

ALABAMA

CURRENT CONNECTION

The newsletter of the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, State Lands Division,
Coastal Section and the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

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Winter 2006

Birders Flock to 2005 Alabama Coastal BirdFest

-D. Fran Morley, BirdFest Coordinator

Despite this summer's nerve-racking weather, October's Alabama Coastal BirdFest was a great success, according to John Borom, president of Mobile Bay Audubon Society and one of the event organizers. "After the hurricanes, we were worried that people from out of state wouldn't come, but we had visitors from 13 states, from as far away as California and Maine." Over 20 guided tours took visitors to spots along the 240-mile long Alabama Coastal Birding Trail.

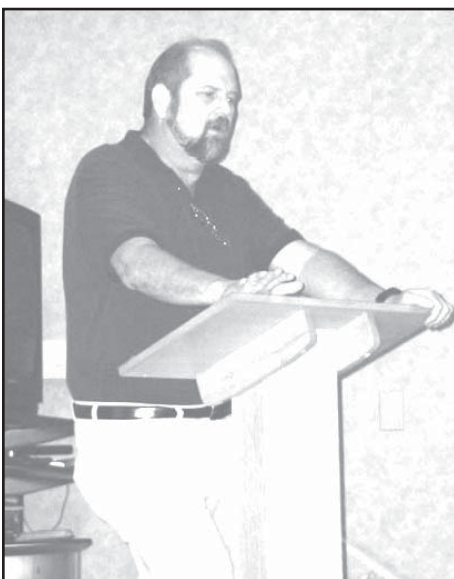
"It's important to educate people about the need to preserve our Gulf Coast habitats, because this is a vital area for migrating birds," Borom



On the prowl for birds at Fort Morgan during one of twenty guided field trips along the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail provided by the 2nd Annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest.

said. Proceeds from the BirdFest go to preserve and protect bird habitats on the Alabama Gulf Coast.

In addition to guided tours, the BirdFest included two evening events with speakers and a free, day-long Bird & Conservation Expo. Speakers for BirdFest included Dr. Van Remsen, curator of birds at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge; Bob Sargent, director of the Hummer/Bird Study Group, one of the country's premiere volunteer bird banding organizations; and Bobby Harrison, Oakwood College Associate Professor and one of the first two people to have a confirmed sighting of an Ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird thought extinct for more than 60 years.



Bobby Harrison, Oakwood College Associate Professor, gave three presentations about his part in the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed woodpecker.



Ivory-billed woodpecker, Singer Tract, Louisiana, 1935. Photo courtesy of David Allen.

Organizers are already looking forward to next year. The third annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest is scheduled for Oct. 19-22, 2006.

Visit www.alabamacoastalbirdfest.com for news as it develops and to see photos from this year's festival.



Coastal Conservation Corner

By Phillip Hinesley, Coastal Section Chief
State Lands Division

This past summer three major storms made landfall on the Gulf Coast all within three months of each other: Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina and Rita. Including damage from Hurricane Ivan in 2004, the cumulative impacts of these storms have affected communities and local economies on a catastrophic level.

The 2005 hurricane season will go down in history as the most active in modern times. The debate is now raging if this is caused by global warming or just a natural cycle. That debate will go on for years due to the lack of scientific information and time.

One thing that the federal, state and local governments can do is prepare for next years hurricane season. In light of Hurricane Katrina now is the time to start preparing for the future. I think it is safe to say that during this hurricane season there was a definite lack of coordinated programs and policies when it came to hurricane and natural disaster response. No one level of government should be held completely at fault. The lack of coordination extends across federal, state and local boundaries. This has resulted in intergovernmental conflicts and the undermining of public confidence in the government to effectively address the problems associated with disaster response. As a result, implementation of federal policies related to disasters can be a hindrance and at odds with state and local efforts. State and local decision makers often do not have sufficient information to assess the appropriateness of a particular

disaster response effort option. In the absence of such information, politically driven options often prevail. Even where the information has been developed, it is often not accessible or in a useful format.

“Congress should fully fund a competitive Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program. These funds could be used to purchase coastal land that is located in hazard areas.”

In light of these problems, what needs to be done to better deal with future disasters?

- Support for better science and research to forecast future hurricanes. This would be in the form of new hurricane hunter planes, more ocean buoys and stations/sensors to monitor wave and ocean conditions.

- Better sharing of data and information among federal, state and local agencies. There is a need develop and deliver better information to state and local governments to make well-reasoned, cost effective, long-termed decisions regarding coastal development, shoreline protection, and disaster and hazard mitigation planning.

- Federal initiatives such as the Stafford Act, which deals with disasters and emergencies, needs to be examined by Congress. The National Flood Insurance Program and FEMA’s Public Assistance Program need to be cost efficient, and related projects should undergo

a cost benefit analysis to determine if they are feasible. Those individuals and local governments that continue to rebuild in high hazard areas should assume a greater part of rebuilding cost and assumed risk.

- Federal, state and local governments should explore the use of mandatory FEMA buyouts in repetitive loss areas.

- Congress is now debating the Coastal Resources Reauthorization Act. Congress should support the expansion of the Coastal Barrier Resource Act to include all undeveloped lands in the states’ coastal zones. The purpose of this would be to minimize federal expenditures in hazardous coastal areas and to conserve natural resources of these fragile landforms.

- Congress should fully fund a competitive Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program. These funds could be used to purchase coastal land that is located in hazard areas.

- State and local governments should update current hazard mitigation plans to incorporate lessons learned from this past storm season. In addition, state and local governments need to develop long-termed recovery plans. These plans need to be comprehensive in nature and focus on recovery issues, such as housing, employment, social and environmental recovery.

Hopefully next year’s storm season will not be as devastating as the last two years. However, with the lessons learned from this season, proper preparation is key to effective response should this happen again.

Coastal Cleanup Takes Place Despite Weather

The 2005 Alabama Coastal Cleanup took place in spite of overwhelming odds. Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast just weeks before the big day. Alabama originally had twenty-two Cleanup Zones scheduled to participate; however due to extensive damage along the coast only eight zones were able to take part on the designated Cleanup Day. But, even at such a reduced capacity, Alabama had 516 volunteers remove 14,245 pounds of debris from 88 miles of coastline. Some of the volunteers were Hurricane Katrina evacuees. "It was very humbling to have these volunteers participate in the Alabama Cleanup. Even though they had no home and no coast of their own any more, they were willing to cleanup ours. And they did it with a smile," said Amy King, Alabama Coastal Cleanup Coordinator.

The Alabama Coastal Cleanup is coordinated by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, Coastal Section and the Alabama People Against a Littered State (PALS). For information on the Alabama Coastal Cleanup and to volunteer, visit www.AlabamaCoastalCleanup.com.

Coastal Cleanup Volunteers Earn Awards for Year-Round Activities

In addition to their work with the Alabama Coastal Cleanup, many volunteers continue to work throughout the year on the cleanup ethic. The Alabama People Against a Littered State (PALS) recently acknowledged two Coastal Cleanup Zone Captains and a Dune Sponsor for their efforts to create a cleaner Alabama.

Bob Simpson, Zone Captain for Wolf Bay, was awarded the PALS Adopt-A-Mile and Adopt-A-Stream Awards. The Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, Coastal Cleanup Dune Sponsor, was awarded the PALS Adopt-A-Beach Award. Richard Carson, Zone Captain for Ono Island, was awarded the Vulcan Materials Volunteer of the Year Award. Congratulations!



Bob Simpson (center) received both the Adopt-A-Mile and Adopt-A-Stream Awards, presented by John Lorensen (left) of the Alabama Department of Transportation and Margaret McElroy (right) of Alabama PALS.



Richard Carson (above, left) received the Vulcan Materials Volunteer of the Year Award, presented by Dr. Don Hines, Chairman of the PALS Board of Directors.



Colette Boehm, Special Projects Director (left), accepted the Adopt-A-Beach Award on behalf of the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, presented by Amy King, Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Alabama State Lands Division, Coastal Section.

Thank You Coastal Cleanup Sponsors

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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

2005 Coastal Planning Summit: Charting a Course of Action

On October 17, 2005, over 100 Mobile and Baldwin County leaders came together to chart the course for an environmentally sustainable coastal Alabama. These leaders engaged in visioning what our water quality, living resources, human uses, economy and natural habitat should look like in the year 2025 and identified priorities to achieve this vision. The goals of this process were twofold: the alliance of a diverse group of champions to make the vision a reality and the development of an aggressive agenda for state and national officials to address coastal challenges. Hosted by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) and Envision Coastal Alabama, this summit was organized to harness community activism for tackling coastal challenges, build active partnerships and open people's eyes to the vulnerability of our coastal resources, particularly in light of coastal hazards like our recent devastating hurricanes.

The vision expressed by these leaders was certainly clear. ***“Coastal Alabama must be a thriving regional community that values and promotes the diversity of its habitats, living resources, human uses, economies, and culture. It must advance environmentally sensitive growth that ensures the highest levels of water quality through innovative, coordinated governmental actions and incentive based initiatives that encourage a balance between***

“I think most of us realize that we no longer have generations to effect change. The actions we take during our own lifetimes will prove pivotal in securing a coastal Alabama that provides both environmental protection and sustainable economic growth so necessary for our quality of life and culture.”

the economic, social and cultural needs, and our natural resources.” They were equally clear regarding the need for increased collective and individual action to make the vision a reality. I think most of us realize that we no longer have generations to effect change. The actions we take during our own lifetimes will prove pivotal in securing a coastal Alabama that provides both environmental protection and sustainable economic growth so necessary for our quality of life and culture.

Several common themes were identified, underscoring the necessity of connecting typically disconnected interests to build a strong foundation for positive coastal change. These cross-cutting themes included the following:

The need for governmental changes to achieve environmental sustainability: The need for some level of regional ‘home rule,’ efforts to coordinate bi-county activities, more consistent enforcement of

ordinances, regulations, and use of zoning, were cited as priorities. ***Regional planning*** employing ecosystem based, and/or smart growth concepts, the need for better ***data management*** practices related to land use, GIS analysis, and improved ***resource management*** related to fisheries, invasive species, and better coordination of monitoring activities were also identified.

Targeting economic development activities to support a sustainable environment: Participants envisioned an evolved seafood industry, diversification of economic activity to include more farming and aquaculture, and a greater focus on “eco-tourism.” ***Diversity*** in our communities’ knowledge base, population, culture, industry, equity, and environment was recognized as vitally important. A diversity of ***transportation and public access opportunities*** were also cited as compelling needs.

Conservation, protection, restoration and preservation of unique habitats: A healthy and prosperous coastal environment is dependent on expanding our conservation and restoration of sensitive habitat including oyster reefs, submerged aquatic vegetation beds, wetlands, dunes and beaches, long leaf forests and others, including migratory bird stop over areas, as well as expanding buffers between urban and rural areas.

Educating our coastal community about the value of our

natural resources and processes and a community dedicated to attaining the highest water quality obtainable: There was overwhelming recognition that our coastal area required *a community that is educated* to secure and support our greatest coastal asset: our water.

Special Summit participants included Congressman Jo Bonner and Mr. Timothy Keeney, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who both spoke of a need to protect coastal resources, streamline activities and better define roles and responsibilities within times of increasingly stressed resources.

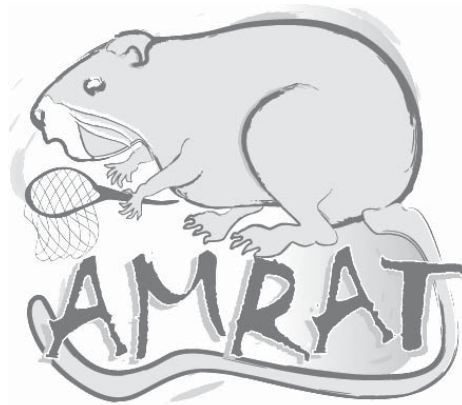
I could not have been more pleased with the participation and hard work accomplished here. The credit for the overwhelmingly positive outcome of this summit must go to the community leaders who participated. Special thanks are also due to Envision Coastal Alabama, The FORUM, Partners for Environmental Progress, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, B.A. Vittor and Associates and the Bellwether Group.

Our follow-up plans include additional workshops to further develop specific actions on the priorities identified, the development of an aggressive agenda for state and national officials to address coastal challenges and using the priorities identified to help guide our coastal resource management agencies. The complete summary of the summit is posted at www.mobilebaynep.com.

Gulf Coast Programs Recognized for Their Team Efforts

The Alabama Mississippi Rapid Assessment Team (AMRAT) took first place in the Partnership category in the 2005 Gulf of Mexico Program Gulf Guardian Awards. Coordinated and led by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and the Center for Fisheries Research and Development at the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, over 100 participants from more than 22 organizations worked together to complete invasive species surveys of the Alabama and Mississippi coasts in 2003 and 2004. Invasive species pose ecological, economic and even human health threats. AMRAT set the standard for future Gulf programs. The 2005 Gulf Guardian Awards will be presented at the "State of the Gulf 2006" meeting at the Harte Institute in Corpus Christi, Texas on March 28, 2006.

The Mississippi-Alabama



Sea Grant Consortium (MASGC) produced a Public Service Announcement (PSA) aimed at reducing marine debris and won national honors from Clear Channel Radio's approximately 1,500 stations. The PSA won first place in the most creative category from over 1,500 entries and featured a fish throwing seaweed, mud, dead carcasses, and pond scum at a human much like humans throw various forms of trash in the rivers, bays and oceans. The PSA was written and directed by John Bell with Clear Channel Radio

Current Events

January 14-22, 2006

7 Rivers in 7 Days, Kayak Trip

For more information, contact the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Baldwin County Office 251-937-7176

February 2, 2006

Bacterial Source Tracking Workshop

For more information, contact Lee Yokel at Mobile Bay NEP 251-431-6409

March 11, 2006

Derelict Crab Trap Recovery Program

For more information, contact Lee Yokel at Mobile Bay NEP 251-431-6409

April 23, 2006

Bay Area Earth Day at the Fairhope Pier Park

For more information, contact Alabama Coastal Foundation 251-990-6002

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

in Mobile, Alabama. Shonda Borden with MASGC manages a grant from NOAA's Marine Debris Program and was instrumental in providing guidance in developing the message. The PSA will air again next Memorial Day weekend on several stations on the Alabama and Mississippi coasts. Additional airtime was supported by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program. If you do not want to wait until Memorial Day 2006, you may download the PSA at <http://www.masgc.org/communications/pubs/marinedebrispsa.mp3>. -L. Yokel

Clean Marina Program Still Making Strides

-Shonda Borden, AL-MS Clean Marina Coordinator, Auburn University Marine Extension & Research Center

The Alabama-Mississippi Clean Marina Program is in its second year, and the marinas involved in the program take pride in their environmental stewardship. This unique bi-state effort is a voluntary, non-regulatory program that promotes responsible marina operating practices in the interest of protecting water quality. It is led by Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium in partnership with many other groups, including Alabama Department of Natural Conservation and Resources (ADCNR), State Lands Division; ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division; Alabama Department of Environmental Management; Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center; Mississippi Department of Marine Resources; Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality; and Mobile Bay National Estuary Program. The program helps marinas protect the very resource that provides livelihood and enjoyment for the Gulf Coast: clean water.

Over time, the Clean Marina program will help to encourage marina operators to use more responsible practices, help educate boaters on environmentally sensitive practices, and create better communication of existing laws by offering recognition for creative and proactive marina operators implementing these practices. Designated Alabama-Mississippi Clean Marinas can be recognized by a flag flying proudly over the marina letting everyone know at a glance that they are going the extra mile to protect our waters. Marinas will be authorized to use the Clean Marina logo on their letterhead and in all their advertising and will be promoted through Alabama-Mississippi Clean Marina web sites, publications and public displays.

Alabama has so far designated three marinas as Clean Marinas: Zeke's Landing Marina in Orange Beach, Dog River Marina in Mobile and Harbor Pointe Marina in Dadeville. There are several more marinas in

Alabama pledged to work towards becoming a Clean Marina within the next year. Likewise, Mississippi has also designated the Beau Rivage Marina and The Palace Marina in Biloxi as Clean Marinas. Our coastline has seen two brutal hurricane seasons back to back, and marinas in both Alabama and Mississippi have suffered extensive damage to all facets of operation. Hurricane Ivan forced many coastal marinas in Alabama to completely rebuild, replacing docks, fuel lines, ship stores, dry stack buildings and more. Some marinas were unable to afford the high cost of rebuilding and were sold to developers. Hurricane Katrina affected marinas in both Alabama and Mississippi with extensive flooding and damage, but Mississippi by far took the brunt of the storm's wrath. Most of the coastal marinas have nothing left to show for what was once a prospering business except for a few piers and piles of rubble. The Alabama-Mississippi Clean Marina Program will continue to work with marinas in both states as the rebuilding process continues. We are



For more information, contact Shonda Borden at the Auburn Marine Extension and Research Center at 251-438-5690, or by email at bordesm@auburn.edu. On the web, please visit www.masgc.org/cleanmarina.

still trying to assess the damage, even months after the storm. Our coastal counties may never be the same as they were before Hurricane Katrina, but we can take this challenging opportunity to rebuild to even higher standards.

Dauphin Island Causeway and Isle of Herbes: Beneficially using Dredge Materials to Restore Critical Wetlands

In the 2005 National Coastal Condition Report (EPA, 2005), the Gulf of Mexico was ranked in the poor category relative to the status of estuarine habitats. Between 1990 and 2000, approximately 7,750 acres of estuarine wetland was lost in the Gulf region. Loss was associated with coastal development, sea-level rise, subsidence, and the interference with normal erosional/depositional processes.

In 1985, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) started using dredged material locally to restore and establish wetlands when they undertook a project on Isle of Herbes (aka Coffee Island) to create a marsh area on the northeast side of the island.

Where proper sites can be located and government and private agency cooperation can be coordinated, USACE commonly uses dredged material to restore wetlands. Recently, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium (MASGC), Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, Coastal Section and the Marine Resources Division, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and USACE came together to plan for two additional "beneficial use" projects to help restore critical wetlands within the Mobile estuary on the Dauphin Island Causeway and again on Isle of

Task Force Develops Plan for Aquatic Non-Natives

The Alabama Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force was established by Alabama Governor Bob Riley Executive Order #30 on June 2, 2005. The goal of the Task Force is to develop a management plan for aquatic non-natives in the State of Alabama.

The task force has met twice and developed a lengthy list of flora and fauna to be included in the plan. Preliminary work in the plan's development has included ranking each species' current and potential future ecosystem threat. The task force is currently evaluating avenues of introduction and potential management strategies for each species. If you would like to follow the task force's progress or find links to other invasive resources go to <http://www.mobilebaynep.com/ANS/ANS%20home.htm>.

The task force is led by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division assisted by the ADCNR Marine Resources Division, supported by the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership at Louisiana State University. Southern Biological Inventories has been contracted to write the management plan. -L. Yokel



Steve Ryder, ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (left) and Smoot Major, Southeastern Biological Inventories (right), leading a homework discussion at one of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force meetings. Two meetings were held, one in August in Daphne and another in November in Andalusia.



Spartina alterniflora, commonly known as smooth cord grass is a native plant on the U.S. Atlantic coast and the Gulf coast. *S. alterniflora* is a medium-large saltwater-loving grass that colonizes tidal marshes. Photo provided by USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database.

Herbes.

The Dauphin Island Causeway project will consist of the construction of approximately 3,960 feet of protective artificial reef wave break offshore to create a semi enclosed area for wetland re-establishment. *Spartina alterniflora* and *Spartina patens* will be the primary species of cord grass planted to colonize the area for wetland habitat along the

3,960 feet of shoreline (approx. 4 acres.) In addition, 2,250 cubic yards of dead oyster shells (hard bottom substrate) will be emplaced to promote oyster habitat. The objectives of this project are to stabilize sediments in the shallow near shore waters and reduce turbidity and erosion, resulting in improved water quality.

This project is in the combined planning and development phase and is estimated to cost approximately \$439,000.

It is estimated that construction will begin by summer, 2006.

The Isle of Herbes project will utilize dredge material from the maintenance of the Bayou La Batre Federal Navigation channel to restore approximately 10 acres of tidal wetlands. Material removed from the channel will be deposited inside a minimal containment levee constructed of natural

material with a wave break that will be constructed offshore to reduce wave energy, providing protection to the newly created wetland. Deposited fill material will be used to achieve an appropriate elevation between the containment levee and shore at which point wetland species such as *Spartina alterniflora*, *Juncus roemerianus*, and *Spartina patens* will be planted. Once the plants are established, the containment dike will be breached at various locations to permit tidal flow. The objectives of this project are to restore wetland and associated vegetation to improve habitat for piping plovers, brown pelicans, seaside sparrows and diamond back terrapins, to increase nesting habitat for colonial birds, and expand suitable substrate for oyster reproduction.

USACE has recently completed its preliminary restoration plan and anticipates entering the combined planning and design phase within the next two to three months. The project is estimated to enter the construction phase some time during the summer of 2006 and is expected to cost up to \$850,000.

-R. A. Swann

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www.outdooralabama.com



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Farewell to NEP Interns

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (NEP) would like to extend a big THANK YOU to Justin Beebe and Jennifer Fank for their contributions to the Mobile Bay NEP this year. Justin Beebe worked through the summer on the Oyster Gardening Program. He will continue his studies at the University of South Alabama (USA) in the Earth Sciences Department. Jennifer Fank participated in a number of outreach activities this fall and will graduate from USA in Interdisciplinary Studies December 2005. Congratulations to Justin and Jennifer for a job well done. You will be missed.



Justin Beebe, Summer Intern for the Mobile Bay NEP, working in oyster cage for Oyster Gardening Program.



Jennifer Fank, Fall Intern with the Mobile Bay NEP, working in the field.