



THE SALT LINE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF
SOUTH ALABAMA LAND TRUST

Friends of Weeks Bay Reserve - Summer 2022



There's a reason people rarely work entirely alone. When we collaborate with other people and organizations, we share ideas, get inspired, get rid of what doesn't work, and it seems much easier than when we're on our own. Not only that, but mutual passion can help create truly revolutionary work. We never know when the partnerships we form will spark ideas that go on to make lasting changes, which is certainly true when it comes to SALT conserving land and providing environmental education. The partnerships SALT has with its environmental partners, donors/members, sponsors, volunteers, municipalities and other governmental agencies spurs SALT on in achieving its mission to protect coastal Alabama; and, hopefully in return, we help them achieve theirs.

Thanks to partnerships with our sponsors, restaurants, volunteers and attendees, SALT hosted another successful Bald Eagle Bash. Some of these supporters have participated in Bash from the beginning. In some ways, it feels like an annual family reunion in addition to a great party for preservation! As our largest fundraiser, proceeds from the Bash go a long way in supporting our general operations, land stewardship and educational activities.

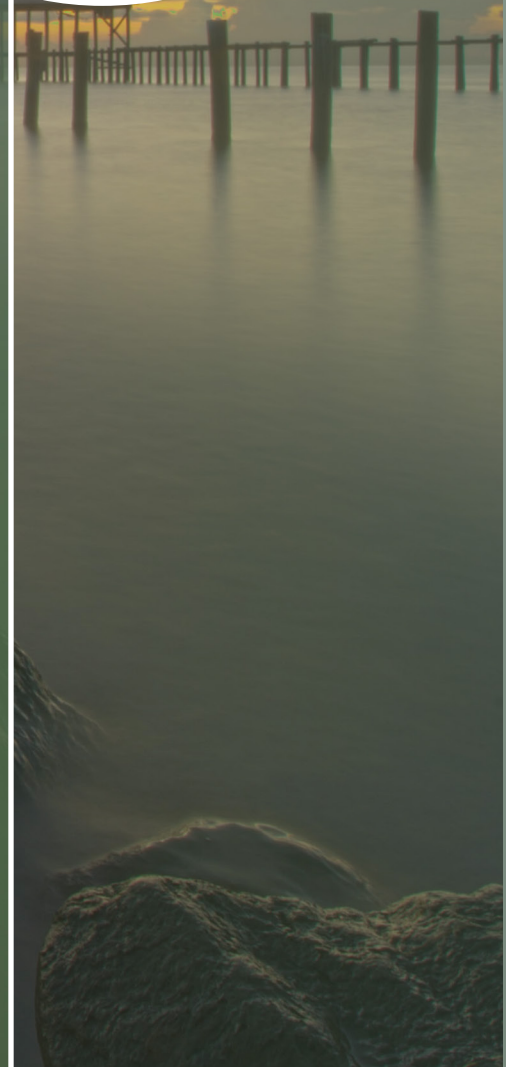
In this issue, you will read about several exciting land projects SALT has been working on. It continues to be an exciting year for Dauphin Island in protecting critical natural habitat – particularly for migrating birds.

As our conservation and restoration efforts have grown, so has our team! We are excited to welcome Sheri Swartz as Development Coordinator. We also want to congratulate our Land Coordinator, Darrel Williams, on receiving his Master of Science - Environmental Science. Not only is Darrel responsible for monitoring and habitat management/restoration on SALT properties, but he will also be heavily involved with the SALT Natural Habitat Certification Program.

Through that program, SALT will promote that the environment, which we all have in common, will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it for our future generations. To change everything, we need everyone, and we can all do our part to be good stewards! As Douglas Tallamy states, "every person on the planet requires a healthy ecosystem, which means everybody on the planet has a responsibility in good Earth stewardship".



Connie Whitaker



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

CURRENT LAND PROJECTS

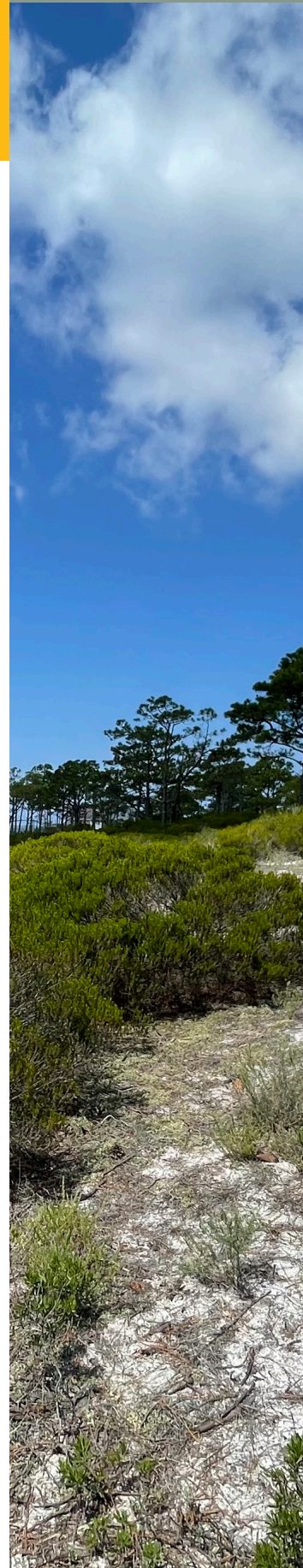
Coastal Alabama's picturesque shorelines and thriving ecosystems attract newcomers from afar. Ironically, the resulting population increase, with its associated development, jeopardizes these natural wonders. SALT continuously seeks out priority land parcels that are invaluable to the area's ecology. Our goal is to preserve these sensitive ecosystems and their natural beauty for current and future generations to enjoy.

With development happening at an alarming rate, it goes without saying that land acquisition is at the front lines of SALT's efforts. Since SALT was founded in 1990, almost 11,000 acres have been protected in Baldwin and Mobile Counties. SALT protected land transpires through several methods, including direct purchase, bargain sale, donation, and conservation easement. Excluding direct purchase, the landowner is often rewarded with tax incentives, making it a win for the property owner and the environment.

SALT is often presented with new opportunities through partners who share our passion for conservation. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is funding the purchase of an additional 28 residential sized parcels on Dauphin Island which will be conveyed to the Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries (DIBS). SALT will hold three separate conservation easements on the 28 parcels, while ownership will belong to DIBS. Additionally, through a collaboration with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), NFWF has funded the protection of an additional 9.4-acre parcel on Dauphin Island's southern coast. While owned by the Town of Dauphin Island (TODI), SALT will again hold the conservation easement. The area includes critical beach and dune habitats that support a diverse array of species such as shorebirds and nesting turtles, while the dunes offer protection to inland communities from storm surge and other severe weather-related events.

Dauphin Island is especially important from an ecological standpoint as it hosts the first stop for returning migratory birds. In certain conditions that include stormy headwinds, a phenomenon known as fallout can occur. In this scenario, birds fall from the sky after an exhausting overseas journey. Because of this unique relationship between the island and migratory birds, it is vital that natural habitat remains. The naturally occurring vegetation supplies protection and food during this critical recovery period. In contrast to the exhaustion of fallout, it can be an exciting time for enthusiasts to observe otherwise elusive birds. In addition, some of the Dauphin Island properties have public trails that allow unique bird watching opportunities.

The island's natural ecosystems not only serve the migratory birds, but humans also benefit from the anchoring abilities the native flora offers. Since barrier islands are dynamic by nature, any removal of flora speeds up the erosional





processes that lead to financial and property losses. These parcels will add to the current list of 32 DIBS owned and SALT protected parcels on Dauphin Island, ensuring this globally recognized birding hotspot gets the protection it deserves.

Back on the mainland, other ventures include participation in a large NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund grant managed by the City of Mobile. This grant provides funding for many different important conservation and land acquisition projects in the City limits, including the purchase of two parcels (totaling 47 acres) of sensitive wetland habitats that will flank the exciting new Brookley by the Bay Park project. Located on the western shore of Mobile Bay, this stretch of shoreline turned City Park will provide unprecedented access to the visitors from near and far to nature and the water. Design for the park is starting late this summer, with a large community engagement process to participate in kicking off the project.

As part of this combined effort, the two parcels will be owned by the City of Mobile, with SALT holding the conservation easement. Much of the northern parcel is a brackish marsh which provides essential habitat for wildlife, including species of high conservation concern. A proposed future elevated boardwalk and lookout will uniquely offer the public a viewing experience of an otherwise inaccessible habitat. Of the 22 acres on the south side of the park, nine acres are wetlands which include a sandy beach, tidal marsh, and upland marsh; the remainder is a forested upland. These conservation easements will ensure that these pristine areas will be protected and managed in the future, and play a part in the education experience in the public access portion of the park.

On the other side of Mobile Bay, SALT is working with landowners to conserve priority parcels along the Eastern Shore. A pending purchase of another 40 acres will add to a much larger contiguous stretch of protected SALT property and State Lands. These woody wetlands not only serve as scenic habitat, they also act as a huge sponge that protects Mobile Bay from pollutants. When water enters a wetland, it is naturally held in place long enough for vegetation to use the excess nutrients for growth, maintenance, and reproduction. However, due to impermeable surfaces such as roads, parking lots, and other forms of development, water does not infiltrate into the soil as it should; instead, it runs off into drainage systems and finds its way into our waterways. In doing so, harmful pollutants and excess nutrients can fuel algal blooms and other toxic conditions. SALT's investment in this wetland parcel combines with prior efforts to create a giant natural filter that protects our waterways from such environmental disasters so that residents can continue to enjoy life on the Bay.

Thanks to the joint efforts of NFWF, TNC, DIBS, TODI, and the City of Mobile, these special places can remain wild and protected for all to enjoy. SALT is especially proud to work with such dedicated partners and to be a part of these projects that combine public access opportunities while protecting our area's natural beauty, health, and future.

-- Darrel Williams, SALT Land Coordinator

Photo by Darrel Williams

THE BRELAND PROPERTY

SALT has traditionally protected land within Mobile and Baldwin counties, but when Louis and Patti Breland approached SALT with a 298-acre donation of natural habitat in Jackson County Mississippi, we were delighted to be a trusted partner.

Just 20 minutes from the Mobile International Airport, the Breland property borders Big Creek, a tributary of the Escatawpa River. The size and flow of Big Creek resembles that of a river, especially during the summer months when the abundance of water connects Big Creek to the surrounding tupelo and cypress swamps.

The variety of ecosystems from upland pine forests to black water swamps makes this property a unique contrast of natural settings. During the initial evaluation of the property, numerous white-tailed deer, wetland birds, alligators, and an array of interesting plant species were witnessed. The protection of this land is an important asset to the surrounding ecosystems and to the people who live there.

Through SALT ownership, land stewardship activities will help to restore native ecology through the treatment of invasive species, maintenance of trails, and the potential implementation of prescribed fire.



Big Creek on Breland Parcel

The long-term goals include a transfer of ownership to a governmental entity or to a private partner with a conservation easement, the principal objective being to protect the land in perpetuity.

Although Louis has lived in Alabama for the past four decades and currently lives in Madison, Alabama, he is a native of Mississippi and especially passionate about conserving this land for future generations to appreciate. Breland Companies are some of the most successful businesses in the state of Alabama, operating a conglomerate of homebuilding, self-storage, and land development entities. Louis is an avid outdoorsman and has protected large tracts of land in Union Springs, Alabama through the placement of conservation easements.

Patti has had a fruitful career in real estate sales and works with Louis on both his business and personal endeavors. Patti moved south from Ohio and she and Louis are approaching a silver anniversary.

SALT is very grateful to Louis and Patti Breland for their profound generosity and their thoughtfulness about the local environment.



Louis and Patti Breland

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Every year, we invite all amateur and professional photographers to submit photos in SALT's annual photography contest. The contest includes categories such as flora, fauna, and people in nature. We encourage everyone to participate, because when we take the time to slow down, absorb our surroundings, and immerse ourselves with the environment around us, we see so much more. We connect the dots. We appreciate. We feel inspired. Or maybe, we are impacted in a way that enables individual or community action.

The "biophilia" hypothesis was coined by German-born American psychoanalyst Erich Fromm which was later used in late E.O. Wilson's work and is described as the "idea that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life".

**Photography Contest
Opens September 1
Closes October 20**

southalabamalandtrust.org/salt-photo-contest/

We offer the photography contest in hopes that it will rekindle a relationship with nature for you and for others.

Photo submissions in the contest are used throughout our publications and social media outlets. Through sharing photos, we can communicate with others in ways that words cannot express, and hope to inspire the protection, awareness, and conservation needs of our area. -- Katherine Kuhn, SALT Volunteer/Outreach Coordinator



Best in Show 2021 - Stillwell Bacon



WELCOME ABOARD !

Sheri Swartz recently joined the SALT team as Development Coordinator! Sheri has over 30 years of experience in communications, community organizing, and event planning. She began her career as a journalist for her hometown newspaper in Canal Fulton, Ohio as she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications from Malone College. After college, she worked for a trade show exhibit company before moving to Mobile, Alabama to work as an event coordinator and then production manager at the Mobile Convention and Civic Centers, where she fell in love with south Alabama. After a move to Fairhope, Sheri worked with the Fairhope Police Department for nearly 18 years where she developed many working relationships on community projects, managed outreach programs, and was the overseer of many city events. She has experience writing grants and bringing people together for a common goal.



Loving nature has been a way of life for Duane Miller. From growing up on a farm south of Huntsville to protecting natural habitats today, it is a love that has never felt like work. He spends endless hours walking local parks, taking nature photos, and now building nesting habitats for birds.

In January of this year, members of the Audubon Eastern Shore Birders approached Duane with a habitat project for prothonotary warblers. He explained, "they are cavity nesters near water. Wetlands are being filled in, swamps are being filled in, and their natural habitat has decreased."

This group discussion eventually brought Duane to SALT. He and other volunteers have been busy building a variety of bird boxes that were for sale at the Baldwin County Master Gardeners Plant Sale, Bald Eagle Bash and now at Corner Copia Gardens in Fairhope. Birdhouses can also be purchased on SALT's website and at their office.



Averaging fifty hours per month in the shop, Duane builds bird boxes that will bring more wildlife into our backyards and parks. The project has be-

come a fundraising effort for SALT which, in turn, will use the funds to save more critical habitat in our area!

If you would like to build your own bird boxes, register for this year's Alabama Coastal BirdFest. Duane will lead a workshop on how to construct boxes for particular species.

For ten years, Duane has also been a member of a volunteer group known as the "Bog Trotters." They have been especially helpful in management of SALT's Juniper Bog where they implement prescribed burns, control invasive species, and conduct other ecologically beneficial activities. Duane expressed how one of the members, Bill Summerour, "was a professor of mine at college in the 1970s. We were at Jacksonville State and became friends." A few decades later, the two ran into one another again when Summerour discovered a rare plant in Baldwin County. "Bill found a white fringed orchid that has never been seen in this area," replied Miller. The "Bog Trotters" became a group, along with SALT to nurture this critical habitat back to its original state. In a decade, that single plant grew to over 1,700. Each August, the group goes back to count the number of plants and report continued progress.

Duane has been married to his wife, Betty Lou, for 48 years. Photos above by Duane Miller.

-- Sheri Swartz, SALT Development Coordinator

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Photo by Paul Dovie, 2022 BirdFest Featured Photographer

ALABAMA COASTAL BIRDFEST SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 1

From September 28-October 1, hundreds of people from across the United States will descend on the Alabama Gulf Coast to take guided birding and nature trips, boat excursions, attend workshops and seminars on hummingbirds, beginner birding, butterflies, building a backyard habitat, and more. Event trips take place from Gulf Shores to Dauphin Island, from Bon Secour to the Mobile Tensaw Delta, to Mississippi and points in between. Each day is filled with walking trips, kayak trips, sunset cruises, and field workshops. The headquarters for BirdFest is the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center on the Battleship Parkway with a free, family-oriented Bird & Conservation Expo on the grounds the fourth day.

This year, we are proud to announce that Jon Dunn, one of the most respected birders in North America and chief consultant and author of much of the National Geographic field guide series, will be the keynote speaker and tour guide on selected birding trips. Jon has extensive knowledge of the identification and distribution of North American birds, and has published numerous papers in a wide variety of journals. He has also long been interested in Asian avifaunas. Jon co-

authored the sixth and seventh editions of the National Geographic Society's Field Guide to the Birds of North America. He was the Chief Consultant/Editor for the first five editions. He is the co-writer and host of the two-video set Large and Small Gulls of North America, as well as co-author (with Kimball Garrett) of Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution and the Peterson Field Guide to Warblers. Jon is a member of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Society and has served some 30 years on the California Bird Records Committee. He has also been on the Board of Directors for Western Field Ornithologists for over a decade. In 2012, Jon was the recipient of the ABA's Roger Tory Peterson Award, given for a lifetime of achievements in promoting the cause of birding.

The BirdFest schedule can be found online at southalabamalandtrust.org/birdfest/

Registration opens August 1, trips and workshops will be filled on a first come first served basis.

-- Connie Whitaker, SALT Executive Director

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Photo by John Oldshue

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 Phil and Kara Wilbourn
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 Y Weeks Community Association

The 12th Annual Bald Eagle Bash netted nearly \$70,000, thanks to the generosity of longtime and many new supporters.

The Bald Eagle Bash Committee and its co-chairs, Chesley Allegri and Kendall Dexter, led the effort to put on a party that would both celebrate community and raise money for the preservation and conservation of vital habitat in South Alabama.

We made a conscious effort to make this event more sustainable with renewable or recyclable products, and promoted local fisheries, restaurants, and music!

With 15 restaurants/caterers and live music by Ross Newell followed by Paw Paw's Medicine Cabinet, we topped off the evening with a gorgeous sunset on Weeks Bay.



A special thank you...

to the amazing volunteers, photographers, committee members, and the following participating restaurants and caterers that donated their time and shared their talents: Blue Marlin Restaurant, Chef Cassie Personal Chef Services, Dew Drop Inn, Divine Empanadas, Dragonfly Foodbar, The Gulf Coast Culinary Institute, Hope Farm, Master Joe's, Provision, Sunset Pointe, Little Coastal Kitchen, Moe's BBQ, Tin Top, Wok by d'Bay, and Warehouse Bakery. Additional thanks are in order for Brew Bus Gulf Coast, Open Water, Bon Secour Fisheries, and Billy's Seafood. It's not a party without craft beer from Fairhope Brewing and Braided River Brewing, and wine from M&J Personal Selections and Pinnacle Imports, too!



Photos top and bottom left - Stephen Savage
Photo bottom right - Sherry Stimpson Frost

WEEKS BAY RESERVE CZMA CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) which was enacted to address the challenges of continued growth in coastal areas while protecting natural resources. Recognizing the importance of estuaries, the CZMA called for the establishment of a national system of estuarine sanctuaries (now called the National Estuarine Research Reserve System-NERRS) protected for purposes of long-term research, public awareness, and education. The first sanctuary was South Slough, in southern Oregon, designated in 1974. Weeks Bay NERR, the 16th Reserve in the system, was designated in 1986, beginning with around 1,000 acres. The Reserve system has expanded greatly through the years, and officially welcomed the 30th Reserve, Connecticut NERR, at a designation ceremony on May 21, 2022.

Each Reserve serves as a unique "living laboratory" where staff conduct research and monitoring as well as public education and outreach activities. Through integrated research and education, the Reserves assist communities in developing tools and know-how to effectively address resource management issues. Locally, the Weeks Bay NERR protects approximately 10,000 acres of land and water, monitors water quality, and provides support to visiting researchers. The Reserve also provides outreach and education for all ages and works with the local community to promote wise stewardship of natural resources.

A recently published study, commissioned by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and The Pew Charitable Trusts, offers a glimpse into the significant contributions that the NERRS makes to local economies. In its review of four of the 29 NERR sites that existed in 2021, the study conservatively estimated that together, they generate more than \$165 million in annual revenue for their communities, including \$56.4 million in wages paid for at least 1,762 jobs. Additionally, NERR sites in total protect nearly 1.4 million acres of coastal habitat for research, stewardship, and public access, and much of the land is of crucial habitat and nesting or calving grounds for diverse species. In fact, wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, protecting and improving water quality, providing vital habitats for fish and wildlife, storing floodwaters, and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. However, coastal areas are more populated than anywhere else. About 40% of the entire world population lives within 60 miles of the coast with 29% of the US population living in coastal counties. The 2020 U.S. Census ranks Baldwin County as the 7th fastest-growing area in the country and the fastest-growing county in Alabama. This rapid growth exerts strong pressure on coastal land-use demands, often at the expense of natural habitats and native species. These statistics show that the CZMA is just as important today as it was 50 years ago and will continue to assist in managing future challenges the best way possible with the knowledge at hand.



The Weeks Bay Reserve is managed by the State Lands Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through a cooperative agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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Photo by Kathy Hicks

WHAT'S HAPPENING

August (Date TBD)

Members only at limited capacity
Guided tours of bog - white fringed orchids

August 1

Alabama Coastal BirdFest Registration Opens

September 1 - October 20

SALT Annual Photo Contest

September 21

Benefit Bingo at Braided River Brewing

September 28 - October 1

Alabama Coastal BirdFest

October 22

Floating Cleanup - Meaher State Park