



THE PELICAN POST

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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.

Layout & Design by
Kathy Hicks

Cover: Black vultures roost in a dead tree along the Magnolia River, which is home to a large population of vultures due in part to the ready food source provided by the nearby Magnolia Landfill. A turkey vulture, noticeable by virtue of its red head, is visible in the lower right corner of the image. (Photo by Ben Raines)

From the Executive Director . . .



In late December, the Weeks Bay Foundation recorded its largest conservation easement to date, 160 acres of old growth maritime forest, one of the rarest and most important habitat types to be found in coastal Alabama.

The easement was donated by former Foundation board member, **John T. Crowder, Jr.**, and his wife, **Karen**. Under the terms of the agreement, the Crowders retain ownership of their property, but a vast stretch of forest and wetlands will be forever protected from development, even if they sell the property. Conservation easements like the one established by the Crowders have become one of the most important tools in the fight to protect our natural places. In exchange for tax credits, property owners agree to set aside some of their land, protecting it from development, logging, or other destructive uses.

“I would never want to see this forest cut down,” John said, standing deep in a swath of woods that begins in lowlands along the edge of County Road 1 and rises toward U.S. Highway 98. “I know my heirs wouldn’t log this place, but I wanted to put some protection in place.”



John Crowder stands next to a couple of the mature slash pines growing in his maritime forest (photo by Ben Raines, Foundation Executive Director)

The soggy-bottomed forest is dominated by towering slash pines, many close to three feet in diameter. Sweetbay magnolias, redbays, wax myrtle, sparkleberry, and other wetland trees crowd together in patches where sunlight sparkles through the tree canopy, and dense carpets of chain fern and bracken grow underfoot. Beaver dams have created a sort of terraced system of small ponds along the northeast edge of the property, with the water draining through the wetlands on its way to a vast sawgrass meadow closer to County Road 1 and Mobile Bay.

Sawgrass and other plants that love wide-open and brightly lit coastal wetlands grow in these wettest portions of the property, which have the big sky feeling of a meadow. That appearance gave an adjacent property its name. The Meadows, over 800 acres of similar habitat that were preserved by Baldwin County and the Forever Wild Land Trust,



butts up to the new Crowder easement, which will be known as the Crowder Barnwell Tract. The Meadows and the Crowder Barnwell Tract surround another 21-acre parcel owned by the Weeks Bay Foundation. Taken together, the three properties add up to more than 1,000 acres of protected land, an evermore valuable commodity along the edges of Mobile Bay.

In fact, this is the largest chunk of protected coastal forest between the mouth of Weeks Bay and the U.S. 98 Causeway. The Weeks Bay Foundation owns several more wooded parcels between the Crowder Barnwell Tract and the Grand Hotel. These forests are vitally important to migrating birds, serving as a last chance to fuel up before launching across the Gulf of Mexico in the fall, or a first chance to eat after making the return trip in the spring.

The Weeks Bay Foundation is one of only a few accredited land trusts along the Gulf Coast, and the only one in coastal Alabama. We specialize in preserving land through conservation easements, purchases, and donations. Contact us if you're interested in protecting land you own, or join up as a member if you want to help us protect more of our wild places.

See you on the water,



Fifth Annual Bald Eagle Bash



The Weeks Bay Foundation's **Bald Eagle Bash** will be on April 26, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center at the U.S. 98 bridge over Fish River. We will provide 800 pounds of fresh Gulf shrimp to some of the area's best seafood restaurants and let them work their magic. With a menu that encompasses everything from shrimp ceviche and shrimp stuffed mashed potatoes to traditional favorites like gumbo and shrimp and grits, nobody goes home with an empty stomach. Our best restauranteurs will go all out to showcase their talents in front of the crowd of seafood lovers.

While everyone is enjoying the food, **Gretch Lyles** and **The Modern Eldorados** will deliver their rockabilly/country/pop blend of pitch perfect classics from the likes of **Elvis**, **Johnny Cash**, and **Patsy Cline**. Both the band and the event are kid and family friendly. We think our Party for Preservation is *the* event to attend for anyone who loves great food, great music, and best of all, *a great cause*.

The Foundation's mission is to protect coastal Alabama. We work hand in hand with other local conservation groups and the Weeks Bay Reserve. We have protected thousands of acres of maritime forests, saltwater marshes, pitcher plant bogs, and seagrass meadows since the Foundation was created almost 25 years ago. The Bald Eagle Bash is our primary annual fundraiser. We'd love to see you there, gobbling shrimp for a great cause!

Tickets are \$35 in advance, and \$40 the day of the event. Kids 10 and under are free. For that price, the event includes all you can eat and drink. Free parking will be available at the Weeks Bay Reserve Safe Harbor site, with BRATS shuttles providing transportation to the event. For more information or to purchase tickets, go to www.BaldEagleBash.com or call (251) 990-5004. Tickets go on sale soon at Page & Palette in Fairhope, the Foundation office, the Reserve, and from Foundation board members.



Photo by
Sherry Stimpson Frost

Otilie Halstead Honored



Over the years, **Otilie Halstead** has been a generous supporter of the Weeks Bay Foundation and the Weeks Bay Reserve. The purchase of the Safe Harbor RV Resort, Baywatch Marina, and Sunset Grill at auction in 1997 by the Foundation and the Coastal Land Trust would not have happened without her assistance. Today, the **Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center** and the Foundation office are located on this 105-acre site near the Fish River Bridge on U.S. Highway 98. In 1997, she also provided funds for the **Kurt G. Wintermeyer Boardwalk** at the Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog. In a ceremony during the 2010 Bald Eagle Bash, the Weeks Bay Interpretive Center was officially renamed the **Otilie Halstead Weeks Bay Visitor Center** by proclamation of Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Commissioner **M. Barnett Lawley**. This building supports education, research, and stewardship activities at the Reserve, as well as provides offices for the staff. The photo shows Otilie on the left of the sign with her relatives from Germany who came to celebrate her 100th birthday in November 2013. We are thankful for her friendship and for her commitment to present and future generations.

New and Old Bad Guys Discussed at Invasive Plants Workshop

by Michael Shelton, Reserve Coastal Training Coordinator

Even as many established invasive plant species continue to inflict damage on the coastal landscape, new bad guys are waiting for the opportunity to strike. Weeks Bay Reserve and Weeks Bay Volunteers teamed up with the Alabama Invasive Plants Council (ALIPC) and Alabama Cooperative Extension to conduct the Coastal Invasive Plants Management conference and workshop in October 2013. Friends of the Reserve, **Fred Nation** and **Gena Todia**, serve on the Board of Directors of ALIPC and were instrumental in bringing the workshop to Gulf State Park. Conducting this working meeting on the coast helped emphasize the harmful effects of invasive plants in the area. The 38 agency people and land managers who attended received information on recent invaders like pampas grass and beach vitex. Beach vitex is commonly called the “kudzu” of the Carolinas because of its effects on south Atlantic beaches. The plant has recently been found on private property around Weeks Bay. The City of Gulf Shores currently works with residents to help control this nasty customer. Pampas grass, a new invader but a common landscape plant, shows up more and more in open areas along the coast and in Gulf State Park. The full extent of the effects of pampas grass as an invasive species is being examined by Auburn University scientists. New techniques to control more familiar baddies like popcorn trees, cogon grass, and climbing fern were discussed. Much of the afternoon was spent at Gulf State Park viewing plant species and control measures. The ALIPC and its members are leaders in assisting landowners and managers to understand the ecology of invasive plants and the techniques to prevent their spread.



Beach vitex spreads both above and below the sand adding to its ability to invade a beach habitat (photo provided by University of Florida)



Stephen Enloe, Auburn University, demonstrates “hack and squirt” herbicide treatment on Gulf State Park invasive popcorn tree (photo by Soos Weber, City of Huntsville)

to control more familiar baddies like popcorn trees, cogon grass, and climbing fern were discussed. Much of the afternoon was spent at Gulf State Park viewing plant species and control measures. The ALIPC and its members are leaders in assisting landowners and managers to understand the ecology of invasive plants and the techniques to prevent their spread.



Weeks Bay Reserve's first AmeriCorps VISTA

by Angela Underwood, Reserve Education Specialist

Born and raised in Baldwin County, **Mikel Corporaal** is the Weeks Bay Reserve's first AmeriCorps VISTA. The VISTA program, or Volunteers in Service to America, is a federal program that was originally conceived by



President John F. Kennedy. Federal dollars, along with matching funds provided by organizations, provide a small living stipend to volunteers, who agree to serve in full-time positions for a year. The Weeks Bay Foundation, the Alabama Coastal Foundation, Baldwin County Trailblazers, and Mobile Baykeeper all make use of VISTA volunteers. Mikel will be assisting with education and outreach programs, as well as various land stewardship activities.

Mikel graduated in May 2013 from Auburn University with a BS in wildlife ecology and management. Throughout his college career, he volunteered at the Southeastern Raptor Rehabilitation Center where he took part in rehabilitating injured raptors. In addition, Mikel also volunteered with **Dr. Geoff Hill** in collecting data for Dr. Hill's study on carotenoid pigmentation in songbirds. Mikel's hobbies include fishing, birding, and playing the banjo.

The Reserve and Foundation welcome Mikel to the Reserve staff and look forward to his contributions to coastal education and outreach.

Volunteer Spotlight - Joy Zeanah

by Maureen Nation, Reserve Volunteer Coordinator

Unlike most of our volunteers, **Joy Zeanah** is a native. She was born in Mobile and has lived in the area most of her life. Joy's zest for life has led her to play a big role in the community. In fact, she held the position of *Ambassador for Mobile* during the time she was an *Azalea Trail Maid*.

Joy is blessed with a beautiful voice and she was lyric soprano for the Mobile Opera Guild. She fondly remembers the time she was privileged to experience the grandeur of the acoustics while performing in the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Joy was able to use her voice to attend the University of Southern Mississippi on a voice scholarship, where she earned a BS in education and a MS in literature.

Joy returned to Mobile to teach science at Hankins Middle School in Theodore. Upon her retirement in 2004, she accepted a new challenge: Baldwin County was the first county in Alabama to receive a Character Education Grant and Joy was chosen to help implement this new program in six Baldwin County schools. She worked as the consultant for the program for four years before retiring for good to spend more time with her husband, **Bob**, their four children, and five grandchildren.



Joy also fills her time by volunteering. She is a Baldwin County Master Gardener, belongs to the Magnolia Springs Garden Club as well as the Newcomers' "Down and Dirty Garden Club." She served on the Magnolia Springs Community Association Board, and is in charge of the Arbor Day tree give-away for Magnolia Springs.

If you would like to meet this fascinating, vibrant lady in person, you can find her busily answering the phone and greeting guests on Tuesday afternoons at Weeks Bay Reserve. We are indeed fortunate to have such a delightful ambassador to represent the Reserve.



Weeks Bay Reserve Puts Marsh Grasses in Baldwin Classes to Restore Our Estuaries

by Jeff Dute, courtesy of AL.com

Grasses in Classes program students from the North Baldwin Center for Technology (NBCT) got their hands dirty while planting smooth cordgrass along a short stretch of Pelican Point beach north of the mouth of Weeks Bay this fall.

“To earn their working day at the beach, each student had to put in hours of sweat equity necessary to grow the 150 salt marsh plants,” said **Margaret Sedlecky**, Education Coordinator with the Weeks Bay Reserve for the past 19 years.

“In this program, I secure grants that take care of everything from supplying the soil, pots, and plants to the t-shirts they get for being a part of it,” Sedlecky said. “The only thing the school has to provide is the water to water the plants, a place to host it on their campus, and to allow teachers to set aside the time to take the kids to the nursery to take care of the plants and accompany them when it’s time to plant.”

With the blessing of the Board of Education in 2006, Sedlecky coordinated creation of the Baldwin County Grasses in Classes Program as a way to produce the seed stock needed to restore coastal dune and salt marsh/brackish-water habitats that had been ravaged by Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and then again by Hurricane Katrina a year later.

“Today, more than 500 high school students from Gulf Shores, Fairhope, Foley, Robertsdale, and the NBCT participate,” Sedlecky said.

Their class and field time combined with that of community volunteers has resulted in thousands of hours being dedicated to grass and shoreline restoration projects at Bicentennial Park in Stockton, Little Lagoon in Gulf Shores, Boggy Point in Orange Beach, several sites around Weeks Bay, Gulf State Park, 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, Camp Beckwith, Perdido Pass Beach, and the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge.

Those efforts lead to more than 41,000 native plants, including smooth cordgrass, black needle rush, sea oats, bitter panicum grass, and longleaf pine, being planted at these public sites.

“There’s a stewardship component that comes with it. The kids realize that it takes all of us to take care of our natural resources,” Sedlecky said.

To help make that connection, retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist **Randy Roach** described to the students how the grass they’d planted would become integral to not only replacing habitat but in being a key ingredient in the entire estuarine ecosystem.

Roach pointed out that juveniles of popular gamefish and the things they like to eat rely on grass for protection and food.

Sedlecky said that it’s gratifying to often hear kids talking about coming back and checking up on their plants.

“They take ownership of it when they have to do all of the hard work in the nursery, see those plants go in the ground, and hear how important restoration is to the health of the environment,” Sedlecky said. “I heard a student early in the spring say he was going to come back to the beach during spring break to check on ‘his’ plants and if he saw anyone walking on them, he was going to kick their butt.”



Students from the North Baldwin Center for Technology planted 150 smooth cordgrass salt marsh plants near the mouth of Weeks Bay as part of the Baldwin County Grasses in Classes Program. More than 500 students in the county participate each year. (Courtesy of Jeff Dute/AL.com)

Sentinel Site Project

by Eric Brunden, Reserve Stewardship Coordinator

In January and February, staff of the Grand Bay Reserve assisted Weeks Bay Reserve personnel in completing a high-resolution geodetic survey within the Weeks Bay marshes. The survey is designed to precisely monitor changes in sea level and marsh elevation. A component of the National Estuarine Research Reserve's System-Wide Monitoring Program and Sentinel Site Initiative (go to nerrs.noaa.gov for additional information), the survey required the use of high-tech digital leveling and Global Positioning System equipment provided by the National Geodetic Survey.

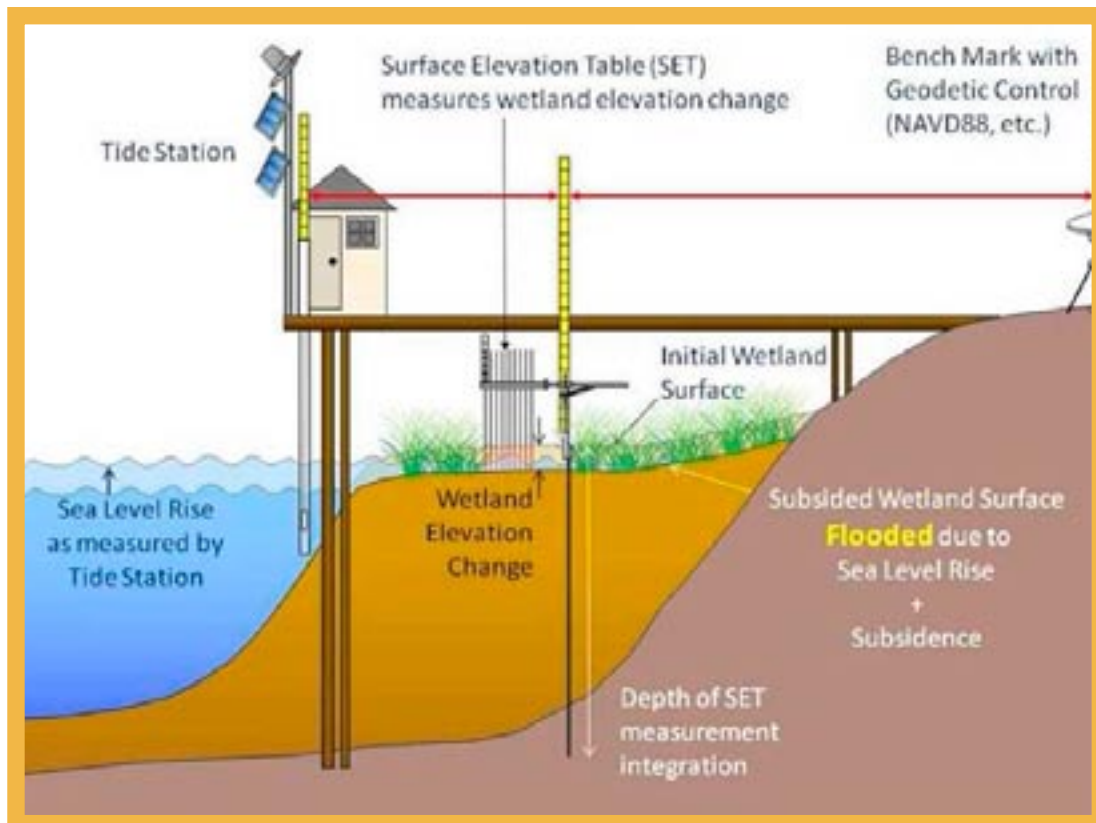
The survey was undertaken to determine the precise vertical and horizontal position of marsh surfaces and benchmarks placed within the project area. The benchmarks used for this project included those installed by the National Geodetic Survey as part of their National Spatial Reference System and those installed by Reserve personnel and AmeriCorps team members in the summer of 2012. The Reserve-installed benchmarks consist of stainless steel rods



driven into marsh sediment to the point of refusal using a gasoline-powered jackhammer, approximately 46 feet on average. These benchmarks were strategically placed along a transect traversing multiple marsh types and will be used as locations for periodic placement of Surface Elevation Tables and biota surveys.

Surface Elevation Tables or SETs are portable mechanical leveling devices for measuring the relative elevation change of wetland sediments. The precise measures of sediment elevation in wetlands in combination with data from the Weeks Bay tidal gauge and vegetation monitoring plots along

the transect will allow researchers to study the response of natural marsh communities to sediment elevation, long-term changes in local water levels, and tidal inundation patterns.



Gulf Coast Reserves Work Together on Training

by Michael Shelton, Reserve Coastal Training Coordinator

The 28 National Estuarine Research Reserves, including the Weeks Bay Reserve, are a close-knit team of researchers, land managers, and educators despite being spread all over the coastal United States. Nowhere is this partnership closer than among the three northern Gulf Coast Reserves in Apalachicola, Florida; Grand Bay, Mississippi; and Weeks Bay, Alabama. The Coastal Training Programs at these Reserves conducted two regional workshops on the planning and principles of ecological restoration. In November 2013, the Reserves brought in a real “rock star” in the restoration world, **Dr. Andy Clewell**, to lead workshops in Pensacola and Moss Point. Dr. Clewell served on the faculty at Florida State University, and for over 22 years, A. F. Clewell, Inc. worked to recover native and degraded ecosystems for agencies and clients throughout the world. He, with co-author **James Aronson**, wrote the bible of restoration work: *Ecological Restoration: Principles, Values, and Structure of an Emerging Profession* (Island Press). At the three-day Principles of Ecological Restoration workshop,



Andy Clewell (center), lead instructor at the Principles of Ecological Restoration workshop, discusses dune wetland restoration near Pensacola Beach (photo by Lara Berkley)



Healthy shoreline ecology was restored at Project GreenShores in Pensacola thanks to careful restoration planning (photo by Lara Berkley)

about 60 class participants from several southeastern states learned the principles for restoring specific coastal habitats. In Pensacola, Dr. Clewell and **Glen Miley** of Edmisten and Associates guided students through restoration projects in several locations including dune wetlands and longleaf pine savannahs. **Will Underwood**, Stewardship Coordinator at Grand Bay Reserve, led field exercises in Moss Point. Each student left the workshops with an understanding of ecological restoration and the special considerations for restoring specific coastal habitats.

Restoration remained the theme for the next regional training event. Weeks Bay and Grand Bay Reserves hosted the newly developed Coastal Restoration Project Design and Evaluation workshop in Mobile in January 2014. **Pam Kylstra** with the NOAA Coastal Services Center in Charleston, South Carolina, served as lead instructor aided by **Ann Weaver** from the Gulf Coastal Services Center in Mississippi. Apalachicola Reserve hosted the one-and-a-half-day training the same week. The workshop provided restoration professionals valuable knowledge, skills, and tools to enhance their ability to design projects with a greater chance of success. The 28 participants came from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida highlighting the regional impacts of the Reserves’ training programs. Students left with a planning framework to ensure restoration projects have measurable outcomes and with the tools to evaluate success.

Birding 101

by Margaret Sedlecky, Reserve Education Coordinator



Nancy Martin, an avid birder, presented a Birding 101 program at the Weeks Bay Reserve

This fall, **Nancy Martin**, a member of the Mobile Bay Audubon Society and an avid birder, presented a “Birding 101” program, at the Weeks Bay Reserve for approximately 20 participants. The presentation was designed as an introduction to birding and included a birding tour on the boardwalk that winds through our maritime forest. Presentation topics included the role birds play in the ecology of our area, field marks to help identify birds, bird anatomy, and a primer on birds that are commonly seen in our area. If you missed this great presentation and would be interested in having Nancy present again please contact the Reserve at (251) 928-9792 and leave your name and contact information with **Angela Underwood** or **Margaret Sedlecky**. If you have additional topics beyond birds that you would like to know more about let us know so we can arrange a presentation.



SPRING 2014 CALENDAR

March

- 4 **Mardi Gras Day.***
- 11 **Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 6:30 p.m.
- 11 **Guest Lecture Series “Year of the Razorbill”** presented by **Dr. Bill Summerour.** This will be a summary of Razorbill sightings, photos, and specimens collected along the Alabama Gulf Coast during the winter of 2012-13. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 19 **Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.

April

- 4-6 **Baldwin County Master Gardener Plant Sale.** Safe Harbor at Weeks Bay, across U.S. Highway 98 from the Reserve Visitor Center, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- 8 **Guest Lecture Series “Update on the Status of the Endangered Whooping Crane”** presented by **Chester McConnell.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 19 **Earth Day Mobile Bay 2014.** Environmental displays and activities, Science Project Fair, and interactive activities for children and adults. Fairhope Pier, 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Free admission. For more information, go to www.earthdaymobilebay.org.

- 26 **Bald Eagle Bash.** Fundraiser for the Weeks Bay Foundation. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. For more information, call the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004, or go to www.BaldEagleBash.com.

- 28 **Confederate Memorial Day.***

May

This year's Kids Fishing Day will be held in the fall. Please check the Foundation's website, www.weeksbay.org, at a later date for further details.

- 10 **Weeks Bay Area River Cleanup.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 8:00 a.m. to noon. For more information, contact **Michael Shelton** at (251) 928-9792.
- 13 **Guest Lecture Series “Birding the Mayan Ruins”** presented by **Gaye Lindsey.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 19 **Weeks Bay Foundation Annual Membership Meeting.** Open to the public. Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 4:30 p.m. For more information, call the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004.
- 26 **Memorial Day.***

June

- 14 **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.

** The Visitor Center will be closed. All trails and boardwalks will remain open for your walking and sightseeing pleasure.*



Weeks Bay Reserve Staff

(L to r) Mark Cooper, Eric Brunden, Maureen Nation, Mike Shelton, Sarah Johnston, Michael Henry, Scott Phipps, L. G. Adams, Margaret Sedlecky, Angela Underwood, Brian Gilchrist, and Mikel Corporaal



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 Program
 National Estuarine Research
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Weeks Bay Foundation

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American Kestrel
Falco sparverius

Photo by Kathy Hicks

*"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."
- Albert Einstein*

Weeks Bay Foundation Applies for Renewal of Accreditation

The land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. The Weeks Bay Foundation is pleased to announce it is applying for renewal of accreditation. A public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs. The Weeks Bay Foundation is the only accredited land trust in coastal Alabama, making the Foundation the only organization recognized as meeting the stringent standards of the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how the Weeks Bay Foundation complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see landtrustaccreditation.org/tips-and-tools/indicator-practices.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org.

Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. Comments on the Weeks Bay Foundation's application will be most useful by June 1, 2014.



Saturday, April 26

4 PM until 7 PM at Weeks Bay Resource Center

Featuring A Taste of Weeks Bay with seafood prepared by the area's finest restaurants.

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\$25 of the ticket price is a tax deductible contribution

No pets. Lawn chairs encouraged.

