FALL 2026

THE SALT LINE

A SOUTH ALABAMA LAND TRUST PUBLICATION



FRIENDS OF WEEKS BAY RESERVE

DEAR FRIENDS,

I have nothing but great news to share! Our 16th Bald Eagle Bash was our most successful to date! Our restaurants and caterers knocked it out of the park with their fabulous entrees and desserts. Tim Roberts Bearded Music brought the crowd to their feet. The beverages hit the spot. The larger seating area was comfortable. Our sponsors and donors showed their commitment to land conservation. And everyone had fun!



Since our last edition of SALT Line, we enhanced our ability to acquire more conservation land by selling two of our existing parcels subject to conservation restrictions that will forever protect vital habitats and ecosystems. With those transactions behind us, we're looking forward to investing in new conservation projects.

I am retiring at the end of this month! My three years at SALT have been incredibly rewarding. I have faced some challenges, like removing encroachments on our land, navigating the accreditation renewal process with the Land Trust Alliance, and, candidly, managing my fear (!) of snakes. But the conservation victories always outweighed the challenges. Since July 2023, SALT protected 888 acres of land in Baldwin and Mobile counties and we expanded our mission to include conservation of Alabama Beach Mouse habitat. Those accomplishments were made possible by the support of SALT's donors, our pro bono attorneys, volunteers, staff, the Weeks Bay Reserve's team, and, of course, our Board of Directors.

Our new executive director will be Jamie Marshall, an impressive professional with roots in Alabama. With his years of experience in real estate law and running small businesses, Jamie will be a great leader for SALT as we press forward with our work. Please keep an eye out for announcements in your email, social media, and on our website about his arrival at SALT!

As I hand over the reins to SALT's new executive director, I leave these happy words: Land conservation is fun!

Jane Herndon
Executive Director



Photo by E. Anderson

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WHERE DOES THE WATER GO?

When it comes to land conservation, SALT will often prioritize land that contributes to good water quality. This article compares two of SALT's conservation lands that are very different in how water moves through them and how they impact water quality.

SALT's Fish River Nature Preserve has a variety of ecosystems (forests, a pond, wetlands, floodplains), and **the land surface drops from 78 feet above mean sea level to 7 feet at the river's edge.**



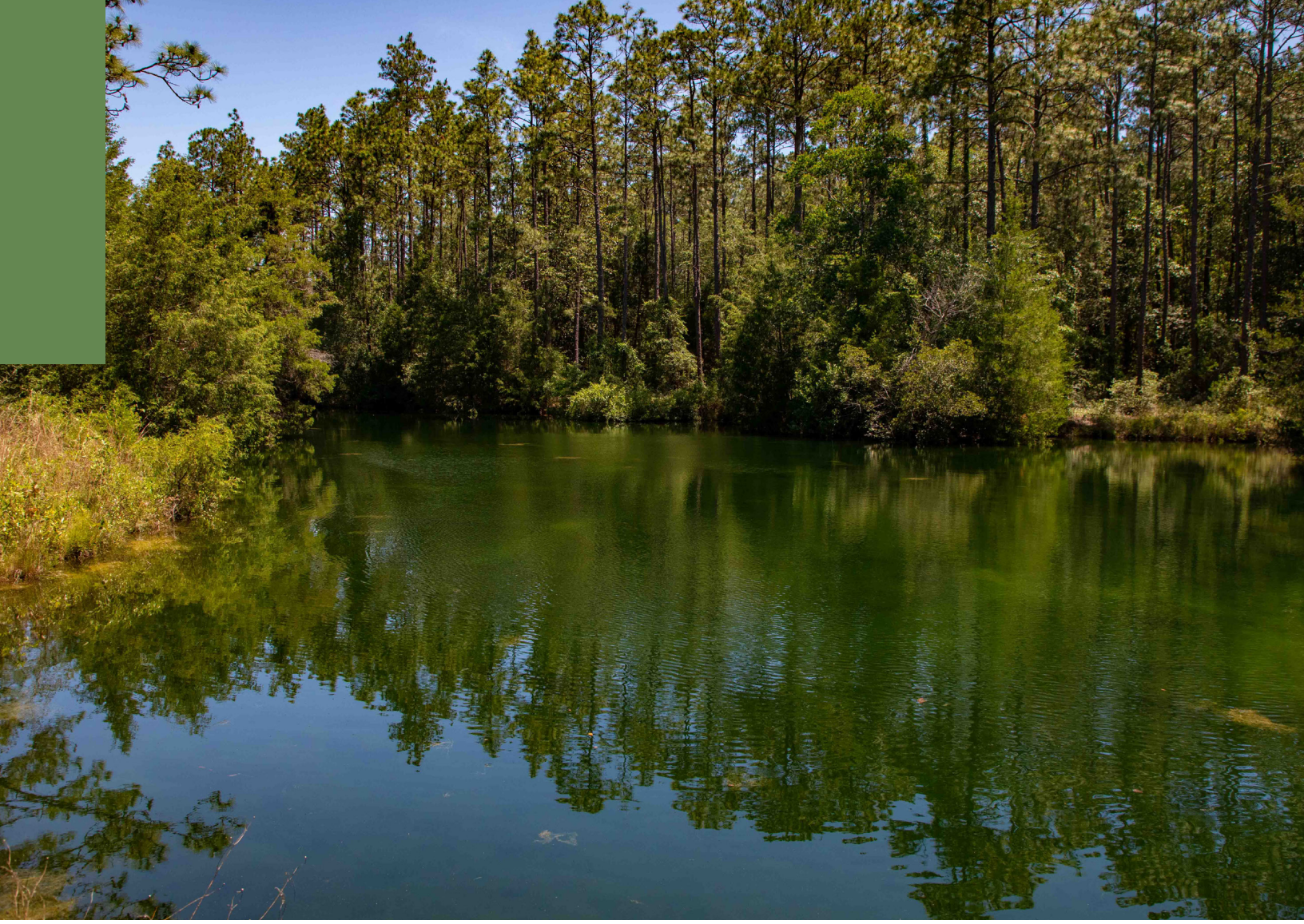
Water enters the land from precipitation, stormwater flow, surface water, and groundwater flow. Precipitation soaks into the soil and moves downward through the soil column to ultimately replenish underground aquifers, or it can be evaporated or taken up by plants. Once in the aquifer, water might keep moving downward into deeper portions of the aquifer, and some might discharge into Fish River. When surface soils become saturated, excess water flows over the land, typically discharging into Fish River or to other low-lying areas, like the Preserve's pond and wetlands. Some water is returned to the atmosphere through simple evaporation before it even saturates the soil.

As water moves through the Preserve, the land absorbs naturally occurring nutrients and minerals, as well as pollutants. Water flowing across the surface of the land can pick up solid material such as soil, vegetation, and waste, but natural storage of the water in the Preserve's wetlands filters out those materials.

In contrast to the Preserve, there is very little topographic relief at SALT's Juniper Bog (less than 4 feet) and there are fewer ecosystems – namely the bog and the surrounding wetlands. Here, it is the land's relationship with groundwater that shapes the ecosystems.

Groundwater seeps up from aquifers, providing a steady supply of water to the surface soils. A lateral flow of water from the soils in the bog to nearby surface water carries nutrients away, creating the nutrient-poor wetlands that pitcher plants need to thrive.

The Juniper Bog contains 30 acres of swamp habitat, which acts as a natural water reservoir. Within this wetland, a drop of water



may remain for months or even years before leaving the system. By contrast, the Fish River Nature Preserve has few large wetlands to store water, thus allowing water to move through the landscape more quickly.

When a natural landscape is altered through actions like paving or filling of wetlands, the movement of water through the land changes dramatically. Roads, parking lots, and buildings create impervious surfaces that prevent water from soaking into the ground. This drastically reduces the recharge of groundwater aquifers. Additionally, these surfaces can accumulate pollutants such as **oil and gas from vehicles, heavy metals, particulate matter, and other compounds associated with human use.**

Stormwater flows at higher velocity across impervious surfaces than natural vegetated surfaces, increasing the risk of erosion and flash flooding in downgradient low-lying areas. Without wetlands and natural soils to act as filters, stormwater can carry pollutants directly to nearby systems.

By protecting these landscapes, SALT preserves natural systems that filter nutrients, trap sediments, and remove pollutants before they reach our aquatic systems. A raindrop's journey is shaped by the land it falls on and protecting that land helps protect the health of ecosystems connected to it, both aquatic and terrestrial.

- Dylan Herald is SALT's Land Conservation Associate

Photo by E. Stafford, left

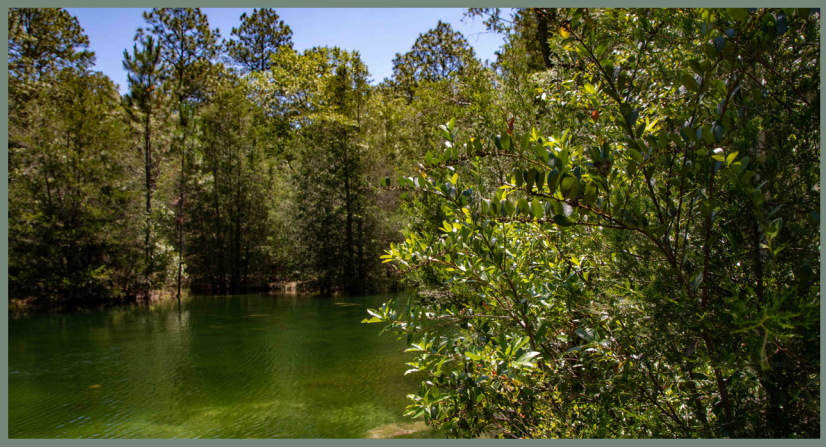
PROTECTING LAND AT THE WATER'S EDGE

While every property within a watershed influences water quality, lands that border rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and bays often have the most direct impact on aquatic ecosystems. Protecting land at the water's edge preserves essential habitat for aquatic and marine organisms. For instance, juvenile brown shrimp take refuge in the marshy margins of Mobile Bay. And the edges of creeks and ponds grant cover from predators for organisms like crayfish, snails, and small fish.

How much waterfront does SALT currently protect?



SALT protects **2.3 miles of waterfront on Fish River alone**, protecting one of Weeks Bay's primary water sources.



19.6 miles of freshwater frontage protected. If you jogged along all of SALT's protected freshwater frontage at an average pace, it would take nearly 4 hours to reach the end.



SALT currently protects **1.8 miles of coastal water frontage**, equivalent to 6.5 Empire State Buildings stacked end to end.



All told, from creeks to bays, **SALT protects 21.5 miles of land at the water's edge.** Farther than a trip from Fairhope to Mobile!





Alligators are essentially shy creatures whose prey consists of fish, invertebrates, frogs, birds and white-tail deer. They are not direct decedents of dinosaurs but share ancestors with them.

ALABAMA'S UNUSUAL AQUATIC SPECIES

Few states can match the sheer variety of life found in Alabama; east of the Mississippi, none do. **With more than 132,000 miles of rivers and streams,** it is no surprise that much of that diversity is aquatic. Alabama leads the United States in species of mussels, fishes, snails, crayfish, and turtles, making our state a global hotspot for aquatic life. All these species depend on clean water and healthy habitats to survive. In this article we'll shine a spotlight on a few standout species, starting in north Alabama and moving south.

Starting in Lauderdale County, if we're lucky, we might find one of the rarest fish on the planet, the Alabama cavefish. This endangered species is found only in Key Cave, **where no more than 10 individuals have been observed at a time. Scientists estimate the total population may be less than 100.** Adapted to life in complete darkness, they have no eyes and translucent skin. Because Key Cave is fed primarily through groundwater, pollution on the surrounding landscape can be carried by rainwater as it infiltrates the aquifer, making pollution of groundwater one of the greatest threats to the species.

Continuing south through the Coosa River system in St. Clair and Calhoun counties and extending to Monroe County, we find



Adapted to life in complete darkness, the cavefish have no eyes and translucent skin.

the tulotoma snail. **The species was considered likely extinct in 1976, but a living population was discovered in 1989.** It is now a federally protected endangered species. This snail is especially unique because it gives live birth rather than laying eggs. Like many freshwater snails, the tulotoma is sensitive to pollutants in water and can only be found in clean, oxygen-rich water with solid rocky substrates. Water pollution and sedimentation are the greatest threats to this one-of-a-kind snail.

Mussels and clams are particularly vulnerable to pollution. The Alabama moccasinshell is a small, delicate mussel found in the tributaries of the Tombigbee and Black Warrior River. It is a federally protected "threatened" species. Because it's highly sensitive to habitat degradation, the moccasinshell serves as a bioindicator species, meaning its presence or absence helps biologists assess the health of the habitat.

The health of Alabama's waterways shapes the diversity of life they support. From rare fish and unique snails to freshwater mussels, alligators, and the brown shrimp of Mobile Bay, aquatic species depend on clean water and healthy habitats. Forests, savannas, bogs, swamps, and other natural landscapes naturally filter pollutants from water, thereby helping to maintain good water quality in the rivers, streams, and wetlands that connect our state. By protecting land at the water's edge, SALT helps safeguard water quality and the remarkable aquatic life that makes Alabama one of the most biodiverse places in the nation.

- Dylan Herald is SALT's Land Conservation Associate

Photo by Jacob Schaefer, above

PLANT DISCOVERY SPOTLIGHT

This summer SALT has had some conservation wins across our preserves! Gena Todia, an experienced, knowledgeable botanist, discovered 7 rare plant species on SALT's Breland Preserve in Mississippi. These include Atlantic white cedar, birdbill spikegrass, hairy wicky, spoonflower, climbing fetterbush, myrtle oak and sandyfield beaksedge. Climbing fetterbush has been ranked S1, the highest rarity rank, by the Mississippi Natural Heritage Program.

The standout discovery was the hairy wicky, a rare species previously known to South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and three counties in Alabama. Its discovery on the Breland Preserve marks the first-ever record of the plant in Mississippi, highlighting the ecological importance of the property and the value of botanical surveys.

Elsewhere, at the Rangeline Preserve, the parrot pitcher plant was observed during SALT's first pitcher plant survey. This rare species was previously not known to be on the property. It is now known to be present at 2 of SALT's 4 pitcher plant bogs.

Discovering these rare plants on SALT's land reminds us that even today, there is still much to learn about our natural landscapes. It also underscores the value of land conservation.



Pieris phillyreifolia (climbing fetterbush) produces small, white bell-shaped flowers that are typically 1-1.5 inches in diameter. Its growth creates an understory that provides habitat for birds, insects, and other small animals.



First observed parrot pitcher plant at the Rangeline preserve. These carnivorous plants help control insect populations and are frequently studied due to their unique adaptations.



The first hairy wicky to be observed in Mississippi. Its flowers support a wide variety of pollinators which in turn support our agriculture.

Photo by Scott Allen Davis, far left

Photo by Gena Todia, above



GENA TODIA

Wetland Resourses Environmental Consultant

Gena Todia is a Certified Wildlife Biologist, botanist, and wetlands specialist. She has nearly 40 years of experience in natural resources management and wetland regulatory matters. For SALT, Gena develops comprehensive baseline documentation reports that describe the species present, wetlands, and other ecological features of a property.

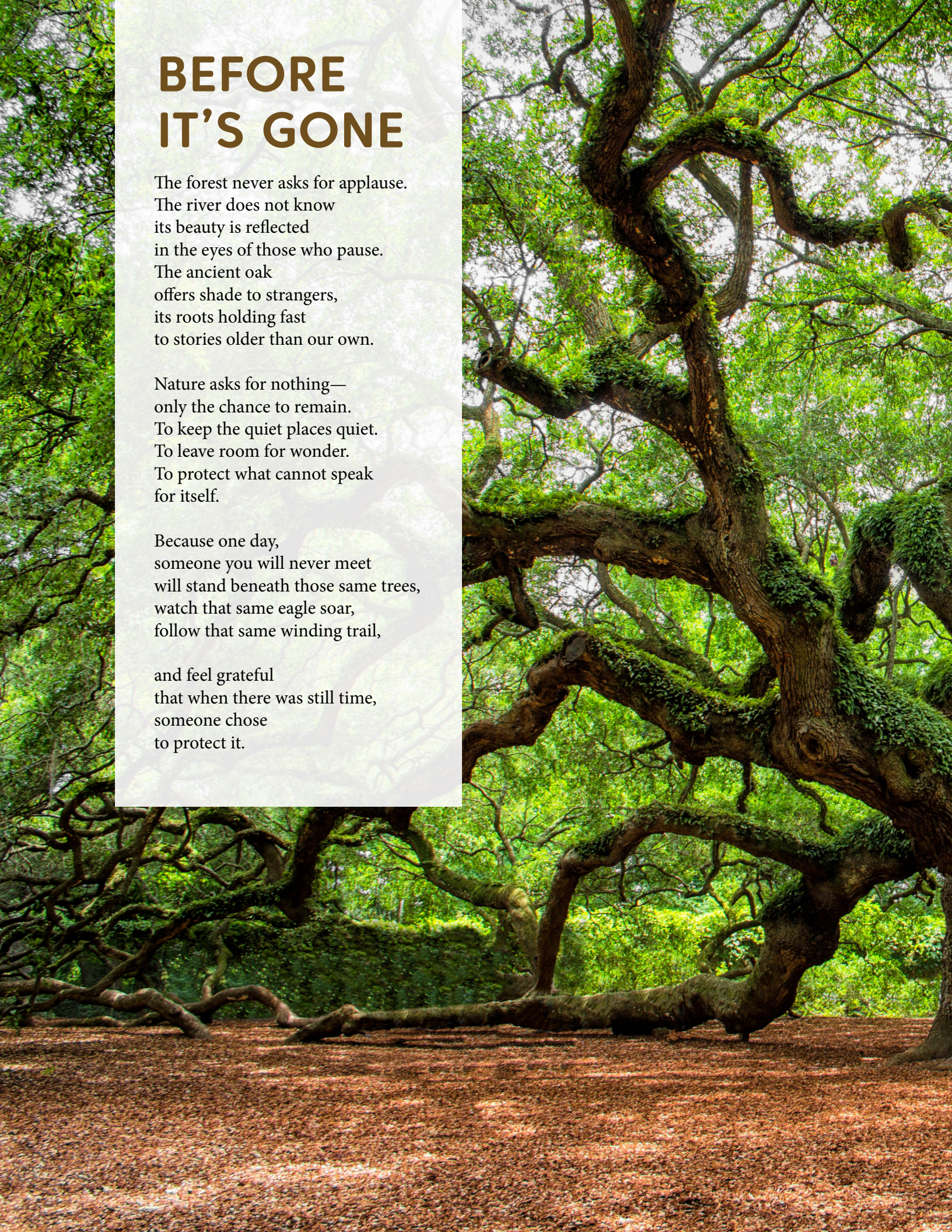
BEFORE IT'S GONE

The forest never asks for applause.
The river does not know
its beauty is reflected
in the eyes of those who pause.
The ancient oak
offers shade to strangers,
its roots holding fast
to stories older than our own.

Nature asks for nothing—
only the chance to remain.
To keep the quiet places quiet.
To leave room for wonder.
To protect what cannot speak
for itself.

Because one day,
someone you will never meet
will stand beneath those same trees,
watch that same eagle soar,
follow that same winding trail,

and feel grateful
that when there was still time,
someone chose
to protect it.





A BOY, NATURE, AND BLUEBERRIES!

When Paul Lyrene was a boy growing up on his family's farm in Silverhill, Alabama, he spent hours exploring the nearby woods with his brothers. One of his discoveries – blueberries – shaped his future in unexpected ways.



From left to right: Paul Lyrene and his brothers, Steve and George.

Today, Lyrene is widely regarded as the "father of Florida blueberries." A University of Florida emeritus professor of horticultural sciences, he transformed blueberry production across the Southeast through decades of research and plant breeding. **In recognition of his contributions, the university dedicated the Paul M. Lyrene Blueberry Research Building in 2025.**

"I've learned a lot about blueberries since I was a child picking them in the woods," Lyrene said with a laugh. A favorite, the tiny native berries, known as "Mayberries" because they ripen in May, required several hours of picking to produce enough fruit for a single pie.

The family farm, established in 1901, shaped Lyrene's future in more ways than one. Although chickens supported the farm, timber sales paid for college educations for Lyrene and his two brothers. "They cut down old longleaf pines—which still hurts my heart," he said.

Lyrene joined the University of Florida in 1977, where he took over the blueberry breeding program. By applying innovative breeding techniques, he developed early-ripening, low-chill varieties that thrive in Florida's subtropical climate. **During his career, he patented 23 blueberry cultivars and helped grow Florida's blueberry industry from just a few hundred acres to more than 4,000.** "It's a little ironic to me that picking wild blueberries was such a joy as a child, without any expectation that I'd become a professional blueberry breeder," he said. "I'd never have guessed that."

The royalties from his own cultivars came full circle. Lyrene used them to purchase his brothers' shares of some family property. This year, the woods where a young boy first discovered wild blueberries were permanently preserved because of the career they inspired.

In March 2026, Lyrene sold 52 acres in Silverhill to SALT at a reduced price, preserving forested uplands of



longleaf pine and hardwoods along both sides of Perone Branch, a tributary of Fish River. Along with the trees and the delicious Mayberries, Lyrene said he wanted to protect the remarkable diversity of native plants growing along the creek. "There's mountain laurel that's been there, I guess, since the glaciers retreated," he marveled.

Looking back, Lyrene can trace the path of his life to a boy wandering through these woods, filling buckets with wild blueberries. Because he chose to protect this land, another child may one day make discoveries of their own beneath the same trees, along the same creek, surrounded by the same wild beauty. For Lyrene, that's a future worth preserving.

- Meagan Fowler writes about the environment

16th ANNUAL BALD EAGLE BASH

SOUTH ALABAMA LAND TRUST

The 2026 Bald Eagle Bash was an unforgettable afternoon celebrating conservation, community, and the generosity of the people who believe in protecting the places that make coastal Alabama extraordinary. Our SALT friends gathered for live music, fellowship, and an incredible showcase of local food—all while raising critical funds to conserve land for people, wildlife, and future generations.

The Bald Eagle Bash is more than a fundraiser—it's a celebration of the community that makes conservation possible. A heartfelt thank you to our generous sponsors; dedicated volunteers; amazing restaurant and catering partners; Fairhope Brewing Company for keeping the taps flowing; our wine purveyor, Oakley's Wine Cellar; and every guest who joined the fun.

Let's keep protecting the land we love before it disappears.











WHERE CONSERVATION MEETS COASTAL CUISINE

Food is always the highlight of the Bald Eagle Bash, and this year's restaurant and catering partners delivered - big time! Talented chefs and local foodie favorites generously donated their time, creativity, and amazing dishes, giving guests a taste of top-notch food.

2026 Restaurant & Catering Partners

- Alabama Coastal Catering — Cobalt, Luna's, GTs, and Cosmo's
- Dragonfly Foodbar
- Fairhope Social Club
- Guthrie's Chicken
- The Hope Farm
- Lucky Cow Handcrafted Ice Cream Sandwiches
- Market by the Bay
- No BS Catering
- Punta Clara Kitchen
- Southwood Kitchen
- Tammy's Sports Bar & Grill
- Warehouse Bakery & Donuts
- The Waterfront







16th ANNUAL BALD EAGLE BASH

SOUTH ALABAMA LAND TRUST

SPONSORS MAKE CONSERVATION POSSIBLE!

The Bald Eagle Bash would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors. Their commitment to conservation helps SALT protect the lands, waters, and wildlife that define coastal Alabama while making this signature event a success year after year.

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THANKS!

PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION: AIRBUS

For Airbus, protecting the Gulf Coast's vibrant ecosystem is a commitment that begins at the hangar doors and extends into the community. "At our Mobile facility, sustainability is built into our DNA—literally," said Jason Brasfield, Airbus Mobile Manufacturing Site Sustainability Manager. The company's Mobile campus includes LEED Silver and Gold-certified buildings, while its operations are guided by the internationally recognized ISO 14001 environmental management standard.

That commitment extends well beyond the Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility at Mobile Aeroplex at Brookley. "Our most impactful work happens through the passion of our employees," Brasfield said. In 2025, Airbus fielded the Gulf Coast's largest volunteer group for the annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup, with approximately 115 employees and family members helping restore an area near Arlington Park. The company also supports community initiatives ranging from urban gardening to neighborhood cleanups.

During Earth Week, employees collected more than 1,700 pounds of electronic waste, diverting unwanted devices from local landfills. The materials were donated to Ransom Ministries' PEP program for processing and recycling.

Airbus also continues to reduce its environmental footprint through operational





innovation. A new system at the Mobile assembly hangar captures condensation from the facility's HVAC system and repurposes it as cooling tower make-up water, a project expected to reduce purchased water consumption by 25 percent beginning in 2026. Since August 2024, the site has also achieved a 91 percent landfill diversion rate through recycling and energy recovery efforts.

"Sustainability is our baseline, not just a buzzword," Brasfield said. "We aren't just pioneering sustainable aerospace; we are working to ensure a safe, united, and thriving Alabama coast for generations to come."

- Meagan Fowler writes about the environment







OUR VOLUNTEERS ROCK!

We couldn't protect and steward the land without our extraordinary volunteers. At South Alabama Land Trust, they bring the energy and heart that help move our mission forward every day. Their time and talents strengthen our work in countless ways, from caring for trails and supporting events to connecting people with the landscapes, waterways, wetlands, and wildlife that make coastal Mobile and Baldwin counties so special.

No matter where their service takes place—in the field, at our events, behind the camera, or in the office —their impact reaches far beyond the task at hand. Each volunteer turns love for this place into meaningful action and joins SALT in ensuring that future generations can enjoy clean water, thriving habitats, and the natural wonder of this region for years to come.

'Thank you' to each and every one of our outstanding volunteers. The land, water and all the critters thank you, too.











HELP US PROTECT MORE LAND

EVERY ACRE SAVED BEGINS WITH YOU.

As you start planning your end-of-year charitable giving, please make the South Alabama Land Trust part of your plan. The places that make coastal Alabama extraordinary—its wetlands, forests, shorelines, streams, and bays—are facing unprecedented pressure as land is being consumed at an unprecedented pace by development and supporting infrastructure. SALT is working with urgency to protect the land that safeguards clean water, supports outdoor recreation, sustains Alabama's fishing industry, and strengthens the tourism economy that depends on healthy, beautiful coastal landscapes. Simply put, preserving natural land supports our way of life and our well-being.

This year has been one of SALT's most successful yet for land conservation. As we look toward 2027, donor support is critical to maintain that momentum. SALT's year-end fundraising drive starts on November 4. Be a part of a worthy mission – protecting our natural landscapes before they're gone forever.

Looking for an easy way to support SALT and manage your tax liability at the same time? Please consider a **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)** direct from your Individual Retirement Account to SALT. A QCD is a direct, tax-free transfer of funds from an IRA to a qualified 501(c)(3) charity like SALT.

Thank you in advance for being part of our land conservation mission.

SOUTH ALABAMA
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SAVE THE DATE

Conservation on Tap
Fairhope Brewing Company
Wednesday, October 21

2026 Year-End Appeal
Campaign starts November 4

2027 Bald Eagle Bash
Saturday, April 24

Photo by Ron Frehm