

THE PELICAN POST

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Weeks Bay Photo Contest
Best of Show by Debi Parnell

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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.

Cover photo by Debi Parnell,
Week Bay Photo Contest
Best of Show

Layout & Design by
Kathy Hicks

From the Executive Director . . .

Moving into the holiday season and the end of the year, I often find that gratitude rises to the top of my thoughts. As I look back at 2017, I am amazed at the communities surrounding and supporting the Weeks Bay Foundation and the Weeks Bay Reserve.

From the volunteers who came out to help bait hooks for the children who attended **Kids Fishing Day**, to the photographers who captured breathtaking glimpses of our coast during the annual **Weeks Bay Photo Contest**, to the neighbors and businesses that offered shelter, food, and money to our friends in Florida, Texas, and Puerto Rico during this **disastrous hurricane season**, we have experienced firsthand what happens when neighbors come together.

We are better for the incredible effort put forth by our Gulf Coast community. With your support, we have installed over 3,000 marsh plants this year, opened a safe fishing space to 255 kids, helped protect over 350 acres of critical habitat, and weathered storms of all shapes and sizes.

Now through our Annual Fall Appeal, we are asking you to consider giving us an additional contribution to keep the momentum going. With this investment, we promise to continue protecting your coastal waterways, wildlife habitat, and the way of life that makes this place so special.

Thank you for your support and have a peaceful holiday season.



A Gift from Weeks Bay!

Our 2017 Weeks Bay Ornament features the endangered Alabama Red-bellied Turtle, our state reptile, basking on a log by the river's edge. This lovely keepsake is a reminder of the importance of our coastal rivers and bays and the unique life that depends on these waterways.



Your purchase of the 2017 ornament helps us to further our mission of protecting the important wetland resources in coastal Alabama. You can pick up your ornament today at weeksbay.org or by visiting the Weeks Bay Reserve's Otilie Halstead Visitor Center or Fairhope Pharmacy's Christmas 'Round the Corner.



Annual Fall Appeal Celebrates Resiliency of Beautiful Gulf Coast

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator

The privilege and pleasure of living, working, and recreating on the Alabama Gulf Coast come with a responsibility—a responsibility to protect and preserve the land, the water, and our way of life. This is the mission of the Weeks Bay Foundation, and it is fueled by the generosity of like-minded people.

Each year, the Weeks Bay Foundation introduces a new Christmas ornament that celebrates an aspect of natural life in coastal Alabama. The ornaments are available for purchase throughout the holiday season. The Foundation also gifts the ornaments to supporters who give a minimum of \$250 during the Fall Appeal. Many Foundation members collect them as keepsakes to commemorate their years of support for the Foundation.

This year, the Foundation celebrates the state reptile, the endangered Alabama Red-bellied Turtle.

“The existence of the Alabama Red-bellied Turtle, found only in lower Alabama, is a tribute to the resiliency and productivity of the Gulf Coast ecosystem,” **Skipper Tonsmeire**, founding member of the Weeks Bay Foundation, said. “But that ecosystem does not happen by accident and must be protected.”

Tonsmeire, and others who helped establish the Foundation in 1990, knew then that it would require work, dedication, volunteers—and funds—to sustain the natural resources that provide such an abundance of prime habitat and that attract so many of us to the Gulf Coast. From preserving land to educating citizens, to advocating for continued funding for the Reserve, the Weeks Bay Foundation has become a leader and a resource in Baldwin and Mobile counties, having protected some 7,000 acres of sensitive coastal habitat. Today, as an accredited land trust, the Foundation is working to open up some conserved lands for public recreation, a move that will create numerous opportunities for volunteer activities, environmental education, and community conservation.

“It all begins with our supporters, the people who share our desire and invest in our vision for ensuring that this place is as beautiful for our grandchildren as it is for us today,” Tonsmeire said. We are so fortunate to be able to live here and enjoy this place. We just need to take care of it, and it will be good to us.”

To give during the Annual Fall Appeal, visit weeksbay.org, or call (251) 990-5004.

UNSPOILED WILDLIFE HABITAT.
CLEAN WATER.
OUR WAY OF LIFE.

We have the pleasure of living, working, and recreating on the Alabama Gulf Coast. We also share in the responsibility of ensuring that this special place is here for our children and grandchildren.

2017 WEEKS BAY CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT

The Weeks Bay Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that works to protect the natural resources of coastal Alabama and provide support for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.





Growing Conservationists, One Child at a Time

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator

Thanks to the Mapp Family Foundation, the Weeks Bay Reserve, and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, over 250 children spent a beautiful September day fishing with parents and grandparents, many for their first time.

The Weeks Bay Foundation's annual Kids Fishing Day is a long-standing tradition that allows our youngest citizens to enjoy the outdoors in a special way.

"In addition to spending a beautiful fall day outdoors, fishing in the Weeks Bay Reserve's stocked pond, those in attendance no doubt leave with a deeper love and appreciation for our amazing environment," **Yael Girard**, Weeks Bay Foundation executive director said. "Getting people out in nature has been shown to be the most effective way to make conservation connections. Starting them young is even better!"

The joy on a child's face, reeling in their first fish, makes one hope and believe we've created a conservationist for life.

Gulf Coast Brings Home PALS Awards

Individuals and businesses from across the state were recognized recently during the 2017 Alabama PALS (Partners Against A Littered State) Governor's Awards. As **Governor Kay Ivey** stated, these are the people who have actively contributed to keeping Alabama beautiful.

Don Bates and Thompson Engineering were awarded the "Coastal Cleanup Award" for their tremendous efforts introducing and facilitating the rigid plastics recycling program during the 2017 Alabama Coastal Cleanup. Also, related to this new recycling effort, **Yael Girard**, executive director of the Weeks Bay Foundation, received the "Vulcan Volunteer of the Year Award" for the time and effort she put in to coordinating all of the Coastal Cleanup recycling activities. Under this new initiative, volunteers collected 2,000 pounds of rigid plastics that will be made into shampoo and conditioner bottles.



Chris Blankenship, commissioner, ADCNR; **Yael Girard**, executive director, Weeks Bay Foundation; **Don Bates**, vice president of operations, Thompson Engineering; **Angela Underwood**, education coordinator, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; and **Patti Powell**, state lands division director, ADCNR.



Alabama Coastal BirdFest

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator

Sponsors:



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Alabama



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Town of Dauphin Island

Weeks Bay Foundation

Weeks Bay National
Estuarine Research Reserve

From the majestic Mobile-Tensaw Delta to the Forever Wild Grand Bay Savanna to the peaceful inlets of the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, the setting for the John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest could not have been more perfect. Even the threat of a hurricane that canceled the final day of this 14th annual eco-tourism event didn't dampen the spirits of the hundreds of birders from across the United States and Canada who enjoyed prime bird- and wildlife-watching during fall migration.

In addition to the boat and walking trips to prime spots that are recognized for amazing biological diversity (more than 370 bird species have been counted at various locations along the Alabama coast), BirdFest also included trips focused on seeing alligators, dolphins, wildflowers, and more. In all, there were 36 expertly guided trips—including several new trips, two evening speaker events, and workshops. The Bird & Conservation Expo was unfortunately canceled due to the hurricane.

Thanks to generous sponsors, Alabama Coastal BirdFest has raised more than \$100,000 since 2004 to help preserve and protect vital coastal wildlife habitat and raise awareness about the great biological diversity of the Alabama Gulf Coast.



Attendees of the Dauphin Island shorebirding trip were treated to flyover views of this Merlin.



The Alabama Coastal BirdFest shorebird excursion to Dauphin Island





Junior Best of Show - Evelyn Prickett

The Beauty That Surrounds Us

2017 Weeks Bay Photo Contest Winners

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator

There are amazing sights throughout coastal Alabama. In the way the sunlight touches a leaf, or a baby sea turtle takes its first steps on the snow-white sand. Perhaps it's the petals of a Spider Lily, or the majestic Brown Pelican as it glides low across the water. These moments of wonder are too many to name, but we are fortunate to have photographers among us who capture these images so we can enjoy them, year after year.

The winners of the 2017 Weeks Bay Photo Contest were selected by judges **Rodney Kilgore**, **Kathy Hicks**, and **Janice Neitzel** from among 234 photographs submitted. The Open and Junior divisions are Flora, Fauna, Habitat, and People in Nature. There is also an overall Best in Show (featured on this magazine cover). The winning photos will be available for viewing on the Weeks Bay Foundation website (weeksbay.org) and at the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center Apalachee Exhibit Hall. They will also be featured throughout the year in Weeks Bay Foundation literature.

Congratulations to the winners, and thank you to all who took the time to submit an entry.

PEOPLE IN NATURE, JUNIOR



1st Place – Sophia Haines



2nd Place – Sophia Haines



3rd Place – Isaac Martin



Honorable Mention – Isaac Martin

PEOPLE IN NATURE, OPEN



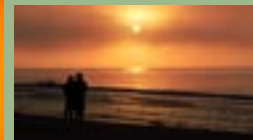
1st Place – Kim Huskey



2nd Place – Mary Smith



3rd Place – Angie Carn



Honorable Mention – Herbert Hahn

HA



1st



2nd Place – Sophia Haines

H



1st



H

HABITAT, JUNIOR



1st Place – Cole Boswell



3rd Place – Ashlyn Powers



Honorable Mention – Brooke Hahn

FLORA, JUNIOR



1st Place – Audrey Haines



2nd Place – Sophia Haines



3rd Place – Isaac Martin



Honorable Mention – Aidan Hood

FAUNA, JUNIOR



1st Place – Isaac Martin

2nd Place – Isaac Martin



3rd Place – Sophia Haines



Honorable Mention – Sophia Haines

HABITAT, OPEN



1st Place – Susan Rouillier



2nd Place – Karen Chiasson



3rd Place – Winston McQuitery

Honorable Mention – Gwen Ainsworth

FLORA, OPEN



1st Place – Susan Rouillier



2nd Place – Charles Lilly



3rd Place – Debi Parnell



Honorable Mention – Karen Chiasson

FAUNA, OPEN



1st Place – Karen Chiasson

2nd Place – Susan Rouillier



3rd Place – Tonda Dickerson



Honorable Mention – Angie Carn



International Extension Group Tours the Reserve

by Angela Underwood, Reserve Education Coordinator

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) was awarded a contract to train Extension administrators and agricultural leaders from Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi for two weeks in September. These international guests toured various parts of the state to learn about agriculture in Alabama, Extension programming, agribusiness, and the importance of the relationships among agricultural leaders and organizations.



Ag Leaders from Africa

It was interesting for Weeks Bay staff to hear how the visitors were able to link situations here in Alabama to local situations in Africa. Participants noted that agriculture in Alabama was similar to that in Africa, although on a much larger scale and with more mechanization. They said they also faced similar pressures on resources from increasing populations and development.

A special thank you goes out to the Alabama Cooperative Extension System for allowing the Reserve to be a part of this program, and to the international visitors for the wealth of knowledge they shared during the visit.

Weeks Bay Reserve was fortunate to host the group for a brief tour of the estuary. During the visit, participants heard from Education and Research staff from the Reserve, and staff from the Alabama Coastal Area Management Program. Topics included the history of land use and agriculture in Baldwin County, the effects of land use and increasing populations on water quality in Weeks Bay, and wetland preservation measures within the watershed.



Ag Leaders from Africa learn about Weeks Bay Reserve

GulfCorps to Help with Coastal Restoration

by Eric Brunden, Reserve Stewardship Coordinator

The Weeks Bay Reserve and the Weeks Bay Foundation are excited to collaborate with the newly formed GulfCorps program to tackle restoration and stewardship work within the Weeks Bay watershed. GulfCorps was created under a grant written by The Nature Conservancy. This \$7 million award, provided under the RESTORE Act, established a citizen conservation program for the Gulf states. The GulfCorps program is designed to benefit local communities by creating approximately 300 short-term jobs for local citizens who will receive training and field experience with ecological restoration.

Jeff DeQuattro, GulfCorps Program Director, solicited ideas from multiple coastal agencies and organizations that could benefit from assistance with restoration and land management efforts. Reserve and Foundation staff proposed several projects to improve habitats within the Weeks Bay watershed. During

this partnership, GulfCorps team members will provide significant hands-on assistance. Some of the activities to be completed include treatment of exotic invasive species, maintenance and expansion of existing pitcher plant bog ecosystems, restoration of pine flatwoods and associated bog communities, improvements to existing infrastructure, and assistance with data collection.

Expect to see many updates in upcoming issues of *The Pelican Post* regarding GulfCorps activities, as training and on-the-ground projects progress.



Audra Melton/TNC



Audra Melton/TNC



Active Hurricane Season Impacts Many Reserves

It is no surprise to hear that 2017 was an active hurricane season. What you may not know, however, is that this active season affected many National Estuarine Research Reserves, NERRs or Reserves, for short. Hurricanes from east to west brought winds, rains, and tidal surges to a dozen reserves that are part of the NERR System. The impact varied, from minor winds, waves, and coastal erosion to direct damage, floods, and devastation.



Hurricane Harvey blew into the Texas coast on August 25. The **Mission Aransas Reserve**, east of Corpus Christi, caught a near direct hit causing damage to the main building, animal rehabilitation center, and exhibit areas. **Jace Tunnell**, the reserve manager said afterwards, "All staff are well and accounted for, but damage to facilities has moved operations temporarily to Corpus Christi."

Hurricane Irma churned through the Caribbean, eventually hitting the Florida Keys and making a second landfall in Naples, Florida, on September 10. **Rookery Bay Reserve** sustained high

winds that pushed water into the learning center and parking areas. Manager **Keith Laakkonen** said, "We were lucky the storm jogged to the east and spared us from a direct hit on that bad northeast quadrant side." Irma, covering most of Florida, moved north impacting both **Apalachicola Reserve** to the west and **Guana Tolomato Matanzas Reserve** to the east.

Hurricane Maria plowed through the Caribbean slamming into Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm on September 19. Hurricane force winds engulfed the entire island with heavy rain, floods, and coastal surge. **Jobs Bay Reserve** on the south side of the island was left with devastating damage to facilities and will take months if not years to fully recover. Maria then moved north through the western Atlantic also impacting east coast reserves.

Then, in early October, **Hurricane Nate** was formed in the Caribbean, headed north to the central Gulf coast, and made a second U.S. landfall west of **Grand Bay Reserve**. Both **Grand Bay Reserve** and our own **Weeks Bay Reserve** were affected, but damage was minor in comparison to others.

Hurricanes are a natural part of living on the Gulf coast and the National Estuarine Research Reserves are at the front line when hurricanes threaten our shores. Coastal areas like the Reserves, where habitat is preserved and left natural, are resilient to storms and protect the developed areas landward, where we build our homes and businesses. For more information on the NERR System, visit coast.noaa.gov/nerrs.

If you would like to contribute to the recovery fund for damaged reserves, visit nerra.org/how-you-can-help/give-today.

Native Plant Sale: 25 Years and Going Strong!



The Weeks Bay Volunteers' 25th Annual Native Plant Sale in October was another huge success, with record sales, some new discoveries, and a cadre of dedicated volunteers who make this planet a more beautiful place.

The Master Gardeners make it their mission to promote native plants, teach novice gardeners, and work long hours making hundreds of plants available to the public. The event relies on volunteers such as **Caterina Kenworthy**, now 96, who has been feeding the volunteers since the days when the plant sale was held at the Weeks Bay Reserve Visitor Center. Her dedication, and that of the others, truly makes the plant sales a beloved tradition in lower Alabama.

WINTER 2017-18 CALENDAR

December

- 12 Pot Luck Christmas Social & Guest Lecture Series "Raptor Talk" presented by Kathy Hicks and Mark Wetzel.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 6 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 13 Weeks Bay Holiday Open House.** Light snacks and drinks will be served at the Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- 13 Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2 p.m.
- 25 Christmas.***

January

- 1 New Year's Day.***
- 9 Guest Lecture Series "Small Group Eco-tours in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta" presented by Jimbo Meador.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 15 Robert E. Lee Birthday / Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday.***
- 16 Weeks Bay Volunteers Annual Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 11 a.m. to noon. Lunch to follow.

February

- 13 Mardi Gras Day.***
- 13 Guest Lecture Series "Nature Photography" presented by Paul Dovie.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 19 George Washington Birthday / Thomas Jefferson Birthday.***

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



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Bobby Zlata

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*In honor of Lesley Pacey
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John Borom

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*)

“The only way to save the diversity of life and come to peace with nature is through a widely shared knowledge of biology and what the findings of that science imply for the human condition.”
- E. O. Wilson



It's a Party for Preservation!

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator



The Ninth Annual Bald Eagle Bash--the Alabama Gulf Coast's Party for Preservation--is taking place on Saturday, April 21, 2018, at the Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center. This signature event for the Weeks Bay Foundation has earned a reputation for delivering great food, great music, and a great time, all on the edges of beautiful Weeks Bay. The "Bash" includes fresh Gulf shrimp prepared by the area's best chefs and restaurants, a low country shrimp boil, delectable desserts by area bakers, and beer from Fairhope Brewing Company and Budweiser.

But it doesn't stop with the food!

This year's musical entertainment is **Johnny Hayes and the Loveseats**, a local band that's definitely on the rise, and is enjoying some celebrity status after Johnny made it to the final rounds of *The Voice*!

Last year, more than 1,300 people attended the Bash, 16 restaurants participated, and the Foundation raised \$68,000 to preserve and protect this beautiful Alabama Gulf Coast! Mark your calendars now, for Saturday, April 21, 2018, and don't miss out on this Party for Preservation!

