

Most of us are familiar with Dr. Seuss's story about the Lorax who spoke for the Truffula Trees because they had no voice of their own. In order to manufacture Thneeds, every Truffula Tree was cut to the ground until there were no more. But it wasn't just the Truffula Trees that were no more. The Barbaloots, Swomee Swans and Humming Fish also went away because their housing and food source were gone, only to be replaced with Gluppity Glup and Schloppity Slopp. After years had passed, and the forest was no more, amazingly a single Truffala seed was found. At the end of the book we are given hope that with the planting of the seed, more Truffala Trees could grow and the native wildlife could return!

While the native species and wildlife in the story are make believe, the consequences of us stripping our landscape of native species is very real. We have seen development around us increase at an alarming rate. If we don't have a change in behavior to begin giving back to what we have been taking from our beautiful Alabama coast, we could lose it forever. You may remember how abundant wildlife was, how you could drive through Baldwin County for miles and view beautiful forest and fields. Those landscapes are becoming more fragmented every day.

This year SALT will be launching a Natural Habitat Certification program. Whether you own hundreds of acres of land, or have a small patio yard, you can adjust your planting choices to be both beautiful and environmentally useful, and inclined toward good stewardship.

As part of the program, we will be working with other environmental groups, nurseries, landscapers and educators. We will be hosting guided natural habitat tours, educational workshops, book clubs and partnering with local nurseries to offer a broader selection of native plant species.

Our first book club study will be on Douglas Tallamy's book "Bringing Nature Home – How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants" in which he explains how all of us can invite more wildlife into our yards, schools, churches and businesses just by planting a few native plants.

We all play a part in being important players in the management and wellbeing of wildlife in coastal Alabama!

Connel Whitaker

Connie Whitaker





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- (R) Steve Cole
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Photo credit: Alex Cary

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The mission of the South Alabama Land Trust is to protect land and promote environmental education so curent and future residents can enjoy clean water and the marine life, wildlife, and outdoor recreation that define our area.







Photo credit: Micah Howard

#### Michael Jordan

If there's an invasive plant species on one of SALT's protected properties, you can bet Michael Jordan is on top of it. A retired environmental scientist, and a naturalist, botanist, and birding guide, Michael puts in not just hours or days, but weeks identifying and treating invasive species for South Alabama Land Trust.

He is the invasive species expert in the area, says SALT Land Coordinator Darrel Williams. Michael visits a SALT property, comes up with a treatment plan, and then puts that plan to work ridding the property of invasives. He also does a lot of research and identifies threatened plant species on SALT properties. He is an invaluable member of SALT's stewardship program.

In addition to spending so much time in the woods, Michael was a guide during the 2021 Alabama Coastal BirdFest, and he occasionally leads botany tours on SALT properties.

SALT is very grateful for Michael's generosity with his time, talent and expertise!



Photo by Katherine Kuhn

# **VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT**



South Alabama Land Trust (SALT) is pleased to announce two popular musical acts for the 12th annual Bald Eagle Bash, set for Saturday, April 30 at the Tonsmeire Weeks Bay Resource Center. Ross Newell, well-known for his previous band, The Mulligan Brothers, will perform first, followed by Paw Paw's Medicine Cabinet.

Tickets for the 2021 Bald Eagle Bash sold out just days after they went on sale, so organizers believe there will be just as much excitement for the 12th annual Bash.

Ross Newell, who will play the first hour, has a huge following from his days with the Mulligan Brothers, one of the most popular bands to play at the Bash. Paw Paw's Medicine Cabinet is making its first appearance at the Bash.

As the original creative source and founding member of the Mulligan Brothers, a superb band from Mobile, Newell has been honing his song craft over many years. The three studio albums released by that band are all highly recommended, full of great melodies and songs that reflect the daily push and pull of every man in trying to make real connections and looking for enduring meaning.

Paw Paw's Medicine Cabinet features Gabriel Will, Mike

Jernigan, Ethan Snediger, Jeremy Ault and Jacob Hall. They released two full-length albums in 2017. Recent appearances include the Gautier Mullet Festival in Gautier, Mississippi, and the Gulf Shores Sunset Series. They also performed at the Americanafest in Nashville, Tennessee. They have played alongside bands such as The Marcus King Band, Wet Willie, Counting Crows, Kristy Lee and The Dirt Road Revival, The Mulligan Brothers, and River Whyless.

This "taste of the Gulf" brings more than a dozen area restaurants together to create dishes based on delicious fresh shrimp. Whether it's fried shrimp, shrimp ceviche, or gumbo, you can be certain that each chef prepares a signature dish that is sure to delight all participants. Two restaurants will serve tasty desserts.

Fairhope Brewing will once again serve their signature beer, Bald Eagle Blue, along with other favorites, and Braided River Brewing Company from Mobile will be returning with their specialty brews..

Co-chairs are Chesley Allegri of Fairhope and Kendall Dexter of Mobile. Tickets are \$55 for SALT members and \$65 for non-members. To purchase tickets, visit baldeaglebash.com or call 251-990-5004.

Photo above by John Oldshue

# CREATE A SANCTUARY IN YOUR OWN YARD



South Alabama Land Trust (SALT) is launching a new program, Natural Habitat Certification, that is geared toward reconnecting habitats one yard, one garden, at a time.

The program involves a certification checklist that covers five categories: water, sustainable practices, breeding places, food, and cover. Each category has a list of best practices. Participants must check a certain number in each category to earn the certification and receive a small sign for display stating their yard is "Natural Habitat Certified" by South Alabama Land Trust.

"Coastal Alabama is being developed at an alarming rate, with developments encroaching on wildlife habitat, wetlands, and open spaces," Connie Whitaker, executive director of SALT said. "Ecosystems are being quickly damaged by what's known as fragmentation. For every homeowner or business that creates a natural habitat in their yard by following the certification process, we are closing the gaps between productive habitats that sustain the entire ecosystem."

The success of the program will be directly tied to the number of people who participate, she added.

SALT's Natural Habitat Certification program is, primarily, an education program. It will include workshops on native vs. non-native plants, pollinators, soil types, and more. Literature will be available at plant nurseries and distributed to organizations such as garden clubs, homeowners' associations, school environmental and horticulture



clubs, and scouts.

This program will also include education and resources on nesting houses for birds. SALT will provide bird boxes for purchase and will also hold workshops on building bird boxes during which participants will build and take home a birdhouse. These workshops will include education on the right kinds of bird boxes for both migrating and local birds, proper installation, and information about the birds.

"We believe that we, as individuals, are nature's best hope," Whitaker said. "Encouraging and teaching homeowners to change the way they see their yards by removing non-native plants, planting only native plants to attract pollinators, eliminating the use of chemicals, and providing breeding spaces and homes for even the tiniest insects at the bottom of the ecosystem, can and will make a difference."

A SALT Pinterest site will be updated regularly with tips, resources, and best practices.



Additionally, SALT will use social media to highlight certified yards and yards in progress.

Additionally, SALT is incorporating the principles of natural habitats into the restoration of a 60-acre, SALT-owned property. Future plans include hosting field trips for after school and summer programs to the 60-acre property.

For information and to download the certification checklist, visit www. southalabamalandtrust.org/natural-habitat. Or call 251-990-5004. - DB



The Natural Habitat Certification checklist is a guide, a tool to help you transform your yard and help close the gaps between natural areas. The number in each category refers to the number of items you must check in that category to be certified. The lists are not exclusive. For example, if you provide a cover or

breeding place that's not listed, you may count it.

SALT is also gathering the names of local nurseries that carry or will carry native plants. To see the list in progress and download the checklist, visit

southalabamalandtrust.org/natural-habitat.

## Recommended Native Plants

Swamp Chestnut Oak Spruce Pine Dahoon Holly Two-winged Silverbell Winterberry Mountain Laurel Saw Palmetto Florida Anise American Wisteria Coral Honeysuckle Narrow-leaf Sunflower Climbing Aster Blue-eyed Grass Purple Muhly Grass River Oats

#### **Invasive Exotic Plants**

Camphor Tree Chinese Tallow, Popcorn Tree Coral Ardisia, Hen's Eyes Nandina, Heavenly Bamboo Chinese Privet, Glossy Privet, Japanese Privet
Russian Olive, Autumn Olive,
Thorny Olive
Multiflora Rose, Macartney
Rose, Cherokee Rose
Chinese Wisteria, Japanese
Wisteria
Pampas Grass
Wild Taro

### 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

#### **OPERATIONS**

General Operating Budget: \$424,100

• Income from Contributions: \$256,000

• Earned Income: \$47,900

Income from Events: \$194,158

Number of Employees: 4

• Board of Directors: 23

#### **FINANCIAL STABILITY**

# of Member Households: 438

Revenue from Memberships: \$88,110

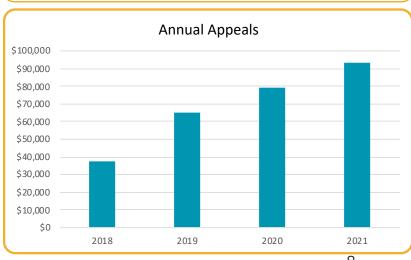
# of Active Donors: 672

Average Gift Amount: \$270

# of New Donors/Members: 210

Two major fundrasing events





#### **SALT FOOTPRINT**

Total acres protected: 10,500

New acres protected: 296

 Acres held in conservation easements: 1.743

# LAND CONSERVATION PROJECTS COMPLETED

• Jackson Co. MS - 296 acres

# LAND CONSERVATION PROJECTS WITH MUNICIPALITIES

- Brookley/City of Mobile
  - 45 acres
- Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries
  - 11 acres
- Town of Dauphin Island
  - 9.4 acres

# ORGANIZATIONAL DURABILITY

# of Volunteers: 288

• # of Volunteer Hours: 2,331



#### WELCOME NEW SALT BOARD MEMBERS

#### J. PATRICK (RICK) COURTNEY, III



A native of Mobile, Rick Courtney is a long-time trial attorney with experience in business, real estate, environmental, natural resources, and land use, among other things. Rick has represented a variety of business clients, including local banks and the largest oil field in Alabama. He was on the executive committee, and served as

chairman in 1995, of the Environmental Law Section of the Alabama State Bar. He has also served as special counsel for the Alabama Environmental Management Commission of ADEM, and represented the Nature Conservancy in the acquisition of the Perdue Tract on Fort Morgan, as well as other acquisitions in the area. Rick is admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States, the Supreme Court of Alabama, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth and Eleventh Circuits, the U.S. District Courts for the Southern, Middle and Northern Districts of Alabama, the Eastern District of Mississippi and all Alabama State Courts.

In addition to his professional affiliations, Rick has served on the boards of civic groups, including: Gulf Coast Conservation Association; Alabama Wildlife Federation; The Nature Conservancy; Dog River Clearwater Revival; Alabama Coastal Foundation; Dauphin Island Sea Lab Foundation; Providence Hospital Foundation; Athelstan Club (president); Country Club of Mobile; American Inns of Court; Mobile Baykeeper, Inc.; and, Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary.

A graduate of Auburn University and the Cumberland School of Law, Rick and his wife, Janet, have three children and three grandchildren, and live on Rabbit Creek/Dog River. His hobbies include fishing (Dog River and Dauphin Island), golf, and hunting.

#### MIKE CREEL, DVM

Mike Creel, retired veterinarian, was owner and practitioner of Red Barn Animal Hospital in Boaz, AL for 40 years before moving to Gulf Shores. Red Barn Animal Hospital was one of the longest running and most extensive veterinary practices in all of Marshall County. With a Bachelor of



Science in biology from Birmingham Southern, Mike was accepted into the Auburn University Veterinary Medicine Program and graduated in 1974. That same year he opened Sand Mountain Veterinary Services in Kilpatrick, AL, and after a year he became an instructor at Snead State Junior College in Boaz, a position he held for 10 years. For 48 years, Mike practiced mixed animal medicine.

He was a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Bovine Practitioners, American Association of Swine Practitioners, American Animal Hospital Association, Alabama Veterinary Medical Association, Northeast Alabama Veterinary Medical Association where he served as president for five terms, Alabama Guernsey Association and the North Alabama Dairy Goat Association, where he served as president, and the Alabama Swine Improvement Association where he served as director and veterinarian.

Mike and his wife, Rhonda, have five children and 11 grandchildren.



# BIODIVERSITY - WHAT IS AND WHY SHOULD WE (

Our planet's biodiversity is under threat in what many ecologists describe as Earth's sixth mass extinction. There is hope, however, and we are the answer.

Throughout Earth's geological history, there have been at least five mass extinctions – a biological crisis in which a dramatic decrease in biodiversity, the variety of living species, occurs. Unlike prior extinctions, however, the sixth is deemed anthropogenic, meaning due to human activity.

Extinctions have been occurring naturally since the beginnings of life; but it is the unprecedented rate of current extinctions that is alarming. Generations of organisms adapt over time to deal with environmental changes, but when those changes happen too quickly and beyond the tolerance threshold of the species, that organism can become extinct.

Early humans influenced extinctions as a result of overhunting. As the human population grew, many of the large land animals, also known as megafauna, were the first to fall. Some of the well-known megafauna extinctions include the woolly mammoth around 10,000 years ago, the dodo bird in 1681, and Steller's sea cow in 1768. Extinctions due to overhunting are not just part of our ancient past; for instance, recent extinctions include the Zanzibar leopard in 1990 and the black rhino in 2011.

In today's world, human population has driven an increase in development, agriculture, and international trade, presenting far bigger threats to biodiversity than overhunting. Forests and other wild places around the world are being destroyed and replaced with shopping malls, industrial parks, housing developments, and agricultural land. Furthermore, herbicides and pesticides are reducing what biodiversity remains in these disturbed areas. So severe is this trend that the extinction rate is thought to be 100 to 1000 times greater than the natural extinction rate. When considering north American birds alone, there has been an almost 30 percent population decrease since 1970, which accounts for nearly three billion birds gone.

So why does biodiversity matter? Biodiversity is the string that holds the biological world together. If a key species is lost from an ecosystem, the whole system can decline. You may look at an agricultural field and see only corn, but what you aren't seeing are the hundreds of different species of soil microbes, amounting to one ton per acre, hard at work breaking down matter that create available nutrients for the corn's roots to absorb.

A mere teaspoon of soil can harbor 10 billion microbes alone, emphasizing the unseen importance of biodiversity. Loss of biodiversity is a crisis for the living world, including humans. It places all remaining species under threat, including

the microbes and fungi that supply nutrients to our crops. The late, great E.O. Wilson recognized this dilemma, inspiring his call for the conservation of 50 percent of the planet.

In the case of residential housing, a developer is likely to first clear the land of native vegetation,

then build a house and landscape the yard with a standard list of exotic plants and grasses. It is easy to assume that any green space is an ecological asset, so homeowners often continue to add attractive exotic plants to enhance the aesthetic beauty of their yards.

The problem with exotic plants is, by definition, that they evolved elsewhere and not in their new environment.

Native organisms evolved together over millions of years to create a balanced ecosystem. A native butterfly, for example, may be able to eat the nectar from an exotic flower, but the plant is not suitable for any other stages of the butterfly's life cycle so is insufficient for the butterfly's survival. In many cases, native insects do not recognize exotic plants

as food at all, causing an entire yard to become almost ecologically sterile.

In turn, many exotic plants are also invasive, meaning they spread into wild places and outcompete the native vegetation. When this happens, essential food sources for native animal populations decline, causing yet more loss of biodiversity. To underline this point, a native tree, such as a Live Oak, can support well over 500 species of native insects, while an exotic tree may support fewer than five.

Developing land and removing native species in place of exotic plants leads to isolated pockets of wilderness. This loss of connectivity between

> fragmentation. our remaining wilderness.

natural areas has been coined Fragmentation is known to further reduce biodiversity as smaller populations of a species are less adaptable and more vulnerable to extinction. Successful ecosystems depend on biodiversity, and biodiversity depends on the connectivity of

What can we do to help? Anyone with a yard or greenspace can make a difference. While exotic flowers can be aesthetically pleasing, they do not support local ecology and instead reduce biodiversity. A more exciting option is to plant attractive native species that encourage biodiversity by supporting the life cycles of pollinators, insects, birds, and other animals to live and breed. This not only enhances wildlife in your own yard, but if we come together as a community and plant native species, we can reconnect the existing wild places and reduce the effects of fragmentation.

By simply choosing native plants over exotic, we can begin to rewild nature and turn back the clock on another mass extinction. - DW

Loss of biodiversity

is a crisis for the

living world,

including humans

### **I WONDER**

By Angela Underwood Weeks Bay Reserve Acting Manager

"Is the sun the world's lightbulb...Are trees the sky's legs...Are rivers the earth's veins...I wonder. Me too." Wonder Walkers, by Micha Archer

Have you ever taken a "wonder walk" where you mindfully use your senses to explore nature, and where your observations lead you to questions: "I wonder if that is the saltwater I am smelling"; "I wonder why this plant feels so sticky"; "I wonder why the bird makes that sound."

At the Weeks Bay Reserve, we had the opportunity to host such an outing for a group of environmental educators from across Alabama.

For those of us familiar with the south Alabama landscape, the surroundings may seem all too familiar, maybe even boring. But when using your senses, it's less about the "new" and more about the experiences. And on these wonder walks, you learn that no matter how many times you've been down that one trail, curiosity doesn't have to end. There is always something new to explore or new ways to observe the most familiar of surroundings.

The nature walk with the educators was the first chance to lead alongside the Reserve's new education specialist, Danielle Davidson. Danielle is no stranger to coastal areas or education. She spent most of her childhood saltwater fishing along the Florida Gulf Coast with her parents, both of whom are charter boat captains. She is also an avid fly fisher.



Danielle Davidson

Danielle enjoyed sharing her passion for the outdoors as a K-6th grade teacher before beginning her position with the Reserve. She said working at the Reserve is her "dream job" because she "values the opportunity to bring awareness to environmental issues that the community faces, while teaching youth the skills to make informed and responsible decisions to lessen human impact on the environment."

Danielle has already begun making an impact in the community, leading fieldtrips for students and adults, creating the Tide Traveler's Storytime Program, a cooperation with local libraries to bring nature literature and art to students, and developing two community outreach programs, Kids Fly Fishing Day and Earth Day BioBlitz Paddle scheduled for April.

Follow the Reserve on Facebook or call the Reserve for information on these and other Reserve events.

Whether you participate in a guided tour with us, or explore the trails alone, I encourage you to take time in your observations and experience the new in the otherwise seemingly ordinary. I wonder what you will find.



## OUR SUPPORTERS

DECEMBER 1, 2021 - FEBRUARY 28, 2022

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#### Guardian \$2,500

Rob and Tela Constantine Tonsmeire Charitable Foundation

#### Conservator \$1,000

Sally Demott

#### Steward \$500

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David and Elaine Delaney
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Jim and Siri Johnson
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Joe and Kristin Babington
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Jack and Patti Burrell
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Kenny Hanak
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#### YEAR-END APPEAL

#### \$5,000 and up

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Cunningham Delaney Construction, LLC Mobile Sail and Power Squadron Walter A. (Trey) and Mary Jane Ruch

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T.K. Jackson Jay and Anna Keene Miller

#### \$1,000 - \$2,499

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Veronica Herndon and Ron Frehm
Dunn Foundation
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Gavin and Margaret Bender
Bufkin Appraisal Company LLC
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Ben and Jo McNeill
Hank and Claudia Mullins
The Robert and Joanna Cunningham
Charitable Foundation, Inc.
Al and Bonnie Weeks

#### \$500 - \$999

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\$1,000 - \$2,499

Larry Menefee and Laurie Dill

#### \$100 - \$249

Kendall and Amanda Dexter Marshall Jansen Josh and Abbie McCullough Welcome Newcomers of the Eastern Shore

#### TRIBUTE GIFTS

*In Honor of Jacob and Ariah Coheley -*Amber and Jason Little

*In Honor of Darrel Williams -* Chuck and Debbie Farris

In Honor of Brock Gordon and Laura Butler - Margaret R. Gordon

*In Honor of Bob and Lolly Holk -*Neal and Becky Underwood

*In Honor of Virginia McPhearson* - Lee and Gayle McPhearson

In Honor of Susan and Steve Tucker, Kellee and Steve Reinhart, Kristine Fitts, Emily and Jack Leigh, Frances and Joe Fritz - Virginia McPherason and William Pruett

In Honor of Harriet Adams Carl Adams

*In Memory of Raymond John Harbrecht* - Eebie Cheshire

*In Memory of Gilbert Rusell Ladd III -* Ellen McWhorter

*In Memory or Henry A. Wise V -* Johnny Wise

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Blue Water Millwork

#### Blue Heron Sponsor - \$2,500

Blue Water Millwork McCurley & Associates Tonsmeire Properties

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