

Alabama current connection

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Connecting to Nature Makes Us More Caring

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Paying attention to the natural world not only makes you feel better, it makes you behave better, finds a study published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

"Stopping to experience our natural surroundings can have social as well as

personal benefits," says Richard Ryan, coauthor and professor of psychology, psychiatry and education at the University of Rochester. While the salubrious effects of nature are well documented, from increasing happiness and physical health to lowering stress, this study shows that the benefits extend to a person's values and actions. Exposure to natural as

opposed to man-made environments leads people to value community and close relationships and to be more generous with money, find Ryan and his team of researchers at the University of Rochester. The paper includes four experiments in which 370 participants were exposed to either natural or man-made settings.

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Coastal Corner

By PHILLIP HINESLEY, COASTAL SECTION CHIEF, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES, STATE LANDS DIVISION

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, **Announces Grant Award for Upcoming Year**

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), State Lands Division has selected six projects to be funded under the Alabama Coastal Area Management Program (ACAMP) for Fiscal Year 2015. Funding became available October 1, 2014, for projects in the two coastal counties and is

provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The application was submitted to NOAA and approved by ADCNR. This application for assistance will be the 35th year for ACAMP, which was approved in 1979 as a cooperative program between the State of Alabama and NOAA. The goal of the program is to assure a balance between

economic development and resource protection. The ACAMP strategic planning goals include protecting current public access areas, restoring public access to coastal resources and providing technical and financial assistance to local governments for improving access and planning.

With those goals in mind, the following projects have been selected for funding:



Comprehensive Plan – City of Prichard

ACAMP will provide funding to the City of Prichard to develop a Comprehensive Plan. This plan will create a framework for the development of future public policy, specifically in the areas of future land use and water use. The plan will provide tactics to qualify residential growth, encourage economic development and expansion, as well as specific and general improvements to protect and enhance the quality of life for the citizens. The plan will also provide opportunities to address coastal, infrastructure, and environmental issues and develop related projects.

Comprehensive Plan – City of Bayou La Batre

ACAMP will provide funding to the City of Bayou La Batre to develop a Comprehensive Plan. This plan will provide a strategic tool to proactively address future community development demands of the Bayou La Batre community while sustaining the rich history and character of the area. Environmental issues that will be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan include: identifying and prioritizing land for green space preservation, protecting water quality and supply, integrating stormwater management controls, and protecting natural diversity. Major community planning elements of the project will provide guidelines addressing residential land use and housing, commercial and industrial growth, public safety, transportation, and facilities and services.

Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map – City of Chickasaw

ACAMP will provide funding to the City of Chickasaw to create a comprehensive Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map. This project will update the regulations and ordinances that accompany the plan

and serve as implementation tools. This project will identify sensitive areas for development and allow the City to begin implementing the community goals and recommendations that are outlined in each chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. The project will be important in protecting the City's wetlands and water quality.

West 10th Street Public Access Improvements – City of Gulf Shores

ACAMP will provide funding to the City of Gulf Shores to improve public access to the Gulf of Mexico at West 10th Street in an effort to preserve coastal dune habitat. The proposed project includes construction of a handicap-accessible beach dune walkover and public parking area with signage. The dune walkover will be an elevated six-foot wide boardwalk with showers, benches and ADA-accessible portable toilets. The parking area will be constructed at West 10th Street on the north side of West Beach Boulevard using permeable material. The project site is currently unimproved with no designated parking, and visitors access the Gulf of Mexico by walking over beach dune habitat. The addition of a dune walkover at this location will provide a designated path for beach goers that will assist with dune protection.

Gunnison Creek Canoe and Kayak Launch – City of Satsuma

ACAMP will provide funding to the City of Satsuma to install a pier and canoe and kayak launch on Gunnison Creek – a tributary of Steele Creek which flows into the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. The project site was recently donated to the City to provide water access for all residents and visitors to coastal Alabama. The proposed project includes removal and replacement of a wooden pier, installation of a prefabricated canoe and kayak launch and addition of

designated parking and signage. The City of Satsuma intends for this site to be incorporated into the southern extent of the Bartram Canoe Trail, which links other public access locations in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta.

Bayou Heron Park Canoe and Kayak Launch – Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board

ACAMP will provide funding to Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board (DIPBB) to design and install a handicap-accessible canoe and kayak launch at Bayou Heron Park on the north side of Dauphin Island. The proposed project includes removal of an existing pier, design and installation of a launch and gangway, installation of two pilings, and construction of a platform to anchor the dock system and signage. The floating launch will allow visitors to access the site at both low and high tides while increasing infrastructure resilience to storm events and fluctuating water levels. DIPBB is hoping to leverage this project to launch a regional Blueway Scenic Water Trail while providing water access to people needing handicap access.

The total amount of the federal funding for these projects is \$269,000 and must be matched on a one-to-one basis by the local entity. ADCNR is excited about these projects and looks forward to working with these local entities to promote, improve and safeguard the lands and waters located in the coastal areas of the state.

The Mon Louis Island Shoreline

Providing Fisheries Habitat and Recreational Access on Mobile Bay's Western Shore



Submerged rock islands installed 1,100 and 700 feet from the stabilized shoreline at Mon Lois Island. Inset above shows greater detail of the northern island, constructed of Class III riprap by J&W Marine Enterprises.

In January 2013, J&W Marine Enterprises' boats moved into the shallow waters off northern Mon Louis Island (MLI) to construct two submerged rock islands. The purpose of the islands was to provide habitat for oysters, other shellfish, and finfish as part of the shoreline stabilization project that pinned the beach in place.

Two barges worked in concert to build the islands. One, stacked high with blue granite rock, sat anchored further outside in deeper water to stage the construction material. The other moved back and forth, artfully propelled by a 24-foot push boat and "walked" into place with the Caterpillar long-reach excavator on its deck. It carried smaller loads of rock into shallower water and placed them within a "footprint" marked with PVC poles. The northern and southern islands lay 700

and 1,100 feet from shore, respectively, and are each marked with lit navigation warning signs. Although included in the engineering design solely to provide habitat for fishery resources, contractor Wayne Eldridge expressed confidence that the islands would significantly contribute to reducing the wave energy impacting the shore.

Over a year and a half later, the project is performing as intended, with four rock headland breakwaters stabilizing the



Barge-borne excavator and push boat work to place riprap to construct one of the two submerged rock islands along the stabilized Mon Louis Island shoreline.

almost-700-foot shoreline. The six property owners who collaborated with engineers to design the project are delighted, not only with their erosion-protection benefits, but also with the recreational opportunities provided by the offshore, submerged islands. MLI property owner Dottie Lawley and her guests frequently kayak around the islands that provide an interesting destination, especially on clear days. Recreational anglers are beginning to understand the value of these structures, as residents report more frequent visits by kayakers or fishing boats casting lines. MLI resident and University of Alabama student Frank Foley's first attempt at fishing the islands resulted in the harvest of a six-pound speckled trout that could not resist his skillfully-offered topwater lure.

Recreational access points along Mobile Bay's western shore are not common. Recognizing this, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's new

Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan's Five-Year Restoration Strategy prescribes the creation of ten new access points (with at least seven in Mobile County) that couple "access" with demonstration of restoration techniques. The Mon Louis Island project was a model for such a recommendation, with the islands providing fisheries habitat and recreational opportunities in clear view of an effective living shoreline strategy that performs as an alternative to shoreline armoring and bulkheads.

The islands are currently being monitored by Dauphin Island Sea Lab graduate student Ashley MacDonald, who is investigating how the provision of "ecosystem services" is enhanced by shoreline restoration. These rock structures provide nooks and crannies that provide refuge for small fish and shellfish and solid substrate that offers attachment opportunities for oysters, muscles, and other invertebrates. These, in turn, attract

larger predators in search of food. Algae and barnacles were the first organisms to attach to the bare, blue rock. The presence of oysters was not obvious at the conclusion of the first year, but the islands provide suitable structure to attract them. Once integrated into the structures, they are expected to increase the complexity and quality of the habitat for other organisms.

With a new CCMP restoration strategy driven by watershed planning that includes shoreline assessment, more opportunities for recreational access in and around Mobile Bay can be expected before 2018. In the meantime, if you find yourself in the bay south of Fowl River with fishing tackle and a little time, look for two well-marked submerged rock islands. Just don't tell Frank Foley who told you about them.



Connecting to Nature Makes Us More Caring *Continued from page 1*

One of the things valued most by people along the Alabama coast is “access to the water and open spaces.” This article is a reprint summarizing research conducted by Netta Weinstein, Andrew K. Przybylski, and Richard M. Ryan at the University of Rochester, New York highlighting the value of green spaces for connecting people.

The paper includes four experiments in which 370 participants were exposed to either natural or man-made settings. Participants were encouraged to attend to their environments by noticing colors and textures and imagining sounds and smells. In three of the studies, participants were shown a selection of four images on a 19-inch computer screen for two minutes each. Half of the subject viewed buildings, roads, and other cityscapes; the other half observed landscapes, lakes, and deserts. The urban and nature images were matched for color, complexity, layout, and lighting. In a fourth study, participants were simply assigned at random to work in a lab with or without plants. Participants then answered a questionnaire assessing the importance of four life aspirations: wealth and fame (“to be financially successful” and “to be admired by many people”) and connectedness and community (“to have deep enduring relationships” and “to work toward the betterment of society”).

Across all four studies, people exposed to natural elements rated close relationships and community higher than they had previously. The questionnaire also measured how immersed viewers were in their environments and found that the more deeply engaged subjects were with natural settings, the more they valued community and closeness. By contrast, the more intensely participants focused on artificial elements,

the higher they rated wealth and fame.

To test generosity, two of the studies gave participants a \$5 prize with the instructions that the money could be kept or given to a second anonymous participant, who would then be given an additional \$5. The second participant could choose to return the prize money or keep it. Thus, subjects had nothing to gain if they chose to trust the other participant, and risked losing their money.

The result? People who were in contact with nature were more willing to open their wallets and share. As with aspirations, the higher the immersion in nature, the more likely subjects were to be generous with their winnings.

Why should nature make us more charitable and concerned about others? One answer, says coauthor Andrew Przybylski, is that nature helps to connect people to their authentic selves. For example, study participants who focused on landscapes and plants reported a greater sense of personal autonomy (“Right now, I feel like I can be myself”). For humans, says Przybylski, our authentic selves are inherently communal because humans evolved in hunter and gatherer societies that depended on mutuality for survival.

In addition, write the authors, the richness and complexity of natural environments may encourage introspection

and the lack of man-made structures provide a safe haven from the man-made pressures of society. “Nature in a way strips away the artifices of society that alienate us from one another,” says Przybylski.

Lead author Netta Weinstein says that the findings highlight the importance of creating green spaces in cities and have implication for planners and architects. Incorporating parks and other representations of nature into urban environments may help build a stronger sense of community among residents, she explains. By contrast, “to the extent that our links with nature are disrupted, we may also lose some connection with each other,” the authors warn. This alienation may help explain other research showing that urban as compared to rural dwellers show more reservation, indifference, and estrangement from others.

On a personal level, Weinstein says the take home message from the research is clear: “We are influenced by our environment in ways that we are not aware of,” she says. Because of the hidden benefits of connecting with nature, people should take advantage of opportunities to get away from built environments and, when inside, they should surround themselves with plants, natural objects, and images of the natural world. “The more you appreciate nature, the more you can benefit,” she says.



Boats surround Bird and Robinson Islands in Orange Beach.

The Importance of Access *for Sustainable Tourism in Coastal Alabama*

By KRISTIAN ABOUD, TOURISM MANAGER, WILD NATIVE TOURS

Mobile, Alabama, is considered one of the top eight water-based cities in the world, according to the World Leisure Organization, placing it squarely in the company of its better known rivals. What Mobile lacks in comparative population, it makes up for in untamed wilderness.

No more than 45 minutes from two major airports, lie some of the top ten beaches in the USA along with the second largest river delta, the 4th largest estuary system and perhaps the most biologically diverse corridor of land and water in North America. So tightly packed is this corridor, that it can be effectively circumnavigated in a car in less than 5 hours. With such potential sustainable tourism assets literally at our finger tips, coastal Alabama should be world renowned as an eco/adventure tourism destination.

Economically, water accessibility has been key to coastal Alabama's strength for centuries. Today, Mobile still operates the 11th largest port in the USA by tonnage, access to the Gulf of Mexico's oil reserves pays for much of Alabama's government, the fishing and shrimping industry continue to contribute to Alabama's history, and the Gulf beaches are strained to breaking point with happy holiday seekers through the

summer. Nonetheless, access points outside of industry and the beach are limited, with a general lack of sustainable tourism development in and around these major environmental assets. Many boat ramps, kayak launches and docks have serious limitations making them ineffective. Despite Mobile's size in the region, there is limited access to tourist marinas for recreational boating, waterfront retail developments and/or fishermen's wharfs. It is not unusual to find local children who have never been on a boat or visited many of the nature preserves that provide access to the water.

The potential offered by establishing and growing access to coastal Alabama's world-class, water-based assets is astounding. Growth in tourism directly relates to more regional jobs than any other industry, and spending in the industry holds more power than most sectors, generating an equivalent or better return to the economy as a whole over and above the initial tourism dollars spent. Tourism is growing at a higher rate than any other single sector. Furthermore, eco/adventure tourism – what our water-based assets offer in abundance – is growing at an annualized 20%. With these figures in mind, the importance of protecting and appropriately developing access to coastal Alabama's unexplored assets becomes ever more relevant.

Our region currently faces a “chicken or egg” scenario, where growth of our tourism industry relies on better access, not only to the natural resources but also to funding for their proper marketing, development and protection. Conversely, this access to assets and funding requires growth of the sector in the first place, as traditional funding normally comes from “mom and pop” operators or large multi-nationals, both of whom need to be convinced that coastal Alabama is serious about developing a solution. Fortunately, a variety of local non-governmental organizations within coastal Alabama are pushing identification, economic development, and protection of these assets. Local government has the opportunity to step up and ensure the provision of funding that will close this loop, creating the businesses that generate the jobs, spend the money and collect the taxes. It will take a combined effort across county lines with a single focus on marketing, promotion, and development to truly take advantage of our geographic riches and provide the sort of access our region needs, for quality of life and to grow a world-renowned, competitive and sustainable tourism industry. “Access” in coastal Alabama is the key. Without it, our citizens will never know what our assets are and why they are worth protecting.

Exploring Coastal Alabama Through A Public Access Inventory

By AMY GOHRES, NATURAL RESOURCE PLANNER, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES, STATE LANDS DIVISION

While coastal Alabama is known for its beaches, there are many lesser-known areas where the public can visit our state's exceptional coastal resources. For the past year, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources State Lands Division, Coastal Section staff have explored and documented publicly owned coastal areas throughout Mobile and Baldwin counties.

These "public access" sites include many well-visited spots on the shores of Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, but also less-traveled gems along inland waterways such as Chickasaw Creek and Fish River. Public access sites include places such as state, county, and city parks and boat launches; federal refuges; state and local nature preserves; historic forts and battlefields; dead-end road rights-of-way and scenic vistas. Over 180 coastal public access sites have been identified so far, with nearly forty sites in Mobile County and over 150 sites in Baldwin County.

When including all areas influenced by changing tides, Alabama has 607 miles of coastline. This coastal region is home to public access sites with diverse environments ripe for exploration, including the pitcher plant bogs of Weeks Bay Reserve, the sandy dunes of Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, the bottomland hardwoods of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, and historic and cultural sites such as Fort Gaines and Blakeley State Park. Alabama's coastal public access sites also support a wide range of outdoor activities such as birding at Dauphin Island's Audubon Bird Sanctuary, biking the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail, kayaking along Graham Creek in Foley or camping at Mobile County's Chickasabogue Park.

Many of our region's public access sites are included in current guides such as the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail or the Bartram Canoe Trail; however, a comprehensive list of public access sites in Coastal Alabama does not exist. The information collected through this inventory will be used to develop a guidebook that highlights public access sites in Mobile and Baldwin counties. The book will be free to the public and will include maps, a description of each site with photographs, and a list of different types of uses and their amenities. The guidebook will provide a comprehensive, user-friendly resource for both residents and visitors to explore the cultural, historical and natural areas along Alabama's coast.



Perdido Bay



By MARK BERTÉ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF THE ALABAMA COASTAL FOUNDATION

The Alabama Coastal Foundation has a mission to improve and protect Alabama's coastal environment through cooperation, education and participation. An event that exemplified all three of those principles recently took place on June 21, the first day of summer.

The ACF is a member of Mobile United's Natural Resources Committee which last fall discussed highlighting the proposed Crepe Myrtle Trail by holding a bike ride along the portion that is closest to the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley. ACF helped schedule meetings with interested parties to discuss the idea and to work with everyone to help bring the idea into reality. The purpose of the ride was to educate citizens about our local natural resources, to promote the benefits of biking, and to experience the beauty of coastal Alabama's biological resources.

I had the honor of talking about Gaillard Island and bird habitat to the 150+ riders who participated that beautiful day. Buddy Rice from the Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley also spoke with the riders about not only the history of Mobile's first airport, but also the future of Brookley now that Airbus arrived. At the next stop, Mendel Graeber from Dauphin Island Sea Lab educated everyone about the benefits and features of Mobile's estuary. The final stop on the 12-mile roundtrip ride featured Jeff DeQuattro, who represented both The Nature Conservancy and the Delta Bike Project. His topic centered on restoring and protecting the beauty and biodiversity of Mobile Bay.

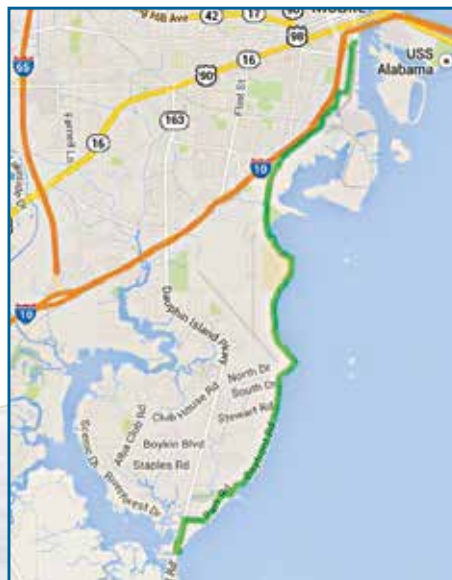
Originally proposed in the late 1990s, the Crepe Myrtle Trail would provide access to miles of the Bay with a biking and pedestrian path that runs from downtown Mobile, then around the east side of Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley, and finally down Bay Front Road to Helen Wood Park at the mouth of Dog River.



Cycling on the (Future) Crepe Myrtle Trail

Photo by Mark Berté

The trail would include over two miles of greenway and park access along the last stretch of undeveloped property on



Mobile Bay to south of downtown and would connect four city parks (Arlington, Doyle, McNally, and Helen Wood). Additionally, the trail has the potential to increase property value and quality of life on Mobile's only peninsula; promote healthy lifestyles, outdoor activity, and appreciation of the environment; and increase access to the waterfront as well as bicycle connectivity from DIP to downtown.

Access to trails for people to enjoy natural resources is crucial to maintaining our quality of life. People who are interested in helping bring the concept of the Crepe Myrtle Trail into reality, should contact Mobile United's Executive Director Katherine Pitman at kpitman@mobileunited.org or (251) 432-1638.



Coastal Alabama Blueway to Launch in 2015

BY CHANDRA WRIGHT, NATURE TOURISM SPECIALIST WITH GULF SHORES & ORANGE BEACH TOURISM

One look at the Great Seal of Alabama and it is clear that our waterways have been important to Alabamians since our earliest days. With more than 77,000 miles of rivers, streams, bays, bayous, estuaries and the Gulf of Mexico coastline, water is something many of us in Alabama take for granted.

All that water is partially responsible for the tremendous amount of biodiversity found throughout the state. Alabama is home to more species of freshwater fishes, snails, mussels, crayfishes and turtles than any other state and ranks in the top five nationally for total species of flora and fauna. Dr. E.O. Wilson believes Alabama could eventually be ranked number one with more scientists coming here and identifying new species.

Like all these water-dependent species, those of us who live in coastal Alabama

thrive on access to these same waters whether for work or for play. Alabamians have taken to the waters in boats of all shapes and sizes over the years, but more people are taking advantage of the benefits of smaller vessels like canoes, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards to get out on the water and sometimes navigate to those special spots where larger motorized vessels are unable to go. A 2013 report by the Outdoor Foundation and the Coleman Company, Inc., revealed that in 2012, more than 19 million Americans engaged in a paddlesport. Among their reasons for doing so were to be close to nature, to enjoy the sounds and smells of nature, and to observe scenic beauty, not to mention the great exercise benefits of paddling.

Many of our local communities are recognizing the growing desire the public has for access to our waterways. Places like the cities of Foley, Orange Beach, and Mobile are all working on adding or improving access sites for nonmotorized

watercraft and designating canoe trails or “blueways.” The Orange Beach Canoe Trail, for example, has ten launch sites, while Foley has opened a kayak launch at Graham Creek Nature Preserve and another one at their new Wolf Creek Park. Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge added a launch at the Jeff Friend Trail to provide additional access to Little Lagoon. In Mobile County, excellent paddling options abound with the Dog River Scenic Blueway and the Ron Jones Paddle Trail, which links Chickasabogue Park and William Brooks Park, to name just a couple of the trails. There are many other access points throughout both counties whether along Mobile Bay, Weeks Bay, Wolf Bay, along our various rivers, creeks and streams, or through the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

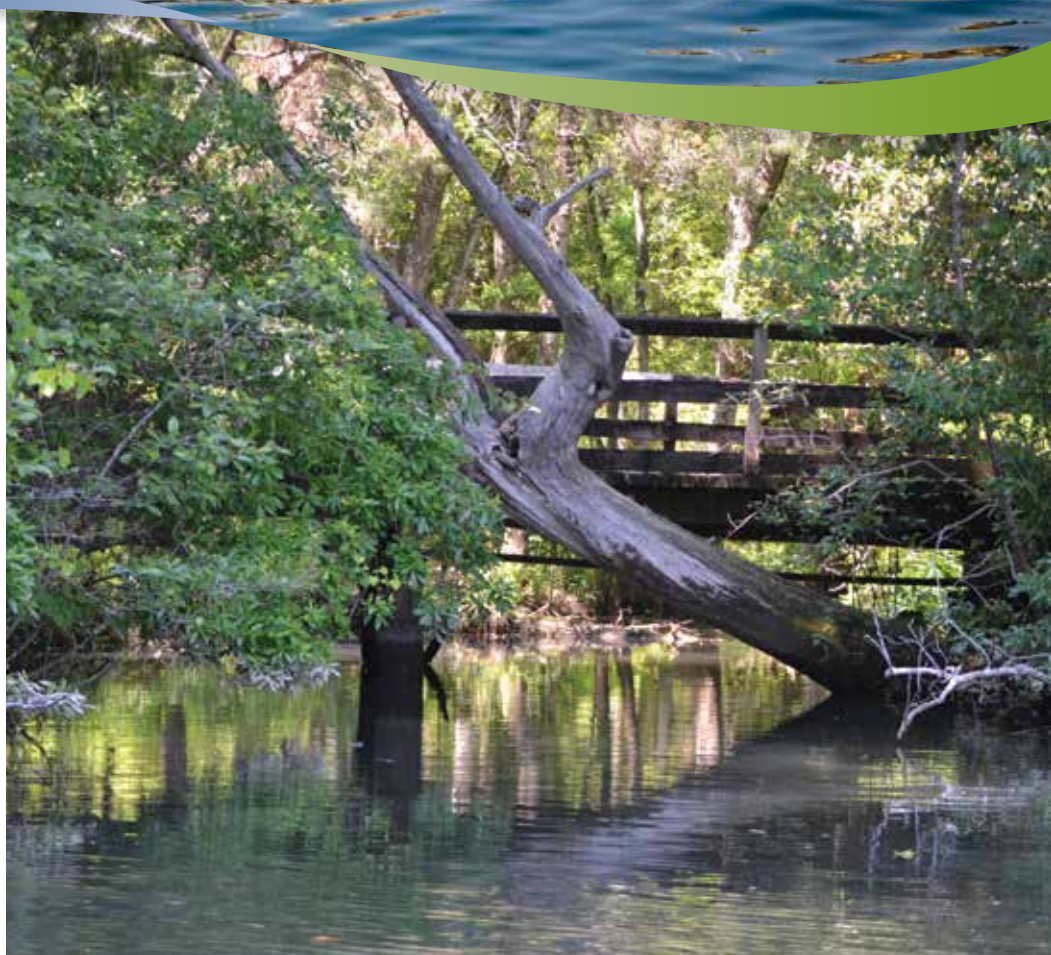
One of my projects as the Nature Tourism Specialist with Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism is to help publicize the availability of these public



access points not only for our local residents but also for visitors to our area. We are working to increase awareness of the paddling opportunities in the region and build on the success of the Alabama Scenic River Trail, which is the longest river trail in a single state, offering over 2,000 miles of the core river trail and its tributaries. The Trail officially opened in 2008 with 631 original miles beginning where the Coosa River enters Alabama from Georgia, continuing down the Alabama River through the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and ending at Fort Morgan in Mobile Bay. The Alabama Scenic River Trail built on the success of the Bartram Canoe Trail, which is a project of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division. The State Lands Division recently compiled data on available public access sites appropriate for kayak/canoe/paddleboard launches in Baldwin and Mobile counties, which includes sites that are already on an official trail and other lesser known sites. We are taking the data compiled by the State and building on that information to develop maps, appropriate signage along the blueways, and an anticipated mobile application for smartphones. The app will include not only the GPS coordinates and directions to the sites, but also the available amenities such as parking, restrooms, food and beverage facilities, camping areas, local

outfitters, and the like. Other information might include those tips you wish a local expert would tell you before you try a site for the first time. The Coastal Alabama Blueway will launch in 2015 and will be a great way to market all the public access paddling opportunities around coastal Alabama. Locals and visitors alike will

easily be able to put together their own paddling trips, whether they want to just paddle an hour or two on a weekend or embark on a journey of several hundred miles and everything in between.



Alabama Coastal Cleanup *Draws Record Participation*



*Kayaker on Fowl River
collects debris and trash
along the coastline.*

By ANGELA UNDERWOOD, NATURAL RESOURCE PLANNER, ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES, STATE LANDS DIVISION

In late April of this year, Alabama's coastal counties experienced a once in a lifetime storm that dumped over 15 inches of rain on the Fish River area in less than 24 hours. Fish River crested at a record high of 24 feet, destroying many homes and displacing hundreds of residents. The swollen river swept away boats, docks, lawn furniture, and trees, most of which ended up far down river or in Weeks Bay.

Several months later, household debris can still be seen littering the banks, while entire trees swept away by the storm present a hazard to navigation in the bay.

While the April flood provided a spectacular display of nature's ability to turn our domiciles into debris, it doesn't take a record storm to fill our waterways with litter. Normal rain events provide plenty of opportunities for litter and debris to be washed into streams and rivers, creating a downstream issue. Even with modern efforts to recycle and collect litter before it

can enter the environment, approximately 80% of all marine litter comes from the land-based sources. Unfortunately, most marine litter is a result of direct carelessness. Visitors leave bottles, bags and sand toys along our beautiful beaches. Local citizens throw trash from cars or intentionally dump large items at overpasses, while items left unsecured in the beds of pickup trucks often blow away along the highway. Fishermen don't always dispose of fishing line and nets properly, or they abandon dilapidated crab pots to remain submerged and unseen in bays and rivers.

On the surface, marine debris and litter are terrible eyesores that can lessen our enjoyment of the environment. Beyond the aesthetics, we know that marine debris can cause major ecological and economic harm.

A quick web search for marine debris will return hundreds of pictures with entangled turtles, dolphins, manatees and birds. But do people stop and think about how litter affects their own quality of life, especially when visiting public areas? Beach users can be injured by stepping on broken glass, cans, or other litter. Swimmers and divers can become tangled in abandoned netting and fishing lines. Boat props can become ensnared in old crab pots and abandoned fishing gear. And I don't think

anyone would deny that littered areas are unsightly and unappealing, which in itself can result in lost tourism revenue.

In an area where the economy is closely tied to fisheries and tourism, local citizens are increasingly conscious of the effect debris has on their surrounding communities and



Photo by Courtland Richards Photography



environment and their ability to make a difference. Citizen participation in “Get the Trash Out of the Splash” showed an increase over last year for the 27th Annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup. On September 20, a record 5,200 volunteers – community organizations, businesses, individuals, school groups and families – worked to clean and restore the area’s beautiful waterways and shorelines. Over the past 27 years, Alabamians have collected over 1.5 million pounds of trash during Coastal Cleanup. Try to imagine what your favorite fishing or beach spot would look like if the cleanups had not occurred. Additionally, the cleanup not only engages people to pick up trash, but it teaches volunteers about sources of trash in an effort to decrease the amount put into the environment. Local resident Gregory Spruill knows what it’s about: “Thank you all for caring about our waterways... much love from a fisherman!” Just like Mr. Spruill, the Alabama Coastal Cleanup thanks all the volunteers and sponsors who help make our state waterways, bays, and beaches a cleaner place to fish, swim, and simply enjoy.



*Coastal Cleanup participants showcase their collections at Boggy Point Boat Launch in Orange Beach, Ala.
Photo by Courtland Richards Photography*



On September 20, a record 5,200 volunteers –community organizations, businesses, individuals, school groups and families – worked to clean and restore the area’s beautiful waterways and shorelines.

Exchange Program Participant from Bangladesh

Creating Community with Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

By MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM STAFF

Maharam Dakua is currently in Mobile, Alabama, as part of the U.S. State Department's Community Solutions Program. For four months, Maharam, an emerging international leader in civil engineering, is working with American counterparts at Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, collaborating on projects here that will provide skills and ideas for creating lasting change in his home community.

Maharam joined an Auburn University team hired by MBNEP to work in the Toulminville area of the Three Mile Creek Watershed. The project is aimed at developing a model to help Mobile County and city planners make science-based decisions related to capital improvement budgets for infrastructure maintenance. His primary role is to learn about community concerns related to flooding and water pollution and to engage the residents in learning about best practices for managing

and reducing water volumes and sources of pollution. While in the U.S., he will also learn to use computer models as a tool for projecting impacts of stormwater runoff and sea level rise, information that will be helpful in designing infrastructure maintenance programs.

Maharam worked on water resource management and sanitation in both urban and rural areas of Bangladesh as Project Coordinator for his organization. He has conducted research and managed sustainable water distribution projects with limited resources, especially for low-income people. He also worked as a facilitator in training programs on rainwater harvesting and water safety plans for academicians, sector professionals and students in Bangladesh.

Started in 2010, the Community Solutions Program is a professional development program for global community leaders working in the fields of transparency and accountability, tolerance and conflict resolution, environmental issues, and

women and gender issues. During their fellowships, the emerging leaders spend up to 400 hours learning leadership and organizational skills through training courses and more than 600 hours at their U.S. host organizations. The fellows also

design community development projects that they implement upon returning to their home countries.

The State Department partners with International Research & Exchanges Board to identify and place engaged leaders who are committed to the ideal that individual efforts can fight poverty and

discrimination, correct inequalities, cultivate peace, and develop new approaches to environmental issues. "Maharam arrived with his sleeves rolled up- ready to learn, get into the field, and make a difference. He immediately became a part of the MBNEP team and we look forward to working with him to continue the excitement surrounding the restoration of Three Mile Creek," commented Roberta Swann, Director.



Canoeing Three Mile Creek

Outstanding Line-up of Keynote Speakers for 2014 Bays & Bayous Symposium

By MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM STAFF

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program is pleased to announce this year's keynote speakers for the 2014 Bays & Bayous Symposium on December 2nd and 3rd at the Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center. Headlining the event will be *New York Times* bestselling author Winston Groom and award-winning freelance science journalist Dr. Ari Daniel.

Winston Groom, who grew up in Mobile and now resides in Point Clear, Alabama, is the author of sixteen books. In addition to *Forrest Gump*, which took the publishing world by storm in 1986 and stayed atop the *New York Times* best-seller list for 21 weeks, Groom's novels include *Better Times Than These*, *Gone the Sun*, *Only* and the award-winning *As Summers Die*, which was made into a movie starring Bette Davis. He is also the author of *Conversations with the Enemy*, a non-fiction account of the experience of an American prisoner of war in Vietnam and a brilliantly-rendered Pulitzer Prize finalist. Mr. Groom's family has a long connection to the Alabama coastline and deep roots in the heritage and culture of our waters. We are excited to have him speak on the history of our bay and the economies that have long thrived because of our natural ecosystem.



Winston Groom



Ari Daniel

Ari Daniel is an award-winning freelance science journalist based in Boston, Massachusetts. He has an undergraduate degree in Biology from Boston College,

where he graduated summa cum laude. He earned a Fulbright Fellowship to pursue a Master's degree at the University of St. Andrews, and he later received a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution for his dissertation research on Norwegian killer whales. Ari's radio and video journalism has appeared on PRI's *The World*, *Living on Earth*, and *Studio 360*; National Public Radio's *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, and *Weekend Edition Sunday*; *Radiolab*; and *NOVA* online. He and his colleagues with the group Mind Open Media have produced numerous podcasts and other multimedia products to convey science to a curious public. Recently, this has involved work on the northern Gulf of Mexico coast to convey the science of impacts of the BP/Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill to our regional ecosystem. Ari is well-known for being an engaging speaker with a unique ability to convey complex scientific issues to people from a wide range of educational backgrounds and experiences, and we are honored to have him contribute these abilities to the 2014 Bays and Bayous symposium.

Additional keynote speakers will include Scott Hardaway, Marine Scientist Supervisor at the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences and national authority on living shorelines; Dr. Holly Bamford, recently appointed NOAA's acting Assistant Secretary for Conservation and Management; Dr. Cynthia Jones, Professor and Eminent Scholar at Old Dominion University; and Justin Ehrenwerth, Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council. To register for the symposium, go to www.mobilebaynep.com and click on Bays and Bayous 2014.

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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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BAYS & BAYOUS SYMPOSIUM 2014

The Building Blocks of Coastal Resilience

December 2-3, 2014 • Arthur R. Outlaw Mobile Convention Center • Mobile, AL

Register online at www.mobilebaynep.com

Respecting our connection to the natural environment is an important component of building a caring community and protecting what we value most about living along the coast. Learning about how our coastal environment functions and how we as a community can become more resilient in the face of future natural hazards will improve the connection we have to this place we

call home. The biennial Bays and Bayous Symposium will be held December 2-3, 2014, in Mobile, Alabama. This is more than an academic event – it is an opportunity for people to learn how to be wiser stewards of our coastal resources and to question scientists about ongoing research. For more information go to www.mobilebaynep.com/BaysandBayous.



Artwork by Stig Marcussen