

Update: Perdido Pass Navigation Project Recovery

Florida Point Habitat Restoration

Since the last issue of the Alabama Current Connection, the ongoing habitat restoration of the dunes on the Florida Point Unit of the Gulf State Park has been completed. According to Larry Parsons with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Mobile District, more than 560,000 cubic yards of dredged material were removed from the pass and placed on Perdido Key. "The Corps feels that the project was a great success in rebuilding the valuable habitat destroyed by Ivan. The resulting environmental benefits will be a wonderful example of how agencies working as a team can reach a common goal. All in all, the project was a win-win situation around the board," stated Mr. Parsons.

Patrick Harper, a biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Daphne Field Office, represented the USFWS during the project and was responsible for initiating the process of conducting the project. After seeing the destruction of the dunes at Florida Point, Mr. Harper contacted the agencies involved and got the ball rolling on this project. Mr. Harper's initiative and expertise as a wildlife biologist was key for the success of the project.

Kelly Reetz, the Park Naturalist for Gulf State Park, was also a key player in coordinating the project. After completion of the pumping of sand, Ms. Reetz also coordinated the placement of sand fencing. "Gulf State Park was pleased that the Corps was able to help with post Ivan recovery efforts by re-stabilizing the beach with dredged

Habitat Restoration at Alonzo Landing, Dauphin Island



Placement of artificial reef-wave attenuation structures along the shore of Alonzo Landing on the eastern end of Dauphin Island.

On April 4, 2005, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, the Town of Dauphin Island, the Mobile County Commission, Auburn University and Artificial Reefs, Inc. commenced construction of a habitat restoration and public access project at Alonzo Landing on the eastern end of Dauphin Island. This project will involve the placement of artificial reef-wave attenuation structures along the shore (as seen above), the planting of marsh vegetation landward of the reefs, and the construction of a public access pier. Funding for this project was provided by the project partners and is a great example of agencies, local governments, and non-governmental organizations working together to restore habitat in Coastal Alabama.

sand from Perdido Pass," stated Ms. Reetz. "This was a huge step in our effort to heal the damage done by Hurricane Ivan. Once the Corps completed the dredging and constructed new dunes, we were able to put sand fences up in a way that would hopefully maintain these dunes and build them higher."



Coastal Conservation Corner

By Greg Lein, Assistant Director
State Lands Division

The Forever Wild Land Trust was recently awarded two U.S. Forest Legacy Grants totaling \$2.4 million. The federal matching grants will help facilitate purchases of land in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and the Cumberland Mountains Preserve. Forest Legacy is a federal program that partners with states to protect environmentally sensitive forest lands and provide for enhanced public recreation.

In the last five years, Alabama has received \$21.6 million from federal land acquisition programs, including approximately \$8 million from the Forest Legacy Program. In each instance, these federal funds are required to be matched. This match has been achieved in Alabama through the Forever Wild Program.

The Forever Wild Program is funded by a percentage of the interest earned from state royalties on offshore natural gas leases belonging to Alabama. With federal programs like Forest Legacy, grants are matched by Forever Wild state funds, which significantly increase the purchasing power of the state. State Lands Division Assistant Director, Greg Lein, said that Alabama's ability to match federal funds such as those through the Forest Legacy Program is what makes Forever Wild so valuable. "The state is able to purchase much more land because of these grants than it would on its own," he said.

The Mobile-Tensaw Delta purchase, which is the Bayou Sara Tract in Mobile County, consists of 684 acres. It will adjoin another

Forever Wild tract, the Jacinto Port Tract, to allow for a more comprehensive approach to the conservation and management of this unique ecosystem. This area in south Alabama is an important travel corridor and year-long habitat

for the state's largest remaining black bear population. This purchase will add to the 54,000 acres of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta already purchased through Forever Wild.

The Cumberland Mountains Preserve, located in Jackson and Madison counties, consists of 7,846 acres in three tracts adjacent to the 12,000-acre Walls of Jericho Tract in Jackson County. These areas are located within one of the most biologically rich habitats in the world and consist of hardwoods, significant watersheds and many species of flora and fauna unique to the area. The Forest Legacy grant will supply approximately \$1.2 million toward the purchase of this land.

Alabama has requested \$8.25 million through the Forest Legacy Program for 2006, targeting unique longleaf pine forests adjacent to Hatchet and Weogufka Creeks and the Coosa River. This 10,000-acre project would support the long-term hunting programs at the Coosa Wildlife Management Area.



Wetlands of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

A similar application is being made for \$5 million through the federal Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program, targeting unique habitats along Baldwin County's Perdido River. If successful, this project could create a new 10,000-acre Wildlife Management Area for public hunting that also protects habitat crucial to the state's seafood and tourism industries in coastal Alabama.

Public hunting areas have declined in recent years because of lost leases. These purchases will help secure property that will always be managed as public hunting land. Both of these requested grants are only available to Alabama if matching funds can be provided through the Forever Wild Program.

Forever Wild land now totals 107,000 acres since the program acquired its first tract in 1994. The land is used for wildlife management areas for public hunting, nature preserves, additions to state parks and outdoor recreational areas.

More than 100,000 acres of the total Forever Wild land is available for public hunting.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources through five divisions: Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Parks, State Lands, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. To learn more about ADCNR and the Forever Wild Program visit www.outdooralabama.com.

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Perdido Pass, *continued from page 1*

During the next few months, the staff at Gulf State Park in conjunction with the Corps plan to begin the planting of sea oats in the project area. Hopefully, through these efforts, the plant community at Florida Point will recover quickly.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources would like to thank all of those involved for making this project a great success.

“Reefing” of Damaged Weir Sections

In addition to the damage to the beach and dune system, Hurricane Ivan also caused significant damage to the eastern jetty at the pass. The storm surge and wave action caused tremendous scour along the jetty. This, in turn, caused the concrete weir sections of the jetty to become unstable and collapse. As part of the preparations to repair the jetties, the Corps had to recover the old, damaged weir sections and dispose of them. After consultation with the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (ADCNR), Marine Resources Division and ADCNR, State Lands Division (SLD), Coastal Section, it was decided that the best option for disposal was to use the damaged concrete weir sections to construct reefs along the previously permitted “trolling corridor” located in the Gulf of Mexico seven to nine miles south of the pass. After a period of coordination between the agencies on permitting, transportation of materials, siting of the reefs and other issues, the agencies were able to get this project under way.

The ADCNR, SLD Coastal Section would like to thank Nate Lovelace and Larry Parsons with the Corps, and Jim Duffy with the ADCNR Marine Resources Division for all of their hard work on this project. At some point in the future, the Marine Resources Division will make the location of the new reef available to the public, adding yet another great public fishing spot to the superb system of artificial reefs off of Alabama's Gulf Coast.

– C. Ferraro

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The editorial staff reserves the right to edit submissions for content and grammar.



From the Director's Desk

By David Yeager, Director
Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Most of us agree that continuing environmental education is an effective and necessary agent for positive change. Indeed, a recent survey conducted by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (NEP) ranked K-12 environmental education as one of our community's priority issues.

Recently, I came across an article written for Newsweek by Katie Slivovsky that provides food for thought about environmental education and creating an environmental ethic. She cites David Sobel's essay "Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education." In it he recounts the story of an eight-year old who learned about elephants being killed for their ivory and wanted to help. The child created a poster for display in local stores with the slogan "Save the Elephants, don't buy Ivory Soap." The child's motivation was commendable but she lacked an understanding of the real issue: poaching.

A related issue discussed in the article is the confusion and fear that can be produced by focusing on potential environmental catastrophe rather than age-appropriate understanding and illustration. "Global Warming Responsible for Melting Glaciers!," "When Will Our Water Run Out?," "Mercury Contamination Prompts New Fish Warnings!" - These actual or possible headlines represent valid environmental concerns. Concerns that deserve serious study and action. However, the message a second-grader takes away from a classroom

session on such environmental issues is probably far different from that received by a student in fifth grade. Appropriate responses are not the same at all grade levels. Curricula must be tailored to account for students of perhaps closely related ages but of differing reasoning ability.

"A recent survey conducted by the Mobile Bay NEP ranked K-12 environmental education as one of our community's priority issues."

*-David Yeager
Mobile Bay NEP*

The importance of "non-traditional" education such as childhood outdoor experiences and their influence in the development of an environmental ethic is also discussed in Dr. Sobel's essay. He points out that the result of studies indicating that adults who are active in environmental issues trace their interest to "many hours spent outdoors as children...and an adult who taught respect for nature." We may take these valuable experiences for granted in coastal Alabama where opportunities seem plentiful as we turn our youngsters loose to explore field and dune or take them with us birding, to the farm, on hikes, or hunting and fishing trips. However, this is not the case everywhere. We

are becoming increasingly urbanized and not all children are exposed to enriching outdoor experiences. This is where environmental educational venues that blend hands-on or experiential learning with age-appropriate classroom instruction become so important. There are a number of such programs right here in coastal Alabama that enable students of all ages to learn about the wonders of our rivers, oceans, woods, coasts, and creatures. Residential and field trip based experiential learning programs such as those at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab create these experiences for children from every county in the state (and help K-12 teachers develop appropriate skills and curricula). The Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in connection with the Baldwin County School System also provides day programs for all grade levels (K-12) and helps teachers with curriculum development. A new residential program at the Beckwith Camp and Conference Center called "Coastal Wonders" will open later this year. Operated by the Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast, the Beckwith Coastal Wonders curriculum is also experience-based and designed for schools throughout the central Gulf Coast.

Other programs include the Environmental Studies Center operated by the Mobile County School System and the Pelican's Nest supported by the Fairhope Educational and Enrichment Foundation and the Baldwin County School System. Both provide positive

environmental experiences that supplement our local school systems. Several local schools such as Alma Bryant High School, Fairhope High School, and Gulf Shores High School are providing practical, hands-on programs in areas such as aquaculture and habitat restoration.

All these local efforts are important in creating the ethic that is at the core of environmental stewardship and they deserve our continuing support. As Baba Dioum quoted, "In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught."

Now Open! Montlimar Canal Greenway Park

The first mile of the City of Mobile's Greenway Plan was dedicated March 16, 2005, and is now open! ATOFINA Chemicals, Inc., in conjunction with the Dog River Clearwater Revival, the Mobile Bay NEP and the City of Mobile, developed the park segment. To access the greenway, go to Outback Steakhouse, 901 Montlimar Drive or the Sonic Drive-In, 951 Montlimar Drive.

Crab Watch Pilot Program

The Mobile Bay NEP, in partnership with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Marine Resource Division, is starting a new pilot project called Crab Watch. This is a volunteer based program that allows recreational crabbers to monitor crab populations in coastal Alabama and incidentally monitor for invasive species through bycatch. Anyone in Alabama coastal waters may participate.

The volunteers will fill out a detailed data sheet each time the crab traps are emptied. The data sheet includes crab length, crab sex, number caught, number released, hard-shell vs. soft-shell, total soak time, gear type, and a bycatch information section. In addition, the volunteers are asked to attend an annual training session.

Master Crab Watch volunteer positions are also available for volunteers who want to play a larger role in the program. The Master Crab Watch volunteer will help distribute gear, answer general questions, and photograph of any unidentifiable species. Should an unidentifiable species occur, the volunteer is asked to call the Master Crab Watch volunteer in their area. The Master Crab Watcher will take four photographs of the animal and will then contact the Mobile Bay NEP. After photographs are taken, the animal will be transported by the Master Crab Watch volunteer to the Mobile Bay NEP who will work with Marine Resources Division to identify the animal.

The Marine Resources Division currently has no data on the recreational blue crab fishery. This creates a gap in the data, which the Crab Watch Program is expected to fill. To participate or for more information, visit www.mobilebaynep.com. – K. Lankford

Current Events

June 8 & 9

Nonpoint Source Pollution
Solutions for Teachers
Workshop at Weeks Bay
Reserve, limited registration,
for more information contact
Margaret Sedlecky 251-928-
9792 or Lee Yokel 251-431-
6409.

June 11

"Dog Paddle"
8:00 AM - 1:00 PM at Luscher
(Navco) Park on Dog River
[www.southalabama.edu/
geography/fearn/DogPad05.
html](http://www.southalabama.edu/geography/fearn/DogPad05.html)

June 14 & 15

Coastal Alabama Vegetated
Treatment Systems and Buffers
Workshop, for more information
contact Jody Scanlan 251-438-
5690.

June 15

Wet and Wild at Weeks Bay
- a teacher workshop focusing
on integration of conservation
education into the classroom.
For more information contact
Margaret Sedlecky 251-928-
9792.

July

Throughout the month of
July, Dauphin Island Sea Lab
will offer extensive summer
programs for children, middle
school students, high school
students, and K-12 educators,
as well as college and graduate
classes. For more information
on these programs visit [www.
disl.org](http://www.disl.org) or call 251-861-2141.

*For more information about these events please
contact Lee Yokel at 251-431-6409 or Amy King at
251-929-0900.*

Submerged Grasses Planted in Weeks Bay

On April 18 and 19, 2005, a first of its kind collaboration took place. High school students, scientists and researchers planted in Weeks Bay two common types of submerged aquatic vegetation native to the Gulf Coast, Tape Grass (*Vallisneria americana*) and Widgeon Grass (*Ruppia maritima*).

The project is a culmination of several efforts all coalescing toward the same goal – growing and planting underwater grasses

It all began in 2003, the Mobile Bay NEP secured a grant from the Gulf of Mexico Program to develop a manual and volunteer

planting program for underwater sea grasses commonly called submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). The program began researching the different SAV in Alabama coastal waters and how they might be grown and transplanted for restoration purposes. Ms. Lisa Allen at Gulf Shores High School was also interested in underwater grasses. She was looking for unique projects that would involve her Aqua Science students. Ms. Allen applied successfully for a mini grant from the Mobile Bay NEP toward the development of growing SAV with



Paddy Patterson of Gulf Shores High School holds a plug of Tape Grass before planting it at Weeks Bay Reserve.

her students.

In 2004, Dr. Just Cebrian at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) took on the next steps of the Mobile Bay NEP's grant. He began working with Ms. Allen and developed a local guide for restoring SAV. At the same time, Margaret Sedlecky at the Weeks Bay Reserve was also gaining interest in growing SAV for habitat restoration and education. She began researching opportunities for a new program, "Baldwin County Grasses In Classes," which also incorporates other important native vegetation.

So why all the fuss about SAV? Submerged grasses are critical habitat in coastal waters. SAVs provide a food source for waterfowl, turtles, fish and other creatures, and provide habitat for juvenile species. These grasses also help stabilize sediments, thus helping to stabilize underwater banks and prevent erosion. Wander into a 'seaweed meadow' and you'll quickly see the biodiversity increase.

The four partners working together identified a site in need of preservation within the Weeks Bay Reserve. Just simply getting SAV and planting them is not so simple.

The partners had to get appropriate permission to obtain live plants for harvest as well as plant them in a new location. The water bottoms and associated SAV are governed by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, so activities must be approved by the agency. In the case of SAV harvesting, the City of Daphne was notified so water access could be approved.

The two-day effort started with Dr. Just Cebrian, Paddy Patterson, and Mairi Miller all of DISL and Lee Yokel with Mobile Bay NEP harvesting

Mobile Bay NEP: Planning for the Future

The purpose of the Mobile Bay National Estuary program (MBNEP) is to encourage a community-based approach to watershed management by empowering citizens, grassroots organizations, government agencies, industry and educational establishments to work together to address local environmental challenges. MBNEP's early objectives were to engage these groups in the development of a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), act as a catalyst to leverage greater funding for estuary activities, and educate the communities surrounding the estuary regarding the best treatment of Mobile Bay and its surrounding watersheds to ensure their protection for our lifetime and beyond.

The planning and development phases of MBNEP included identifying stakeholders, reviewing the status and impact of established coastal and estuarine programs, characterizing the estuary (water quality, living resources, habitat, etc.) through studies, and identifying needs and actions to bridge gaps between the status quo and a future vision. The culmination of this effort was the creation of a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).

As MBNEP works to effectively implement the objectives of the CCMP, it is recognized that an evaluation of CCMP objectives and the development of a strategic plan will enable the program to focus limited resources on areas of



Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) planting with Gulf Shores High School students and Dauphin Island Sea Lab researchers at Weeks Bay Reserve.

grasses near Bay Front Park in Daphne, Alabama. Weeks Bay Reserve staff and volunteers installed a turbidity fence and the grid for planting at the restoration location. Ms. Allen worked with her students to prepare the transplants they had grown from seeds. The seeds were collected from Mobile Bay and are the first attempt to actually grow Tape Grass.

On April 19, about 30 Gulf Shores High School students, plus scientists and researchers, planted the SAV. The collaborative team will monitor the success of the planting site as well as the area from which harvesting took place. It is important to know how the grass adapts to its new location as well as how it recovers in places where it was harvested. Tape Grass cannot be found in herbariums around the Gulf Coast and the team is anxious to see if the SAV will survive and thrive. They hope to learn how to expand their program, and plant other types of submerged grasses over the course of the next few years. Many area agencies have noted the value and high priority that SAV have in our coastal environment. This project is one step towards addressing these priorities and preserving coastal habitats. -L. Yokel

Baldwin County Uses GIS for Wetland

Protection -Derek Lemoine, Natural Resource Analyst, Baldwin County Planning and Zoning Department

The Baldwin County Commission is currently in the third phase of an EPA-sponsored wetland mapping and assessment project that began in 1995. This most recent phase, called the Baldwin County Wetlands and Watershed Protection Program, aims to provide Geographic Information Systems (GIS) services to the municipalities, to develop innovative wetland policies, and to further refine a GIS technique for remotely assessing the functional capacity of county wetlands.

To date, county staff has provided free maps, data, training, and general GIS services to the municipalities of Daphne, Fairhope, Foley, Loxley, Robertsdale, Silverhill, and Spanish Fort. This data enables Planning Commissions to make more informed land use decisions and provides municipalities with data and maps that have a variety of uses, from identifying wetlands to clearly marking police jurisdictions to locating utility lines. In addition, county staff is providing these mapping services to developers and to the general public to encourage more informed decision-making on a parcel-level and on a watershed-level. GIS mapping services should be available through the county web site in the near future.

Another goal of the Baldwin County Wetlands and Watershed Protection Program is to develop innovative wetland policies for the county that can also be adapted by municipalities to produce a coherent natural resources policy framework across Baldwin County. Staff is developing a proposal to create a new subdivision option that promotes the permanent protection of open space while increasing the flexibility of developers to explore alternative site designs. This proposal is currently in the initial draft stages, but it has been well-received by a variety of stakeholders.

More information can be found at www.wetlands.co.baldwin.al.us under "Baldwin County Wetland Conservation Plan."

Future Planning *continued from page 6*

the CCMP that are most critical to sustaining the estuary. The goal of this evaluation is to revitalize implementation efforts by developing priorities and modifications to the plan, resource opportunities, and timelines for CCMP objectives. The hope is that through this process, MBNEP can engage estuary stakeholders in clarifying program priorities and outcomes so that the NEP can establish programmatic indicators for measuring estuary health.

Concurrently, MBNEP is reassessing its role within the environmental community in an effort to generate increased support, investment and ownership among local governments, the state, private industry, and the community at large. By working with community leaders to identify MBNEP's role among the many organizations working to address environmental issues, the MBNEP will develop an effective organizational structure and create an investment strategy for long-term community driven financial ownership.

MBNEP looks forward once again to working through a community driven process to accomplish these efforts and will need the help of many of you as community leaders to steer the MBNEP towards future success. -R. Swann

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Bumper Sticker Contest Results

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Community Advisory Committee is pleased to announce the winners of the 2005 Bumper Sticker Contest. Ninth grade classes throughout Mobile and Baldwin Counties were invited to develop ideas that would represent the estuary program. The first place winner is Rebecca Esser from Baker High School. Second place went to Patricia Sirmon at Bayside Academy. Third place was a tie between Suzanna Williams of Fairhope High School and Emily Ikner of Daphne High School. First and second place entries were very close and both concepts may be developed into stickers or decals.



First place entry for the Mobile Bay NEP 2005 Bumper Sticker Contest was awarded to Rebecca Esser from Baker High School.

The Mobile Bay NEP received a total of 47 entries. To view them all, log onto www.mobilebaynep.com. Congratulations everyone!