, alligators, snakes, frogs, and more. Along with walking and paddling trips and comfortable pontoon boat rides, the festival includes a free Bird & Conservation Expo, workshops, and evening events. This year’s keynote speaker for Friday night’s event at Five Rivers Delta Resource Center in Spanish Fort is Dr. John Dindo, the associate director of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. Dr. Dindo will discuss the range of coastal habitats in our area that support a unique diversity of avian species—from flooded riverine forests to sandy shorelines of the Gulf of Mexico—and how natural and man-made changes affect these habitats and their inhabitants.

Tours, workshops, and evening events require advance registration. The Bird & Conservation Expo, on Saturday at the Halstead Amphitheater on the Faulkner State Community College Campus in downtown Fairhope, is a fun, free, family day with live raptor and snake shows, a birdhouse build, exhibits, vendors, and hands-on activities for all ages. For more information on BirdFest or to register for a paid tour or event, visit www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com. Registration is open from August 15 through September 23.
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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
4th Annual Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race
Register at pelicanpaddle2016.eventbrite.com

Mark your calendars! The 2016 Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race will be held on Saturday, July 23 from 8:00 a.m. to noon. You can get out your fastest craft and compete for bragging rights, or you can join us for a non-competitive, educational Eco-Tour around Weeks Bay. Last year we had nearly 200 participants! Register online at pelicanpaddle2016.eventbrite.com. For a paper registration form, or for more information, stop by the Foundation office or call us at (251) 990-5004. The form is also available at weeksbay.org.

Race categories include:
- Men’s Solo Kayak
- Women’s Solo Kayak
- Junior Solo Kayak (Age 13 and under)
- Tandem Craft (Canoe or Kayak)
- Stand Up Paddle Board
- Non-Traditional (Any type of non-motorized boats not in the other divisions, including foot-pedaled kayaks, excluding sailboats)
- Pro Solo Kayak (A 7.0 mile race, any age and gender)