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Poarch Band of Creek Indians: Intrinsically Connected to Our Coast

By Debi Foster, Communications Coordinator, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Caitlin Color Plate 1
Courtesy of Poarch Bank of Creek Indians

"Each day, tradition says, our people would stand at sunrise facing east, then dip in the water four times to honor the Great Earth Mother's daily rebirth. If a person was too old to get into the water, the water was brought to them. It represented the spirit. It was "sacred," according to Tribal Historic Preservation Officer of the Poarch Band Indians, Robert Thrower. Little Bird, his Indian name, is an oral tradition scholar and the last person on the Poarch, Alabama reservation to receive an official Indian name. Bestowed on him by his late great-grandmother, the last medicine woman of the Poarch, Thrower says the name represents a great honor.

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Currently Inside

Coastal Corner

By Phillip Hinesley, Coastal Section Chief, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division

The History of Public Access to Alabama Waters

Access to public waters is a right that many Alabamians take for granted. Fortunately for us, this right is protected in Alabama by a concept known as the Public Trust Doctrine. Rooted in ancient Roman law and expanded in the English Magna Carta, this doctrine, in general, protects the rights of the citizens to access public waters and submerged lands and to consume common resources such as game animals and fish, subject to government regulation. These resources are held "in trust" by the government for the people. This concept was formalized in the United States by several Supreme Court decisions.

In the Illinois Central Railroad vs. Illinois (1892) ruling, the court recognized state title to navigable and tidally-influenced waters and water bottoms, establishing these as trust resources.

Currently, 35 states with coastal areas apply the Public Trust Doctrine, each with its own legal interpretation of the concept. In Alabama, the doctrine is applied such that submerged lands are owned by the State and held in trust for the benefit of the public. The boundary between state-owned submerged lands and upland private property along tidal waters is mean high tide. According to the Alabama State Code (§ 9-12-22), "All the beds and bottoms of the rivers, bayous, lagoons, lakes, bays, sounds and inlets within the jurisdiction of the State of Alabama are the property of the State of Alabama to be held in trust for the people thereof." Further evidence of the state's interest to protect the public's right is the Alabama Coastal Area Management Program (ACAMP) policy to safeguard public access to and use of coastal lands and waters such as beaches, shorelines, boat landings, and fishing grounds. Although property owners do not hold title to submerged lands adjacent to their property, they do retain special rights to the adjacent tidal area, known as riparian rights. These include the right to build a pier or dock, to harvest oysters, and to access the water.

Access to public waters is a right many Alabamians take for granted.

While private property rights are important and must be recognized, so is the public's right to access the water and use water resources.

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There is increasing demand for both private and public access to coastal waters. This is evidenced by the increasing demand for recreational activities, including rising numbers of boater registrations, permits for waterfront developments, and permit requests for private docks, harbors and marinas. As these demands are accommodated, the areas for public access and use are decreased.

As Alabama's coastline is rapidly developed and held in private ownership, the right of citizens to access coastal waters is challenged. A recent preliminary inventory of coastal public access sites revealed 140 sites in Baldwin County and 38 sites in Mobile County. While this may seem like a large number, the increase in population and development in the Alabama coastal zone will likely result in the need for a greater number of access points to meet the recreational needs of the public.

Additionally, protecting and enhancing the public's ability to access coastal resources has tremendous economic implications for the Mobile Bay region and state as a whole. In 2009, more than 7 million tourists spent over $3 billion while visiting Mobile and Baldwin counties. This accounts for one third of the total tourism-related revenue in the state of Alabama. Over 40,000

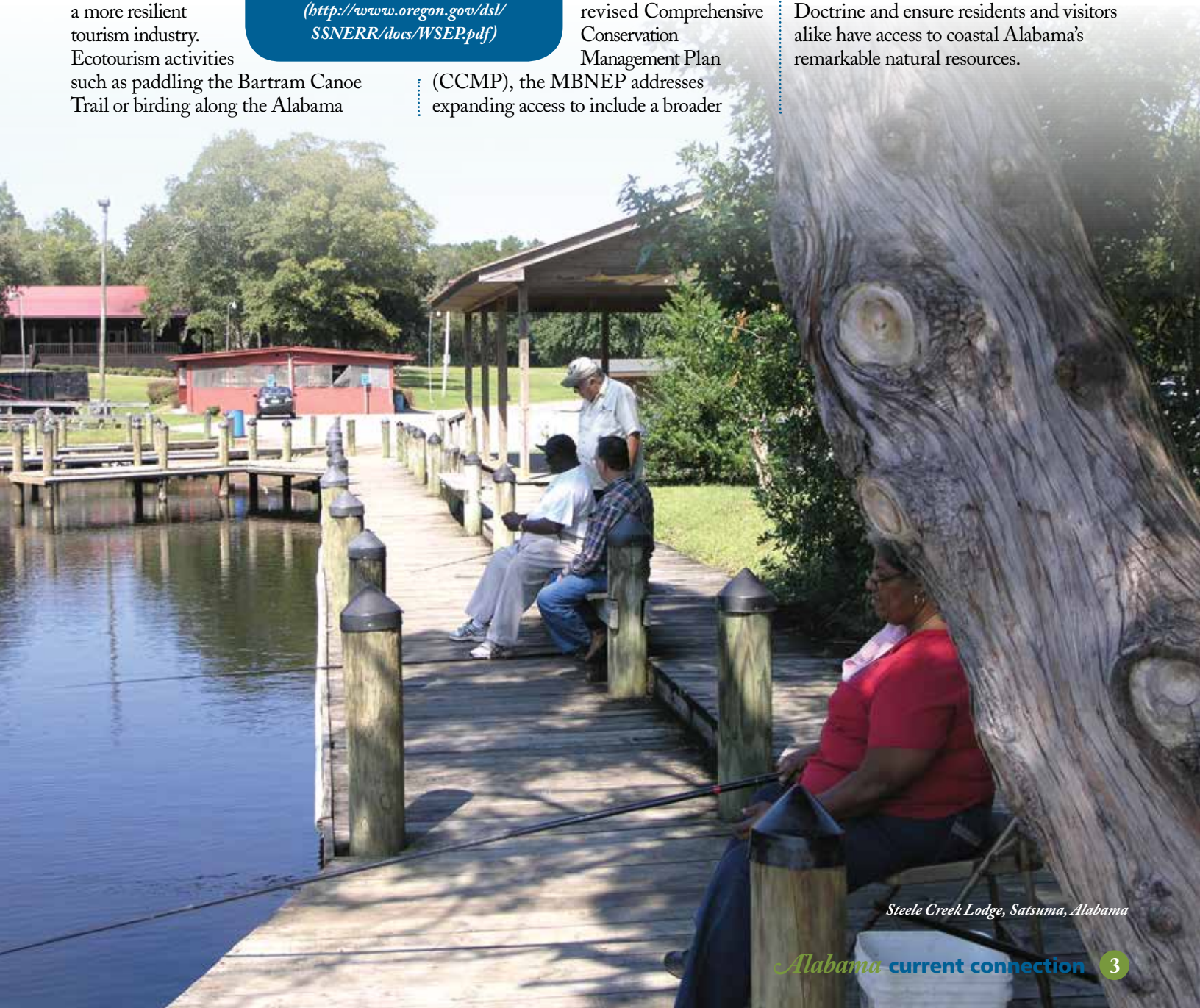
people are employed either directly or indirectly by the tourism sector in the two coastal counties. Nature-based tourism activities including bird watching, kayaking, and fishing are growing in popularity and point towards a need for improving and expanding public access opportunities on the coast to create a more resilient tourism industry. Ecotourism activities such as paddling the Bartram Canoe Trail or birding along the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail extend the coastal tourism season beyond the typical summer months. Despite the popularity of coastal activities, finding a way to access the shoreline can be difficult for both tourists and local residents.

Human history and economic development are intimately linked to estuaries. Estuaries provide abundant, easy-to-access fish and shellfish. We build cities on their shores and ports in their sheltered harbors. We come to the sea to breathe the salt air and be renewed.

(http://www.oregon.gov/dsl/SSNERR/docs/WSEP.pdf)

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), along with the ACAMP, recognizes that people value access to coastal resources. In the revised Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP), the MBNEP addresses expanding access to include a broader range of natural experiences, while securing funding sources to develop new access points and maintain and improve existing sites.

Increasing public access, while achieving a delicate balance with nature, will require adequate funding, commitment, and implementation of fair and reasonable regulatory and conservation practices. The new CCMP sets forth clear actions to address these issues based on successful models already in practice in other areas. It is our responsibility to work with federal partners, state and local governments, and non-profits to safeguard the Public Trust Doctrine and ensure residents and visitors alike have access to coastal Alabama's remarkable natural resources.



Steele Creek Lodge, Satsuma, Alabama

Poarch Band of Creek Indians: Intrinsically Connected to Our Coast *Continued from page 1*

According to Thrower, the Poarch people have always been so intrinsically connected to coastal waters it is said their name "Creek" arose from the kinship. Recounting the history of this unique tribe, Thrower explains that in the late 1700s, as the new America was expanding its territory south and west, it began to encroach on land occupied by his ancestors. New laws allowed the Native American group to move from their land around Wetumpka south down the Alabama River to establish businesses along the Indian trails. These "Friendly Creeks," as they were known, signed contracts with the new federal government to serve as guides, interpreters, ferrymen and river pilots for anyone traveling through Creek Territory. Creek families acquired land along the Alabama River from Tensaw to Claiborne, and eastward along Little River, operating inns and raising free-range cattle. The Indian trail was later widened to become the Federal Road.

Yellowroot (Xanthorhiza simplicissima)

The Poarch Creek did not rely upon scientists to tell them the importance of wise stewardship of natural resources. "Our people knew the land better than anyone," Thrower recalls. "They understood that for every action there is a reaction. If you take all of a resource, nothing will be left." He cites examples of resource mismanagement from a collection of first-hand stories he has recorded over the years for the tribe's historical records, like one describing the use of dynamite to bring fish to the surface of the water for easy removal. Eventually the practice is thought to have contributed to the elimination of entire species of fish.

Sign posted on Poarch Reservation.

Land-use changes and overharvest of yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*) is another example, according to Thrower. Now, 51, Thrower recalls times in his childhood when his grandmother would send him in search of the medicinal herb known for its anti-inflammatory and natural antibiotic properties. Today, he says, it's almost impossible to find.

"Another example, and probably the biggest loss we experienced as a result of misuse of the land, is the depletion of the massive canebrakes of native rivercane that used to stand thick and tall throughout the area," says Ralph McCullers, Environmental Director for the tribe. He says huge stands of *Arundinaria gigantea*, were found nearly everywhere along the river bottoms of the southeast and were essential to the delicate balance of the life-giving estuary. "Their roots mat together holding the soil, and their thick canopy creates safe habitat. The connection between the water, the rivercane and the people was extraordinary," McCullers says. "The people used the cane for making nearly everything. They used it for roofs and walls, carrying baskets, cooking and serving vessels, shoes, mats, rafts, toys, musical instruments and arrows. It could be cooked and eaten like potherbs, and its ripe seeds were gathered and ground into flour like wheat. The roots of the cane were prepared and used as medicine. According to the United States Department of Agriculture plant guide website, http://plants.usda.gov/, "Historical accounts along with recent surveys identify at least 23 mammal species, 16 bird species, four reptile species and seven invertebrates that occur within canebrakes (Platt et al. 2001).

Large areas of rivercane, known as canebrakes, were once abundant along river bottoms in the southeastern United States.
Photo credit: http://myviewfromthegarden.blogspot.com/2012/07/other-right-way.html

Rivercane baskets made by Poarch Indians.

The native people used the animals that lived within the shelter of the canebrakes, like white-tail deer, black bear and cougar, for survival. Hides were tanned and cured for use as blankets, leggings, or cloaks. Dried hide could be used as lacing. Sinew was made from tendons, while rattles were made from hooves. Bones were sharpened to be used as fishhooks or needles, while larger ones were good for digging tools. Shells from the abundant mollusk species were converted into jewelry or clothing adornment, while some were ground and added to clay for pottery. All animals were held in reverence to the Earth, the men say. "The animals that were used were treated with respect and honor. Great rituals were held before and after a hunt to give thanks to the spirit of the animal and the creator," Thrower says.

Land-use changes over the years have resulted in further degradation, where today canebrakes have been reduced to less than two percent of their former area and are considered a critically-endangered ecosystem in the Southeastern United States (Noss et al. 1995).

But McCullers and Thrower are hoping to change that with new efforts to restore the cane to several areas found along the many tributaries running throughout the Poarch Reservation. "It's fascinating to see science now backing up what our people have known all along. Our kin were 'accidental' ecologists. They were even the first to control burn," Thrower chuckles about the now widely-used environmental practice. "It's good having our traditional wisdom being validated by science." Traditional wisdom supported by sound science is a good formula for promoting wise stewardship of sustainable natural resources.

In 1984, the United States Government, Department of Interior, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs acknowledged the Poarch Band of Creek Indians as an "Indian Tribe." It is the only federally-recognized Tribe in the State of Alabama. On April 12, 1985, more than 229 acres of land were declared a Reservation. As of 2011, there are 3,095 members of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, of which over 1,000 live in the vicinity of Poarch, Alabama, located eight miles northwest of Atmore in rural Escambia County. It is 57 miles northeast of Mobile. MVTO (*Thank You* in Creek).

For more information about the value and use of canebrakes, visit http://plants.usda.gov/, or to read the original study by Steven G. Platt and Christopher G. Brantley, "Canebrake Conservation in the Southeastern United States," visit http://www.rivercane.msstate.edu/research/activities/pdf/canebrakeconservation.pdf

For more information about critically endangered ecosystems in the Southeastern United States, read the full 1995 article entitled "Endangered Ecosystems of the United States: A Preliminary Assessment of Loss and Degradation" by Noss, R. F., E. T. LaRoe III, and J. M. Scott, available in the National Biological Service Biological Report 28, Page 58.

Ralph McCullers, left, discusses Perdido Creek, an area of focus, with Robert Thrower.

Titi

Florida Anise

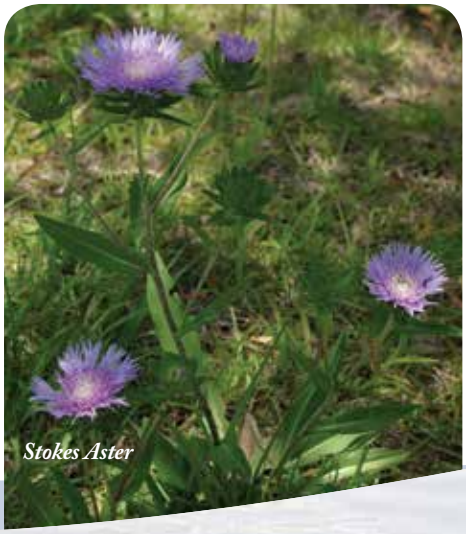
Pink Muhly Grass

Coastal Natives Excel in Conservation Projects and as Landscape Ornamentals

By Fred Nation, Field Botanist

Our native plant communities along the Gulf Coast are tough. They have to be. Periodic fires, which we tend to view as cataclysmic, are also natural renewal mechanisms for fire-dependent coastal habitats in Alabama and throughout the South. A couple of other violent natural phenomena occur predominantly along the coast, and they require special hardiness, adaptability and resiliency from Alabama's coastal flora.

"Windthrow," as foresters and ecologists call it, is the periodic, massive, widespread devastation of coastal natural areas from hurricanes and other extreme winds. Another peril that frequently, but not always, arrives with tropical storms, is the deep, long-term storm surge inundation of natural areas, often with salty water. After hurricane Ivan in 2004 and Katrina the next year, the natural environment in coastal Alabama was in bad shape nearly everywhere. Trees were down and de-limbed; shrubs were stripped and uprooted; vines were on the ground; and herbaceous plants, including native grasses, sedges and rushes just looked dead. Many people remarked that our forests, marshes and swamps would never recover. But, by 2008, hurricane damage in natural areas was already becoming hard to find. Many of the largest, oldest trees fell, which created open, sunny areas for the regeneration of wildflowers and young trees, which will eventually become new canopy layers in forests throughout Alabama's coast.



Stokes Aster

Many of our coastal native plants have characteristics that make them attractive for plantsmen to grow, and quite desirable for conservation and restoration projects. Some of the characteristics that growers and project managers look for are ease of propagation, fast growth, disease resistance, and durability over a wide range of habitats and growing conditions.

Remarkably, many of our tough coastal natives are also quite beautiful. Some are, in fact, among the finest ornamental landscape plants on the market. Here is a short primer - a small sample of just a few of coastal Alabama's world-class native plants that are admired both for landscapes and for restorations of natural areas. All are widely available from area growers.


Buckwheat Tree

Full Speed Ahead...

Charting the Course to Protecting Our Coastal Way of Life

By Roberta Swann, Director, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

On November 29, 2012, 108 dedicated scientists, environmental and community group members, county and municipal personnel, federal and state agency representatives, business leaders, and engineers joined together to develop actions necessary to protect the access, coastlines, fish, heritage and culture, resilience, and water quality that is valued by our coastal community. Using data and community input gleaned over a one-year period, a total of 158 actions were recommended for subsequent prioritization by 232 brave community souls who took the time to provide input on which actions they felt were most important for protecting the above values over the next five years. What follows are the results of their efforts.

Access

Access is a key ingredient for connecting people to the splendor of the Mobile Bay Estuary. **Imagine Mobile and Baldwin Counties laced with well maintained locations for boating, fishing, and experiencing the estuary in urban settings - green spaces that reflect the unique connections of ecosystems within this salt and fresh water mixing zone.**

The priorities for achieving this vision:

1. Inventory current access points, their uses and condition, and develop strategies to restore those in disrepair (protected lands, ramps, other).
2. Identify and prioritize locations for expanding access for different uses (hunting, boating vistas, working waterfronts, other).
3. Improve how impacts to access points from use are managed using volunteer efforts, impact fees, private sector partnerships (maintenance, shoreline plantings and other non-invasive shoreline stabilization measures, education).
4. Expand interpretive signage and interactive media about history and cultural significance and ecosystem care (including demonstrations of restoration techniques) at appropriate access points.
5. Monitor progress, and evaluate at three and five years.

Coastlines

Coastlines provide the estuary's first line of defense against storms while supporting key sectors of our State's economy. **Imagine healthy, resilient beaches and dunes that provide protection from storms and technological hazards and support a robust tourism industry. Imagine resilient bay shores and riparian edges that contribute to private property values and maintain ecosystem functions.**

The priorities for achieving this vision:

1. Develop comprehensive strategies for restoring beaches, dunes, and shorelines that identify erosion rates and storm vulnerability. Assess available restoration techniques.
2. Expand dune system by restoring vegetation on beaches and adjacent upland areas, and restore beaches, as recommended.
3. Ensure that dredged sand is returned to the natural sand transport system to nourish Gulf-fronting beaches, and identify other long term sources of sand for beach nourishment.
4. Retrofit armored bay shorelines using living shorelines and pocket beach technologies in bays and backwaters.
5. Monitor populations of beach-nesting birds, turtles and other species of concern through volunteer efforts, and develop Apps to educate beach goers about areas of sensitive nesting habitats engaging them in reporting observations.

Fish

Fish and shellfish continue to play a leading role in our coastal quality of life. **Imagine healthy, resilient fisheries from thriving nursery and nearshore habitats, communities with productive working waterfronts and citizens who respect the connection between coastal resources and abundant fish and shellfish.**

The priorities for achieving this vision:

1. Develop a comprehensive monitoring program of habitats that support the life cycles of important species that contribute to the coastal economy to improve baseline data.
2. Engage recreational and commercial fishermen in collaborative data-gathering and monitoring activities.
3. Develop a comprehensive sediment management plan that minimizes impact of sand and silt to prime fishing areas.
4. Protect critical habitats that contribute to fishery health and water quality through acquisition, conservation easements, or other methods, and engage industry participation in these ongoing restoration and stewardship activities.

5. Promote the inclusion of an "Alabama Conservation Education" curriculum in schools as a core course of study for grades K-12 to educate about the watershed, estuary, fishery, pollution and connection between upstream and downstream environments.

Heritage

The rich **Heritage** of Coastal Alabama, from the Shell Mounds on Dauphin Island and mound-building on Bottle Creek to rich histories of Bayou la Batre and the ghost town of Blakeley, is intrinsically tied to the Mobile Bay estuary. **Imagine community growth, economic development and environmental protection efforts that give priority to preserving our area's rich history and cultural heritage and use the past to inform future decision-making.** *The priorities for achieving this vision:*

1. Undertake a Coastal Alabama Heritage Landscapes Inventory to identify, document and inform future planning for the protection of areas and livelihoods vital to our history, heritage and quality of life.
2. Conduct research on, and adapt best practices for, protecting archaeological and historical resources.
3. Expand human connections to the water by creating driving, walking, biking, and paddling trails; boat tours; and pocket parks on historical, ethnic and religious themes to encourage eco-heritage tourism on and around the estuary (Native American, African-American, Civil War, etc.).
4. Create educational opportunities that include interpretive signage and Apps that link places throughout the estuary to that place's history (education on site) and outreach materials for use by the business community to promote our estuary's cultural and natural resources.

Resiliency

Resilience in a community depends upon recognition of the value of its natural resources in protecting, enhancing and maintaining its health and viability. **Imagine a coastal Alabama made up of communities that are able to recover from weather extremes such as storms, floods, eroding coastlines, heat waves, and droughts through collaboration, cooperation and consilience.** *The priorities for achieving this vision:*

1. Forecast impacts of storms by consolidating hazard data (sea level rise, temperature, flood, and climate) for use by planners and elected officials in risk reduction strategies.
2. Monitor community use of risk reduction strategies and resiliency measures in day-to-day operations.
3. Protect undeveloped lands important for groundwater recharge.
4. Restore salt marshes, encouraging use of dredge material for restoration of nearshore and intertidal marshes and flats.
5. Develop policies to protect sensitive habitats through regulations and incentives.
6. Develop social marketing campaigns to increase public stewardship by raising awareness about issues of resilience and "what is in it for me?" to increase public stewardship.

Water

Water Quality (WQ) is essential to a healthy and productive estuary. **Imagine coastal Alabama waters with pristine rivers, streams, creeks, wetlands and bays. Imagine a coastal Alabama clean water future.** *The priorities for achieving this vision:*

1. Develop a WQ monitoring program that targets watersheds based on areas under most and least stress and use data to provide the community a report on the estuary's health every three years.
2. Determine the minimum amount of freshwater inflow necessary to sustain a healthy estuary.
3. Investigate the feasibility of achieving "Green Port" status for coastal Alabama ports to improve Bay sediment management, reuse and water quality.
4. Restore streams, stream banks and freshwater wetlands through development and implementation of comprehensive watershed management plans to improve freshwater discharges to fishery nursery areas and sea grass beds.
5. Develop alternatives for financing stormwater management activities and reduce litter and other types of nonpoint source pollution in conjunction with watershed management planning efforts.
6. Promote the need to emphasize water quality as a goal of the State Water Resources Management Plan to government officials and legislators.
7. Expand opportunities for community members to participate in protecting water quality through education and volunteer monitoring activities.

As Admiral Farragut fought the Battle of Mobile Bay, he faced a harbor full of mines and watched his lead ship sink after striking one such "torpedo." Farragut gave the "reckless" order for the fleet to ignore the danger and bombard the smaller Confederate fleet, leading to a decisive victory - a true act of guts and faith. I am humbled by the dedication of so many community leaders throughout coastal Alabama, committed to protecting this unique and complex wonderland. Our charge is not simple or small and will be fraught with setbacks and losses. But I believe that we will succeed in preserving the Mobile Bay estuary and what we value most for ourselves and generations to come. So, in the words of Admiral Farragut, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."

Three Mile Creek: A Glorious History

By Debi Foster, Communications Coordinator, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Images of creek baptism. *Photo credit Billy Skipper papers, courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama.*

Take me to the water
Take me to the water
Take me to the water
To be baptized.

None but the righteous
None but the righteous
None but the righteous
Shall see God.

I love Jesus,
I love Jesus,
I love Jesus,
oh, yes, I do.

He's my Savior,
He's my Savior,
He's my Savior,
oh, yes, He is.

Immersion baptismal spiritual written by: Rev. E.D. Campbell, c 1890

If one was to examine the historical nature of water quality throughout the Mobile Bay Estuary, one would be remiss not to look at Three Mile Creek. It wasn't that long ago that people in the downtown area of Mobile drank from it, frolicked on its shore, or were baptized into their faith through complete immersion in its pristine waters. Included on the State's 303(d) List of Impaired Waterbodies, the creek running through the historically rich community known as "The Bottom," is on the brink of a rebirth.

According to City of Mobile historian John Sledge, the end of Civil War slavery meant African-American people from throughout the south were free to come to Mobile looking for opportunities. The waterfront along the Mobile River offered an emerging riverboat trade. The saw mills and lumber yards further north along the River's tributaries were thriving. Fishing and hunting camps were popping up throughout the delta, and the railroad was flourishing. As a result, an area north of the heart of the city began to develop. Known as Davis Avenue, the quiet, serene and crystal clear flowing waters of Three Mile Creek ran nearby.

As the turn of the century approached, African-American churches in the south were thriving, as newly freed slaves accepted and practiced their Christian faith. Mobile's Stone Street Baptist Church, organized in 1806, was the first "colored" Baptist church in the state of Alabama. By 1853, St. Louis Missionary Baptist Church opened its doors. Since baptismal fonts or pools had not yet been popularized, the faithful would walk to nearby Three Mile Creek to "have their sins washed away," according to author and local historian Paulette Horton. "When black children turned 12, they had to 'get religion.' Everybody wore white; white robes, white socks and a white turban wrapped around their heads, and they would walk in a ong line behind the preacher singing 'Take Me to the Water to be Baptized,' a traditional immersion baptism spiritual," Horton said. "The whole community would attend. Even the Davis Avenue street car would stop so that everyone on board could watch," according to Horton, who is about

to release her fourth book, "Treasured Memories: The Beginning of an Era," a carefully researched look into the history of black churches in Mobile, Alabama. Over the years, Horton estimates that thousands of African-Americans were baptized in the waters of Three Mile Creek before the practice moved indoors.

In addition to quenching a spiritual thirst, the creek provided the main source of drinking water for the growing southern port city throughout the early years. However, urbanization throughout the watershed in the 1940s resulted in the degradation of the quality of the water, forcing city leaders to look farther west to Big Creek for its water supply.

Though compromised, the life of Three Mile Creek is not over, and a vision for transforming this degraded stormwater conveyance into a vital community asset is moving closer to reality. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and partners, including the EPA Climate Ready Estuaries program, Mobile Area Water Sewer System, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, and Mobile County, have invested $250,000 to fund a Watershed Management Plan (WMP) for the Creek and its 29-square mile drainage basin. A completed WMP will recommend ways to reduce trash and litter, restore hydrology, improve water quality, provide recreational opportunities, enhance aesthetics, and restore ecological integrity and function to this urban stream. It will determine current condition; investigate options for restoration, mitigation, and protection; challenge stakeholders; and prescribe prioritized actions for implementation. A funding support plan will employ a three-tiered financing structure designed to effectively leverage the public and private sectors' support for WMP implementation.

The headwaters of Three Mile Creek begin near present-day University of South Alabama, and it flows 14 miles east to its confluence with the Mobile River. It meanders through habitat-rich wooded wetlands that support a broad diversity of both marine and freshwater species as well as through areas that have since become urbanized. Its watershed includes all three Mobile County Commission Districts and five of the City's seven Council Districts.

Willie Jackson's Legacy:

A Restored Urban Stream in Prichard

By Tom Herder, Watershed Protection Coordinator, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

On March 2, 2013, as 30 volunteers began a busy day of planting, Marjorie Jackson paid a visit to the park that bears the name she has shared with her husband Willie for the past 60 years. Willie passed in January after a battle with cancer, but the beautiful park that sits on land they donated is beginning a life that will continue to give.

Marjorie Jackson, left, shares memories of the area with Prichard City Councilwoman Ossia Edwards.

Close to 3,000 native plants were installed in and along a restored urban stream on that cold Saturday at Prichard's Jackson Reading Park in Whistler. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and Coastal Alabama Clean Water Partnership oversaw the restoration with funding from a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Five Star Grant, design and guidance by Jessica Roberts and Eve Brantley of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, labor and materials from the Prichard Public Works Department, and volunteer assistance from Mobile Baykeeper.

The effort included excavation and grading, stabilization with temporary grasses and jute erosion blankets, and, finally, planting with emergent and upland native plants. The plants will provide food and habitat for wildlife and aquatic species while stabilizing the stream banks from the impacts of stormwater runoff. By late spring, when educational signage is installed, the park should be a showplace of native blossoms that provide a passive destination for residents to enjoy and an outdoor laboratory for school-aged kids.

Remembering Connections Made Along Mobile's Bay

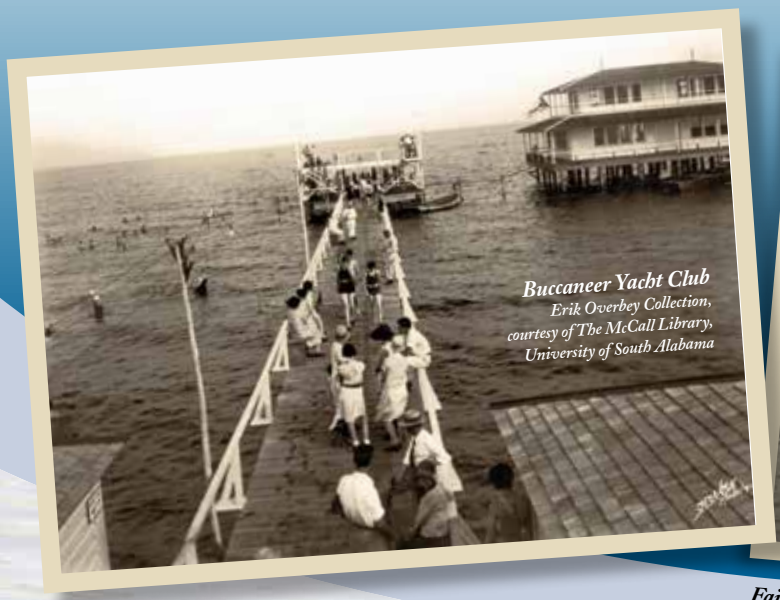
By Debi Foster, Communications Coordinator, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

For people like Billy and Iris Anderson, the shorelines of Mobile Bay just north of Dog River mean more than words can express. Having a place to stroll in the sand or sit along the water's edge feeling the breeze has always meant a slower time, a time to connect. For some, perhaps more than others, Mobile's shoreline is where lasting relationships are made. "It's where we would park my '48 Plymouth sedan and, uh, neck," Mr. Anderson chuckles. Married now for 58 years, they still visit the nearby beach, but say it's not the same. The Andersons say upwards of 100 feet of beach have disappeared, as have countless acres of sea grasses that once lined the water's edge.

"I moved into this neighborhood in 1942 and was raised here. I spent all my summers camping out down at Alba Beach with all the other boys of the neighborhood. We would swim across the Dog River channel and climb up on the pier at Grand View Park where it cost 10 to 15 cents to get in," Anderson recalls.

Grand View Park
S. Blake McNeely Collection courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama

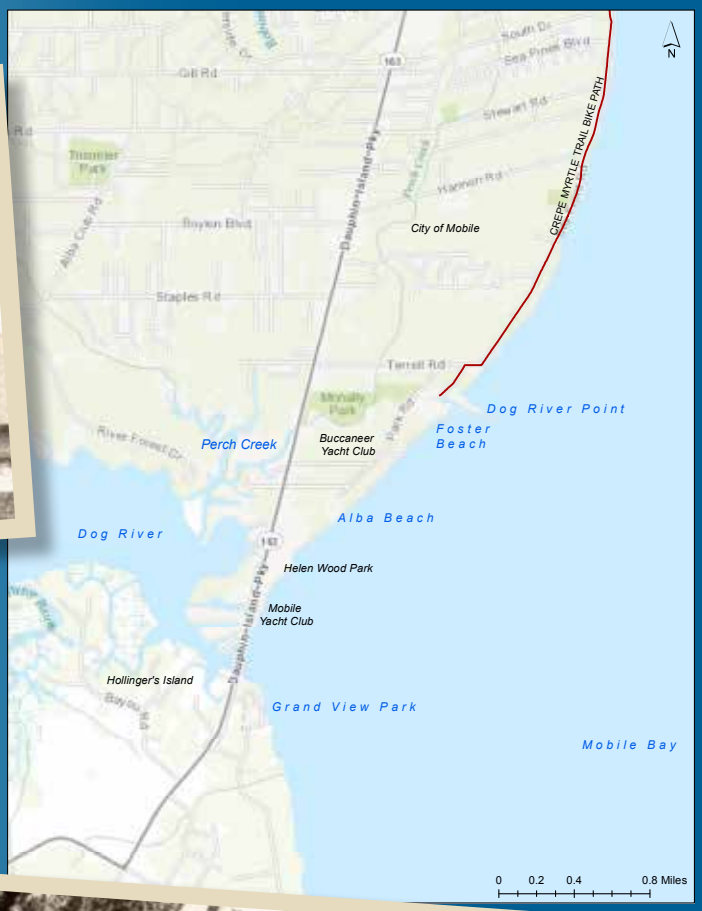
Michael P. Feore also remembers when the City of Mobile possessed public beachfront. In a recent letter to the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Feore recalls the northwestern shore. "Throughout the history of the city, this area was open to the public, and for much of the time it supported both of the City's yacht clubs, the Mobile Country Club, Arlington Yacht Harbor, fresh and saltwater bathing, outdoor theaters, eating establishments, and many other activities that were directly tied



Buccaneer Yacht Club
Erik Overbey Collection, courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama

Fairhope Pier circa 1930s *Erik Overbey Collection, courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama*

Yacht Club *courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama*



to the Bay or were enhanced by their proximity to it. All of this was eliminated in one fell swoop with the construction of Brookley. At that time, I was three years old. Now I'm 74. Except for the recent construction of an observation pier, Mobilians have gone without any use of this Bay front for 72 years."

DeLauris Hopper shares similar memories. She remembers Alba Beach that now skirts the edge of Mobile's Crepe Myrtle Bike Trail as it meanders along the western shore south of Bayfront Road. "There weren't too many places for teenagers to go," Mrs. Hopper recalls of the early 1940s. "We'd walk from Alba Beach, past Buccaneer, up to Foster Beach, where there was a dance floor. For five cents, we'd dance to the music on the jukebox."

While today there are no dance floors, public waterslides, outdoor theaters or hundreds of yards of sandy beach on the western shore, public parks like Arlington, Helen Wood and McNally do exist. The MBNEP 2013-2018 Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan acknowledges the need to rebuild the coast and build upon current efforts like the marsh restoration project at Helen Wood Park and the 100-1000: Restore Coastal Alabama wave-attenuating reef that protects the shoreline north of the park. Projects like these assist in providing the conditions necessary to support and promote the growth of coastal wetlands and seagrass beds. Meanwhile, people are still making memories along the Mobile Bay northwestern shoreline while they walk along what remains of Foster and Alba Beaches or simply sit and soak up the beauty of the shore.

Above: The border of the Gulf of Mexico Dancing Pavilion at The Rolston Hotel in Coden, Ala.
Courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama

The Slide at Fairhope, Ala.
Courtesy of The McCall Library, University of South Alabama

Alabama Seafood: Finding a Delicate Balance

By Angela Underwood, Natural Resource Planner, ADCNR, State Lands Division, Coastal Section

Alabama's 607 miles of coastal shoreline lies along one of the world's most fertile fishing grounds. Long before European settlers arrived on the Gulf Coast, Native Americans were enjoying the boundless supply of shellfish and seafood offered in our coastal waters as evidenced by large shell middens found in coastal regions. Seafood harvest became more industrialized in the late 1800s, and you can still find family businesses from that time period in operation. One such business is Bon Secour Fisheries, which was opened by Danish immigrant Frank Nelson in 1896, as a small, family-run oyster house on Oyster Bay, Alabama.

Shell Mound in Coden, Ala. Photo courtesy of Eric Overbey Collection, USA Archives

Bon Secour oysters were not only eaten locally, but were shipped up the east coast making it into well known, high-end oyster bars, including the Oyster Bar at Grand Central Station in New York City.

Today, the business, run by the grandson and great-grandsons of Frank, is a modern seafood processing plant that supplies oysters and other seafood to stores and restaurants all over the Southeastern United States. John Ray Nelson, Chairman of Bon Secour Fisheries, explains how the company has undergone many changes throughout the years. "As times have changed, we have had to diversify. Only about 5 percent of oysters we now process come from Alabama. The rest come mostly from Louisiana and Texas. With the dredging of the Mobile Ship Channel, the construction of the Mobile Bay Causeway, and other environmental factors, the Bay became clogged with silt, which is not good for oyster production. We added shrimp harvesting to our business around WWII, but through the years, changes in regulations along with the skyrocketing price of diesel have made

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Blue crabs Photo by Mary Gohres

Crabbing in Mobile Bay.

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it harder on shrimpers. At the height of shrimping in the 1970s, we owned a large fleet of oceangoing shrimp boats. Now, we only have three. To keep up with decreases in harvest, we not only sell local seafood, we also import products from other areas."

When asked what must be done to keep this industry sustainable, Kevin Anson, Chief Biologist with the Alabama Marine Resources Division, says, "It is a balancing act between allowing what has been historically and culturally acceptable in these fishing communities and doing what is environmentally responsible. Our local fisheries are conduits to the rest of Alabama. If someone wants to enjoy a seafood dinner in Birmingham without traveling to the coast, that meal should be coming from local producers. Local fisheries are extremely important in the economy of Alabama."

"We must maintain the health of the ecosystem. We have to continue with monitoring of fish stocks to assess the health and abundance of these organisms. Each year you want the overall harvest from commercial and recreational fishing to be one that is able to maintain healthy fish populations. We need to make shorelines more resilient and productive nursery habitats for juveniles of a variety of species. Also, we must have more diligent planning on upland developments. People need to know that what they do upland carries down to our creeks, rivers and bays. These all have an effect on the health of our waters and fisheries."

Despite countless obstacles, the seafood industry is still a big part of who we are in Alabama. It is with great eagerness that we watch this balancing act, as fishermen, biologists and regulators try to find common ground and a shared vision to ensure the future of the industry.

Current events

April

April 20
What: **DISL Discovery Day**
Where: Dauphin Island Sea Lab
When: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
For more information, visit www.disl.org or call (251) 861-2141

April 20-27
What: **Don't Drop It On Alabama** Spring Cleanup
For more information, call (334) 263-7737 or visit www.alapals.org/spring cleanup.asp

April 27
What: **2013 Earth Day Mobile Bay**
Where: Fairhope South Beach Park
For more information, visit www.EarthDayMobileBay.org

April 27
What: **5th Annual Delta Woods & Waters Expo**
Where: 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center
For more information, visit www.deltawoodsandwaterexpo.com or call (251) 817-0814

April 27
What: **Dauphin Island Sailboat Regatta**
Where: Mobile Yacht Club, 4925 Dauphin Island Parkway, Mobile, AL
For more information, call (251) 471-3131

April 27
What: **Great American Cleanup**
Where: Dauphin Island Parkway, Mobile, AL
For more information, contact Keep Mobile Beautiful

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 the Mobile Bay and 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, please 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 have recommendations for future articles or would like to subscribe, please contact the editor:

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Marine Environmental Science Consortium
101 Bienville Boulevard
Dauphin Island, Alabama 36528

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Permit No. 1343
Mobile, AL 36601

May

May 4
What: **The Environmental Studies Center Spring Open House**
Where: Environmental Studies Center, Girby Road, Mobile
For information: visit ESC Facebook page

May 4
What: **Grand Bay's Heritage Day**
Where: Grand Bay Community Center 11610 Hwy. 90, Grand Bay, AL
For information: call (251) 656-4576

May 4 & 5
What: **Blessing of the Fleet**
When: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. both days
Where: St. Margaret's Church Bayou La Batre, AL
For information: visit www.fleetblessing.org or call (251) 824-2415

May 11
What: **Weeks Bay River Cleanup**
Where: Weeks Bay Reserve
For information: Mike Shelton, Weeks Bay Reserve (251) 928-9797

June

June 1
What: **Grandman Triathlon**
Where: Fairhope, AL
For information: www.thegrandman.com

June 14-15
What: **Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival**
Where: Foley Sportspark
For information: South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, http://www.southbaldwinchamber.com or call(251) 943-3291

June 25-27
What: **2013 Gulf of Mexico Alliance All Hands Meeting/Gulf Guardian Awards**
Where: Tampa, FL
For information: e-mail Laura Bowieat Laura.Bowie@gomxa.org

July

July 18-21
What: **Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo**
Where: Dauphin Island, AL
For information: Dauphin Island Mobile Jaycees, www.aldsfr.com or call (251) 471-0025

September

September 21
What: **26th Annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup**
Where: Various zones
For information: visit www.alabamacoastalcleanup.com/clean-up.html or call (251) 621-1216

October

October 3-5
What: **10th Annual John L. Borom Alabama Coastal Birdfest**
Where: Various locations

October 10-14
What: **142nd Annual Shrimp Festival**
Where: Gulf Shores, AL
For information: http://alagulfcoastchamber.com/pages/ShrimpFestival/