

# Alabama current connection

FALL 2011 • Vol. VI, Issue 2

*Yellow-throated Vireo  
(Vireo flavifrons)*



## Fall Migration

By GREGORY J. HARBER  
DAUPHIN ISLAND BIRD SANCTUARIES, INC.

All photography by Tom Ulrich

It's early October as I write, and fall migration is beginning to wane as we ease into the winter season. The first legitimate cold front of the season passed through our state at the end of September, sweeping away several days of unsettled weather. As might be expected, there was an uptick in migrant songbirds appearing at our local parks, backyard bird feeders and the coastal migrant traps – such familiar places at Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island. It seems an eternity since spring was here, but at times feels as though it was only yesterday.

Spring migration is fairly short in duration, with the biggest thrust of birds moving through Alabama between mid-March and early May. It can be likened to a spectacular mad dash, where the winners are those males who arrive first on the breeding grounds to establish territories and begin the ardent task of attracting a mate. The females arrive not long afterwards, seeking a mate who has all the right qualities and a territory with suitable habitat to ensure a successful breeding season.

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Currently Inside



# Coastal Corner

By *PHILLIP HINESLEY, ADCNR,*  
*STATE LANDS DIVISION, COASTAL SECTION*

## The National Coastal Zone Management Program is in the State's Best Interest

**T**he nation's economy and security depend on the health of oceans and coasts and the resilience of coastal communities and environments. Well managed coasts benefit all Americans; an investment in governance, funding and policy for the nation's coasts is a good investment for the country.

Coastal states and territories are on the front lines of increasingly complex social, environmental and governance challenges, including pressures to develop in high risk areas and valuable habitats, management of natural resources, energy development, climate change impacts, and maintaining ports and waterways. For almost 40 years, the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) has provided coastal states with financial resources and authority to manage the nation's coastal resources. In return for this investment, states have actively protected and restored habitat, provided access to coastal waters, guided development, provided monitoring and scientific research, and promoted citizen stewardship of coastal resources. The unique state-federal partnership under the CZMA that supports coastal communities on the ground is being neglected at a time when the U.S. is increasing its reliance on coasts and oceans for economic and energy development and has adopted a National Ocean Policy. It is in the national interest for Congress and the Administration to support the purposes, priorities and objectives of the CZMA.

A reauthorized CZMA should assist the states in exercising stewardship and management responsibilities by maintaining their authorities and essential program services. A strong CZMA should also encourage greater state-federal efficiencies through better partnerships. Congress should provide incentives to states to develop and implement programs to address national coastal management priorities to:

- support healthy, resilient coastal communities and economies;
- protect and restore coastal ecosystems, habitats, waters and unique resources;
- prepare for effects of natural hazards and climate change on the nation's coasts and coastal communities; and
- ensure that local, state, regional and federal coastal programs are coordinated and integrated at appropriate scales.

The Alabama Coastal Area Management Program (ACAMP) is a State and Federal partnership and thrives to balance conservation of natural resources with economic development. The ACAMP is funding with fifty percent funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and fifty percent from the state and local partners. The ACAMP will continue to work with its partners to address state management priorities. Starting in October of this year, the state program will fund the following projects and programs:

The ACAMP staff will provide funding to the **City of Spanish Fort** to rewrite its subdivision regulations to provide up-to-date infrastructure, design and environmental protection standards in order to manage growth of the corporate

limits and the planning jurisdiction. The new subdivision regulations will implement the goals and objectives, as outlined in the recently completed Comprehensive Plan, and aid in the development of a sustainable plan for this coastal community.

The ACAMP staff will provide funding to the **Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board** to improve three components of the public beach access site on Dauphin Island. These include improvements to the bath/restroom houses, improvements to the parking area and native landscaping.

The ACAMP staff will provide funding to the newly formed **Town of Perdido Beach** (incorporated June 2009) in Baldwin County to develop a comprehensive plan. Activities to be conducted are collect and analyze existing conditions; perform a land use analysis; prepare, review and prioritize goals and objectives; draft plan alternatives, review and revise; select preferred plan; and create plan document and implement the approval process through citizen involvement. Major elements will include historical/architectural, recreational, land use, public safety, environment and quality of life.

The ACAMP staff will provide funding to the **ADCNR, State Lands Division** to improve an area across from the Battleship Park. Activities include demolition of a building and slabs destroyed by hurricanes, removal of the large amount of litter that has accumulated, remove or treat invasive plants and trees, replant native aquatic grasses, improve the parking area with crushed aggregate, remove depilated bulkhead and pilings and rebuild one finger pier for boating access.

The ACAMP staff will provide funding to the **City of Saraland** to construct a low-impact public access project over the pristine floodplain wetlands of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. The City will construct a 400-foot boardwalk and install bike racks and picnic tables.

The ACAMP staff, in partnership with the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) and other federal, state and local partners, will conduct **Phase I of the development of a Coastal Area and Marine Spatial Planning Program**. This will include collection of GIS data sets and the development of planning tools to protect and preserve critical coastal habitat but also look at areas that are suitable for future coastal development.

The ACAMP will provide funding to the **Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM)** for implementation of the enforceable policies of the ACAMP consistent with the requirements and intent of the Legislature of the State of Alabama. The

ADEM's permitting, monitoring and enforcement responsibilities in regards to the ACAMP are codified in the ADEM Division 8 Coastal Program regulations. This includes the consistency review of federal permit applications, federal projects, federal assistance to local governments for beach and dune protection programs, outer continental shelf (OCS) activities and other federal actions; activities subject to the management program that require a state permit; direct permitting of numerous uses subject to the management program that are not regulated by existing state or federal permitting requirements including protection of coastal wetlands.

The ACAMP staff will provide funding to the **Alabama Geological Survey** to monitor and conduct aerial photography of Gulf-front beaches in Mobile and Baldwin counties. This is critical in planning for catastrophic natural events and natural beach erosion.

In addition to the above, ACAMP staff will continue to provide local planning

assistance to local governments by working with the **People Against A Littered State (PALS)** to hold the Annual International Coastal Cleanup; partnering with Gulf Shores/Orange Beach in promoting sustainable tourism programs, such as Dolphin Smart and the Sea Turtle Watch Programs; and, working with the MBNEP to implement the Coastal Comprehensive Management Plan.

**In conclusion, the nation's oceans, Great Lakes and coasts provide vital ecological, economic and cultural values to the country for current and future generations. It is in the national interest for Congress and the Administration to support the important work conducted under the CZMA.**



*Steele Creek public access improvements funded by ADCNR with Coastal Management funding in Satsuma, Alabama.*

## Translating What Alabamians Value About the Environment into What We Can Do to Protect It

BY ROBERTA SWANN, DIRECTOR, MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

Last summer, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program hired Research Strategies, Inc. to undertake a Coastal Alabama Community Attitudes Assessment to provide insight into what stakeholders consider the most pressing environmental challenges. Five hundred and fifty respondents answered a series of questions related to environmental values, quality of life factors, economic contributions and impacts, and major issues of concern. This assessment will be used to craft a series of community meetings over the coming months, as we seek input to guide the next iteration of the Mobile Bay Estuary Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan.

Questions were posed to randomly selected individuals aged 18-74 who were

heads of households and had lived in their residence for at least two years within residential zip codes of Mobile and Baldwin Counties. The average age of respondents was 53.48 years with average household annual income of \$53,000 and average households of 2.44 individuals. Forty-five percent were employed full time, 29% were retired, and eight percent were unemployed. The random sampling methodology used indicated that 46% of the respondents live within six blocks or less of a seashore, bay, bayou or other waterway.

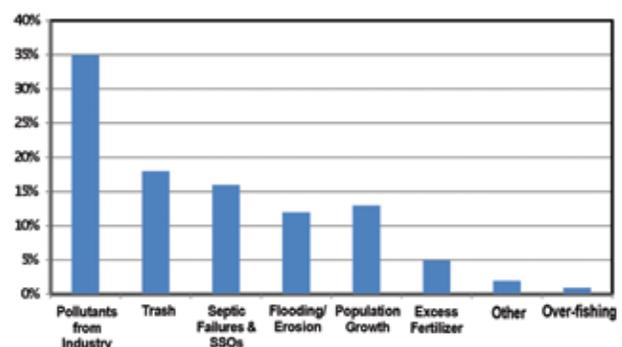
Of those interviewed, lifestyle indicators show that Mobile County residents have a higher tendency for Recreational Fishing, while Baldwin County residents enjoy Boating and Water Sports. However, Baldwin County residents regard Tourism

and Recreational Fishing as the leading economic generators impacting their quality of life. In Mobile County, Recreational and Commercial Fishing are the two strongest economic generators contributing to their quality of life.

When asked which was more important - the environment or economic growth - **61% recognized the need for balance between environmental protection and economic growth**, versus 26% who thought the environment was more important and 13% who thought that economic growth should come first. Breaking this data down, Baldwin County residents favored environmental protection 12% more than Mobile County residents, and, as might be expected, those living

*Photo by Rob Nykvist*

Which environmental problem has had the greatest impact on Mobile Bay and its estuaries?



within six blocks of a water body gave higher priority to the environment by 13%.

Most of Mobile and Baldwin County residents have mixed feelings about Sea Level Rise. **Over 60% believe to some degree that Sea Level Rise is real** versus approximately 40% who did not. Mobile County residents and residents living within six blocks of a waterway have a slightly stronger belief that sea level is rising.

Can you say *es-cho-aree*? Of Baldwin County residents interviewed, 49% understood what an estuary was. Only 37% of Mobile County residents demonstrated a correct understanding. However, a review of the qualitative answers provided indicates that many of those interviewed had some understanding of what estuaries provide, including answers such as, “where fish hatch their eggs,” “where small fish and crabs grow up to be adults,” “where we raise little fish,” and “where water systems converge.”

On a scale of one to five, with five being most important, **respondents scored the economic importance of Mobile Bay to the State of Alabama at 4.62, with residents from Baldwin County residents rating its importance 7.79% higher than those from Mobile County.** When asked how they viewed the overall health of the bay, (one = poor to five = excellent), Baldwin County residents scored it lower (2.99) than Mobile County respondents (3.18). However, both indicated that the Bay’s health at about average.

Interestingly, when asked about the overall quality of life in their specific county, **Mobile County residents rated their quality of life 5.67% better than Baldwin County residents,** with a combined average of 4.22. Residents living within six blocks of a waterway indicated slightly higher quality of life (4.40).

Resoundingly, **the feature having the most positive impact on quality of life in and around Mobile Bay is Fishing or Fisheries Habitats** (50%) with those living within six blocks of a waterway rating that slightly higher (52%). Beaches and Waterfront (23%) rated second and was valued 12.84% higher by those living greater than six blocks from a waterway.

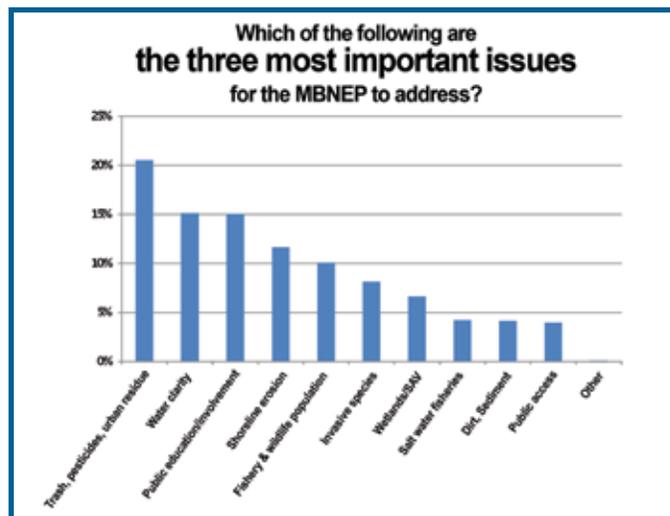
An overwhelming **34% rated Pollutants from Industry as the number one environmental problem having impacting Mobile Bay and its estuaries,** followed by Trash and Septic Failures and Sanitary Sewer Overflows. However, when asked to compare their answer

to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill regarding which would have a more long-term effect on the environmental quality of Mobile Bay, 57% rated the oil spill as having a greater long-term effect. In retrospect, it appears that the answer to this question may have been skewed by the events unfolding last summer, when these interviews were taking place. Within the different problem categories, Baldwin County respondents rated Flooding and Erosion (15%) and Septic Failures and Sanitary Sewer Overflows (22%) as more serious problems than Mobile County respondents (10% and 13% respectively).

In a related question, **33% of respondents believe that among infrastructure projects Coastal Building and Industrial Development had the greatest impact on the quality of our estuarine system.**

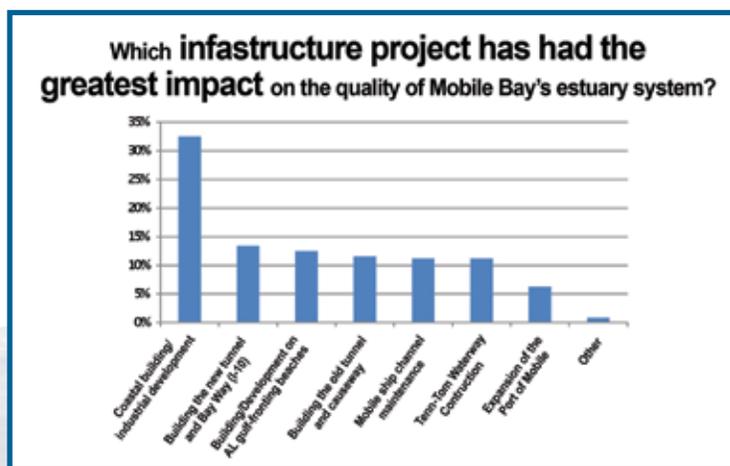
This research was undertaken in part to gauge how the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program could target activities to address community environmental

concerns in the coming years. Although respondents felt that Industry was the biggest environmental polluter, they felt that the two most important issues to address are Trash, Pesticides, and Urban Residue and Water clarity. Interestingly,



these issues all relate in part to how stormwater runoff is managed and reflects the stress that stormwater is putting not only on area aesthetic values but also on ecosystem health. Note that the third most important issue is Public Outreach and Education, a key directive for the Program in terms of moving towards a “tipping point” for changing behaviors.

Overall, the Community Attitudes Assessment provided a valuable community perspective of what the perceived environmental issues are at this point in time. The data found in this report will be used to frame a new Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan that integrates environmental protections into



planning for community growth so that what the community values most about our coastal environment is conserved into perpetuity. Our goal in developing the priorities for this next plan is that each objective resonates with the community, is achievable and realistic, is based in science, and, above all, contributes to the long-term viability of the coastal ecosystems that underlie our quality of life.

# Clean Up the Bottom Unites Hundreds Towards Community and Environmental Improvement

By TOM HERDER, MOBILE BAY NATIONAL  
ESTUARY PROGRAM

Photos by Rhoda Vanderhart

**O**n foot and in canoes, over three hundred residents and community volunteers recently spent a morning cleaning up "The Bottom," the historically African-American neighborhood that surrounds Martin Luther King (MLK) Avenue. The effort included cleanups of neighborhood streets and the adjacent Three Mile and One Mile Creeks in downtown Mobile. It began at 8 a.m. at the check-in location on Mobile Housing Board (MHB) property at the intersection of Lawrence and Morgan Streets with words from Mayor Sam Jones and Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) Director Roberta Swann and a

blessing from Michael Pierce of the MLK Avenue Redevelopment Corporation. Scotch Gulf Lumber on Conception Street Road provided a launch site for paddlers. Major funding for the event was supplied by BP.

The goals of the project included more than just removal of trash from streets and waters within this neighborhood, which has been home to many of Mobile's past, current, and future leaders. They included educating the public about the connection between the streets, where trash is discarded, and the waters, where it is carried by stormwater to accumulate and degrade wildlife habitat. Together, the MBNEP, the City of Mobile, the MLK Avenue Redevelopment Corporation, and MHB aligned their interests to engender community pride, promote wise stewardship of the waters and natural resources that exist just out of sight of urban streets, and to celebrate the community with positive action to improve community, economic, and environmental health.



*Volunteer couple enjoying fine weather while cleaning up the bottom.*

*Paddlers work to remove trash from Three Mile and One Mile Creeks.*





*Mayor Sam Jones welcomes volunteers to the Clean Up the Bottom Event while Mobile Bay NEP Director Roberta Swann looks on.*



With the Three Mile Creek Watershed targeted for a major watershed management planning effort, this is the first of many neighborhood clean-up days planned for this urban drainage area that stretches from west Mobile, through pristine woody wetlands that surround the closed Hickory Street Landfill and areas of downtown Mobile, and into the Mobile River. Volunteers who cleaned up zones on neighborhood streets or worked from canoes within these habitat-rich urban creeks received yellow event tee shirts with artwork by local artist A. C. Smith. Lunch was provided by Mobile Gas. Following registration at the check-in site, paddlers launched at Scotch Gulf Lumber and received on-the-water support from the Mobile County Sheriff's Flotilla, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Southeastern Wildlife Conservation Group, and Scotch Gulf Lumber.

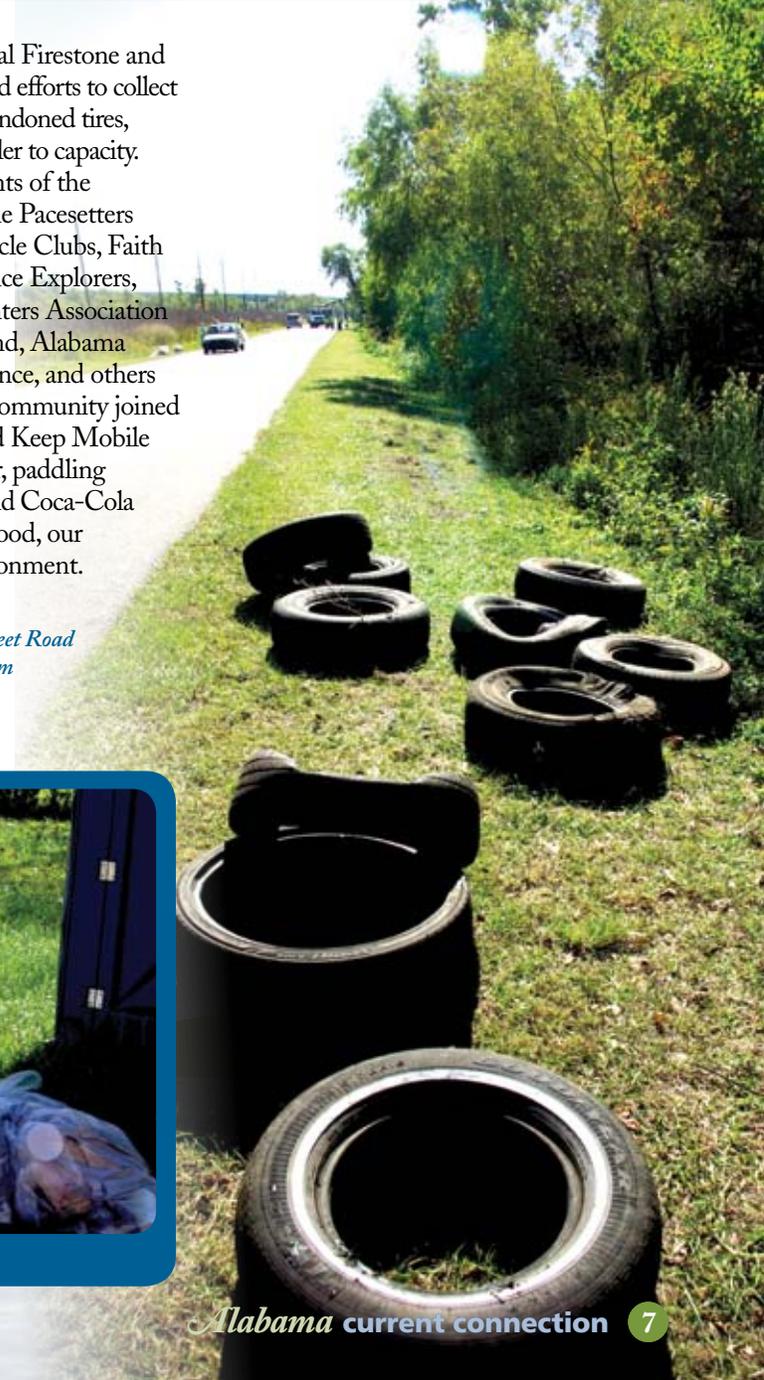
Bridgestone Tires and local Firestone and CarQuest dealers supported efforts to collect and remove over 1,000 abandoned tires, filling a 48-foot tractor trailer to capacity.

Working with Residents of the Bottom, groups such as the Pacesetters and All Throttle Motorcycle Clubs, Faith Academy, the Mobile Police Explorers, Progressive Black Firefighters Association of Mobile, Outward Bound, Alabama School for Math and Science, and others from the greater Mobile community joined partners that also included Keep Mobile Beautiful, Alabama Power, paddling consultant Rob Nykvist, and Coca-Cola to support this neighborhood, our community, and the environment.

*Ten tires along Conception Street Road await pickup by volunteers from Bridgestone and Firestone.*



*Trash collected during Clean Up the Bottom.*





*Philadelphia Vireo*  
(*Vireo philadelphicus*)

## Fall Migration Continued from the page 1

*All photography by Tom Ulrich*

Arrive too soon, though, and you may find lingering winter weather that creates hardships when locating food. Arrive too late, and the best territories are already taken. Bird migration is a delicate balancing act that Mother Nature has perfected through the eons, and continues to refine with each generation.

Fall migration, on the other hand, unwinds at a more protracted, leisurely pace. Purple Martins, those familiar denizens of waterside martin houses, set the early example. Vast flocks start appearing at traditional migration roost sites in early July and are largely gone from most areas of the state by late August. Warblers of the southern landscapes, like Swainson's and Prothonotary, are also early to depart.

Common Nighthawks, familiar sights at Friday night high school football games across the state, reach their peak migration around Labor Day weekend. Species like Bay-breasted Warblers are fairly late migrants, reaching their peak in early October. Bringing up the rear, and staying through the winter, are Yellow-rumped Warblers; their smacking call notes announce their presence wherever they appear, often in large numbers.

September is the month with the most bird movement as the later migrants join in the southward push. Vireos, orioles, tanagers, flycatchers, grosbeaks, buntings



*Indigo Bunting (Passerina cyanea)*

and many warbler species are often seen together in mixed feeding flocks as they stop to refuel their depleted fat reserves before continuing their journey. A variety of trees and plants provide a colorful array of fall berries that attract many of these birds. Plant these natives in your yard and you will surely be rewarded when the migration train visits.



*Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Pheucticus ludovicianus)*



*Orchard Oriole*  
(*Icterus spurius*)

Add a water feature and you'll be the hit of the neighborhood! A variety of trees and plants provide a colorful array of fall berries that attract many of these birds. Plant these natives in your yard and you will surely be rewarded when the migration train visits.

Another factor that contributes to the sense of a prolonged migration is the fact that adults of many species are often the first to depart, before the juveniles. It's as though the adults, knowing that an arduous journey lies ahead of them, begin their southbound journeys without wasting any time once the young have fledged. The young birds, on the other hand, tend to linger a bit longer before eventually commencing their own southbound journey. Sound like a teenager you may know?

When fall migration finally winds down in mid-October, sometimes there is a sense of "Where have all the birds gone? I miss them already." There is a lull in the action, so to speak, but within a matter of weeks, ducks, hawks, sparrows and finches start arriving and our attentions are diverted once again to another happy pursuit!



*Prothonotary Warbler* (*Protonotaria citrea*)



*Scarlet Tanager* (*Piranga olivacea*)

*Established regenerative step pool storm conveyance in Anne Arundel County, MD*

# Joe's Branch Watershed Restoration – Potential Kickoff for Restoration of D'Olive Watershed

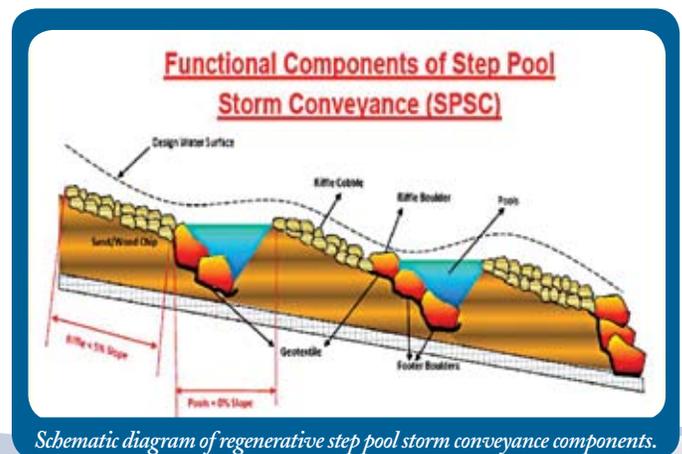
BY TOM HERDER, MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

If Clean Water Act Section 319 funding is approved, restoration of an impacted stream and wetlands on Westminster Village property in Spanish Fort, along with upstream management efforts as part of an education/outreach campaign, could kick off measures recommended in the Watershed Management Plan for D'Olive Creek, Tiawasee Creek and the Joe's Branch Watersheds (WMP). This downcut stream has been impacted by stormwater concentration from a highway culvert and sheet flow from park and school facilities (to the north) and Faith Family Fellowship (to the east) onto a once-pristine wooded natural slope. Since at least 2005, severe erosion and mass wasting have accelerated with every significant rainfall event, as the

flowing water seeks to create a stable floodplain at a lower elevation. The broadening and deepening channel has deposited tons of sediment into downstream wetlands, Joe's Branch, D'Olive Creek and Bay, and ultimately into Mobile Bay. Section 319 funds provide federal support through the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) for non-point source pollution issues, including sedimentation.

The D'Olive Watershed has been plagued by excessive erosion and sedimentation since the 1970s. Five of its stream segments – D'Olive Creek, Tiawasee Creek, Joe's Branch and unnamed

tributaries to D'Olive Creek and Tiawasee Creek – are on the 2010 303(d) list of impaired water bodies for siltation/habitat alteration from land development. Of almost 23 miles of streams in the Watershed, two miles have been substantially degraded by runoff and sedimentation, four miles are currently being degraded, and six miles



have the potential for future degradation. This proposed stream restoration will alleviate sedimentation in both Joe's Branch and D'Olive Creek. Another factor that made this project a target for 319 funding was the hiring by Westminster Village of Thompson Engineering (who headed the team that developed the WMP) to design a plan to restore natural hydrologic function, prevent further damage, and reduce transport of non-point source pollutants (primarily sediment) via the impaired Joe's Branch stream. Thompson developed a plan to install regenerative step pool storm conveyance (SPSC). This open-channel conveyance structure converts surface runoff to shallow groundwater flow through a linear series of shallow, surface ponds with riffle grade control overlying a sand/woodchip seepage filter installed within the channel. This cutting-edge methodology, also known as a coastal plains outfall, was designed using guidelines provided by Anne Arundel County in Maryland. The riffled pools interrupt the development of water depth and velocity along the flow path and maintain non-erosive flows during larger volume storms to limit development of stream energy. A native plant community will "knit" the site together, producing native habitat, serving as a carbon sink for the system, and complementing the pleasing aesthetic value of the SPSC.

Additionally, approximately 1.0 to 1.5 acres of impacted wetlands down slope of the SPSC will be restored to improve the hydrological, biological, and chemical health of Joe's Branch; reduce pollutant loadings; and prevent further pollutant impacts downstream. Native wetland plants (including groundcover and trees) will be reestablished throughout the project site to create a functional riparian floodplain; stabilize stream banks; reduce erosion and sedimentation; and provide food, habitat, and passage corridors for invertebrates, fish, and wildlife. This native vegetation will serve as an aesthetic enhancement to the project area by providing shade and visual interest.



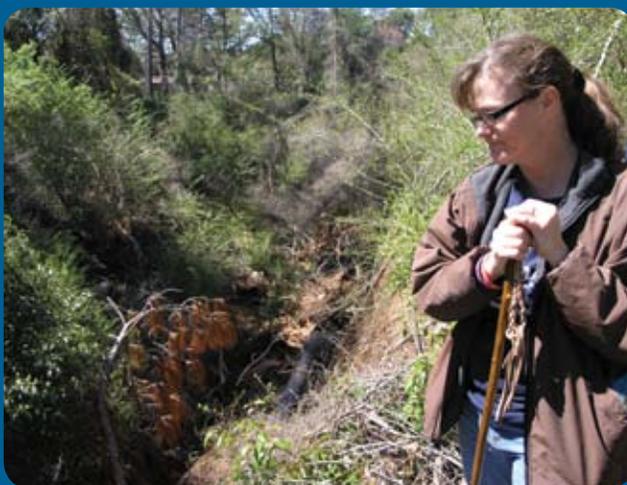
*ADEM Director Lance LaFleur discusses plans with Thompson Engineering's Emery Baya on impacted wetlands in Joe's Branch Watershed.*

An education and outreach component will be implemented to help increase public and private sector knowledge of watershed and water quality protection, engage stakeholder in innovative technologies and thought processes, and promote investments of human and financial capital needed to accommodate future watershed management goals and objectives. Upstream best management practices, like bioretention swales, rain gardens, and rain barrels, will be installed in nearby public areas like ball fields, parking lots, and the campus of SpanishFort Elementary School to provide demonstrations of low-impact development measures. Other proposed outreach activities include brochures, videos, presentations,

artistic projects, an oral history initiative, public service announcements, and workshops.

The impending widening of Highway 31 by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) provided another incentive to secure 319 funding for this project. Concerns over threats to the integrity of Highway 31 by the widening gully that runs parallel to and only feet from it stimulated ALDOT to offer \$200,000 necessary to extend and expand stormwater conveyance to be used as non-federal match for 319 project funding.

A consensus of project partners, including the Cities of Spanish Fort and Daphne, Baldwin County, Westminster Village, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), ALDOT, and Thompson targeted this sub-watershed as a kickoff for restoration efforts within the D'Olive Creek Watershed. The cost of comprehensively restoring this impacted Watershed is estimated at around \$44 million, so the necessity of addressing this worsening situation, plans by and need for ALDOT to protect Highway 31 from stormwater impacts, and availability of potential 319 funding make this a logical first step in the process. MBNEP and Thompson prepared the 319 Grant proposal that was submitted to ADEM in early August. A decision by the funders is expected later in fall, 2011.



*Ashley Campbell of the City of Daphne examines severely impacted stream on the property of Westminster Village in Spanish Fort.*

# Community Group Profile: The Southeastern Wildlife Conservation Group

By TOM HERDER, MOBILE BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

**T**he Southeastern Wildlife Conservation Group was Spanish Fort resident Mark Langner's idea. It was born in 2004, when land near Trussville, where the Langner kids played growing up, was sold and a familiar mountain top leveled to create a mall. He worried that his two young daughters would not have the same opportunities to experience nature and wildlife that shaped his values. In 2005, SWCG was established with a mission to "protect, conserve, and re-establish the southeastern United States' diminishing wildlife and their habitats."

Organization goals include environmental education with a focus on youth, habitat restoration, wildlife rescue, and support of marine research. Langner gets help from several partners, notably former U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Lloyd Culp, but frequently he carries the ball. Langner's "regular job" involves providing consultation service to companies attempting to enter the federal government market place, providing business development direction, bid submission, and project management, often for construction jobs.

In 2007 SWCG entered into a cooperative agreement to serve as a "Friends Group" in support of the Fish and Wildlife Service Gulf Coast Complex that includes the Bon Secour, Grand Bay, and Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuges. In May, 2008, they received 501(c)(3) status, and Langner's leisure time became a thing of the past!



Mark Langner, president, Southeastern Wildlife Conservation Group, pilots the SWAT boat.

SWCG's growing list of accomplishments is a tribute to the dedication of this volunteer and his allies.

An initial SWCG project stemmed from its Alabama Clean Oceans Initiative that included monofilament recycling, clean up efforts, and pollution

## SOUTHEASTERN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION GROUP

education outreach. In 2008 SWCG partnered with the ADCNR, State Lands and Marine Resources Divisions; MBNEP, AUMERC; ADEM; and others to install monofilament collection bins at local fishing spots or tackle shops. Collected monofilament and empty spools are sent to Pure Fishing where they are recycled.

Youth education has been a primary focus of SWCG, with development of an Environmental Education Outdoor Classroom at Spanish Fort Elementary School that includes on-site displays of dune and wetland habitats. Another SFES program, Project Jubilee, involves transporting students to the Bon Secour NWR each spring to plant sea oats and other dune plants to rebuild and repair fragile dune habitat. Another SWCG program, Tidal Pool Explorers, targets underserved, low-income kids from along the Eastern Shore to provide education and resources to learn about local wildlife and habitats and the need for conservation. SWCG provides them with opportunities to experience snorkeling, kayaking, fishing, hiking, and hands-on conservation and restoration activities.

In 2010 on the tail of the Deepwater Horizon spill, SWCG received a Dragonfly Boatworks-designed, 17-foot skiff powered by a 40 hp Evinrude motor to support marine and estuarine rescue efforts. This vessel, donated by PGA golfers, Greg Norman, Vijay Singh, and David Duvall, includes a sea turtle recovery cradle to recover stranded or distressed animals in shallow water. It will be used to support Dauphin Island Sea Lab marine mammal research programs, including the Manatee Sighting Network, on an as-needed basis. SWCG recently obtained migratory bird permits necessary for rescue responses in marine environments, which allow them to transport birds to the Mobile Public Schools Environmental Studies Center for rehabilitation. A relationship with the Bonefish and Tarpon Trusts is also in the works, since our coast is in the path of tarpon migration, and SWCG is seeking angler participation.



*Project Jubilee students plant sea oats at the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge.*

Langner's vision includes securing financial support for and expanding all SWCG programs to educate more kids, restore more habitats, reduce plastics pollution, and support more research studies on the Alabama and Mississippi coasts. Eventually he hopes to develop a SWCG facility to educate youth, provide a resource for other organization's research efforts, headquarter SWCG's wildlife rescue operation, and provide outdoor experiences and exposure to research programs to kids in need. Mark Langner can be reached at [mark.langner@swcgroup.org](mailto:mark.langner@swcgroup.org).

## Dr. John Valentine is DISL New Executive Director

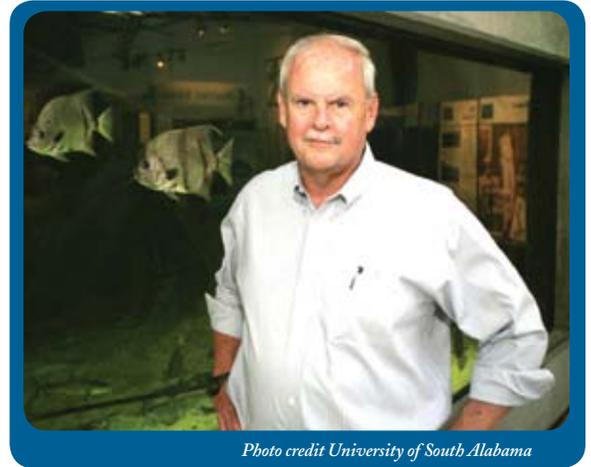
*FROM LISA YOUNG,  
THE DAUPHIN ISLAND  
SEA LAB SKIMMER*

As of October 1, 2011, Dr. John Valentine is the new Executive Director of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. Dr. Valentine has an almost 25-year history with the DISL – conducting his Ph.D. research here as a graduate student; becoming a post-doctoral fellow; joining the faculty as a senior marine scientist; taking on the role of University Programs Chair; now facing the challenges as Executive Director.

But although the challenges are many (competitive and shrinking revenue streams; an aging physical plant; a hurricane-prone location), Dr. Valentine values the Sea Lab's resources. "In a way, my long history with the Sea Lab is representative of what makes this institution so unique and valuable," said Dr. Valentine. "Our mission of serving the state's needs for science education, research and outreach is an easy one to rally behind and one all of us here take to heart. Once you get to know what we do, how we do it, and why we do it – it gets under your skin. You become a life-long devotee."

The Sea Lab has been in the spotlight for the past few years for its leading role in research in the Gulf of Mexico due to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. "In an unfortunate, tragic incidence, we were in a fortunate position of having had years of baseline data under our belts, as well as a roster of top-notch scientists who have studied this under-studied environment for quite some time," he commented.

"We need to maintain this momentum in interest and investment in the Gulf. It is often called 'America's Sea,' but we need to treat it like the national treasure it is. Everyone, from those in the corridors of the State House to those sitting in



*Photo credit University of South Alabama*

elementary-school classrooms, needs to learn about the Gulf's value to our state, and to our country."

"The Sea Lab is proud of its role of service for the state of Alabama," continued Dr. Valentine. "We were created to minimize duplication of classes at the undergraduate level, and we embody the true spirit of collaboration as the state's Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium, with 22 institutions of higher learning. And we've moved on to create award-winning K-12 programs, teacher training, an outstanding public aquarium, and continuing partnerships with the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, the Northern Gulf Institute, Coastal America, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the National Marine Educators Association, and so much more."

"We are poised to be one the 'big players' on the national scene, on par with Woods Hole and Scripps. We will continue to work hard and think innovatively, but we can only continue to move forward with the combined will of the citizens of this state, particularly its political leaders."

"To them I say, come down to the Sea Lab. See what we do here. Once you do, you, too, will become one of its life-long devotees," he concluded.

# Alabama Brings Home Three 2011 Gulf Guardian Awards

By KELLY SWINDLE, NATURAL RESOURCE PLANNER FOR THE ADCNR STATE LANDS DIVISION, COASTAL SECTION

Coastal Alabama businesses and non-profit groups took home three of the 2011 Gulf Guardian Awards, which is hosted each year by the Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program. The Gulf of Mexico Program initiated the Gulf Guardian Awards in 2000 as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals, and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive. A first, second and third place awards are given in seven categories: individual, business, youth environmental education, civic/nonprofit organizations, cultural diversity/environmental justice, partnership and bi-national efforts.

The Awards ceremony was held in conjunction with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance Meeting on August 3, 2011 at the Westin New Orleans Canal Place in New Orleans.

Daphne Utilities of Daphne, Alabama received a First Place Gulf Guardian Award in the Civic/Nonprofit Category for their Used Cooking Oil Recycling and Biodiesel Programs. As a water/wastewater utility company and past recipient of the EPA "Award of Excellence," Daphne Utilities has always been concerned about protecting the drinking water supply and the environment which produces it. In 2006 Daphne Utilities began the Used Cooking Oil Recycling Program, in which gallon jugs were distributed at more than 20 locations throughout the city of Daphne for customers to pick up.



Handmade soaps from glycerin by-products of the biodiesel process.



Third place Gulf Guardian Award winners, Volkert. Left to right: Patti Powell, Director of the ADCNR State lands Division; Stan Meiburg, Deputy Regional Administrator for EPA Region 4, Atlanta, GA.; Mr. Buddy Covington, Vice President, Environmental Services, Volkert, Inc.; and Carl Ferraro, Natural Resource Planner for the ADCNR State Lands Division, Coastal Section.

Once filled, these can be returned to recycling stations. The utility went further and investigated converting this oil into biodiesel fuel and constructed a homemade biodiesel processor inside their wastewater treatment plant. Their first batch of biodiesel was made in late 2006 with good results and they began blending their own fuel to make a B20 blend (80 percent regular diesel/20 percent biodiesel)

which they burn in their trucks and heavy equipment. Daphne Utilities

then recognized that the glycerin by-product generated by the biodiesel process could be made into homemade soap. The employees added colorful dye and scents to the soap and used molds to shape it into fish and animal forms. These were a huge hit with children and got the attention of their parents as

well and quickly became a cornerstone their marketing program. Their story has crossed the country and utilities in major cities across the U.S. (and even in Australia) and they have started their own programs based upon the Daphne Utilities extraordinary program.

In May 2009, as part of its mission to promote a sustainable Alabama Gulf Coast, Partners for Environmental Progress (PEP) launched its By-Product Synergy Central Gulf Coast (BPS CGC) project in Mobile to achieve significant economic benefits for participating companies while simultaneously advancing environmental protections. PEP formed a diverse network of 12 companies to actively seek opportunities to turn one company's waste or by-product into raw materials for another. BPS CGC creates a system where regional businesses can constantly network and systematically review opportunities to reduce their environmental footprint. This type of



*Howard Johnson, PEP Board of Directors Treasurer; Jennifer Denson, PEP Executive Director; and By-Product Synergy participants Rebekah Bell, Alabama Power, and PEP BOD President Gary Criscione, Evonik Degussa*

innovation and collaboration can only help recruit like-minded, environmentally progressive new industry to the Alabama Gulf Coast. The BPS projects diverted more than 8,200 tons of materials from landfills, wastewater treatment plants and other disposal sites. 5,300 tons of hydrochloric, hydrofluoric and nitric acids are no longer going into waste treatment plants or deep injection wells and more than 8,800 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were avoided. The 12 companies continue to network to share new data, one time material opportunities, best practices and more. Because of their efforts, Partners for Environmental Progress of Mobile, Alabama received a First Place Gulf Guardian Award for 2011 in the Business Category.

Volkert, Inc. of Mobile, Alabama received a Third Place Gulf Guardian Award in the Business Category for their Little Bay Finfish and Shellfish Recovery project. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina's waves and storm surge crossed the Mississippi Sound as far north as Little Bay, just west of Bayou La Batre, Alabama. The hurricane eroded and breached a small peninsula south of Little Bay that protected sea grasses, oyster reefs, and extensive salt marsh habitat to the north. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources developed the Finfish and Shellfish Nursery Habitat Restoration Program to identify and implement coastal restoration techniques.

Volkert was assigned the Little Bay Project in 2008 and they provided their client and partner, turn-key services including planning, design, permitting, bidding, and construction management. As the largest coastal restoration project in Alabama, it presented major challenges of no land access, shallow bottom, and high energy wave conditions. State-of-the-art engineering technology, site-specific adaptation, and ingenuity were used to achieve the goals. Development of a wave attenuation device (WAD) permeable segmented breakwater was an essential task in the overall project success. The WADs provided a solution that could be installed from barges in a high energy environment. They were designed to remain stable during a storm surge and provide sufficient wave calming effects. As constructed, the breakwater allows for biological and hydrological exchange with Mississippi Sound. This exceptional project not only corrects serious ongoing environmental degradation, but also demonstrates how engineered structures can provide habitat protection and creation for the overall good of the environment. The Little Bay Finfish and Shellfish Recovery project serves as a model for similar type restoration and protection projects.

## 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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## Current events

### October

**October 29, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

**What:** Dog River Ghost Chase 5K Run/  
Walk and Goblin Gallop

**Where:** River Shack Restaurant and  
Boat Launch, 6120 Marina Dr. S.  
Mobile, AL 36605

**For more information and registration**

**visit:** <http://www.dogrivers.org>

**Online registration:**

<http://www.imathlete.com> until  
midnight October 27, 2011

### November

**November 8, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.**

**What:** Dog River Clearwater  
Revival's Monthly Meeting  
(2nd Tuesday each month)

**Where:** Mobile Public Library  
1924-B Dauphin Island Parkway

**For more information visit:**

[www.dogrivers.org](http://www.dogrivers.org)

**November 12, 6 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

**What:** Dog River Clearwater  
Revival's 2nd Annual Dog River  
Fishing Tournament

**Where:** Register and pay at Captains  
Meeting on Friday, November 11th from  
5:30 p.m.- 7 p.m., or in person at George's  
Water Sports (several more locations to  
be announced).

**For more information:** email [wchx@wchxrail.com](mailto:wchx@wchxrail.com) or call 251-343-1619

### January

**January 17, 2012 - 8 a.m. - Noon**

**What:** Dog River Clearwater  
Revival Annual Meeting

**For more information visit:**

[www.dogrivers.org](http://www.dogrivers.org)

### April

**April 21, 2012**

**What:** Earth Day Mobile Bay

**For more information visit:**

<http://earthdaymobilebay.org>