



**For immediate release**

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### **Weeks Bay Foundation launches new greenspace projects in Mobile and Baldwin counties**

FAIRHOPE, AL -- After 28 years of preserving coastal habitat and educating the community about these important natural resources, the Weeks Bay Foundation is proud to launch its first public greenspace and recreation area project, thanks to a \$260,000 grant from the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, a \$20,000 grant from the Daniel Foundation, and a \$7,500 sponsorship from Baldwin County Sewer Service.

"The Foundation believes in the importance of greenspace to our health and happiness," Yael Girard, Weeks Bay Foundation executive director said. "We also believe people will better protect things they understand, and they will better understand something they experience firsthand. This project will give folks on both sides of Mobile Bay new access to nature."

Rio Vista is a 25-acre tract on Fish River in Baldwin County, on a section of river popular for kayaking, swimming, and fishing.

"This is a perfect spot for recreation and education," Girard said. "This property will become a paddle-accessible preserve focusing on watershed health. A 'watershed' is more than just the rivers and bays. It is also the land surrounding those waterways. What we do on that land directly influences the health and resilience of our communities."

Alternatively, the 70-acre Rangeline property is on a main road between Mobile and Dauphin Island. This area is a hub of industry and shipping, but has few opportunities for community access to nature.

"Rangeline was once slated to be a subdivision (prior to the Foundation acquiring the property), but that idea was eventually abandoned," Girard explained. "Through this restoration plan, we will clear brush, plant trees, and construct walking trails. This property will become a valuable public wilderness space for an underserved part of the community."

Coastal Alabama is growing rapidly. Baldwin County's population is projected to grow more than 60 percent by 2040. "This growth will have significant impacts on the surrounding wetlands, rivers, and bays," Girard said. "It is important that residents and community leaders understand the value of our coastal resources in order to make good choices as our area changes."

The Association of American Colleges and Universities reports that people gain a deeper comprehension of issues when they are able to experience a resource firsthand. By getting residents out into these

critical habitats, for both restoration activities and leisure recreation, it will improve their connection to these places and their likelihood of becoming good stewards of the land and water.

In addition, the demand for recreational activities, especially walking and hiking, are higher than ever. The 2013 Alabama Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) states that 91 percent of Alabamians see outdoor recreation as important or very important. Furthermore, "Walking for Pleasure" was the number one activity of interest for participants in the SCORP survey.

The creation of these preserves will introduce community members to two new, unique locations for recreation, with a combined 2.5 miles of trail. Outreach will include volunteer participation in the restoration activities, such as invasive plant removal, tree planting, and trail construction. In addition, the Foundation will install educational signage for each preserve. This signage will teach visitors about watershed health, coastal biodiversity, endangered species, and how land use affects water quality.

Activities on these properties have begun, and projections are for the preserves to be open to the public by the winter of 2020.

If you, or your company, would like to be part of this process, through sponsorship or volunteerism, please contact Yael Girard at [yael@weeksbay.org](mailto:yael@weeksbay.org).