



THE PELICAN POST

A quarterly publication - Weeks Bay Foundation
Spring 2015
Volume 30, No. 1

Protecting the Edges for 25 Years



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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: Cotton rats are common all over south Alabama, from longleaf forests to cypress swamps to our backyards. Adults are about four inches long and mostly nocturnal. Cotton rats have large families, with females sometimes giving birth to up to 15 babies per litter. They are considered one of the most prolific mammals in terms of the number born each year, but cats, hawks, foxes, and other predators keep the population in check. Photo by Ben Raines

Foundation Celebrates 25 Years of Protecting the Edges



This year, the Weeks Bay Foundation celebrates its 25th anniversary. Created in 1990 as one of the first organizations dedicated to protecting coastal Alabama, the Foundation has had a hand in preserving thousands of acres of our most delicate habitats.

Several new local environmental groups have appeared around Mobile Bay in the intervening years, and the Weeks Bay Foundation welcomes their help raising awareness about issues facing the coast. But when it comes to the critical task of preserving coastal land, the Foundation stands alone.

Thanks to your investments in the Foundation, we have managed to permanently protect miles of shoreline on our coastal rivers, thousands of acres of marsh around our bays, and thousands of acres of maritime forests. Sometimes we buy the land outright, often at reduced prices through bargain sales, where the seller qualifies for a tax deduction for a partial donation. Other times we accept property donations from landowners, who also receive a tax deduction. Either way, piece by piece, for the last 25 years, we have worked to make sure more of our wild places will stay that way forever.

The Foundation has its origins in the creation of the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge and the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Some of the same people that pushed the federal government to create those protected areas in the 1980s went on to found the Weeks Bay Foundation. At first, in the early 1990s, the Foundation's main focus was on supporting the fledgling Weeks Bay Reserve. And that has caused some confusion over the years. The Reserve is a partnership between the state and federal government, and is staffed with state employees who facilitate scientific research and public engagement. The Foundation, meanwhile, is a non-profit group that acts independently to protect coastal Alabama, relying on funds raised from the public. Our volunteer board of directors decides what land to acquire and what causes to support without input from the state or federal government.

In the early years, the Foundation worked to fund live animal exhibits at the Weeks Bay Reserve Visitor Center, and raised the money to build the extensive and popular boardwalk network that winds through the wetlands, forests, and pitcher plant bogs along Fish River and Weeks Bay. Today, the Foundation provides annual funding to the Reserve for various programs and provides an annual grant for an education assistant to help with programs for school kids. In addition, the Foundation has served as the fiscal agent for hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of research grants for scientists at the Reserve, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, and universities around the country. Other grants have facilitated training for coastal decision makers all along the Gulf of Mexico. We still consider supporting the Reserve and its research and education efforts a primary component of our mission.

By the mid-90s, the Foundation was turning its attention to acquiring land and adding to the state holdings at the Reserve. The Weeks Bay Foundation purchased a number of parcels along Fish River at this time, culminating with the purchase of 106 acres around the U.S. Highway 98 bridge at Fish River in 1997. That purchase included the boat ramp area there, which is now one of the most popular public ramps around Mobile Bay. The next time you ride up Fish River or around Weeks Bay, know that the Foundation played a role in protecting most of the undeveloped areas you see



along both sides of the river. In some cases, we sold land we had acquired to the state at a loss, in order to make sure larger deals went through. As you read this, we are actively pursuing more land along our coastal rivers.

Lately, we've shifted more of our focus to the rest of Mobile and Baldwin counties. The Foundation began its move into Mobile County with the donation to the Foundation of 684 acres along Bayou Sara that is now part of the Forever Wild Land Trust system. As recently as December, we accepted a donation of a 68-acre pitcher plant bog along Rangeline Road, on the way to Dauphin Island. Our intention there is to preserve that rare and delicate habitat and one day open it to the public. And we are still taking donations and making purchases in Baldwin County, including two in December. First we purchased a 73-acre pitcher plant bog near the Grand Hotel. Then we accepted a fabulous donation from siblings **Rob Shine** and **Laura Shine Lee**. They gave us a 20-acre parcel of maritime forest along Scenic 98 that had been in the Shine family since the 1970s. Today, we own land or hold conservation easements as far north as Bay Minette, and as far south as Dauphin Island.



A pond in the Robert Shine Nature Preserve, donated by his children

In addition to our land acquisition efforts, the Foundation has emerged as a major force when it comes to connecting the community to the water and the woods. Last year was our 16th annual Kids Fishing Day, a free event that pits kids against 1,000 pounds of catfish stocked in the Reserve's Safe Harbor pond. We've also launched an annual canoe and kayak race, the Pelican Paddle, and an annual fishing tournament, known as the Kingfisher Classic (check the story on page 8 about last year's tournament). Those events are on top of our most popular fundraiser, the Bald Eagle Bash, where we give 800 pounds of shrimp to the area's finest restaurants and invite everyone to the best party on the bay. The Bash is coming up on April 18. See page 12 for all the details.

After 25 years in existence, the Weeks Bay Foundation remains true to its core purpose, which is protecting coastal Alabama. In essence, our mission can be summed up with this simple statement: **We protect the edges.** Everything we do is about protecting the edges. By the edges, we mean the places where the land and water meet, and where wilderness and civilization meet. If we are going to save the things that make coastal Alabama special, we must protect those edges. Along our rivers and bays, those edges include most of the wetlands in our area. Those wetlands are biological hot spots, home to an incredible array of life.

Alabama is home to more species per square mile than any other place on the continent, and a large portion of those unique creatures and plants live right here in Mobile and Baldwin counties. The pitcher plant bogs in this area rank among the most diverse places on the planet. The rivers in these two counties are home to more turtle species than can be found anywhere else on the planet. Unfortunately, our state environmental protection laws are not up to the task of protecting this place. Alabama ranks last in the nation in what it spends to protect the environment. It is up to those of who live here to take care of the amazing bounty that surrounds us. The Weeks Bay Foundation has been doing just that, protecting the edges and protecting coastal Alabama for 25 years. Join us and help make sure we are here for another 25 years.

See you on the water.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name "Ben".



America's Amazon in Alabama High Schools and Middle Schools



Thanks to a \$5,500 grant from the Weeks Bay Foundation, copies of the *America's Amazon* DVD will be provided to every public high school and middle school in the state, along with a lesson plan created by the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative. The Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) program is a division of the state school board.

“We are truly impressed by the *America's Amazon* video. It has great filming, coverage, and narration,” reads an email from **Steve Ricks**, head of the AMSTI program. “We are pleased to be able to help distribute the video to schools across the state. It is a fabulous resource for teachers.”

The film explores the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and the rivers of the Mobile Basin, which is the most diverse river system in North America. Alabama is home to more species of freshwater fish, crawfish, mussels, snails, and salamanders than any other state. But, Alabama also spends less to protect its environment than any other state, and ranks at the top of the list for extinctions in the continental U.S. Alabama has more extinctions than Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana combined.

That's why the work of the Weeks Bay Foundation is so important. Our mission of protecting the edges is really about protecting the places the state's rare plants and animals live.

The film was written, narrated, and coproduced by Weeks Bay Foundation Executive Director **Ben Raines**. **Lynn Rabren** directed and coproduced the film, while **Eric Lowe** was the primary cameraman. **Mary Riser** with Alabama Nature Partners was the executive producer. Copies of the film can be purchased at the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center or online at Americasamazon.net.

Fringetree by Fred Nation



Photo by Fred Nation

When Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) is in bloom, masses of snow-white spring flowers are among the most beautiful sights in our southern forests. Like many beloved natives, it has many names, including Old Man's Beard, White Ash, and Grancy Graybeard. Fringetrees can be found in the wild from New Jersey to central Florida, west to Arkansas and eastern Texas. In Alabama they are found mostly in the mid-story of rich, moist, forested sites, nearly throughout the state, including south Baldwin County.

Most often seen as large deciduous shrubs, Fringetrees can be pruned and trained into small, well-formed trees with a potential height of about 25 feet. The leaves are opposite, oblong to oval, up to about 8 inches long, 3 inches wide. Snowy-white flowers, in April or May, are small and fragrant, with masses of strap-like petals arranged in attractive panicles. A few “wild” Fringetrees can be seen along the forest boardwalk behind the Otilie Halstead Visitor's Center at Weeks Bay Reserve.

The bark and roots of *Chionanthus* have been used by southeastern Native Americans as a poultice, to treat boils and wounds. Tea made from the bark is



often listed in old herbals as a treatment for fevers. The ripe fruits are oval, blue-black, with a single large pit. They are eaten and the seeds are spread by many birds, including thrashers, vireos, bluebirds, and finches. (Native plants are best left for the wildlife; they should not be dug from the wild or collected for human consumption.)



Photo by Fred Nation

Fringetree belongs to a large and famous plant family. Relatives include Ash trees, in the genus *Fraxinus*, Lavendar, *Lavandula angustifolia*, and Olive, *Olea europaea*, one of the most ancient and economically important of the world's cultivated plants. Other family relations are the exotic Privets, which are often planted as hedges. Several of these have established themselves outside of cultivation, and one species, Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense*, has become a destructive invasive exotic on roadsides and in natural habitats in the southeastern United States. Fringetrees are good citizens, however, and they can be purchased as responsibly grown container stock at plant sales and garden centers for beautiful additions to our landscapes and restoration projects.

Tracking Migration Across the Gulf by D. Fran Morley, BirdFest "Nestkeeper"

Plans are coming together for the 2015 Alabama Coastal BirdFest, October 1-3. Organizers are considering the addition of some new bird and nature trips and are working on designs for this year's poster, featuring the photography of one of our birding guides, **Patsy Russo**.



Dr. Frank Moore

This year's Friday night speaker for Alabama Coastal BirdFest might be a familiar name to some birders. **Dr. Frank Moore** is Distinguished Professor with the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg and heads up the Migratory Bird Research Group at the university who have studied migration along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico for more than 25 years. For BirdFest, he will be speaking on the work he and his graduate students do in this area of study. Dr. Moore was a speaker at BirdFest in 2008, talking about the availability and importance of suitable habitat during migration.

On his website, Dr. Moore calls bird migration "one of the most fascinating of all behavior." He notes that although many migratory birds are capable of making spectacular, non-stop flights, few actually engage in nonstop flights between points of origin and destination, rather they stopover periodically between migratory flights.

Of course it is this stopover for birds heading across the Gulf of Mexico that makes the Gulf Coast of Alabama a prime spot for birding during migration - and during the annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest. Dr. Moore's presentation this year will focus on the behavior of migratory birds as they negotiate the Gulf of Mexico, including the application of fascinating technology designed to study the movement of migrants across the Gulf.

The schedule for this year's BirdFest will be available by mid-July and registration will open in early August. Watch for more information on our website at www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com and 'like' Alabama Coastal BirdFest on Facebook for up-to-the-minute news and information.



Bird Photos by Patsy Russo





The owl was found dazed in the woods.
The great blue heron was hit by a car on a road.

The wounded pelican came from a nest of pellets.

All three birds ended up at the Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center. The Graham Creek Nature Preserve in Foley, AL. The CWRC is a one-stop shop for bird rescue. Last year, the center rehabilitated over 1,000 birds.

“In the winter, it’s raptors – hawks, owls, and falcons – come in to hunt. A lot of them come in veiled in the center. “In the spring we get the songbirds. In April, May, and June. We have to be careful because the birds are so small, they need to be handled very carefully.”

Staffed entirely with volunteers, the center is as precarious as the birds it rescues. That was found in a Fairhope park in late December. Christmas. The Rescue Center is in Baldwin County. In early February, a red-tailed hawk, a couple of pelicans, and a pair of osprey patients.

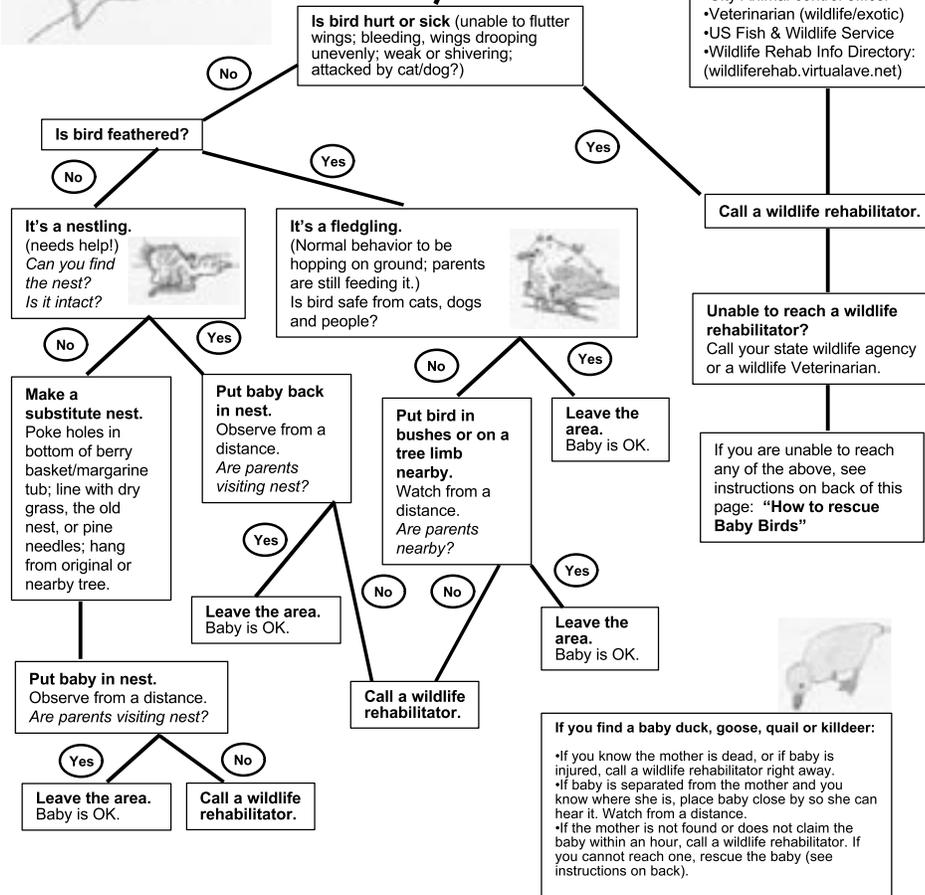
“This time of year, the birds are starting to hatch. If the parents are pelicans, they may not know how to care for their young. If they said. “They’ll come in and just be there. If they get hungry or hurt and the parents are not on their hands on a bird, we’ll treat the parents and the bird.”

Pelicans are particularly susceptible to diseases occurring most years around here. They look to be quite substantial birds, but they are quite different. A full-grown brood is much more fragile than you’d expect.

“They just don’t know any better. If you have a broken wings, broken mandibles, or a broken beak, kids once we get them in here,” Yancy says. “You know you are helping them.”

The center is working to assemble a collection of birds in the spring. They are also collecting information on a bird aviary for rehabbing big birds. To learn more, visit www.cwrc.org.

I Found a Baby Bird Now What?



To Find a wildlife rehabilitator in your area, contact

- Your state wildlife agency
- Humane Society
- Audubon Society
- Wild bird stores
- City Animal control officer
- Veterinarian (wildlife/exotic)
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- Wildlife Rehab Info Directory: (wildliferehab.virtualave.net)

Unable to reach a wildlife rehabilitator?
Call your state wildlife agency or a wildlife Veterinarian.

If you are unable to reach any of the above, see instructions on back of this page: **“How to rescue Baby Birds”**



If you find a baby duck, goose, quail or killdeer:

- If you know the mother is dead, or if baby is injured, call a wildlife rehabilitator right away.
- If baby is separated from the mother and you know where she is, place baby close by so she can hear it. Watch from a distance.
- If the mother is not found or does not claim the baby within an hour, call a wildlife rehabilitator. If you cannot reach one, rescue the baby (see instructions on back).

A baby's best chance for survival is its mother

Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center
24003 Wolf Bay Road, Foley, AL 36535
(251) 752-WILD



he middle of the road on Ono Island.

by a car as she fished in a ditch on the side of the

from Fish River, his back end full of shotgun

e Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center (CWRC) at
I Foley during January. Entering its third year,
anything with feathers that needs a helping hand.
300 birds.

awks and falcons – and pelicans that are learning
ry hungry,” said **Jody Young**, cofounder of the
songbirds. We will be full up with songbirds in
o staff the place 24/7 then, because some of the
e fed every 10 to 15 minutes.”

ers and funded solely by donations, the survival
e health of some its patients, such as the goose
with an arrow sticking out of its body around
the only wildlife rehab facility in Baldwin
shouldered hawk, several screech owls, a great
a heron, and a few songbirds were among the

are already stressed from the cold. The young
to hunt very well, and can't find any fish,” Young
e full of parasites. Something happens to them,
parasites just bring them down. So, if we get our
parasites and get them fed up for release.”

ceptible to prolonged cold spells, with major die
Gaillard Island and Dauphin Island. Though they
hold a pelican in your hands and the reality is
own pelican weighs about four pounds. They are
ect.

tter when they're young. We'll get them with
from diving in shallow water. They are really like
Young said. “They start feeding right away. They

mble volunteers to staff its songbird team for the
umber and other supplies to construct a larger
o volunteer, call (251) 752-WILD.

SPRING 2015 CALENDAR

March

- 10 Guest Lecture Series “Alabama Orchids”** presented by **Dr. Bill Summerour**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 11 Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.

April

- 7 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting for the Weeks Bay Watershed Project.** Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 6:30 p.m.
- 10-12 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.
- 11 Discovery Day at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.** Free children's admission to the Estuarium, interactive exhibits at the research laboratories, kids' activities, ocean games, and fun crafts, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. For more information, go to www.disl.org.
- 14 Guest Lecture Series “Tales from Down Under”** presented by **Gaye Lindsey**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 18 Earth Day Mobile Bay 2015.** Environmental displays and activities, Science Project Fair, and interactive activities for children and adults. Fairhope Pier, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Free admission. For more information, go to www.earthdamobilebay.org.
- 18 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.
- 25 Delta Woods and Waters Expo Family Day.** 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Free admission. For more information, go to www.deltawoodsandwatersexpo.com.
- 27 Confederate Memorial Day.***

May

- 12 Guest Lecture Series “Nature Photography”** presented by **Kathy Hicks**. 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 7:00 p.m. Bring a friend.
- 25 Memorial Day.***

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



Second Annual Kingfisher Classic Fishing Tournament

Who could pass on a day of cash and door prizes, locally brewed beer, and college football? Of course there was also some fishing to be done at the Weeks Bay Foundation's second annual Kingfisher Classic Fishing Tournament presented by ExxonMobil. We had about 100 anglers sign up this year to catch fish and win prizes in the categories of speckled trout, redfish, flounder, bream, and largemouth bass. Adding prizes of \$350 and \$150 in each category for first and second place made for a fun and competitive environment.



The Foundation organizes the annual tournament to help raise awareness among fishermen of our work to protect local ecologically sensitive areas. Recreational fishers spend so much time on the water and understand the need to protect the productive wetlands and estuaries that serve as a spawning habitat for many species of wildlife. In a growing area like coastal Alabama, protecting environmentally vital habitat is critical if we want to keep alive the outdoor activities nature provides us.

This year's tournament went down as a great success and all the money raised went to protecting those environmentally important habitats that help make our local area such a great place for fishing. Thank you to our presenting sponsor, ExxonMobil, and to our category sponsors, Arthur J. Gallagher & Co; Triad Rx; Coldwell Banker Reehl Properties Inc.; and Alabama Gulf Seafood. Other sponsors who provided prizes and/or cash for prizes included Franklin Tire & Auto Inc.; Bass Pro Shops; Southern Light, LLC; Fairhope Brewing Company; and The

Picklefish Pizza Pub. Finally, thank you to all the volunteers that showed up to help. We think everyone had a great time and really enjoyed the tournament even if they weren't one of our cash prize winners. Be sure to look for the Kingfisher Classic next year; maybe you could end up on our leader board and take home one of those cash prizes!

2014 Kingfisher Classic Fishing Tournament winners:

Category Sponsor	Category	1st Place (lbs)	2nd Place (lbs)
	Bass	Murray Cameron (2.42)	Richard Rutland (2.24)
	Flounder	Mike Foster (2.52)	Vicki Foster (2.08)
	Redfish	Dawson Skoglund (7.61)	Shon Pipkin (7.29)
	Trout	Rick Tourne (6.73)	Doug Tierce (4.72)
	Bream	Sue Steele (0.45)	Kyle Mitternacht / Tommy Nelson (0.42)



Magnolia Springs Residents Help Make A Happy New Year For One Young Manatee

by Ruth H. Carmichael, Senior Marine Scientist, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

When chilly temperatures dominate the season, one does not expect to see manatees in cold Alabama waters. Sharp-eyed volunteers in Magnolia Springs, however, first spotted several of these gentle giants in the Magnolia River near the “Cold Hole,” shortly before Christmas. On New Year’s Day, Dauphin Island Sea Lab’s (DISL) Manatee Sighting Network (MSN) and the Alabama Marine Mammal Stranding Network (ALMMSN), along with collaborators from SeaWorld Orlando, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Audubon Nature Institute, attempted to rescue two of the wayward animals.



DISL Stranding Coordinator Noel Wingers (left) and Graduate Student Allen Aven (right) monitor the first manatee rescued from Magnolia River on January 1, 2015. Credit – Jody Carroll Moore, Magnolia Springs

Despite tireless efforts by DISL staff and their collaborators, the first manatee rescued on New Year’s Day was too sick to survive. A necropsy conducted on the young female manatee the following day indicated the animal had external signs of severe cold-stress such as discolored skin, weight loss, and skin lesions, as well as signs of pneumonia and abnormal gut function.

Also suffering from cold-stress and propeller wounds on her back, a second animal, which could not be rescued that day, was successfully removed from the water on January 4. The second animal, in better physical condition than the first, was successfully transported to SeaWorld Orlando under the care of Veterinarian **Stacy DiRocco**. The young manatee remains in stable condition, with the expectation that she will continue to recover.

“She did extremely well for the transport back to Orlando. She was started on systemic antibiotics and was rehydrated with oral fluids for a couple of days, and has now been transitioned to dilute gruel that she is taking well. She is housed with other cold stress manatees and looks good,” said DiRocco.

Simone Lipscomb, a Magnolia Springs resident and MSN volunteer visited the recovering manatee at the SeaWorld rehabilitation facility in mid-January. According to Lipscomb, “She is doing well. Eating well... She gets 24/7 care. Three other injured manatees share her 82°F pool.” At the suggestion of Magnolia Springs residents, DISL researchers have requested the moniker, **Magnolia**, which is already in use by many locals, be formally assigned to the recovering manatee. The name designation is pending final documentation and approval.

DISL researchers have responded to three other stranded manatees this winter. The first stranding occurred on Thanksgiving Day in Halls Mill Creek, a tributary of Dog River in Mobile, Alabama. Two more strandings occurred in December in Mississippi waters. All three animals were found dead in the water. Researchers hope that any animals remaining in the Alabama-Mississippi area will seek suitable refuge.

“The single most important factor affecting whether these animals are able to be rescued and survive, is early reporting,” said **Dr. Ruth H. Carmichael**, Senior Marine Scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. “The sooner we know an animal is at risk, the sooner we can assess their condition and coordinate a response, if needed. Unfortunately many animals cannot be relocated or are reported too late for them to survive.”

Anyone who sees a manatee any time is asked to please report sightings to the Dauphin Island Sea Lab’s Manatee Sighting Network at 1-866-493-5803 toll-free 24 hours, or go to manatee.disl.org for online reporting.

Sightings are valuable year-round, but are most critical to animal survival between mid-November and mid-May when local waters are typically too cold for manatee survival. For more information about DISL’s marine mammal research or to make a donation to support marine mammal stranding response and research contact manatee@disl.org.



A young manatee rescued from Magnolia River on January 4, 2015, is prepared for transport to SeaWorld Orlando. She is the first stranded manatee ever successfully rescued in Alabama waters. Credit –Magnolia Springs Community Association Facebook page



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Saturday, April 18

4 PM until 7 PM at Weeks Bay Resource Center

Your attendance will raise funds to protect the natural resources of coastal Alabama while supporting the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

