



# THE PELICAN POST

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2016 Weeks Bay Photo Contest  
First Place, Flora  
by Stephanie Pluscht

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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

## From the Executive Director . . .

Over the past few months, I have had some great opportunities to educate people about the amazing resources we have in coastal Alabama. Our 8th Annual Bald Eagle Bash had record-breaking attendance, with over 1,300 people learning about and supporting our mission. In early May, I attended the Land Trust Alliance's Advocacy Days and spoke to our representatives in Washington, DC, about coastal land conservation and the importance of programs like Forever Wild and the Reserve System. And, a few weeks ago, we had the pleasure of again hosting a group of interns from Jacksonville State University. For many of these students, this was their first visit to the coast.

Each of these experiences reinforces why we have worked for 27 years to "protect the edges" and support the Weeks Bay Reserve. We will continue striving towards these goals. The Foundation recently acquired three new properties, including the 25-acre Rio Vista tract on Fish River. It is our goal to one day open that land for educational programs. The ecological systems that support our clean water, fishing industry, and outdoor recreation opportunities may be complex, but the outcome is not: this place is uniquely beautiful and we are all lucky enough to enjoy it!

We hope you will stop by Weeks Bay this summer. It is a great time to bring family and friends to the Reserve visitors center, stroll on the shaded boardwalks, and paddle across the estuary to visit with the bald eagles. We also invite you to come out for the Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race. The Bay is waiting!



## Alabama Coastal BirdFest

Mark your calendars now for the 14th Annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest, October 4-7.

This birding and nature festival features trips that highlight local and migrating birds, wildflowers, alligators, dolphins, and other creatures that share our world. And don't miss the Bird & Conservation Expo, a fun family day that takes place Saturday, October 7, on the Alabama Coastal Community College campus in downtown Fairhope.

Admission to the Expo is free and open to all. Advance registration is required for all trips and evening events. To learn more and to register, visit [www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com](http://www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com). Registration opens August 14 and closes September 22.



## Weeks Bay Goes to Washington

by Yael Girard, Executive Director

Alabama is a long way from Washington, DC, but the decisions made in our nation's capital can instantly affect the programs, projects, and regulations in our backyard. Given the fast pace of life on Capitol Hill, it is easy to see how our representatives may not be able to keep up with everything happening in coastal Alabama. We went to Washington recently to connect with and update our lawmakers on current conservation issues in Alabama.



Our trip was part of the Land Trust Alliance's Advocacy Days, an annual event to bring staff from land trusts across the country to the capital to meet with their senators and congressmen. The Alliance provides training on pertinent federal legislative issues and how to approach our representatives in a productive and respectful way. The Weeks Bay Foundation was fortunate to receive a stipend from the Alliance to cover travel costs to the event.

For the Weeks Bay Foundation, the most important issue to address with our representatives was the proposed federal cuts to the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). If you have been following our Facebook and E-news, you know that the 2018 Budget Blueprint calls for a 100 percent cut to NOAA funding for the NERRS program. This is important because our Weeks Bay Reserve is part of this program and receives 70 percent of its funding from NOAA and 30 percent from the state of Alabama. A 70 percent funding cut would result in a dramatic drop in programs, research, and land stewardship and restoration.

During our visit, we met with both senators' staff members and most of our congressional representatives, and most of them were very supportive of the NERRS program. **Senator Richard Shelby's** staff had a strong understanding of land conservation and the role of the Reserves in our coastal resource protection and community education. **Congressman Bradley Byrne** went so far as to sponsor a letter of support to all congressional representatives across the United States who have a Reserve in their district.

Vocal support from our elected officials is heartening and much of it is thanks to concerned community members like you. Both Senator Shelby and Congressman Byrne's staff commented on the HUNDREDS of calls and emails they had received from Alabama constituents who love the Weeks Bay Reserve and its programs. Calls from people who take their children to the boardwalks. People who fish on the protected shores of Weeks Bay. People who did their graduate research at the Reserve. People like you who care! One notable caller said, "Look, if you cut the funding to the Reserve, I will cut my vote for you!"



This fight to protect the NERRS is far from over. It is a marathon, not a sprint. We will continue to get the word out about the amazing programs at the Weeks Bay Reserve and we hope you will continue to talk to your friends, family, and representatives about the importance of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System and your Weeks Bay Reserve. You can visit [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org) for the contact information of your congressmen and senators.

Keep up the good fight Weeks Bay family!

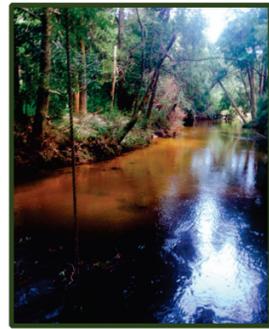


## Preserving Land. Protecting Our Future.

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator

Preserving environmentally-sensitive land along the water's edges in Mobile and Baldwin counties is at the heart of the Weeks Bay Foundation, so the recent acquisition of three new properties gave new lifeblood to the protection of land—and water—for future generations.

In Mobile County, the Foundation received a property donation on Dauphin Island, land that will be added to the Scenic Birding Trail in the southern part of the county. This undeveloped, forested land is adjacent to the Dauphin Island Golf Course, and with its existing pine canopy, is ideal for birds and other wildlife.



View of Fish River from Rio Vista

In Baldwin County, the Foundation acquired 10+ acres of wetlands in the Polo Ridge subdivision in Point Clear. Also a donation, the land serves as a buffer against runoff into Mobile Bay, and maintaining it could help mitigate flooding issues in the area.

The largest of the new properties is 25 acres along Fish River that will serve as a valuable buffer against increasing waterfront development

in Baldwin County. The undeveloped tract, purchased by the Foundation, is located south of County Road 48 and Bohemian Park, between Fairhope and Silverhill, and includes more than 1,500 feet of frontage on Fish River and a boundary on the small tributary of Still Creek.

“In the fastest growing county in Alabama, waterfront property is a hot commodity,” Foundation Executive Director **Yael Girard** said. “Unfortunately, each time we build adjacent to our streams and rivers, we increase the likelihood of damaging those waterways. This can be through additional erosion, sedimentation, and nutrient and pollutant runoff.” Buffer lands like this one provide an area



Rio Vista shoreline

for storm water to slow down and be reabsorbed into the soil.

The property, known as Rio Vista, was selectively timbered previously and needs a significant

amount of restoration, Girard said. The Foundation will work with local experts on a restoration and management plan for the tract that will include

## Stewardship—Managing That Which Is Worth Protecting

by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator

When the Weeks Bay Foundation agrees to protect land, either by owning it or by holding a conservation easement, we promise to take care of that land over the long term. We get excited about new transactions, but it's only by keeping our promises — through consistent, capable stewardship — that we truly protect the land.

Stewardship is defined as the responsible oversight and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving. In our case, the environment.

In some instances, stewardship involves actually restoring the land to make it more accessible to the public. Such is the case for the Fish River Rio Vista property. In other cases, stewardship is achieved through annual maintenance to protect or enhance the natural and cultural resources on the land.

Stewardship requires individual donations, as well as corporate and foundation partners and grants to help fund the restoration of the land, make these natural resources more accessible to the public, and safeguard the area's most sensitive lands—and water—for future generations.

For more information about supporting the Weeks Bay Foundation, contact **Diana Brewer**, Development and Communications Coordinator, at [diana@weeksbay.org](mailto:diana@weeksbay.org), or by calling 251-990-5004.



the removal of invasive plants, addition of native plants, creation of foot paths, and installation of interpretative signage.

“With some work, Rio Vista has the potential to be a great educational site for the general public, school groups, and visiting resource managers,” Girard said. “It's also on a portion of Fish River that is popular with canoers and kayakers, so it will give boaters access to a natural park setting. By protecting this property and opening it up for educational opportunities, we hope to better connect community members with their watershed resources.”

## Ongoing Research: Plotting the Course for Protecting Shorelines

by Sara Martin, Yael Girard, Nigel Temple, and Eric Sparks

In the Spring 2017 issue of the *The Pelican Post*, we described an ongoing project investigating the potential impacts of breakwaters (structures made from rock, concrete, or oyster shells, that sit just offshore and slow down waves and the erosion caused by high wave energy) on wetland restoration in the article, “Living Shorelines: Adaptive Strategies for Changing Tides.” That project, located on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, originally included plots of naturally occurring vegetation, planted marsh grasses, and barren sediment on portions of shoreline with and without the protection of an existing breakwater. Recently, new breakwaters were built along the shoreline, just north of the original project site. These new breakwaters presented an important opportunity to expand the project and to compare the initial and long-term effects of breakwaters on shoreline restoration success.



Coast guard volunteers working on a “Cluster” planting

To take advantage of this opportunity, we established plots at the new breakwater site with the help of volunteers organized by the Weeks Bay Foundation. Comparing these new plots to the old breakwater plots will help to answer many questions. Do breakwaters have an immediate effect on shoreline stability or does the effect take time to develop? Do breakwaters actually enhance pre-existing natural plant stands or do they persist regardless of wave protection?



Unprotected eroding shoreline

Additionally, two different patterns (checkerboard and clumped) were used when installing the new marsh grass plots to explore optimum planting practices. Traditionally, a checkerboard pattern is used to minimize the competition between planted sods. However, studies have suggested that planting sods directly next to one another could maximize plant productivity by helping to alleviate environmental stresses such as lack of fresh water and high wave energy. By utilizing these two planting patterns, we hope to shed light on which is more appropriate in high wave energy environments.

The plantings on the Swift Tract were done through a combined effort of the Weeks Bay Foundation and Weeks Bay Reserve. Over two days, 30 volunteers braved the elements and an exciting boat ride to help install around 2,500 *Spartina alterniflora*. A combination of Coast Guard and civilian community members donated their time (and backs) to establishing these plants in the plot patterns.



Bringing the *Spartina* to shore

The results from this new breakwater site will allow us to answer critical questions as well as enhance the data collected from the old breakwater site. These two sites will help to guide future wetland restoration projects and aid in their success.

In addition to this project, the team from Mississippi State University, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant, Weeks Bay NERR, Grand Bay NERR, The Nature Conservancy, and Dauphin Island Sea Lab is also working to promote the use of living shorelines as an alternative to hardened structures for shoreline protection. To attend one of our living shoreline workshops, or to learn more about living shorelines, visit [masgc.org/living-shorelines](http://masgc.org/living-shorelines) or email [eric.sparks@msstate.edu](mailto:eric.sparks@msstate.edu).





Thanks to All of our Sponsors, Restaurants, & Volunteers!

**Bald Eagle Bash Raises \$60,000 to “Protect the Water’s Edges”**  
*by Diana Brewer, Development and Communications Coordinator*

The weather was perfect, the food was amazing, the band was rocking, and we had over 1,300 attendees! We could not have asked for a better 8th annual Bald Eagle Bash. Or, as some folks like to call it, “The Party for Preservation!”

This event is the largest fundraiser for the Weeks Bay Foundation, supporting our mission to protect the natural resources in coastal Alabama. In addition, the Bash allows us to connect with members of our community and educate them about the importance of their wetlands and this amazing watershed. And on that beautiful Saturday, we connected with lots of great people!

This year we had a dozen area restaurants serving fresh Gulf shrimp and four that served delicious desserts. No one left hungry! And for the second straight year, **The Mulligan Brothers** entertained us with their amazing Americana sound, just before leaving to play the New Orleans Jazz Fest and then a Scandinavian tour!

While the Bald Eagle Bash is all about fun in the sun, the funds raised play a critical role in local conservation and preservation of our most vulnerable natural resources. This is only made possible by incredible restaurants, generous sponsors, and tireless volunteers that give of their time, talents, and treasures. We are very grateful to all who support our mission.

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- Camellia Cafe
- Cobalt the Restaurant
- Dragonfly Foodbar
- Gumbo Shack
- Locals
- Master Joe's
- Panini Pete's
- Sunset Pointe
- @ Fly Creek Marina
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Photos by Sherry Stimpson Frost



## Reserve Reflections

by Yael Girard, Executive Director

Out in the community, it is often surprising how many local folks are unfamiliar with the Weeks Bay Reserve. They may have walked the boardwalks or strolled through the visitors center. Or they pass it every day on Highway 98, driving to Foley or Fairhope. They put their powerboat or kayak in at the Fish River boat ramp. They see the green boundary signs along the edges of the bay, but they never get to know this amazing place.

With summer here, and more people getting out on the water and exploring our coastal resources, it seemed like a good time to delve into the 9,000-acre Weeks Bay Reserve.

We first sat down with staff members and talked about the programs and priorities of each branch of the Reserve. Nearly everyone at the Reserve wears multiple hats. **Angela Underwood** is the Education Coordinator, but also spends half of her time as the outreach coordinator for the Alabama Coastal Area Management Program. Stewardship Coordinator, **Eric Brunden**, describes one of his days: "I might be a boat captain in the morning, then do some habitat restoration, and then collect data for the System Wide Monitoring Program." **Mike Shelton** serves as both the Watershed Coordinator and the Coastal Training Program Coordinator.



Students learn that estuaries are productive nurseries for fish and shellfish

The staff tackle many different facets of the Reserve programming to ensure they are meeting the needs of the community. The "community" might be K-12 students, graduate level researchers, neighborhood organizations such as HOAs, coastal decision makers like engineers and developers, or just local families eager to learn about the waterways in their backyard. The Reserve manages a huge amount of land, collaborates with researchers, hosts numerous field trips, and leads a wide array of workshops.

As we talked to the sector leads, we learned more about the importance of each of these activities. In 2016, the Reserve partnered with nine different research projects. **Dr. Scott Phipps** discussed the many years of research done at the Reserve. "We provide a lot of baseline data. When Deep Water Horizon happened, we were getting calls the next day for data. Over time, there have been a lot of research projects in this area, and that builds a body of knowledge that then attracts more research. We are sort of the caretakers for that body of knowledge." With over 20 years of data on the conditions in the Weeks Bay estuary, the Reserve is one of the best resources for coastal planning.

For young conservationists, a trip to the Weeks Bay Reserve may be their first experience with an estuary. With age-based programs that follow current school curriculum, the Reserve's K-12 programs reach nearly 1,000 students each year. "Our main goal is for students to understand what estuaries are and that estuaries are in their back yard," Angela said. "We also want them to know what they can do to protect these wetlands and why they should be important to them. Not just for seafood but for wildlife habitat, recreation, and the overall aesthetics."

The education sector pursues these goals through some innovative activities. The Squeaky Sneakers summer program is a partnership with the Eastern Shore Art Center to combine science and the arts. Participants explore the Reserve and then document their experience through journaling, visual arts, and music. In another unique program, Grasses in Classes, high school students grow their own native grasses for dune and marsh restoration. Through this process, the kids are a part of the restoration project from start to finish.

Those that are young at heart and feeling left out, fear not! The education sector also works with adults. In 2016, Reserve staff held informal education programs for over 2,200 adults that included boat trips on the bay for church groups, civic associations, and social clubs. They also speak to organizations that can't make it to the Reserve.

Mike Shelton, who leads the Coastal Training Program (CTP), works specifically with those community members who manage our coastal resources and make decisions about how those resources are regulated, developed,



and managed. According to Mike, "My audience includes municipal and elected officials, volunteer boards, private companies, consultants, and engineers." In 2016, Mike led workshops for 279 of these "coastal decision makers" totaling over 1,700 training hours. Working with partners throughout the Gulf, these seminars covered everything from invasive plant management to living shoreline installation.

While the Reserve teaches the community the best available management practices, it also utilizes those same techniques for the 9,000 acres of protected land and water within the Reserve boundaries. Mike has helped the Reserve better prepare for future manmade disasters like the BP oil spill with a more robust Disaster Preparedness Plan. "I remember the days after the spill began and we were all gearing up to do stuff and the plans would change on a dime. Being prepared for hurricanes is certainly a much different experience than something like a Deepwater Horizon. I think we have made the Reserve more resilient."

Eric Brunden, who manages the stewardship, talks about the improvements that using controlled burns has made. "Getting people on board with using fire more as an important maintenance tool was huge. At one point it was used at the pitcher plant bog but not the pine tracts." Fire-dependent habitat such as longleaf pine forests thrive with periodic burning. The Reserve has implemented this technique over the past years, with great success.



Pitcher Plant Bog Burn

Sitting with these veteran staff members, all of whom have been with the Reserve for a decade or more, it was impossible not to talk about the past and the future. We discussed some of their favorite places at the Reserve and, across the board, being on Weeks Bay or one of its tributaries was the winner. Favorite memories included a harrowing kayak trip down the headwaters of Fish River, or seeing a giant plume of pine pollen roll off the forested shoreline. The cloud was so thick that they thought it was a forest fire!

Angela's favorite was working with legally-blind students from the School for the Deaf and Blind. "Learning is not impaired by a person's physical ability. We try to teach to any ability. We took them into the bay to seine with us. They were able to pull the net and feel the water and wind. We were able to take some of the animals, the fish, from the net and let them feel that."

The passion these scientists and educators have for the Bay and the visitors that come to the Reserve is obvious. When asked what they would hope for the future of the Reserve, they all said they wanted to reach more people, restore more land, and do their best work for their sectors. For education, that means having staff to run programs through the summer. For stewardship, it's an extra set of hands to help with monitoring, removing invasive plants, and managing the Reserve's wild lands. For research, this means the capacity to take on more projects that record the health of the bay and the factors that are constantly affecting it.

So by now you should have a good idea of what the Weeks Bay Reserve is all about. However, there is always more to learn! Mike Shelton said, "Don't be afraid to get out in our watershed. Many of us underappreciate this place. See the reason why so many people come to coastal Alabama."

We hope you will take him up on his offer and visit the Weeks Bay Reserve!



## SUMMER 2017 CALENDAR

### June

5 Jefferson Davis' Birthday Holiday.\*

14 Weeks Bay Advisory Committee Meeting.  
Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center, 2:00 p.m.

### July

4 Independence Day Holiday.\*

### August

5 Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race. Call the Foundation office at (251) 990-5004 for details, or go to [weeksbay.org/events/pelican-paddle](http://weeksbay.org/events/pelican-paddle) to register.

**Trips and events for the John L. Borom Alabama Coastal BirdFest available for preview online early-July, with registration opening August 14. Look for updates at [www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com](http://www.AlabamaCoastalBirdFest.com).**

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

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Reserve Association  
NOAA Coastal Services Center  
Partnership for Gulf Coast  
Land Conservation  
The Curtis and Edith Munson  
Foundation  
The Nature Conservancy  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Weeks Bay National Estuarine  
Research Reserve  
Weeks Bay Volunteers

## Become a part of the Weeks Bay Foundation!

### Giving Levels

Legacy Circle	\$5,000 and up
Sustainer	\$1,000 - \$4,999
Steward	\$500 - \$999
Supporter	\$250 - \$499
Friend	\$100 - \$249
Member	\$35 - \$99

Join us by returning the enclosed envelope or look for  
the link on our home page at [www.weeksbay.org](http://www.weeksbay.org).

Florida Registration # CH40701: A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL  
REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED  
FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING  
TOLL-FREE 1-800-435-7352 WITHIN THE STATE OR BY GOING TO  
[WWW.FLORIDAConsumerHELP.COM](http://WWW.FLORIDAConsumerHELP.COM). REGISTRATION DOES NOT IM-  
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# Weeks Bay Foundation

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(251) 990-5004  
www.weeksbay.org

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Photo by Yael Girard

Frog on a Succulent

"Summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language." - Henry James

## 5th Annual Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race



**Mark your calendars!** The 2017 Pelican Paddle Canoe and Kayak Race will be held on Saturday, August 5, beginning at 7:30 a.m. Get out your fastest craft and compete for bragging rights, or join us for a non-competitive, educational Eco-Tour around Weeks Bay. Last year we had nearly 175 participants! Register online or download the form at [weeksbay.org/events/pelican-paddle](http://weeksbay.org/events/pelican-paddle). For a paper registration form, or for more information, stop by the Foundation office or call us at (251) 990-5004.

Race categories include:

- Men's Solo Kayak
- Women's Solo Kayak
- Junior Solo Kayak (Age 13 and under)
- Tandem Craft (Canoe or Kayak)
- Stand Up Paddle Board
- Non-Traditional (Any type of non-motorized boats not in the other divisions, including foot-pedaled kayaks, excluding sailboats)
- Pro Solo Kayak (A 7.0 mile race, any age and gender)

