

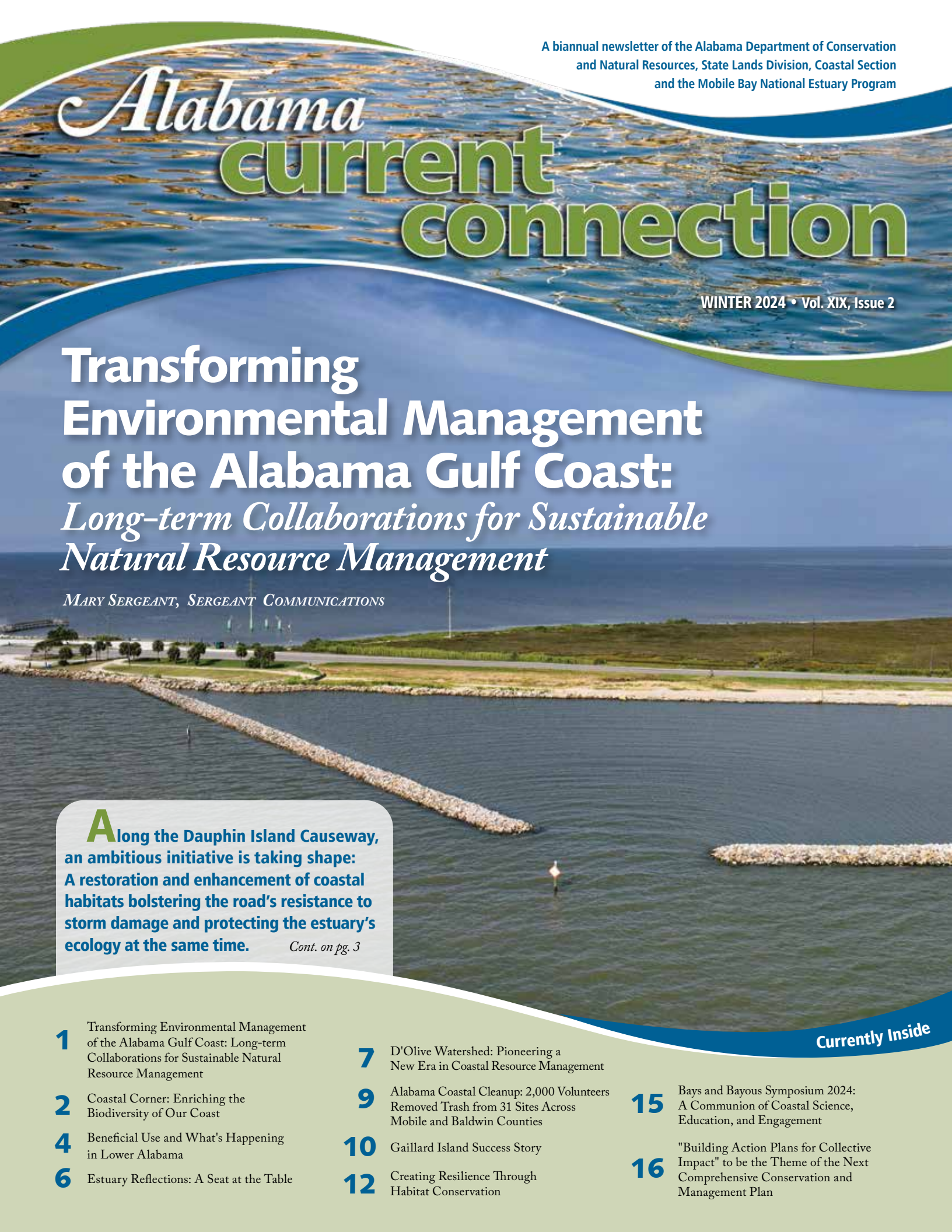
Alabama current connection

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Transforming Environmental Management of the Alabama Gulf Coast: *Long-term Collaborations for Sustainable Natural Resource Management*

MARY SERGEANT, SERGEANT COMMUNICATIONS

Along the Dauphin Island Causeway, an ambitious initiative is taking shape: A restoration and enhancement of coastal habitats bolstering the road's resistance to storm damage and protecting the estuary's ecology at the same time. *Cont. on pg. 3*

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Currently Inside



Coastal Corner

By CHRIS BLANKENSHIP, COMMISSIONER,
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Enriching the Biodiversity of Our Coast

Photo by Colette Boehm

Alabama's coastlines are rich in biodiversity, home to thousands of plant and animal species. From the winding rivers feeding into Mobile Bay to the delicate wetlands protecting our coast, the diversity of life here is a source of beauty, resilience, and livelihood for many.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life within an ecosystem, each creature a piece of the puzzle, eating and being eaten, living and dying within the system. Alabama's coast is a dynamic, always changing environment, which means balance is always a delicate but essential element of conservation efforts. It's a process requiring patience, collaboration, and an understanding of the natural rhythms of the environment.

The Alabama Department of Natural Resources (ADCNR) understands this, implementing strategies with partners to work with nature to restore function and enhance habitats critical to Alabama's biodiversity. Ongoing urban growth presents certain unique challenges such as potentially fragmenting or reducing habitats and increasing storm-runoff. ADCNR has addressed the need to promote a balance between growth and coastal biodiversity by furthering acquisition of unique, ecologically sensitive parcels of land.

ADCNR recently acquired 79 acres of land adjacent to the Beach Club Resort on the Fort Morgan Peninsula. This parcel is also adjacent to the Gulf Highlands property acquired in 2018. The combined area of the Gulf Highlands and Beach Club West properties includes nearly 200 acres. Previously the largest privately held,

undeveloped beachfront property remaining in Coastal Alabama, these properties include more than a half mile of Gulf frontage beach and dune habitat. The dune system's quality and extent contribute to the parcel's unique ecological benefits.

These properties are now part of ADCNR's State Parks System, ensuring their ongoing protection, public access, and improved habitat management benefiting sea turtles, shorebirds, migratory birds and the endangered Alabama beach mouse. Achieving this milestone would not have been possible without the support of Alabama Governor Kay Ivey who allocated GOMESA funding to go along with funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF) to make the acquisition of this acreage a reality.

Cont. on pg. 14

Transforming Environmental Management of the Alabama Gulf Coast

Cont. from page 1

The project, led by Mobile County, with the support from ADCNR, involves the use of dredged sediments from the Mobile Harbor Channel – material traditionally disposed of in designated sites several miles out in the Gulf of Mexico.

Now, as a result of an increased emphasis on sustainable practices to achieve environmental benefits, this sediment is being put to use as material for shoreline restoration. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mobile District (Corps), in an agreement with Mobile County, will place approximately 850,000 cubic yards of sediment along the Dauphin Island Causeway. The sediment will be used to restore tidal habitat along a 3.3-mile stretch from Bayfront Park to Cedar Point.

The addition of the dredged material will not only increase the resilience of Dauphin Island's only access road to storm damage and erosion; the project is also expected to restore marsh and oyster habitat where wetlands have eroded away.

It's a true win-win, according to Chris Blankenship, ADCNR Commissioner. Given there will always be a need to dredge waterways throughout the region, the Corps has an unlimited supply of sediment, he noted. "It's making good use of material to put on the shoreline, or in a place in need of some sediment to build marshes supporting our estuaries," he said.

The Dauphin Island Causeway Shoreline Restoration Project went through an extensive and time laden permitting process leading to its current construction. Going forward, an interagency task force has been charged with identifying future uses of this material to nourish recent restoration projects and stabilize shorelines across the coast.

A project recently funded by a state of Alabama GOMESA award aims to make dredge placement more efficient across Dauphin Island, according to Jeff Collier, its mayor. A programmatic dredge permit will allow the Town to use this "umbrella"

permit to conduct certain restoration activities, avoiding duplication of effort by regulatory agencies and making what could be a very time consuming activity move faster. With a programmatic dredge permit in hand, the Town will have the ability to identify and permit areas for beneficial dredge placement, partnering with the Corps to arrange for placement of materials, Collier said. "It positions us so when the Corps has dredge material available, we are in a position to make a timely decision to accept it," he said.

Once this permit is in place, as the Corps dredges sediment, "They can come to us and say, 'We have this material; where do you want it?'" Collier said. "That's never happened before, because the Corps has always had their own predetermined locations, and those were mainly offshore."

Collier noted the sediment management projects are thoroughly evaluated for potential environmental impacts. "Anything done is reviewed by a host of regulatory agencies," he said. "No one wants to do anything to harm the environment. The programmatic permit and a list of available placement sites is reviewed by several

federal and state agencies to ensure no adverse impacts. The review process goes all the way up to the federal level."

"The sediment management projects will restore and enhance numerous sites on and around Dauphin Island, including Aloe Bay, Little Dauphin Island, and more," Collier said. These projects will also enhance public access and enjoyment of the Island's abundant natural resources.

"The overall goal is environmental stewardship," he said. Because Dauphin Island is a barrier island, "everything we do is meant to promote a healthy environment, and in turn supports a sustainable economy."

"The process of transforming sediment management in the region is expected to result in fiscally responsible, sustainable environmental management, and the effort has also created productive partnerships among numerous agencies and local governments," Blankenship said.

"We've got good leadership and we're all interested in working together to make the best use of dredged material and find ways to collaborate and do good work," he said. "We're all trying to do good things and work together."





Beneficial Use and What's Happening in Lower Alabama

By MARY SERGEANT, SERGEANT COMMUNICATIONS

Bayfront Park, photo by Mobile County Commission

According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), “over 90 million cubic yards of material is dredged annually to maintain navigation channels in Mobile Bay.” Of that 90 million, they report 85% is available for beneficial use, the practice of repurposing dredged material to restore habitats, nourish beaches, combat erosion, and protect waterways.

In coastal Alabama, numerous local environmental organizations are putting this material to work in beneficial use projects across the region, from Fowl River to the Dauphin Island Causeway.

Here are updates on some of these projects happening in south Alabama.

Deer River Coastal Marsh Stabilization and Restoration Project

The Deer River marsh system is essential to the 1,000-plus developed and undeveloped acres within the Deer River Watershed. Unfortunately, the river has averaged 12 feet of annual shoreline regression since 1997. Because of this, MBNEP decided to step in with the support of ADCNR and funding from the NFWF. The organization broke ground on this \$19-million project in fall 2023 with the goal of safeguarding the area against tropical systems, waves and ship wakes, restoring the river’s salt marsh habitat.

Project Update: According to MBNEP Restoration Program Lead Jason Kudulis, construction of the containment berm is now complete. In December, the Corps is scheduled to fill this area with dredge materials to create 19 acres of salt

marsh. Once settled this area will be planted with different marsh grasses. In addition, the middle fork of Deer River will be dredged and this material will be used to nourish the adjacent marsh.

Fowl River Marsh Restoration and Shoreline Stabilization Project

Saltwater intrusion, sea level rise, and boat wakes have all caused severe degradation to the marsh spits along Fowl River. To combat this issue, MBNEP with assistance from ADCNR, received \$17 million in funding from NFWF’s GEBF to commence this project in 2017, which began with a three-year comprehensive marsh study. The project includes adding thin-layer sediment to raise the elevation of the marsh spits as well as installing timber wave screens and limited riprap to protect the spits and adjacent seagrass beds.



Fowl River, photo by Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Project Update: After the study was complete and the project designed, ground was officially broken in July. Currently, “crews are driving pilings, building the wave screens, and dry placing material on the marshes in a thin layer,” stated Kudulis. Completion of this phase is estimated for November.

Dauphin Island Causeway Shoreline Restoration

Conceived back in 2023, the Dauphin Island Causeway restoration was designed for two purposes – to re-establish critical marsh habitat and fisheries resources and increase the resilience of the Island’s only evacuation route. The project is being implemented by Mobile County with ADCNR’s support and funded by NFWF’s GEBF and Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund. The first portion of the project consisted of placing more than 150,000 tons of rock from Bayfront Park to Cedar Point to create segmented breakwaters serving as wave protection.

Project Update: Starting this fall, the Corps will fill the area behind the breakwaters with 850,000 cubic yards of dredge material pulled from Mobile Harbor, creating an estimated 80 acres of marsh habitat.

Salt Aire Shoreline Restoration

Through NFWF’s GEBF and with ADCNR’s support the Mobile County Commission was able to acquire the 233-acre Salt Aire property, located along the western shore of Mobile Bay. The County has proposed protection of the region’s degraded shoreline via wave

attenuation structures along with the restoration of 30 acres of coastal marsh with beneficial use materials dredged from nearby areas.

Project Update: The County expects to have a revised permit for the Salt Aire Shoreline Restoration soon. From there, the project will go out to bid.



Fowl River, photo by Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

A Seat at the Table



Jason Kudulis, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Restoration Program Lead discusses a restoration project with Mayor of Mobile Sandy Stimpson.

Growing up in a suburb of Boston, my childhood memories are filled with the vibrant chaos of Italian family dinners – overflowing with diverse flavors and passionate conversations. Looking back, I see how these lively meals prepared me for my work in environmental stewardship, especially here on the Alabama coast.

For more than 20 years working for the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), and now as the Director, I've worked to blend voices – government agencies, businesses, scientists, and citizens – into a shared vision of a healthier, more resilient coastal Alabama. Much like an Italian feast, it's all about orchestrating diverse ingredients to create something greater than the sum of its parts.

MBNEP, one of 28 national programs established by Congress to protect our estuaries, serves as a convener, bringing people to the table to collaboratively manage a delicate ecological roux that binds the exquisiteness of this place.

Together, we've crafted our "cookbook," the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). This science grounded blueprint guides our efforts to protect what Alabamians hold dear: access to water, healthy shorelines, abundant wildlife, resilient communities, and swimmable, fishable waters.

Just as in an Italian family, traditions are rooted in shared values. Our work reflects the values of this region – faith, family, and a deep connection to the land. Alabamians have always understood the importance of being good stewards of the environment. People protect what they care about. Fueled by passion, our rich cultural, historical, and natural legacy defines our traditions and quality of life. We honor these legacies through our work, recognizing a shared heritage and coastal way of life that nourishes us all.

Our collective commitment to stewardship has fostered a restoration economy, engaging the region in sustainable practices. Our relationships with local governments, businesses, and communities have allowed us to work together on solutions aligning with local priorities while ensuring

our piece of the world remains healthy and vibrant for generations to come.

As we look towards the future, we're reimagining our recipes for the next 10 years of the CCMP. This includes exploring opportunities in managing community growth to create a more resilient region; rethinking how we address waste issues, and what it means to reduce, reuse, and keep our waters clean; and addressing sediment in our ecosystem, from using sediment for shoreline protection and habitat enhancement to reducing sedimentation where it's doing the most harm. To solve environmental challenges like sea-level rise and stronger storms, an appetite for practical, innovative solutions is needed. Coastal Alabama is poised to lead in innovation to preserve our way of life, while ensuring economic and environmental sustainability for the Gulf Coast. And we'll do it together.

Though I may no longer be in Boston, and it's been a while since I've had to prepare a Feast of the Seven Fishes, I've found a new home, a new table to set. The door is open, the food is ready, and there's a seat for everyone.

D'Olive Watershed: *Pioneering a New Era in Coastal Resource Management*

BY CHRISTIAN MILLER, PUBLIC SECTOR PROGRAM LEAD, MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

The D'Olive Creek Watershed, located on the eastern shore of Baldwin County, is a prime example of how a watershed approach can successfully guide coastal resource restoration and management. Covering approximately 8,700 acres, the Watershed includes parts of the cities of Daphne and Spanish Fort and drains three main tributaries: D'Olive Creek, Tiawassee Creek, and Joe's Branch, all of which flow into D'Olive Bay. Over the past few decades, rapid growth has caused significant erosion and sedimentation, leading to multiple streams within the watershed being listed on Alabama's 303(d) list of impaired waters due to sedimentation.

To tackle these challenges, a collaborative effort involving local property owners, municipal and county governments, State agencies, and the MBNEP led to the development of a comprehensive watershed management plan in 2010. This plan detailed the condition of the watershed and identified strategies to reduce sedimentation and improve water quality entering Mobile Bay.

So far, the D'Olive Watershed Plan has driven almost \$20 million in investments to reduce erosion by over 28,000 tons per year, enhancing habitat and water quality, and leading to the removal of Joe's Branch from the State of Alabama's List of Impaired Waters. A key factor in this success has been the cooperation among governing authorities, which not only guided the implementation of the



Mayor of Daphne Robin LeJuene and Mayor of Mobile Sandy Stimpson are pictured at D'Olive Creek.

watershed management plan but also improved local stormwater management and natural resource protection regulations in Daphne and Spanish Fort.

The success in D'Olive serves as proof of the effectiveness of a comprehensive watershed approach and has provided a model for coastal restoration efforts across Alabama's intertidal watersheds.

The success in D'Olive serves as proof of the effectiveness of a comprehensive watershed approach and has provided a model for coastal restoration efforts across Alabama's intertidal watersheds.

Implementing this model, across all 45 tidally influenced drainage basins is now possible with funding from NFWF's GEBF, and a RESTORE grant from the State of

Alabama. These efforts are guided by baseline watershed sediment assessments, citizen input, landscape assessments, and recommendations for where projects will have the best impacts.

In addition, the watershed planning process has equipped local resource managers with tools to manage growth and development while minimizing negative impacts on habitats and water quality. A comprehensive review of the regulatory framework in Mobile and Baldwin counties outlined federal, State, county, and municipal requirements for stormwater management, natural resource protection, and low-impact development.

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D'Olive Watershed: *Pioneering a New Era in Coastal Resource Management* Cont. from page 7

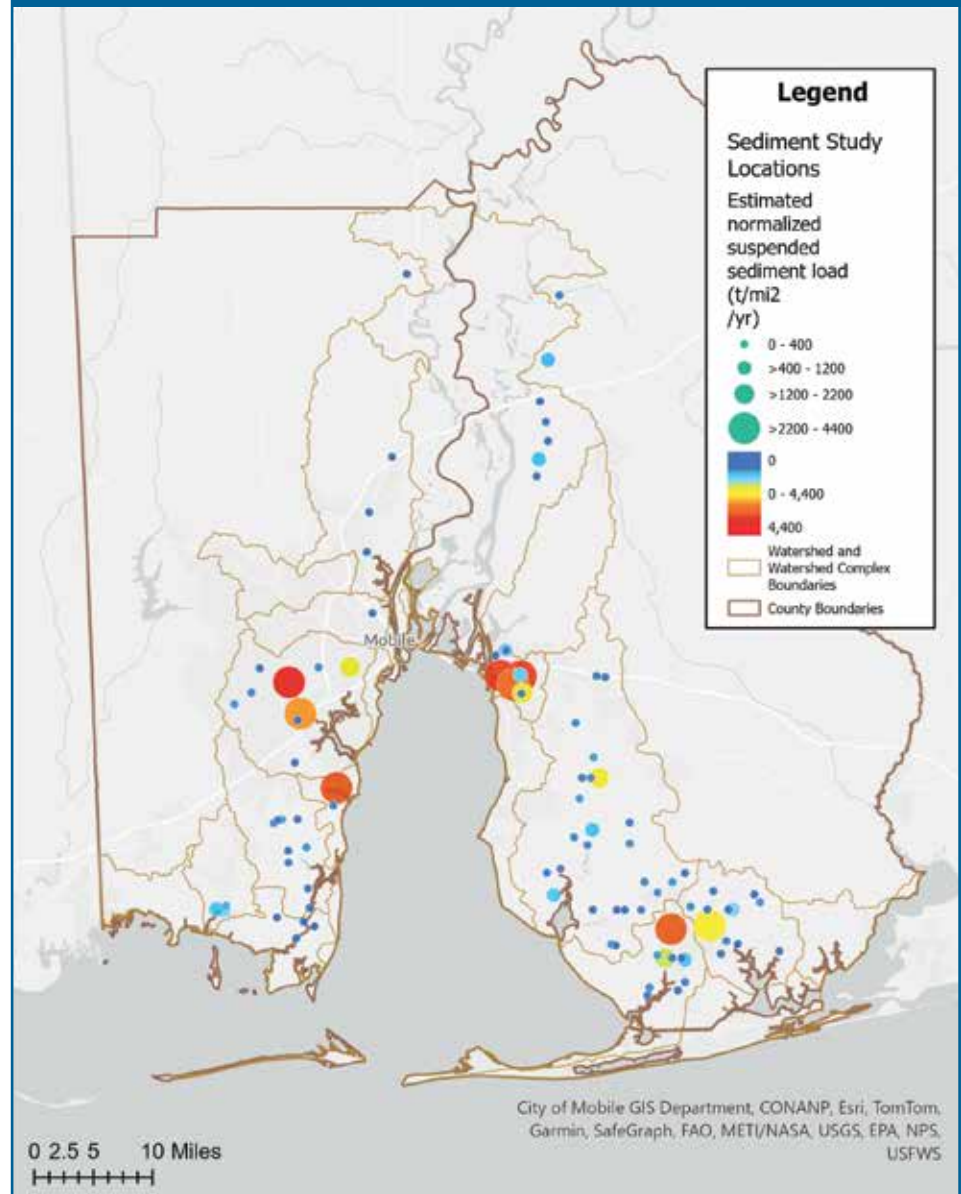
This review, which has been updated every other year, has been an essential resource for municipalities working to mitigate the effects of increased impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff from development. Hydrologic modeling has also improved planning decisions, ensuring sustainable development practices are prioritized.

To extend the lessons learned from D'Olive, annual stream restoration workshops have brought together engineering, construction, and local government professionals to share critical information. These workshops have fostered open discussions about challenges and solutions, enabling professionals to enhance their ability to manage complex conservation and restoration projects.

Currently, restoration efforts are underway in watersheds such as Wolf Bay, Fish River, and Magnolia River in Baldwin County, as well as Three Mile Creek, Dog River and Fowl River in Mobile County. These projects follow the same watershed-based assessment, planning, and implementation framework first established in the D'Olive Watershed.

Intergovernmental cooperation has also been crucial, with efforts in D'Olive serving as a model for groups like Plan Lower Alabama Now (PLAN). PLAN, which began by bringing together municipal and county planners during the development of the Weeks Bay Watershed Management Plan, and continues to meet monthly to sustain networking and knowledge transfer. According to Baldwin County Natural Resource Planner Ashley Campbell, "The D'Olive Plan wasn't a document that sat on the shelf, it was used to guide restoration. We updated regulations and used it to guide implementation. It has been responsible for the successes we've seen."

Baseline Sediment Loading in Coastal Watersheds



Adopting a watershed approach to coastal resource management has fostered a shared understanding of the interconnectedness between natural and built environments. This shift from

traditional management across geopolitical boundaries to a focus on improving water and habitat quality by drainage basins has been key to sustaining both our economy and quality of life.

Alabama Coastal Cleanup: 2,000 Volunteers Removed Trash from 31 Sites Across Mobile and Baldwin Counties

By CHRIS BLANKENSHIP, COMMISSIONER, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES



Spencer Ryan, executive director of ALPALS, retires.



Volunteers removed over 900 tons of trash from 31 sites in Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

The 37th Annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup took place on the third Saturday in September this year – just like it has every third Saturday of September since it began in 1989. The morning dawned on over 2,000 volunteers, eager to pick up litter at 31 sites across Mobile and Baldwin Counties. Since its inception, the Alabama Coastal Cleanup has resulted in over 900 tons of trash being removed from Alabama's coast, an effort involving more than a hundred thousand volunteers and a few dedicated coordinators. The Alabama Coastal Cleanup is the largest single day volunteer event in Alabama and is annually coordinated by the State Lands Division, Coastal Section of the ADCNR and the nonprofit Alabama People Against a Littered State (ALPALS).

This year's cleanup was significant for more than just the number of volunteers and the volume of trash removed, however, as it marked the end of an era. Spencer executive director of ALPALS, announced his retirement. Through the years, Spencer has displayed an unwavering dedication to making Alabama a cleaner place. Through public outreach, partnerships, and boots on the ground trash removal, Spencer made it his mission to keep Alabama "the Beautiful." While ADCNR takes on most of the site and zone captain coordination, Spencer and ALPALS shoulder the responsibility of

recruiting sponsorships, purchasing supplies, and organizing the behind the scenes work necessary for the success of a massive volunteer event.

Since its inception, the Alabama Coastal Cleanup has resulted in over 900 tons of trash being removed from Alabama's coast, an effort involving more than a hundred thousand volunteers and a few dedicated coordinators.

Spencer Ryan has played such an iconic role in his management of ALPALS and his dedication to the Alabama Coastal Cleanup, it is difficult to imagine the event occurring without his participation. His successor, Jamie Mitchell, has a solid foundation to build on, and there is no doubt she will flourish in her new role. We also hope Spencer will find fulfillment in his future

pursuits. We suspect we will see Spencer at future cleanups for many years to come.



Gaillard Island Success Story

BY SALLY ERICSON

Photo by Colette Boehm

There's an environmental success story in the middle of Mobile Bay: Gaillard Island, created in the early 1980s as a site for millions of pounds of dredged material from the construction of the Theodore Ship Channel and now home to thousands of brown pelicans.

The island shelters between 4,000 and 5,000 pairs of brown pelicans who nest there every year, according to Dr. John Dindo, a retired marine scientist with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, who checks the site regularly. "Gaillard Island has the largest single colony of brown pelicans in

one area in the Gulf of Mexico," he said.

The 1,300-acre island was designed by the Corps of Engineers and named in honor of Dr. Wilson Gaillard, a lifelong nature lover who came up with the idea to convert the unwanted sediment into a wildlife refuge.

The dredging began on May 24, 1979, and consumed 828 days, only interrupted by Hurricane Frederic on September 12, 1979. The island was completed on August 28, 1981, with approximately 33.5 million cubic yards of dredged material, according to a 1986 analysis by the Corps of Engineers.

Prior to the project being built, environmental impact analysis was

completed indicating potential concerns: water quality, loss of natural resources, and potential harm to oyster beds.

Through extensive federal agency and local fishermen consultation, the project was allowed to proceed.

Two years after the island was completed, scientists spotted four brown pelicans nesting on the site. The discovery was exciting because the species had suffered greatly from exposure to the pesticide DDT, which caused their eggshells to be so thin that they shattered when the birds attempted to sit on their nests.

"At first, the brown pelicans nested in the island's vegetation areas," Dindo said,



Photo courtesy of John Dindo, Dauphin Island Sea Lab



Photo by Colette Boehm



Photo courtesy of John Dindo, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

but now, most of the birds nest in the island's rocky border. "They actually build their nests in and among the rocks." With the exception of fire ants, which prey on the very young hatchlings, there are no predators to bother the birds, and the island is off-limits to humans. The birds have a very high success rate when it comes to the nesting cycle," Dindo said.

That doesn't mean, however, life is always easy for the newly rebounded brown pelican population. The island is large enough to support at least four to five times the amount of birds than it currently houses, but the region's food resources are too limited, a situation

known as carrying capacity, Dindo said. "There are only so many organisms in the Bay to support the populations around the Bay."

About 15 years ago, Dindo said, scientists banded some of the brown pelicans with GPS trackers to track where they roamed to feed, but the results showed most of the birds stayed within the immediate region.

Gaillard Island is also home to many other birds. The species he has witnessed include three species of terns (Royal, Caspian and Sandwich); Cattle and Snowy egrets; Tricolored and Black-Crowned Night herons; White ibis; and many more.

The Royal terns have the largest colonies, with 1,500 to 2,000 birds in each colony.

The island continues to receive material from the shipping canal periodically as the need arises. However, Dindo said, the sediment is only added to the island at times when the operation will not disrupt the nesting cycle, which usually begins in April and continues through the end of August.

"Over the last 10 years, we've worked with the Corps very closely on when the nesting season begins and ends," Dindo said. "They've got some young guys down there and they actually listen to us... They've been very cooperative."



Creating Resilience Through Habitat Conservation

By MARY SERGEANT, SERGEANT COMMUNICATIONS

Photo by Colette Boehm

As our area continues to grow, so does the need for land protection, specifically to mitigate sedimentation, the process by which eroded particles of rock are moved by water from areas of high elevation to low elevation and then deposited. In South Alabama, sedimentation is often triggered by heavy rainfall and tropical occurrences, leading to poor water quality, damage to wildlife habitats, and flooding.

Streams most heavily impacted by sedimentation are often in areas where rapid growth and development have occurred. In these previously rural areas, land use planning is often not in place. “We are seeing increased stream bank erosion at one of our properties in Baldwin County, and we believe this erosion is related to increases in run off from conversion of natural habitats to hard impervious surfaces, increasing volumes and velocity of runoff,” says Jane Herndon, executive director of South Alabama Land Trust.

Recently, 65 acres along Mobile Bay were generously donated to South Alabama Land Trust (SALT). The majority of this land consists of wetlands, which, according to Herndon, executive director of SALT, “act like a sponge for stormwater.” In their effort to protect local lands from sedimentation, SALT will preserve these acres alongside the other 300-plus they protect around Fish River in Baldwin County.

“We have over 15,000 feet of undeveloped river frontage,” stated Herndon. “That land acts as a riparian buffer where the natural vegetation filters out sediment from stormwater runoff before it reaches the river.”

Another organization heavily involved in land protection across Lower Alabama is the Baldwin County Commission.



Photos by Collette Boehm

“As Baldwin County grows, it is imperative we achieve a balance between the quality of the environment and the economic interests of our citizens,” states Jay Dickson, Baldwin County planning and zoning director. “This will ensure development proceeds without compromising our quality of life.”

To do this, the commission is actively working alongside local and state agencies, as well as private partners and organizations, to balance growth – Baldwin County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the country. They’re also developing programs to educate citizens, farmers, builders, and developers on best practices for protecting watersheds, as well as strengthening development and subdivision regulations.

Two areas of immediate concern are the Bon Secour River and Magnolia Springs watersheds. Both experienced severe stream channel degradation during Hurricane Sally, resulting in excessive sedimentation, according to Natural Resource Planner Ashley Campbell. For Magnolia River, the Baldwin County Commission received \$4-million in GOMESA funding from the State of

Alabama to fund property acquisition and designed a 175-acre constructed wetland and regional detention facility.

“This project will convert existing borrow pits and abandoned borrow pits adjacent to Magnolia River into constructed wetlands and regional detention ponds to improve water quality and mitigate flooding in the Magnolia River Watershed, as well as the Weeks Bay Watershed,” says Frank Lundy, Baldwin County engineer.

On Bon Secour River, the commission has allocated funding for the construction of a half-mile regional detention pond and two miles of culvert and ditch improvements along CR-49 South and CR-19 to reduce sediment load impacts, improve water quality, and minimize local flooding. Other current projects include the extension of Pleasant Road and the conversion of farmland along Fish River, both aimed at creating stormwater detention ponds.

Across the Bay, the Mobile County Commission has also been working on several projects to help alleviate the effects of sedimentation in its waterways. On the way to Dauphin Island the State of

Alabama with help from Deep Water Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment funding created a “pocket” beach was created at Bayfront Park, a popular spot for birdwatchers. Completed in 2023, the park’s enhancements included shoreline adjustments to provide protected access to Mobile Bay for water activities, like swimming and kayaking.

In addition, ADCNR assisted the County with NFWF funding to acquire 300 acres of wetland habitat in the Dog River Watershed. Lower Halls Mill Creek is “one of the largest contiguous undeveloped areas of bottomland hardwood wetlands in the watershed,” according to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. By acquiring this land, the county is permanently protecting the area from commercial or residential development to preserve the downstream water quality and habitats found within the watershed.

Efforts like these showcase the region’s commitment to protecting our natural resources and preserving our vital ecosystems for future generations.



Photos by Colette Boehm



Enriching the Biodiversity of Our Coast *Cont. from page 2*

Moving across Coastal Alabama to the eastern boundary of Florida, ADCNR also recently acquired a significant addition to the Perdido River (WMA). The recent purchase, which used a variety of funding sources including RESTORE, adds 7,500 acres to the Perdido River WMA for a total of 24,500 acres. Similar to the diverse habitat of the Fort Morgan peninsula, the Perdido River WMA property supports a wide variety of upland and wetland species, including white-tailed deer, Eastern wild turkeys and small game as well as waterfowl.

With Coastal Alabama's status as one of the fastest-growing areas in the nation in terms of residential growth and development, these strategic acquisitions protect important habitat as well as the Perdido and Mobile Bay estuaries. These properties also provide important recreational access opportunities to the community.

Enhancing and restoring biodiversity takes more than just land acquisition. The state also employs direct habitat

management. Methods like prescribed burns and selective thinning help maintain ecosystems, bolstering habitats for keystone species. For instance, a focus on longleaf pine management in the Perdido watershed enhances protection for the gopher tortoise. This approach is complemented by hydrologic restoration activities, such as mitigating the impacts of roads or ditches.

Community engagement and inter-agency collaboration are integral to these initiatives. Through educational outreach and coordination with local stakeholders, ADCNR fosters regional support that ensures the success of future projects. The long-term goals are to build a framework for enhancing habitat connectivity, improving water quality, and setting benchmarks to gauge long-term restoration success in Alabama's coastal regions.

Together, these conservation efforts knit back together the ecological connections sustaining our landscape. ADCNR is responsible for managing and conserving Alabama's natural resources. The approach

the State is taking in recognizes that protecting biodiversity is not just about protecting individual species, but instead the relationships between species, habitats, and the people who rely on them.

Conserving and restoring Alabama's coastlines is a commitment to shaping a sustainable future. It's a journey of identifying meaningful steps; protecting tracts of land, managing unique habitats, and bringing people and organizations together in long-term partnership. We are committed to working together as we continue to enhance ecological function across the coast, and in doing so will ensure that Alabama's estuaries and coast remains a place where biodiversity thrives.

For more information on ADCNR and acquisitions and management efforts as well as Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Restoration projects, visit OutdoorAlabama.com.

Bays and Bayous Symposium 2024:

A Communion of Coastal Science, Education, and Engagement

BY MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM STAFF

Bays and Bayous Symposium 2024 was held on November 19-20 at the Mississippi Coast Convention Center in Biloxi.

The biannual symposium, hosted by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium provided over 450 attendees with an opportunity to connect scientists, students, non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and resource managers with the latest research from the region.

From ecological studies to innovative extension programming, feats of engineering and quiet stories of what it means to pull a life from the water, the conference is a platform for everyone who loves the coast.

That's where Bays and Bayous finds its niche. Through its commitment to serve those who serve the Gulf most directly, this symposium brings together ongoing research related to the challenges we face across the northern Gulf, sometimes looking outside of the region to inform best practices in natural resource management closer to home.

This year's event did not disappoint. We learned about innovations and groundbreaking research happening in our backyard. Mary Collier Eastburn shared with us how the City of Mobile is partnering with Ransom Ministries to engage the unhoused community in litter abatement. Blair Morrison warned of the travails of setting up a monitoring station near an active beaver population.

Throughout the conference, educators and extension professionals at all stages of their careers took the stage to discuss their outreach efforts and the dos and don'ts of the field. Educational initiatives were spotlighted that are driving meaningful change within diverse Gulf communities. The outcomes of Bays and Bayous are demonstrated through the many attendees



returning home and incorporating what was learned in their day-to-day work.

The collaboration, the conversations, and the coming together is a value extending well beyond the two days of the symposium. With so many professionals and students in attendance, Bays and Bayous offers a networking environment where individuals meet people they will work with, not "maybe one day in the future," but tomorrow. Meaningful connections are born from the event, connections making the Gulf Coast stronger.

Ultimately, science is in the driver's seat. There were over 150 posters and oral presentations for attendees to experience from professional researchers and students alike. Bays and Bayous honors both those who have studied our coastal processes for decades and the next generation of leaders in coastal science. The young scholars are celebrated through awards and scholarships, and shown, maybe for the first time, their work makes a difference.

The Bays and Bayous Symposium is always a success, as it ties those of us working down here together in a common purpose. It will be held again in 2026, this time in Mobile, and we're looking forward, not just to seeing each other again, but to hearing what the newest generation has to share.

Alabama current connection

About the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program:

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's mission is to lead the wise stewardship of water quality and living resources of Mobile Bay and the Tensaw Delta. The MBNEP serves as a catalyst for activities of estuary stakeholders, helping to build community-based organizational capacity for sound resource management and leveraging commitment and investment to ensure the estuary's sustainability. For more information, please contact the MBNEP office at 251-431-6409.

About ADCNR, State Lands Division, Coastal Section:

In an effort to protect and enhance coastal resources and reduce potential conflicts between environmental and economic interests, the Alabama Coastal Area Management Program (ACAMP) was approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1979. The ACAMP is administered through the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, Coastal Section. For more information, contact the Coastal Section office at 251-621-1216.

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Alabama Current Connection encourages reprinting of its articles in other publications. If you would like to subscribe, email mbnep@mobilebaynep.com. If you have recommendations for future articles, please contact:

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We reserve the right to edit submissions.

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Building Action Plans for Collective Impact

Working Towards the Next Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan

On Thursday, October 24th, at the National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico, the MBNEP hosted a planning workshop for the next iteration of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

With the theme of “Building Action Plans for Collective Impact,” more than one hundred members of the MBNEP’s Management Conference came out to dedicate their time and expertise to hashing out specific action items to be represented in the new CCMP. These volunteers spent six hours hashing out issues and solutions, but it was well worth it for the more than 1,000 ideas shared.

The next 10 years of the CCMP will address three key areas, Sediment, Growth, and Waste Management. Each of the more than 1,000 ideas developed at the Summit focuses on addressing one these

issues through either action, education, innovation, knowledge, partnerships, or creating funding opportunities.

The MBNEP would like to thank the Management Conference for all of their hard work and commitment over the years, both looking back and moving forward. The Management Conference is the NEP, and the next ten years of implementing the CCMP will require these hardworking man and women to roll up their sleeves and, with support from NEP staff, turn their ideas into reality.

