



THE PELICAN POST

A quarterly publication - Weeks Bay Foundation
Summer 2011
Volume 26, No. 2



A Party for Preservation

**BALDEAGLE
BASH
2011**



Saturday, June 4, 2011
4:00pm to 7:00pm
See inside for details!

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The Weeks Bay Foundation is a non-profit organization whose members work to protect the natural resources of coastal Alabama and to provide assistance and support for the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve's goals and programs.

Cover Photos,
Layout & Design by
Kathy Hicks

From the Executive Director . . .



The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill disaster began in the Gulf about one year ago, and the Foundation worked diligently during this time to ensure that natural resource protection measures were in place in the Weeks Bay watershed. We conducted hydrocarbon testing in Weeks Bay, purchased absorbent oil boom, and worked with **Kenneth Cain**, a retired engineer, who utilized bathymetric data to design a system to prevent oil from entering Weeks Bay. I hope we never see another manmade disaster like the *Deepwater Horizon* incident. Please take a moment of silence and reflect on this natural disaster.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the designation of the Weeks Bay Reserve. There are many folks who have been instrumental in the success of the Reserve over the last twenty five years. I think about the work of **Jack Edwards**, former Congressman and Chairman of the Weeks Bay Foundation, **David Morine**, former Vice President and director of land acquisition of The Nature Conservancy, and **Skipper Tonsmeire**, former President of the Foundation, and other community leaders who had the vision to establish the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The Foundation has also played a critical role in the success of the Reserve. Though the Foundation was not formally organized until 1990, our work dates back to before the establishment of the Reserve. Some examples of the Foundation's assistance to the Reserve include providing funds for the **Kurt G. Wintermeyer Boardwalk** at the pitcher plant bog, the **Ottillie Halstead Weeks Bay Visitor Center**, the specimen collection and display cabinets, providing funds for educational, research and outreach assistance, and land acquisition activities. The present and former staff at the Reserve have also played critical roles over the last twenty five years.

Six new members were elected to the Foundation's Board of Directors at the annual membership meeting in April. **Shawn Alves, David Ed Bishop, Ken Cole, Aubury Fuller, Ralph Havard, and Eleanor Livaudais** were added to the board. I look forward to working with these new members and know they will make valuable additions to the board. After a move which took him out of the area, **Dennis Frodsham** decided to step down from the board. His expertise and insight will be greatly missed. Thank you to all the Foundation's directors for their dedication to the protection of the natural resources of coastal Alabama.

The Foundation has been working with the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries to create a partnership to protect and preserve significant bird habitat on Dauphin Island. Learn more about the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries on page 12 and look for more information about our partnership in the next issue of *The Pelican Post*.

I hope you will support the Foundation by attending the **Second Annual Bald Eagle Bash** on Saturday, June 4. Last year's event was a great success despite the weather and we expect this year to be even better!

The Foundation is proud to be the friends group of the Reserve and looks forward to the future. Thank you for your continued support!

Working for Conservation,

Walter



A PARTY FOR PRESERVATION!

Saturday, June 4, 2011, 4:00pm to 7:00pm

Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center

At the Fish River Bridge on U.S. 98 in Fairhope

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Fly Creek Cafe

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Tickets may be purchased at all area BBVA Compass locations, the Foundation office, and the event website.

www.BaldEagleBash.com

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WEEKS BAY DAY

by Angela Underwood, Education Specialist



Mike Shelton teaches about the water cycle



Raptor show



Participants view plankton up close



Raptor show



Weeks Bay Reserve celebrated the 25th year in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System by hosting Weeks Bay Day on April 2, at the Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center. This family event was open to the public and featured various fun-filled educational opportunities that taught about local resources, habitats, and wildlife.

Highlights of the day included boat tours on the *Weeks Bay Explorer* captained by **Eric Brunden**, tours of the Weeks Bay pitcher plant bog led by **Fred Nation**, and lunch with estuarine delights cooked up by the **Blue Marlin Restaurant**. Many events marked a great day and conservation partners were recognized during lunch under the big top tent.

Mike Shelton, watershed coordinator for the Reserve, conducted his ever popular Watershed Wagon. The Watershed Wagon is a traveling classroom that teaches students of all ages about human impacts on local waterways and resources. Members of the community were able to test their knowledge of water resources in a round of environmental jeopardy while others constructed watershed models, allowing them to see how rain carries pollutants into our waterways.

The live animal displays were also a big hit among the crowd. The **Coosa River Science School** wowed the audience with their presentation of raptors, which included owls, falcons, and a special Bald Eagle named Luke who can not be released due to a crooked beak. In the education room at the Tonsmeire Center, staff from the **5 Rivers Delta Resource Center** talked about the biology and value of a highly misunderstood group of animals—snakes. Over 50 species of snakes can be found in Alabama, the majority of which are non-venomous. Several species of non-venomous snakes were on display and could be held and touched, including the threatened indigo snake which can reach lengths of over eight feet.

In the multipurpose room at the Tonsmeire Center, participants used microscopes to get a close-up view of plankton, those tiny, yet extremely important organisms found floating in our bay. Plankton can be plants or animals and are a vital food source for many larger organisms. Also, many of these organisms are the “babies” of commercially important species, including crabs, shrimp, oysters, and fish. These animals will spend a large portion of their life growing-up in the protected waters of the estuary. For this reason, bays and estuaries are known as the nursery grounds of the world’s oceans.

Additionally, Weeks Bay Day attendees had a chance to highlight their creative talents by participating in a collaborative art project sponsored by the Eastern Shore Art Center. Community Arts Director, **Nancy Raia**, encouraged participants to paint a picture of their favorite estuarine organism on recycled blue jeans, which proved to be an inexpensive and unique canvas. Combined into an estuarine collage, the paintings highlight the lesson that each individual has a contribution to make towards protecting our estuaries.

We thank all of those who have helped contribute to the success of the Reserve for the last 25 years, and we look forward to a future of working with our community to increase coastal conservation and education in south Alabama.

WEEKS BAY APPRECIATION AWARDS

During Weeks Bay Day, the Foundation and the Reserve acknowledged the outstanding contributions to the conservation and preservation of the Weeks Bay watershed by partners and supporters.

The Foundation acknowledged the support of the partners in the purchase of the **Meadows Wetland Tract**, the largest acquisition of land in the 25-year history of the Weeks Bay Reserve. Former Congressman **Jack Edwards**, Chairman Emeritus of the Weeks Bay Foundation Board of Directors, presented the awards with the assistance of **Walter Ernest**, Executive Director of the Foundation.

The Forever Wild Land Trust was acknowledged in recognition of its partnership for land conservation in the Weeks Bay coastal area. **Patti Powell** (l), Director of State Lands Division in the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, accepted the award on behalf of the Forever Wild Land Trust.



The Conservation Fund was acknowledged in recognition of its partnership and support for conservation. **Ray Herndon** (l) accepted the award on behalf of The Conservation Fund.



The Y-Weeks Community Association was acknowledged in recognition of its partnership and support for conservation. **Mike Hendersen** (l) accepted the award on behalf of the Y-Weeks Community Association.



The **Baldwin County Commission** was acknowledged in recognition of its partnership and support for conservation (no photo available).

The Foundation also acknowledged the support of those exhibiting extraordinary efforts in the protection of Weeks Bay and the Reserve during the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

The **Magnolia Springs Volunteer Fire Department** was acknowledged in recognition of its dedication and service during the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. **Jamie Hinton** (c) accepted the award on behalf of the Magnolia Springs Volunteer Fire Department.



The **Fish River/Marlow Fire and Rescue Department** was acknowledged in recognition of its dedication and service during the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill (no photo available).

Ken Cain was acknowledged in recognition of his dedication and service during the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Mr. Cain, a certified engineer, designed an elaborate system of protection devices to block sub-surface oil from entering Weeks Bay. Even though it never became necessary to install the defensive system, his effort was extraordinary. After obtaining a patent for this gunderboom design, he donated it to the Weeks Bay Foundation for its future use. Congressman Jack Edwards (l) presented the award to Ken Cain (second from l) as John Borom (second from r), Foundation Board Member, and Walter Ernest (r) looked on.



The Reserve presented awards to two of its partners during Weeks Bay Day also.

The **Baldwin County Public School System** was acknowledged in recognition of the 25-year partnership with Weeks Bay Reserve to provide environmental education to Baldwin County students. **Margaret Sedleky**, Education Coordinator at the Reserve, presented the award to **Peggy Duck**, Baldwin County Secondary Science Supervisor.



Richard Corom was acknowledged in recognition of his longtime advocacy, dedication and support of the Weeks Bay Watershed Project Citizens Advisory Committee.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Nicole Kesterson by Maureen Nation, Volunteer Coordinator

Shortly after moving to the area, **Nicole Kesterson** found her way to Weeks Bay Reserve. “I was intrigued by the look of the place,” as she recalled, “sort of like a state park, but not really. I had to find out what it was exactly.”



As it turns out, Nicole was in a pretty good position to recognize state park-like facilities.

Born and raised in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, Nicole attended Southeast Missouri State University where she received her BS degree in Wildlife Biology. While attending college, she began working as a seasonal naturalist for the Department of Natural Resources in the near-by Trail of Tears State Park. Upon completion of her degree, with her wide job experience in state parks, she was hired into management at the Harry S. Truman State Park. While working at the park, she met one of the park rangers by the name of **Philip Kesterson**, whom she later married. Both she and Philip developed a great deal of experience building structures of all sorts within the park, so they decided to leave the park and begin their own construction company, and together they built their own house.

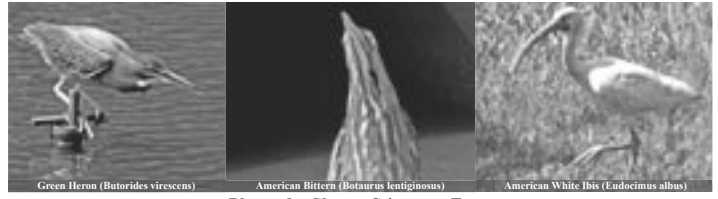
After several years Nicole and Philip decided that they were ready for a change. Nicole was familiar with the Gulf Coast area, having visited Pensacola and New Orleans many times with her family. So they moved to Gulf Shores.

Throughout it all, Nicole really hoped to get back to wildlife biology and fulfill her desire to teach. After performing many valuable functions at the Reserve, she can now be found sharing her love and knowledge of the natural world with the many school groups who visit the Reserve. She has, in fact, become our new Education Assistant through the Weeks Bay Foundation's Gaynor McCown Environmental Education Fellowship.

When asked what she liked most about the Reserve she said, “I really like our mission goal, where the emphasis is on education and research more than providing public facilities as it is in state park systems.”

Weeks Bay Reserve is extremely fortunate that Nicole found her way to us when she did. We have relied heavily on her many talents and her willingness to pitch-in to help us through some lean times. She is a delight to work with; always willing to help wherever she is needed most. Nicole is a recently elected member of the Weeks Bay Volunteers Board of Directors. In this role, Nicole will continue to share her knowledge and experience to help us make good decisions as we work to carry out our mission to educate the public and preserve our natural resources in coastal Alabama.

2011 BirdFest by “Nest Keeper” Fran Morley



Photos by Sherry Stimpson Frost

This year's Alabama Coastal BirdFest features a new schedule of days, more drive-yourself trips, and a modest registration fee that allows guests to attend workshops and a welcome/orientation reception for free.

The 8th annual John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest is Thursday through Saturday, October 6-8. The new three-day format will give visitors a free day, said BirdFest founder **John Borom**. “We do not have trips scheduled on Sunday this year to give our guests a travel day to get back home or a chance to just get out on their own, which a lot of our guests have asked for.”

The drive-yourself trips will give guests who live near birding sites a better opportunity to take part, explained BirdFest “Nest Keeper,” **Fran Morley**. “In the past, we asked all our attendees to come to 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center and ride the bus to the birding site, which is a great way for them to meet other birders, but not so good if you live in Gulf Shores and want to go on the Bon Secour trip, for example. This year, attendees will have the option of paying slightly less, bringing their own lunch, and driving themselves to the site. We think this will be a welcomed change.”

Also new this year is a welcome/orientation reception on Wednesday, October 5, and a series of afternoon workshops. These activities are free to registered attendees. “This year, all BirdFest attendees will pay a modest registration fee, and with that fee, be able to attend the new Wednesday evening orientation reception and the workshops at no charge. They'll also receive other BirdFest treats,” Morley noted.

The evening reception takes place at 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center and will include a light meal and beverages. **Kathy Hicks**, who was the featured artist of BirdFest in 2009, will present “Nature Through Our Lenses,” a musical slide-show of bird and nature photos taken by some of the area's finest photographers. The show will include images by this year's poster photographer, **Sherry Stimpson Frost**, and former BirdFest artists **Bill Summerour**, **Terry Hartley**, **Lisa Comer**, and Kathy Hicks. “We have also gathered outstanding images from BirdFest founder John Borom and members of our local camera clubs, including Mobile's **CameraSouth**, the **Eastern Shore Camera Club**, and Pensacola's **Wide Angle Photo Club**,” said Hicks. “It will be an exquisite photographic journey through the rich natural environment on the Alabama Gulf Coast.”



Protecting Shorelines on the Gulf Coast by Amy Gohres, Gulf Regional Training Coordinator

Severe storm events and wave action, combined with sea level rise, are leading to a loss of land along our coasts and estuaries. The Gulf Coast is facing chronic long-term shoreline erosion problems with average loss rates of six feet per year. Traditionally, hardened structures such as concrete seawalls or bulkheads have been used to protect shoreline property. However, these structures often increase the rate of coastal erosion on adjacent properties, remove the ability of the shoreline to carry out natural processes, and provide little habitat for estuarine species. To combat coastal erosion and maintain natural shorelines in the face of sea level rise, restoration efforts have moved towards the use of “living shorelines.” Unlike hardened structures, living shorelines use plants, sand, and other natural materials to stabilize the shoreline, minimize coastal erosion, and maintain coastal processes.



Workshop attendees in Apalachicola participate in a living shoreline restoration planting

Since 2009, the Gulf Regional Training Coordinator has hosted living shorelines workshops with each of the five Gulf Coast reserve’s Coastal Training Programs. The Gulf Regional Training Program is funded by a grant from NOAA’s Coastal Services Center in support of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. A sub-grant was awarded to the Weeks Bay Foundation. During these workshops, experts covered the fundamentals of living shoreline design, best practices, and potential funding opportunities. State and federal regulatory personnel were on hand at each event to answer questions related to the permitting process. Participants had the opportunity to visit field demonstration sites of local living shorelines projects throughout the Gulf Coast. This regional living shorelines work among the Gulf Coast reserves has reached 298 Gulf decision-makers and establishes a model for training reproducible for other entities and reserves nationwide.



Workshop attendees visit a shoreline field site at the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Under the appropriate conditions, living shorelines are a sustainable solution to the chronic problem of coastal erosion on both public and private lands. They not only stabilize the shoreline, but reduce wind and storm impacts, improve water quality, and enhance the natural shoreline habitat for the benefit of property owners and wildlife. As a result of the Gulf Coast reserve’s living shorelines training effort, more contractors are equipped to install living shorelines, regulations have been changed to simplify the permitting process, and property owners are becoming aware of an ecosystem-based alternative to seawalls and bulkheads.

Plans for the workshops are still being finalized. “We have an outstanding education team at 5 Rivers with great programs for all ages,” said **Hank Burch**, 5 Rivers Manager. “We think that these new workshops will be a great new addition for BirdFest, particularly for couples that are not both avid birders. Now the non-birding spouse will have something interesting to do during the day while the other goes on one of the trips.”

As always, the 2011 Alabama Coastal BirdFest will feature the free, day-long Bird & Conservation Expo on the Faulkner State Fairhope Campus and expertly guided trips by land and boat to popular spots all along the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail, with visits to Dauphin Island, Fort Morgan, Weeks Bay, Bayou La Batre, the Eastern Shore, and in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Registration will open in mid- to late July.

Visit www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com for more information as details and schedules are announced.

Advisory Committee Recognizes Member Contributions by L.G. Adams, Reserve Manager

Kevin Anson was recently recognized for serving a two year term as Chair of the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee. Kevin is Chief Biologist with Marine Resources Division in the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. In his job with Marine Resources he focuses on topics of resource and fisheries management, coordination of public access areas, and a host of other field related and administrative tasks. His leadership as chair of the Advisory Committee has been greatly appreciated.



Kevin Anson (l) accepts plaque from Chair Randy Roach (r) recognizing his contributions as past Chair of the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee

Lloyd Scott, a long standing and Charter Member of the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee, has decided to retire from his position as Director at the Environmental Studies Center in Mobile County. The Environmental Studies Center (ESC) is part of the Mobile County Board of Education and is an educational site for Mobile County Schools and the public at large. Lloyd Scott as Director of ESC gave direction and oversight to the programs, exhibits, and animal care at this facility. Lloyd served on the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee from the beginning of the designation process of the Reserve. His contributions have been invaluable over the years and added educational insight to many developments at the Reserve including exhibits, programs, and construction projects. His long time advocacy and support have been greatly appreciated by the Weeks Bay Advisory Committee. Congratulations and well wishes to Lloyd as he leaves the committee and moves on to bigger and better things.



L. G. Adams (l), Reserve Manager, presents plaque to Lloyd Scott (r) for his long standing advocacy and support as charter member of the Advisory Committee

25 Research Institutions and Agenciesthat have had research projects at Weeks Bay Reserve

1. Dauphin Island Sea Lab
2. University of South Alabama
3. Troy University
4. Auburn University
5. University of Alabama
6. Mississippi State University
7. Eastern Illinois University
8. Southern Illinois University
9. Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
10. University of New Orleans
11. University of Southern Mississippi
12. Louisiana State University
13. Texas A&M University
14. University of West Florida
15. The Ohio State University
16. Case Western Reserve University
17. Geological Survey of Alabama
18. United States Geological Survey
19. Hollings Marine Laboratory
20. University of California at Berkeley
21. Florida State University
22. USEPA Gulf Breeze Laboratory
23. University of Mississippi
24. Alabama Department of Environmental Management
25. and, of course, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Lands Division

25 Important Thingsthat estuaries and associated habitats provide:

1. Environments that are among the most productive on earth
2. Habitats that create more organic matter than any other
3. Abundant and diverse wildlife such as shore birds, fish, crabs, marine mammals, and shellfish
4. Layover stops for migratory birds
5. Protection against the forces of erosion
6. Nurseries for fish and shellfish
7. Water contaminant filtration
8. Protection against flood/storm surge
9. More than 28 million jobs nationally
10. Cultural enrichment for the community
11. \$8 to \$12 billion annually through tourism and recreation nationwide
12. Research opportunities for scientists
13. Educational opportunities for all ages
14. Aesthetically pleasing environment
15. More than 75% of America's commercial fish catch, and 80-90% of the recreational fish catch
16. Habitat for unique microscopic organisms
17. Transportation opportunities through boating
18. A great abundance and variety of seafood
19. A means of assessing overall ecosystem health
20. A record of storm events through research
21. Wintering habitat for migrating waterfowl
22. Highly productive seagrass beds and meadows
23. Habitat for endangered and threatened species
24. Recreational areas for swimming, canoeing, and kayaking
25. Sequestration of carbon and nutrients that promotes natural cycling processes

Thanks to Our Donors February to April

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John Carlton
Sam Crosby
Donald & Carolyn Dohn
Jimmy & Virginia Dunn
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Skipper Tonsmeire
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Mike, Tina, & Kim Wilson

SPECIAL GIFTS

In honor of Gaye Lindsey

David & Jeanie Lindsey

In honor of Skipper Tonsmeire

James & Helen Moffat
Southwings, Inc.

In honor of Skipper Tonsmeire & John Borom

Hattie Smith

In support of Fish River Clean-up

Fairhope Single Tax Corporation
Greer Radcliff

Baldwin County Soil & Water
Conservation District

In support of Kid's Fishing Day

Mapp Family Foundation
Riviera Utilities

Alabama Department of
Conservation and Natural Resources,
State Lands Division, Coastal
Section

Alabama Department of
Conservation and Natural Resources,
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Weeks Bay Reserve

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at www.weeksbay.org.**

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Sustainer	\$1,000 - \$4,999
Steward	\$ 500 - \$999
Supporter	\$ 250 - \$499
Friend	\$ 100 - \$249
Member	\$ 35 - \$99

Combined Federal Campaign Code 37621



AmeriCorps NCCC

by Eric Brunden, Stewardship Coordinator



Captain Brunden (l) orients AmeriCorps Delta Six Team before a boat tour of the Weeks Bay estuary and watershed

The Weeks Bay Reserve has the privilege of working with an AmeriCorps National Community Service Program (NCCC) team in the months of April and May. The team working here will be assisting in various projects throughout the Reserve.

The mission of the AmeriCorps NCCC is to strengthen communities and develop leaders through team-based national and community service. Teams of about 10 travel around the southern region working with different non-profit organizations. Each corps member is between the ages of 18 to 24 and committed to serve for 10 months.

Upon arriving to the Reserve, the team (Delta Six), was trained in invasive species removal, and was put right to work. This involved identifying different invasive exotics, cutting the plants, and immediately spraying them with herbicide. This is in preparation for the area to be burned in the near future. The team has also worked on building a boardwalk and spurs for different research purposes. These young people have been carrying twelve foot pieces of lumber through the swamp while being covered in mud and sweat! Some members have also worked in the lab conducting water sample tests and assisting in boat tours.

The team is looking forward to spending a few more weeks here in Alabama working on different environmental projects. They are prepared for the hard work and high temperatures that are in store for them.

Alternative Spring Break

by Finley Hewes, National Audubon Society

Rather than working on their tans over Spring Break, four National Audubon Society volunteers migrated into Alabama and worked on environmental projects at the Weeks Bay Reserve last week.

The program, Audubon's inaugural Alternative Spring Break opportunity in Alabama, was a tremendous success. "Working with all the people at Weeks Bay was a fantastic experience," said Audubon's Alabama Volunteer Coordinator, **Kelsey Blum**. "I can't speak highly enough of the time and effort that **Eric Brunden**, the Stewardship Coordinator for Weeks Bay Reserve, put into this week. He really helped the program sail smoothly."

The volunteers spent the week on site, staying at the Weeks Bay dormitories, where their activities were focused on several different projects. "One of the projects that we worked on was capturing the ambient nature sounds of the



Students in the Audubon Alternative Spring Break held at Weeks Bay Reserve document the coordinates of an active Gopher Tortoise burrow. (L-R) Bradley Neyer, Cynthia Godrick, Cyndie Hall

Weeks Bay area," said **Bradley Neyer** who is majoring in Environmental Studies at the University of Cincinnati. "With these recordings, the Reserve intends to create an audio experience for sight impaired visitors to the Otilie Halstead Visitor Center."

"One of my favorite projects was combing through the woods in search of Gopher Tortoise burrows," said **Cyndie Hall**, an Environmental Science student at Northeastern State University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "We located about 15 inactive burrows, and we found one active one, which was encouraging news seeing how the species is at risk in this area. It was kind of funny. We got a little competitive. We would yell out each time we found one, and the others would scramble over to see and document it with photos and GPS coordinates"

The crew also spent time working in the pitcher plant bog, documenting spring habitat conditions. The week wrapped up with a special treat as they accompanied Eric and served as judges at the Southeastern Regional Alabama High School Science Fair held at the University of South Alabama in Mobile.

"I don't know what was the most fun," said **Cynthia Godrick**, who has already earned her degree as a Physical Anthropologist from the University of Florida. "Spotting a Bald Eagle's nest while riding across Weeks Bay with Eric and capturing the audio recordings, being asked to judge the science fair, or the ice-cream at Stacey's in Foley. Tough question! The whole experience was very rewarding."

Audubon hopes to build on the volunteer experience provided at Weeks Bay by offering more opportunities. "Between working with **Walter Ernest** on the Dauphin Island Cogon Grass Remediation Project and this year's Alternative Spring Break, we are excited to continue to work with the Weeks Bay Foundation. I think, across the board, these have been rewarding experiences for everyone, and ultimately we're gaining traction for continued environmental stewardship along the Alabama Coast," said Blum.



Photo by Finley Hewes, Communications, National Audubon Society

The Watershed Program: Reaching Beyond Reserve Boundaries

by Mike Shelton, Watershed Coordinator

In the Fall 2009 issue of *The Pelican Post*, a great article enlightened readers of the history and accomplishments of the Weeks Bay Watershed Project. Educating people and conducting pollution prevention projects beyond the boundaries of the Reserve is vitally important. The Watershed Project has grown into the Reserve's Watershed Program. Three projects embody a goal of both the long-lived Watershed Project and the Reserve's Watershed Program: to protect local waterways using techniques supported by best science and education. As the Reserve celebrates its 25th anniversary, efforts reaching beyond Reserve boundaries deserve recognition.

In October 2010, low impact development (LID) practices were installed at the Sonora Community Hall located County Road 32 near Summerdale. Innovative and science-based practices that reduce pollution impacts on local waterways were constructed. The practices included rain gardens and a rainfall harvesting cistern that decreases storm water volume and the pollutants in rooftop runoff resulting in improved storm water quality. Project partners, **Jess Roberts** and **Katie Dylewski** of Auburn University and Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, designed the practices to fit local rainfall patterns and soils. In addition, a LID manual was written for the



Newly installed rain garden designed to capture rainfall runoff for the Sonora Community Hall roof



Shade tolerant plants are used to treatment rooftop runoff at the Sonora Community Hall



Rainfall collected by the cistern at rear of the Sonora Community Hall will be used to irrigate the adjacent raised garden

technical and professional user. **Ruth** and **Vic Underwood**, **Will** and **Angela Underwood** and two Sonora Community groups provided soil, heavy equipment, people, expertise, and refreshments for project.

A known problem in the watershed of Fish River is persistent contamination of the river by potentially harmful bacteria. A project was initiated in 2008 to search for the sources of the bacteria pollution in a defined portion of the Fish River from Polecat Creek north to the source near Stapleton. Funding was obtained from the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and the Weeks Bay Foundation. The project combined the building of partnerships,

research in the field and educating the public about the results. Knowing the source of contamination makes for more effective management and pollution reduction actions. **Brian Burnes** and his students at the University of West Alabama conducted the technical testing required to help determine sources of the bacteria. Also, bacteria in Fish River were screened with unique DNA fragments as an additional step to determining sources. To date, the results indicate that the *E. coli* bacteria in Fish River come from all three sources, with wildlife as another potential source.

The last project identified as playing a long term role in the Watershed Program is the Watershed Wagon. Conceived in 2009, the Watershed Wagon has always been a rolling classroom to take to audiences who do not come to the Reserve or to other types of outreach program. To date, nearly 1,000 people have participated in Watershed Wagon events. More events are scheduled ensuring that this outreach tool will be used into the future. Maybe at the 50th anniversary of the Reserve, pollution prevention projects and outreach events beyond the boundaries of the Weeks Bay Reserve will be part of the celebration.



Mike Shelton, Watershed Wagon project coordinator (left) shows the audience the connection between land use and water pollution using the Enviroscope®



The Watershed Wagon, ready to take water protection education to audiences beyond the Weeks Bay Reserve

Research in Weeks Bay and the Watershed

by Scott Phipps, Research Coordinator

As the Reserve moves into its 25th year, a couple of research projects get wrapped up that build on earlier work done in the Weeks Bay watershed. These include:

Harsh V. Singh. (2010). Modeling impact of land use/cover changes on water quality and quantity of Fish River watershed. Thesis, Auburn University.

Andrew G. Morrison. (2011). Spatial and temporal trends and the role of land use/cover on water quality and hydrology in the Fish River watershed. Thesis, Auburn University.

These projects were based on a previous model of the Fish River watershed that was published as:

Basnyat, P., Teeter, L.D., Flynn, K., Lockaby, B.G. 1999. Relationships Between Landscape Characteristics and Nonpoint Source Pollution Inputs to Coastal Estuaries. *Journal of Environmental Management* 23: 539-549.



The Basnyat, et.al. (1999) model made predictions about the effects of future development of sub-watersheds of Weeks Bay and Morrison collected data to test the predictions of the model. Singh re-modeled the same watershed with an updated modeling system in order to determine if the 1999 predictions were robust. The Weeks Bay Reserve Research Coordinator was involved with the planning and data collection of Singh and Morrison's research and served as a faculty advisor on Morrison's thesis committee. The results of this research are currently being incorporated into the Weeks Bay Reserve Coastal Training Program. These projects agreed that as the watershed is developed, there will be a great increase in nutrient and sediment loading as well as increased flooding potential and drought potential. These effects have already been documented in areas of the Weeks Bay watershed that have been rapidly developed.



Dr. Celine Lafabrie (center) and team collecting cores for mercury and arsenic determination in the Weeks Bay watershed

Another project that was published in late 2010 was:

Lafabrie, C., K. M. Major, C. S. Major, and J. Cebrian. (2010) Arsenic and mercury bioaccumulation in the aquatic plant, *Vallisneria spiralis*. *Chemosphere* (in press).

This project builds on research initiated by current research coordinator **Scott Phipps** (2000) into estuarine arsenic cycling in the food chain in Weeks Bay; mercury bioaccumulation in largemouth bass by current Coastal Training Program Coordinator, **Mike Shelton**; an Auburn University project investigating differences in mercury concentration in sub-watersheds of the Fish River and possible causes thereof; two Graduate Research Fellowship research projects investigating how mercury enters the food chain in the Weeks Bay watershed; and a USGS project investigating the aerial deposition rate of mercury in the Weeks Bay watershed. All of these projects together have shown that there is evidence of long term arsenic and mercury contamination. Mercury entering the food web from atmospheric deposition is magnified throughout the food chain to produce levels of contamination in the top predators – like the largemouth bass – that are considered toxic to humans.

SUMMER CALENDAR

JUNE

- 4 Bald Eagle Bash.** Fundraiser for the Weeks Bay Foundation. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. For more information, call the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004, or go to www.BaldEagleBash.com.
- 6 Jefferson Davis' Birthday Holiday.** The Visitor Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.
- 6-17 Art Without Limits.** Summer environmental art camp. Weeks Bay Resource Center, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. For more information, call (251) 928-9792.
- 11 Weeks Bay Photography Contest.** Deadline to deliver entries to the Weeks Bay Reserve is 4:00 p.m. today. For more information, call (251) 990-5004.
- 22 Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.

JULY

- 4 Independence Day Holiday.** The Visitor Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.

Deadline

for entries in the

Weeks Bay Photography Contest

is June 11, at 4:00 p.m. Entry forms available at www.WeeksBay.org

Registration

for the

John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest

opens mid-July. Look for updates at www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com

KID'S FISHING DAY 2011



Over 200 children enjoyed attending the 13th annual Kid's Fishing Day at the Weeks Bay Reserve Safe Harbor Pond on Saturday, May 7. This event was originated by Foundation Board Member **John Borom** in 1998. He wanted the Reserve and Foundation to have an annual free event that would connect kids with the outdoors. A lunch of hot dogs and chips was provided. Although each child may not have caught a fish, a good time was had by all that attended the event. The pond at Safe Harbor was stocked with 1,000 pounds of catfish just for this event. Fishing poles and bait were provided for children who did not bring their own.

This event is part of statewide events sponsored by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division. According to **Dave Armstrong**, District Biologist, approximately 25 percent of children who participate in kid's fishing days statewide have never been fishing before. This year's event was sponsored by the Mapp Family Foundation, Riviera Utilities, ADCNR State Lands Coastal Section, Weeks Bay Reserve, and ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division.



Weeks Bay Foundation

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www.weeksbay.org

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Photo by John Borom

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

“Joy in looking and comprehending is nature’s most beautiful gift.” - Albert Einstein

Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries partners with Weeks Bay Foundation

by Greg Harber, President,
Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc.



Louisiana Waterthrush

For the past dozen or more years, Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc., (DIBS) under the leadership of Executive Director, **Dr. John F. Porter Jr.**, has been working diligently to protect habitat for migratory birds on Dauphin Island. Mostly we have targeted wet lots for their ecological value to migratory

birds and other wildlife, and for the crucial role wetlands play in recharging the island’s shallow aquifer system. Thanks to John’s considerable efforts, and with the continued support of many donors, 27 lots have been protected and preserved.

One such lot in the Tupelo Gum Swamp, at the end of Infanta, is a good example of the DIBS holdings. It was purchased with the aid of a \$10,000 donation from the inaugural Alabama Coastal BirdFest. The swamp is seasonal in nature, holding water when the rains come, but bone dry during periods of scarcity. The plant community and wildlife found here have adapted to the varying conditions. The swamp is also ideal for migratory birds, as evidenced by this Louisiana Waterthrush I photographed there one Easter morning several years ago. Colorful Scarlet and Summer Tanagers are often seen in the canopy, when the newly minted leaves in the spring compliment their colors so well.

Other preserves near and dear to the hearts of many DIBS members, supporters, and birders in general are the Goat Tree lots and

key parcels adjacent to Shell Mounds Park. Countless thousands of birders have spent many a pleasant morning or afternoon strolling the trails, observing brilliant Indigo and Painted Buntings, dazzling Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and myriad warblers adorned in a fine array of eye-catching colors. Dauphin Island enjoys an international reputation as a birding destination during spring and fall migration, when weather and flying conditions combine to produce fallouts and exhausted birds seek the food, water, and shelter found there.

This past spring, **Dr. Mark LaSalle**, Director of Audubon Mississippi’s Pascagoula River Audubon Center, and **Walter Ernest**, Executive Director of the Weeks Bay Foundation, with assistance from **Don McKee**, an island resident and DIBS board member, coordinated the effort, with student volunteers, to eradicate cogon grass from several DIBS properties in the Steiner Block, across from the Goat Trees Preserve. This project was part of an Audubon Together Green Innovation Grant. This effort - and similar workday projects, held prior to peak migration periods, that have been conducted by DIBS members to clear trails, install and maintain water drips, and install signage - is a testament to their passionate commitment to our mission of protecting habitat. We sincerely appreciate and recognize the importance of their efforts.

DIBS has partnered with several organizations, such as Partners in Flight, The Nature Conservancy and the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, to help us achieve our shared conservation goals. Each of them has helped us make significant advances in our mission. I am pleased that our newest partner is the Weeks Bay Foundation, an accredited land trust with a stellar reputation in the local conservation community and firm support from its many active members and volunteers. We are developing a plan to grant the Weeks Bay Foundation a conservation easement to our island parcels, on which DIBS will continue to hold the title. With this partnership, we can ensure that these preserves will be maintained in perpetuity in their natural, undeveloped state – for the benefit of the birds and those who enjoy them.