

Alabama current connection

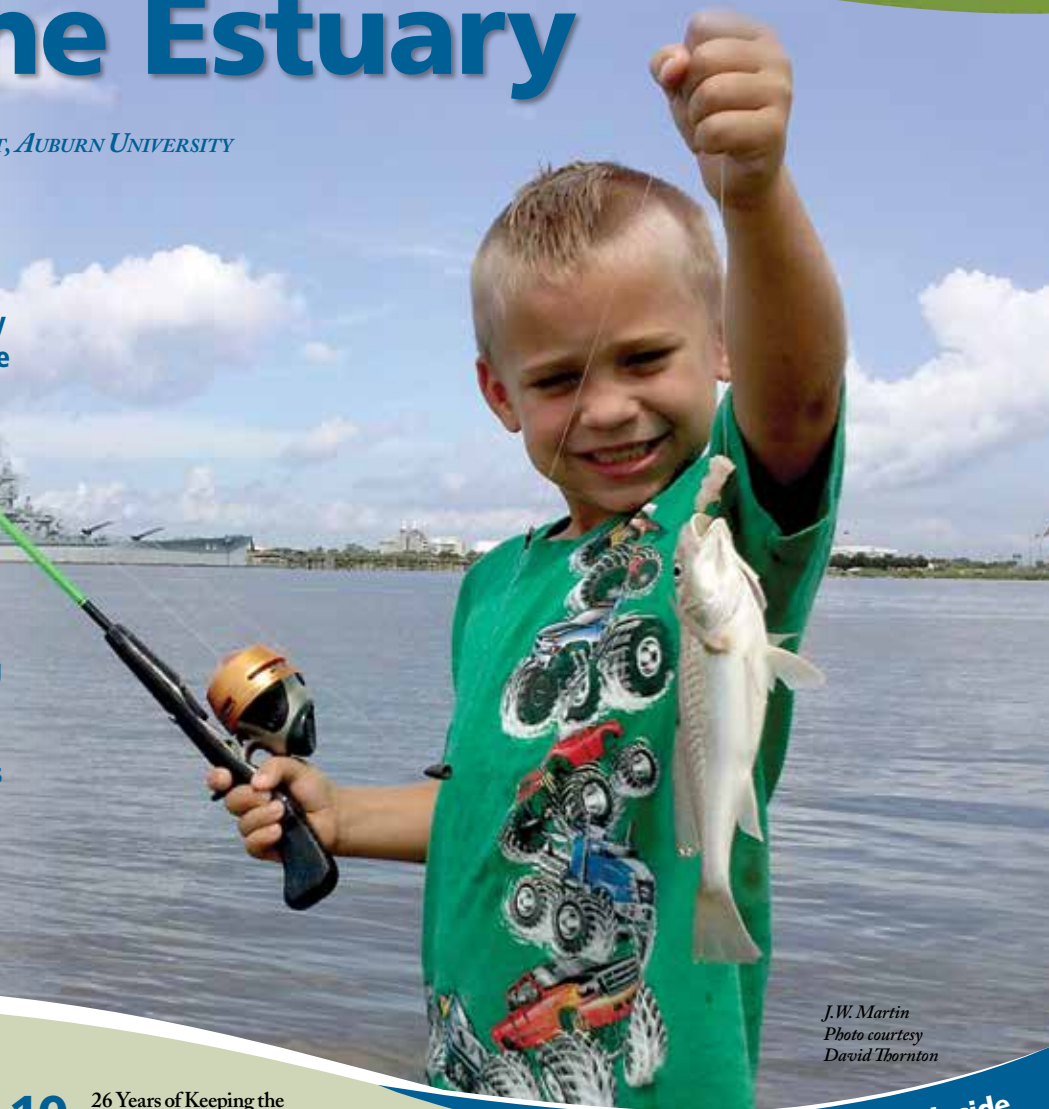
FALL 2013 • Vol. VII, Issue 2

Fish of the Estuary

By CHRISTIAN MILLER, EXTENSION SPECIALIST, AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Long before the first Spanish explorers visited Mobile Bay in the early 16th century, the waters provided people with a wealth of fishing opportunities. All one has to do is visit the plentiful historic shell mounds found on Dauphin Island to envision the bounty harvested by the area's early residents. Flash forward to the 21st century, and recreational and commercial fishing is a billion dollar-per-year industry in Alabama. The common thread binding our coastal fisheries is that the fish and shellfish we all love to catch and eat, along with the various economies they sustain, are dependent upon the estuary for their very survival.

Continued on page 4



J.W. Martin
Photo courtesy
David Thornton

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Coastal Corner

By CHRIS BLANKENSHIP, MARINE RESOURCES DIVISION DIRECTOR,
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Alabama's Seafood Industry: *A Multi-faceted Economic Engine*



I don't know too many people who turn up their nose at a good plate of steamed or grilled shrimp, fried oysters, blackened fish or perfectly cooked crab cakes. Catching, cooking and eating seafood is a way of life in Coastal Alabama, and therefore, protection and management of marine resources of Alabama is **vitaly important**. The Marine Resources Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is responsible for ensuring that the seafood we enjoy and other species of our saltwater

areas are sustainably managed in order to safeguard continued production of these tasty creatures.

Not only do we enjoy consuming these delicacies of the sea, but they are extremely important to the coastal economies of our state.

Recreational and commercial fishing had an almost \$1.3 billion economic impact in Alabama in 2011.

Of this figure, commercial fishing contributed \$499.8 million, and recreational fishing contributed a very impressive \$797.3 million. I don't want to bore you with statistics and numbers; I would rather write about the people of the seafood industry and what these numbers mean to them.





Some of us may not think about all that is involved when we see seafood on our plate, but the industry is a complex one made up of hard working men and women who strive to provide a high quality product to our area and beyond. The fisherman is the first step in the process but certainly not the last. The supply chain continues with dealers, brokers, processors, and distributors who sell to restaurants, grocers, retailers, and consumers. Recreational and commercial fisheries are responsible for over 20,000 jobs, but that does not include the restaurants and grocers. With all these people relying on the bounty of seafood from Alabama, it is critical that we are diligent in our efforts to keep the animals and coastal nursery habitats healthy and well managed.



In 2011, Governor Robert Bentley established the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission to help promote the seafood industry in Alabama. As Program Administrator for this Commission, I hope you have seen some of the Alabama Gulf Seafood billboards and commercials or attended one of the local events targeted to increase awareness about Alabama seafood. The ASMC is also working with other groups to help promote Alabama seafood such as Market Maker that is managed by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Extension Service and the Gulf of Mexico Seafood Marketing Coalition. So far, the ASMC program has been very successful.

People are asking restaurants and retailers where the seafood that is served or sold originated. People want local seafood, and that is a good thing. Asking for and buying local seafood helps keep money in our community of Alabama businesses and fishermen. Those businesses and people spend that money here, and the circle is a boom for our local economy.

I appreciate all the people and agencies that we work with to protect, manage and promote our coastal environment. The seafood industry and recreational fishing interests are dependent on the work done by the many environmental and regulatory agencies in our area. Without the caring and professional people in these fields, we would not have the great seafood and fishing that we enjoy here in our beautiful little part of the world. Thank you all.



Fish of the Estuary *Continued from page 1*

Alabama's abundance of water resources, varied topography and temperate climate support one of the most diverse collections of fishes in North America. The Mobile Delta and its freshwater tributaries support 131 different fish species, including 30 that are marine (or saltwater). While it's impossible to detail all the variety of our coastal fish and their interesting habits, I'd like to highlight one notable example that's close to my heart – the Atlantic tarpon.

Megalops atlanticus, or as it is more affectionately known, the Silver King, is Alabama's state saltwater fish and has been the source of both dreams and nightmares for anglers the world over. Tarpon are unique in that they are a saltwater fish found mainly in coastal and estuarine waters, although they can and do enter bays and river mouths and travel upstream into fresh water. Tarpon are often seen "rolling" at the surface to gulp air. A modification of their swim bladder provides, in essence, a rudimentary lung that allows them access to low-oxygenated waters.

Although little is known about the tarpon fishery in and around Mobile Bay, we do know that larger specimens, like the record setting 203-pounder caught in 1992, are primarily seasonal visitors migrating north along the Gulf Coast from their traditional spawning grounds along the Florida Keys or Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Adult tarpon start showing up along Alabama's coast during the hottest




Juvenile tarpon in hands of Mississippi scientist.
Photo courtesy of media.al.com

parts of the year and hang out along the mouth of Mobile Bay, cruising up and down beaches and crashing through schools of menhaden and other unfortunate baitfish.

Despite "conventional wisdom" that tarpon don't survive in water temperatures below 50 degrees and are, therefore, unable to overwinter in our coastal waters, evidence has surfaced of juvenile tarpon caught in backwater bays and freshwater creeks during the winter months. Jim Franks, Senior Research Scientist in the Center for Fisheries Research and Development at the Gulf Coast Research Lab, studies tarpon along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and has collected ten years' worth of juvenile tarpon in bayous and tidal ditches in Jackson County, Mississippi. "More and more, I'm beginning to believe we have a spawning group here, but not necessarily just off Mississippi," he said. Increasing incidences of juveniles caught in Mobile Bay and surrounding tributaries seem to indicate that not only are tarpon spawning, but at least some of them are overwintering along the northern Gulf Coast. To study this further, the State of Alabama is working with the Bonefish and Tarpon Trust to get a better handle on the behavior of tarpon in Alabama through a satellite tagging program.



Fishing for tarpon.

A person wearing a red hoodie and dark pants is standing on a sandy beach, facing away from the camera. They are holding a fishing rod that extends into the ocean. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, indicating sunset. The ocean has small waves breaking near the shore.

...our estuary provides many different opportunities for a bountiful harvest that should be celebrated and protected now and for generations to come.

Surf fishing at sunset. Photo courtesy of David Thornton.

The folks that know how to chase tarpon with fishing tackle are hesitant to share their knowledge of exactly where and when to target these fish, but it seems the mouth of Mobile Bay around Dauphin Island and the beaches between the Florida state line and the Gulf State Park pier are two of the favorite hunting grounds for large, migrating tarpon. The preferred method is similar to cobia fishing – running up and down the beach and looking for “pods” of fish. Once spotted, live bait is tossed to the fish feeding near the surface. Having an arsenal of finely-honed hooks is a necessity, since the most seasoned tarpon fishermen count their luck in terms of fish “jumped” rather than landed, due to the fish’s ability to throw hooks during a combination of drag-screaming runs and acrobatic aerial displays.

Whether you enjoy drifting for large tarpon or bull redfish on the Dixey Bar, gigging flounder on the shallow flats along the Bay’s shore, or just pulling up crab pots at the end of a dock to check the day’s catch, our estuary provides many different opportunities for a bountiful harvest that should be celebrated and protected now and for generations to come.



Jumping tarpon.

David Yeager: *Farewell to the Captain of the Ship*

By Drs. George Crozier, John Valentine, Dauphin Island Sea Lab and
Roberta Swann, Director, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and coastal Alabama lost an icon with the July passing of Captain David Yeager. The program experienced rough seas throughout its early years and was waning. It was painfully obvious that the endeavor, sorely vital to the coast and State as a whole, needed someone special to salvage it. That's where David came and saved the day.

A 29-year veteran of the Nation's smallest uniformed service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps, David's career combined science and national service. Retiring as a Captain, Yeager served on six NOAA agency ships and was Commanding Officer of three. He led mapping and charting surveys and oceanographic research expeditions throughout many areas of the world. This background made him unusually well qualified for righting MBNEP's "sinking ship".

Few people fully appreciate the challenge of managing a research vessel at sea. These ships have two distinct populations, the sailors and the scientists, each speaking a different language and having separate objectives. There are hundreds of stories, varying from comic to tragic, recounting the love-hate relationship between the two groups. The similarities between research vessel dynamics and the challenges faced by the early MBNEP were striking to say the least. In the Mobile Bay area, the technical community was having trouble communicating with citizens' groups.

Additionally, the so-called policy committee, made up of elected officials and governmental agencies, maintained a lofty distance above the fray, while the business community remained suspicious of any program funded by the Environmental Protection Agency.

David Yeager brought everything to the table! He was retired military, had an advanced degree in oceanography from the Naval Postgraduate School, was a native of Alabama and best of all – an Auburn graduate.

He was intelligent, articulate, and carried himself as a captain of a ship should – an invaluable characteristic. David understood the issues, and his roots allowed him to communicate at every level. He commanded respect from the policy committee and charmed citizens with stories about "stone soup" to reflect upon the situation he inherited. David was accepted as a peer by technical groups and was eagerly embraced by the Coastal Policy Center at Dauphin Island Sea Lab where he became Associate Director. He possessed the networking capacity that was so sorely needed to establish a firm foundation for MBNEP.

David developed a productive working relationship with the State's Coastal Zone Management Program which shared many goals and objectives with the National Estuary Program. His long history with NOAA was a tremendous asset in this arena.



He also became familiar with the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium. Cooperation among these three initiatives, funded by two different federal agencies, created a unique situation for the entire Gulf.

During his tenure, MBNEP experienced a period of relatively stable funding, and progress was made in implementing actions of the first Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan. David reached out to

sectors of the community that were unfamiliar with our coastal environmental challenges and spread a message of balance between economic development and environmental protection. He was active in Leadership Mobile and established

relationships with communities on both sides of the Bay including facilitation of the first honest discussions about stormwater management in Baldwin County.

David made a difference that was tangible and progress that was rare. He remained at the MBNEP helm for over nine years and then moved to Pelham, Ala., to return to his "roots" and enjoy a real retirement. David's legacy endures in a stable, well respected, growing MBNEP program that continues to bring different – and sometimes disparate – interests to the table to develop viable solutions for protecting Mobile Bay and the Tensaw Delta.

*Greatness is not in where
we stand, but in what direction
we are moving. We must sail
sometimes with the wind
and sometimes against it – but
sail we must and not drift,
nor lie at anchor.*

Oliver Wendall Holmes

David Yeager *A Mentor and Friend*

The first time I met David, he was smoking a cigar, proudly wearing a chef's apron, and heartily enjoying the camaraderie that comes with hot, sweaty field work followed by a first-class fish fry. He was a striking combination of "salty dog" and cultured southern man, mixing acerbic wit with intelligence and grace. The five years that I was Deputy to his Director were among the best of my life. He let me navigate the murky waters of promoting wise stewardship with the knowledge that he always had my back...and demonstrated time and again what really mattered: Faith in people, Hope in science, and Charity—an enduring willingness to serve and spread positive energy even if only for a short time. He was my mentor, my friend, my comic relief. The day after I heard of his passing, we found a big black, male lab intimidating in size but so sweet in demeanor. As quickly as this dog entered our hearts, his owner retrieved him, telling us his name was Bear. I have come to believe that this Dog was David—proving definitively that there are, in fact, big black Bears in south Alabama! I smile now as I imagine him—chuckling, delighting in making his point so well. Bravo David for inspiring us all to live life to the fullest with faith, hope, and love.

—Roberta Arena Swann

Conservation Easements *Planning for the Future*

By BEN RAINES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR WEEKS BAY FOUNDATION

With increasing development in south Alabama, the last bits of wilderness are becoming rarer and very important.

As time goes by, keeping some of those places "wild" will prove to be critically important to birds, fish and the overall water quality of Mobile Bay and our coastal waters. People who own relatively undisturbed wild lands may be able to do a favor for both Mother Nature and their own pocketbook by setting up a conservation easement.

Conservation easements are created through an agreement between a property owner and a land trust, like the Weeks Bay Foundation. Typically, a landowner agrees to permanently prohibit development of wetlands or forested areas on their property in exchange for a tax credit from the federal government.

The agreement can be designed to allow construction of homes or buildings on parts of the property or to allow farming or other activities. Even when such activities are allowed, the overall benefit to the larger ecosystem afforded by protecting some of the land is undeniable. For more information, contact the Weeks Bay Foundation at www.weeksbay.org.

If interested in pursuing a potential land trust for your property, the Partnership for the Gulf Coast Land Conservation (PGCLC) is a new coalition of local, regional, state and national land conservation organizations. A member of the Land Trust Alliance, the group includes organizations from all five Gulf of Mexico states who work collectively to protect millions of acres of watersheds, wildlife corridors and important cultural resources.

For how to find an organization near you, visit <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/>



PARTNERSHIP FOR
Gulf Coast
LAND CONSERVATION



People and Fish: *More Alike Than You Might Think*

By JUDY HANER, MARINE AND FRESHWATER PROGRAMS DIRECTOR, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY—ALABAMA

While one may think that fish and people are completely different – after all, we’re warm-blooded and they’re not – the reality is that we share a need for food, clean water and adequate shelter in order to survive. If that’s the case, then why do human populations continue to expand and thrive while fish populations are stressed or declining? One major reason is that people can control their environment, while fish can only respond to the changes that occur in theirs.

Shelter for small fish is usually provided by fringing marshes, seagrass beds and oyster reefs. These nearshore habitats are critical nursery areas, providing food and housing for larval and juvenile fish to hide from predators. Fish feed on algae and small invertebrates that coat the shells of the oysters and the leaves of seagrass and marsh plants. They depend on healthy watersheds, wetlands and coastal marshes to keep their water clean.

Extent of Loss Submerged Aquatic Vegetation

Western Shore Mobile Bay
1940 compared to 2002



Northeastern Shore Mobile Bay
1966 compared to 2002



As people moved to the coasts, however, the oyster reefs that provided shelter for fish and protected marsh shorelines from waves were dredged. The oyster shells were used as road bed and in concrete to build our homes. The unprotected shorelines subsequently eroded which led to cloudy “turbid” water that blocked sunlight needed by the adjacent seagrasses.

As we built our own homes, shopping centers, and communities, we filled in the marshes. We constructed a network of paved roads with solid drainage ditches that degraded healthy watersheds and natural habitats designed to filter water as it meandered to the ocean. By changing the way the land is used, we unwittingly channelized unfiltered, dirty water to the coast along with pollutants and trash. Since more than 90 percent of commercially and recreationally important fish use coastal nursery habitats, our activities have negatively affected the fish and shellfish that people eat. When we harvest fish that are already in decline, we further stress those populations and sometimes impact them beyond their ability to recover.

Fortunately, as humans, we can make changes that will improve conditions and restore habitats for fish. Watershed management plans have been completed for several areas around Mobile Bay. These plans include ways to improve natural water filtration and decrease stormwater runoff through the use of living shorelines. Living shorelines, an alternative to hardened structures such as bulkheads, help replace some of the lost habitat critical for young fish. *See sidebar.*

As we reestablish basic needs for healthy fish populations, people are learning how we can meet our own basic needs, as well as those of the resources we depend on.

The Problems with Seawalls

Shoreline protection from erosion and waves has traditionally been accomplished using hardened structures, like bulkheads and seawalls. Although these techniques are familiar and commonly used, time has shown they destroy habitats, decrease water quality and reflect (rather than absorb) wave energy thereby increasing erosion in some areas.

The vertical walls created by seawalls and bulkheads change the normal rolling waves into waves that smack into the walls causing erosion along the front of the seawall. This can undermine the structure itself. With an ever-growing number of bulkheads and seawalls along our shorelines, we are essentially creating a “bathtub” effect in our bays and estuaries that results in the loss of shallow nursery habitats, like seagrass beds.

Living shorelines can be an effective alternative to the negatives associated with hard structures. Living shorelines break waves and dissipate energy, restore habitats and improve water quality.

A total of 5,248.7 acres of SAV was mapped in 2009. Overall, there were 1,371.3 fewer acres mapped in 2009 than in the 2002 survey, primarily due to substantially less SAV in the Delta and Mobile Bay in 2009.

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Mapping of Mobile Bay Alabama – MBNEP 2009

Mon Louis Island, Alabama

Living Shorelines The Natural Approach

Dog River Park, Mobile, Alabama



26 Years of Keeping the Trash Out of the Splash

By ANGELA UNDERWOOD, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT
OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
STATE LANDS DIVISION, COASTAL SECTION

The threat of rainy weather did not dampen the spirit of volunteers during the 26th Annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup help the third Saturday of September. Over 3,600 volunteers scoured area shorelines and waterways to remove more than 30,000 pounds of unsightly and damaging trash from our coastal habitats.

Marine trash often begins its journey at inland sources as garbage from overturned cans and intentional dumping that washes into waterways during storms. Other marine trash originates as pieces of docks torn apart during storms or from abandoned or lost fishing gear. In either case, this eyesore can pose a real threat to marine habitats and animals.

Studies have indicated that large pieces of debris, such as crab pots, vehicle tires, and pieces of wood from human uses can wash into salt marshes and have immediate and long-term effects on the health of the marsh ecosystem. As debris washes around during incoming and outgoing tides, the degree of impact is increased beyond the original footprint. The result is loss of vegetation, and in effect, loss of ecosystem services provided by the marsh (i.e. loss of buffering effect on wave energy, loss of stabilization of shorelines, and loss of habitat for commercially important fish and shellfish species).

However, **the most prevalent marine litter comes from plastics.** In the past thirty years, the use of plastics has expanded at a rapid pace, and the quantity of plastic debris entering the marine environment has undergone a corresponding increase. One of the most famous areas of concentrated plastic litter is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch within the Pacific Gyre.

*Volunteer cleans up marine debris
along the banks of Dog River Park.*

*Photo courtesy of Lee Yokel,
Dauphin Island Sea Lab.*



Kim Sweet (l) and Rachel Williams (r) promote new tire removal aspect to this year's cleanup. Photo courtesy of Lee Yokel, Dauphin Island Sea Lab.

Currents in the gyre draw in and trap floating and suspended plastics. This area is estimated to cover up to 5.8 million square miles – the size of 2.9 billion football fields. Researchers studying the gyre have found that plastics degrade slowly, thus having effects for decades. Threats from larger pieces of plastic include entanglement of wildlife and ingestion by marine mammals, turtles and fish. Ingested plastics can block digestive tracks causing injury or death. Smaller pieces, even micro-plastics, can be ingested by fish and smaller marine organisms. These plastics contain many chemicals which can find their way into the food chain, posing a threat to marine life and human health.

The Alabama Coastal Cleanup provides a unique opportunity to participate in the solution to marine debris and educate the public about the sources and effects of ocean trash. Volunteer participation in the event

allows for reinforcement of the message that everyone can play a part in maintaining the health of our coasts and waterways. Over the last 26 years, volunteers in Alabama have removed almost 1.5 million pounds of marine debris from state waterways. While cigarette butts rank high among the most collected items, unusual finds

such as electronics, boats, and even cars keep the event interesting for volunteers. According to Kara Lankford, veteran Zone Captain and local Ocean Conservancy Representative, “There is no end to the variety of items found during the

cleanup. Ocean trash ranks as one of the most serious pollution problems of our time, affecting the health of people, wildlife and economies. I would recommend the Alabama Coastal Cleanup to anyone looking to give back to their surrounding environment.”



Coastal Cleanup, led by the Coastal Section of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Alabama People Against A Littered State, is the largest annual volunteer event in Alabama. The endeavor would not be possible without generous support from sponsors including National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, The Original Oyster House, Bebo's, ExxonMobil, Hyundai, Alabama Power Company, Alabama Seafood Association, Alabama Department of Transportation, Compass Media, Ike's Beach Service, LuLu's, Vulcan Materials Company, ALFA, Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, Alabama Farmer's Cooperative, Home Depot, City of Gulf Shores, City of Orange Beach, Baldwin County Commission, Gulf Shores/Orange Beach Tourism and The Ocean Conservancy. To learn more about this event, held every third Saturday in September, go to www.AlabamaCoastalCleanup.com. Next year, do your part in helping keep our waters clean and Alabama Beautiful!



Keeping an Eye on Healthy Waterways

BY MIKE SHELTON, WEEKS BAY RESERVE, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES, STATE LANDS DIVISION

By now, everyone knows fish need healthy waterways, but how do you know if the water is clean? It is impossible to simply look at a bay or river and tell if it is healthy enough to support the seafood people like to catch.

Alabama Water Watch and its coastal chapters train and educate citizens to test our waters to see if they meet the needs of fish and the people who catch them. Volunteers do not need to be chemists to

use the methods in the AWW monitoring program, but they do need to be trained to gather credible information about the health of waterways. After a short class, citizens are prepared to examine water characteristics like clarity and oxygen levels, two things vital to healthy fish. Another class teaches citizens to measure the numbers of *E. coli* bacteria in the water as indicators of contamination. AWW works with local groups like Dog



River Clearwater Revival and Wolf Bay Watershed Watch to help people understand how important healthy waters are to

fishing, swimming and recreation. These groups also work to get people involved in protecting and restoring local creeks, rivers and bays.

To learn more, get trained, start testing and keep an eye on the health of our local streams, rivers and bays, visit www.alabamawaterwatch.org.

Spatial Planning: New Uses for New Technology

BY STEPHEN C. JONES, GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ALABAMA, GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS PROGRAM,
DIRECTOR COASTAL RESOURCES SECTION

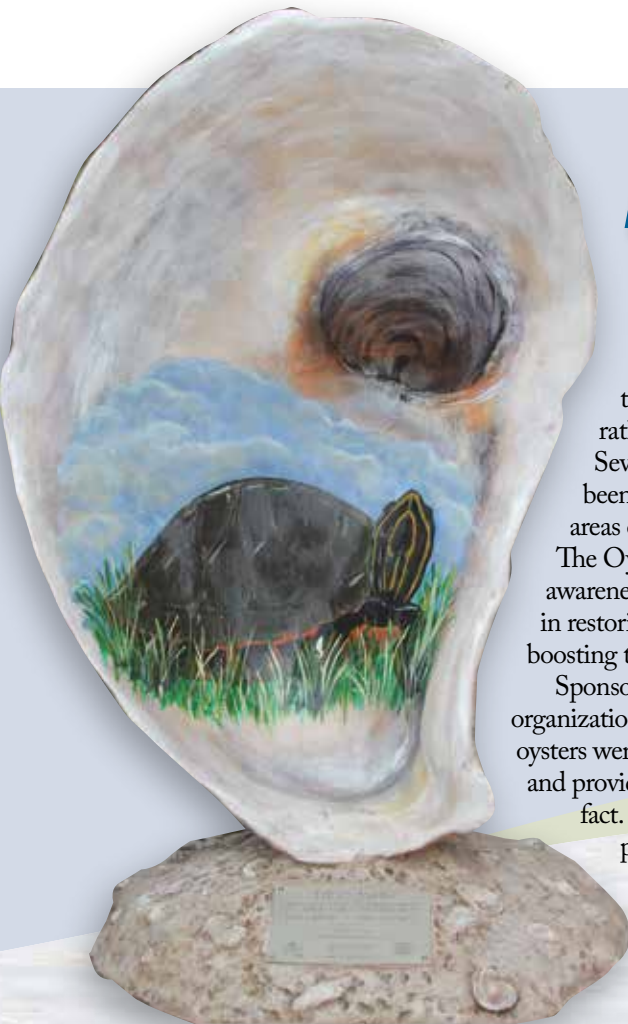
By the beginning of the 21st century, the use of the geographic information system (GIS) technology had become a staple tool in the support of management, planning, decision-making and stewardship of coastal waters. This technology displays a map with numerous thematic “layers” that serve as a smart guidance tool to both novice users and geospatial analysts. Beyond just a map, GIS integrates data about the physical and social characteristics

of a coastal area, allowing the end-user to explore and spatially correlate vital data of today in order to make best-informed management decisions for tomorrow.

Underwater navigation hazards, designated shipping fairways, sediment type, water depth, future planned uses and marine protected areas all can be combined in a GIS spatial platform. For example, this technology is being used to help examine potential nearshore reef zones supporting fisheries and underwater sand source deposits for beach restoration.

It is through the development, availability and management of this ocean marine spatial planning tool that everyone – natural resource managers, stakeholders and the public – have the same up-to-date visual representation of marine uses. This allows for efficient, effective and informed management decisions that affect our coastal resources.

Meet Tip C. Turtle



If you’ve walked along the sidewalks of downtown Mobile, you may have noticed the recent appearance of some rather large, painted mollusk shells. Several of these half-shells have been placed throughout popular areas of the Central Business District. The Oyster Trail was created to raise awareness of the importance of oysters in restoring Mobile Bay, as well as boosting the economy.

Sponsored by local businesses and organizations, the first set of six fiberglass oysters were painted by Mobile area artists and provide visitors with a unique oyster fact. Six more shells are now in production and will be unveiled at a later date, bringing the total to an even dozen.

Our half shell, Tip C. Turtle, can be found on the south east corner of historic Bienville Square.

Oyster Trail sponsors and partners include Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Wintzell’s Oyster House, Hampton Inn & Suites, Mobile Arts Council, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau, The Downtown Mobile Alliance, Alabama Coastal Foundation, 100-1000 Restore Coastal Alabama, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Felix’s Restaurant and Bluegill Restaurant.

Local artists and art groups participating include America Jones, the BayArt Project, Riley Brenes, Devlin Wilson, Melissa Shaver and Dyann Munoz.

Mobile Bay Estuary Corps *Celebrates Successful First Year*

By DEBI FOSTER, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR, MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

Engaging youth and adults in activities that explore and improve the Mobile Bay Estuary system is vital to the long-term sustainability of our coastal environment. With that in mind, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program asked the Alabama Coastal Foundation to partner with them and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab to help bring the concept into reality. Named the Mobile Bay Estuary Corps, the program kicked off in two local middle schools last fall with the purpose to promote the wise stewardship of the water quality and living resources of Alabama's estuaries through education, volunteer experiences, and career path guidance.

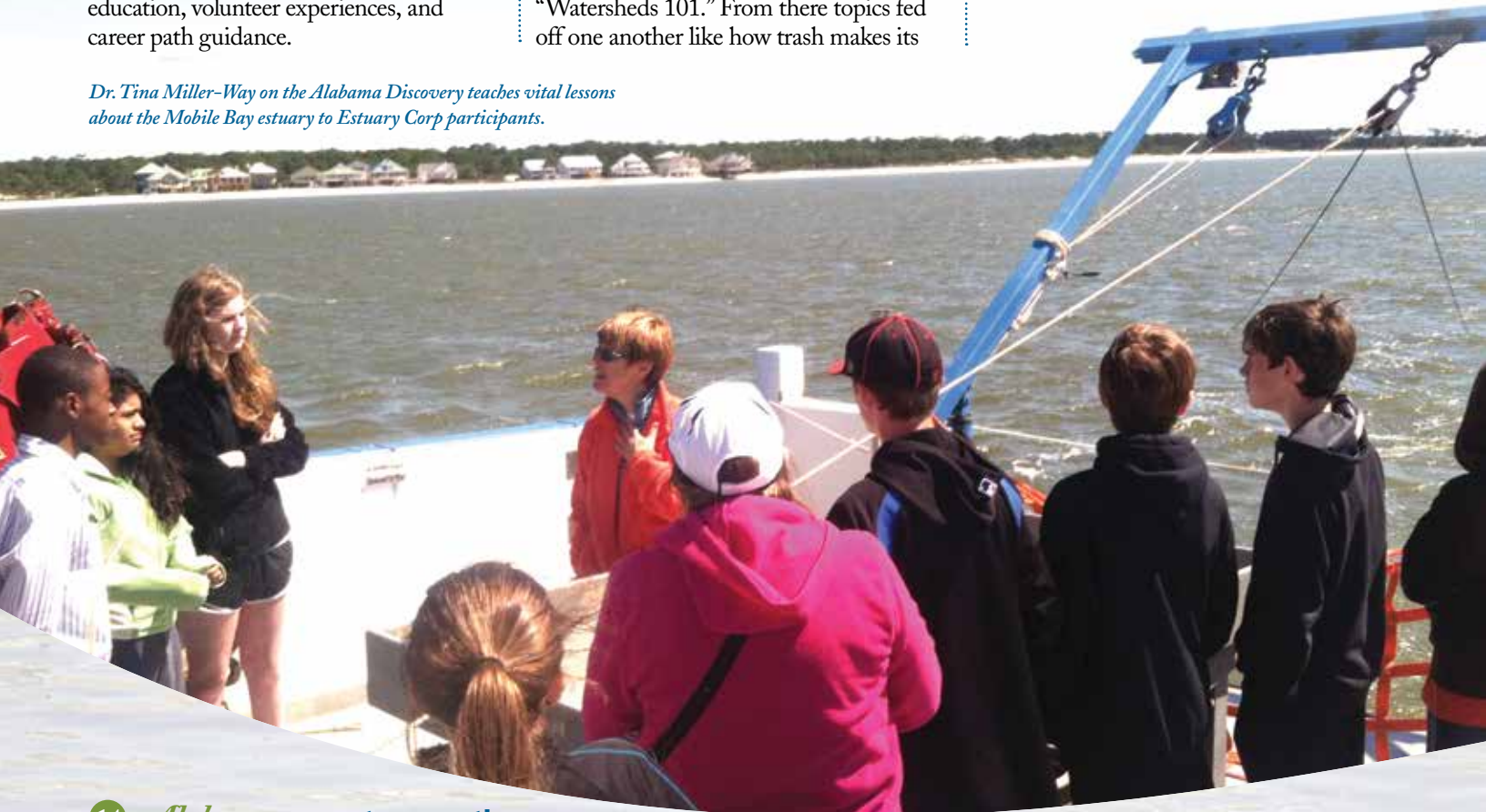
Estuary Corps is an after school enrichment program which engages teachers and students in hands-on learning experiences that encourage stewardship while improving the quality of Alabama's coastal resources. The program further creates opportunities for interested middle school students to interact with and receive guidance from professionals in the fields of environmental science, marine biology, ecology, botany, and wildlife biology/conservation/resource management career fields.

The Alabama Coastal Foundation coordinated the effort and chose Spanish Fort Middle School in Baldwin County and Phillips Preparatory School located in Mobile to be a part of the pilot. Each school selected 10 students to participate in the program and the first session they attended was "Watersheds 101." From there topics fed off one another like how trash makes its

way into the estuary through unfiltered stormwater and how recycling can reduce waste. Among other things students attended an on-site field test to learn about the different measures of water quality including salinity, turbidity and pH. And they participated in tree plantings to emphasize the importance of trees and other forms of vegetation on the prevention of organic runoff and sedimentation.

Now that the program has completed a successful first year, organizers are proud to announce that the program will not only continue but will grow in 2014 to include more students from Spanish Fort Middle School, Phillips Preparatory School as well as adding the Cody Road Boys and Girls Club as a new partner. Congratulations!

Dr. Tina Miller-Way on the Alabama Discovery teaches vital lessons about the Mobile Bay estuary to Estuary Corp participants.



Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Finds a New Home

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program is pleased to announce our new location in Suite 601 of the Commerce Building at 118 North Royal Street in downtown Mobile. Please feel free to come by and visit our new office overlooking the impressive working waterfront of the Mobile River branching out into our prized Mobile Bay National Estuary. Our phone number remains the same 251-431-6409, but please make sure to change our address in your contact information.



Current events

December

December 6

What: City of Gulf Shores Christmas Parade & Beach Celebration

For information: visit <http://beach.alagulfcoastchamber.com/Events/details/gulf-shores-christmas-parade-beach-celebration-3721>

December 28 - 29

What: Christmas Tree Recycling

Where: Designated locations throughout Mobile

For information: call Keep Mobile Beautiful, (251) 208-6029

January 2014

January 4 - 5

What: Christmas Tree Recycling

Where: Designated locations throughout Mobile

For information: call Keep Mobile Beautiful, (251) 208-6029

January 12

What: Mulch Give-a-way

Where: Greater Gulf State Fairgrounds, Mobile

For information: call Keep Mobile Beautiful (251) 208-6029

January 26-29

What: 2014 Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill & Ecosystem Science Conference

Where: Mobile Convention Center

For information: visit <http://gulfofmexicoconference.org/registration-abstract-submission/>

March 2014

March 24-27

What: State of the Gulf of Mexico Summit 2014

Where: Omni Hotel Galleria, Houston, TX

For information: visit <http://sgmsummit.org/>

March 24-27

What: Dauphin Island Gumbo Festival

Where: Dauphin Island

For information: visit <http://townofdauphinisland.org>

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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We reserve the right to edit submissions.

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Alabama Coastal Birdfest *is About More Than Birds!*

By D. FRAN MORLEY, "NESTKEEPER," ALABAMA COASTAL BIRDFEST

One of the great extras that comes with having a healthy fishery is the plethora of birds living in and visiting our marsh areas. Thanks to the many factors that come together in coastal Alabama to create a rich, varied environment, the Alabama Coastal BirdFest celebrated its 11th anniversary last month.

"BirdFest not only takes advantage of our diverse habitats, but it helps support them," noted BirdFest founder Dr. John Borom. "We offer prime locations for birdwatching, so BirdFest attracts birders



Cerulean Photo by Andy Nelson

from all over the U.S., many making their first trip to Alabama or the South. But we also want to educate locals, and we hope that by going out on BirdFest trips, they learn more about how having a healthy ecosystem is good for us all—not just for birds and fish."

Since 2004, Alabama Coastal BirdFest has donated more than \$80,000 toward the purchase of protected habitat. Visit www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com to learn more.

