



For immediate release

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### **Volunteers needed for planting marsh grasses along Bon Secour Bay**

FAIRHOPE, AL – For those willing to get a little wet and muddy, the Weeks Bay Reserve and Weeks Bay Foundation have an opportunity for volunteers to help the environment and be part of an active scientific research project.

On March 11 at 9 a.m., volunteers will gather at Big Mouth/Pelican Point and board the Weeks Bay Explorer pontoon boat to travel to the Swift Tract on Bon Secour Bay. The 30-minute boat ride will take volunteers and WBF and WBR staff to the planting site where they will install hundreds of smooth cordgrasses (*Spartina alterniflora*) along the shoreline.

Eric Brunden, stewardship coordinator for the Weeks Bay Reserve, said the work is needed because erosion has caused loss of native coastal habitat at the tract over the years. In 2012 The Nature Conservancy established a one-third mile breakwater just offshore to help mitigate-erosion forces and protect the state-owned 615-acre wetland dominated Swift Tract that runs along the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. For further wave protection and erosion control, an additional 1.8 miles of breakwater is being constructed using funds from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment, Eric added.

“The creation of a protective breakwater provides the unique opportunity to jump start the recovery of emergent grasses along the shoreline, while simultaneously testing various planting designs,” Yael Girard, executive director of the Weeks Bay Foundation, said. “The public’s help with this planting, in conjunction with ongoing research efforts, will provide invaluable information to future restoration practitioners regarding the effectiveness of restoration methods.”

Eric Sparks, Ph.D., and Just Cebrian, Ph.D., of Mississippi State University, have been testing marsh restoration design approaches on Weeks Bay Reserve property for a number of years,

Girard noted. Currently Dr. Sparks is testing designs on the Swift Tract for a project titled “Maximizing the Effectiveness and Sustainability of Coastal Restoration.”

The Weeks Bay Volunteers will provide lunch, and the volunteers and staff will return to the boat ramp at 2 p.m. All volunteers must be willing to stay at the site for the duration due to the site’s remote location. Also, volunteers must register ahead of time, as space on the boat is limited. To register online, visit [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com) and search for Swift Tract Planting. For more information, call Eric Brunden at 251-928-9792 or email [eric.brunden@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:eric.brunden@dcnr.alabama.gov)

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*Formed in 1990, 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.*