

Issue 3, 2023



ACE Magazine

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ALABAMA CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



TRUMAN FINDS HIS PASSION

with his Papa by his side

[see story](#)

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ON THE COVER

Truman Hentz found a way to grow in his confidence while enjoying the outdoors with his papa, Mike Lunceford. Fishing became a favorite activity between the two and helped a young child develop in many areas. Someone once said, "Time invested in our youth is never wasted!"



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About Us

— **Who is the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officer Association (ACEOA)?** —

We are a nonprofit 501C(3) organization comprised of active and retired conservation enforcement officers and supporting associate members. Although we are not affiliated with any state agency, many of our goals and activities seek to support the mission of the Alabama Department of Conservation and its law enforcement officers and programs.

— **What are our goals?** —

We seek to conserve Alabama's natural resources for future generations through educational and outreach programs. We support conservation law enforcement officers through improved public relations and professional standards.

— **How are we funded?** —

The ACEOA is funded through membership dues, private and corporate donations and the sale of advertising space in the Association publication (ACE magazine).

— **Where are our funds spent?** —

Expenditures of Association funds are decided by an elected board of directors comprised of conservation officers.

Our funds are spent on a variety of education and outreach activities to include hunting, fishing and outdoor events tailored to area youth, disabled persons, women, veterans or newcomers to the outdoors.

The Association may provide training needs, technical support or other items to assist in law enforcement missions of the Alabama Department of Conservation.

We support charitable causes and aid to families of conservation employees during financial hardships caused by natural disasters, injuries or death.

We award educational scholarships with an emphasis on students pursuing careers in professional resource conservation.

— **Why?** —

The ACEOA is driven by a common passion among members to ensure that future generations enjoy the same opportunities to experience Alabama's natural resources that we have. Conservation officers truly believe in their mission to conserve, protect and enhance our state's resources.

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Jo Ann Johnson

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ACE Magazine

Gayle Morrow - *Editor*

For questions about your District Director, ACEOA, or membership contact:

Jo Ann Johnson, 574 Roark Trace, Montgomery, AL., 36116, Cell 334.451.2042, Email edaceoa@gmail.com





A Note from the President

By Joe Goddard, ACEOA President

With the summer months behind us and hunting season in full swing, I would like to thank everyone for this opportunity to be the ACEOA President. I have thoroughly enjoyed serving on the ACEOA Board for the past ten years, and I have worked alongside some of the greatest leaders during this time. I would especially like to thank former President Vance Wood for his hard work and dedication to the ACEOA during his tenure as President. Over the past four years, He has worked alongside former Executive Director Kevin Dodd and current Executive Director Jo Ann Johnson to advance the cause of the ACEOA. One of his many achievements includes creating the Equip Alabama Wardens Program, which is continuing to grow and be successful in purchasing equipment for officers in the field. He has also spent countless hours managing our social media page to keep the ACEOA members and the public aware of current events. Thank you, Vance.

For the next few months, my main focus will be working with the board to coordinate and host the 2024 conference set for June 21-23, 2024, at Gulf Shores State Park Lodge. By the time you are reading this letter, hopefully, everyone has already reserved their room and has planned to be at the conference. The board is extremely excited to host the conference again at Gulf Shores. This year, we will have many exciting activities for everyone, including a top gun competition, golf tournament, family night social, and a formal dinner. We have also invited Kevin Behr from Ohio DNR to share his story about surviving a life-threatening altercation during a night hunting detail. In addition to all these activities, there will be

a board meeting for all association members to discuss the direction of the ACEOA, budget, and give away door prizes. As you all can see, this will be a great conference, and I hope everyone will come ready for a good time.

One last thing I am very excited about is a new website the board has created to sell ACEOA merchandise and help support the association. Check out our website and purchase a t-shirt or hoodie. ACEOA.org





Note from ACEOA Executive Director

By Jo Ann Johnson, Executive Director

Midway through my second year serving as the Executive Director, I am still amazed at the impact this organization continues to have on the preservation of Alabama's natural resources. Mostly, my time is spent processing receipts and writing checks to fund the various outreach and education events throughout the state. However, each time I write a check or file a receipt, it warms my heart to know it is making a difference in the lives of the thousands of youth who attend. And because of the continued support, ACEOA was able to support more events in 2023 than ever before. I am excited to serve with the new ACEOA president, Joe Goddard, as I have witnessed firsthand his passion for this organization and his vision for its future.

Speaking of the future, ACEOA is excited to host the 2024 Summer Conference in beautiful Gulf Shores State Park on June 21-23, 2024. This weekend event is sure to be an inspirational one and fun for members and their families. We are excited to host Kevin Behr as our keynote speaker at our dinner the Saturday night of the conference. An officer for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Behr suffered extensive injuries after being shot from behind during a poaching investigation. Behr's experience is every officer's and their family's worst nightmare turned reality. Behr will share his story of survival, courage, and determination, and ACEOA could not be more honored to have him at our conference. Other fun activities are planned, and of course, the conference is being held at the beach!

But for now, Alabama is deep into its deer hunting season, and if you and your family of hunters are anything like ours, we are constantly struggling to find the time to take off to the woods. Whether it be work, school, sports, or other commitments robbing us of that precious time with wildlife, there never seems to be a free weekend just to take off and focus on bringing that freezer meat home.

Our season begins in November, and sometimes, we don't get into a stand until January! Not this year. Plans are already in the works for my husband and youngest daughter to put on their camo and go hunting during the youth weekend prior to the official start of the season in our region. By the time you read this, that weekend will have come and gone, but I know no matter what they put in the freezer, they will make memories to last a lifetime. And isn't that what it's really all about?

Shifting gears a bit and looking ahead at 2024, I am eager to be a part of the growth and reach of ACEOA. 2023 saw the most significant jump in membership, and we expect our numbers to keep growing. As a reminder, one of the benefits of membership is enrollment in the PORAC Legal Defense Fund Public Safety Insurance Plan. PORAC LDF recognizes that when a public safety officer is targeted, our members need not be burdened with the worry of paying for a high-quality defense. Whether the case costs \$100,000 or over \$1,000,000, LDF always stands shoulder to shoulder alongside its members with the necessary funding.

As membership rises, so does our capacity to support an increasing number of initiatives and events that make a difference in the lives of Alabama's youth. When a youth is excited and engaged at one of the various ACEOA hunting or fishing events, a seed is planted in that young mind, and hopefully, they catch the "fever" of outdoor life. When so many youth today are consumed by electronics, being outdoors away from "the noise" is a super beneficial way to "go off the grid," as our family refers to it, clear the mind, and decompress from the pressure of those work, school, and sports commitments I referenced earlier. A larger membership means we bring this fever to a larger audience, and I can't wait to share those outcomes in the months to come.

Happy New Year! ●



ACEOA Awards Four Educational Scholarships for 2023



*Jacie Lynn Bracket
Jacksonville State University
Criminal Justice Major*



*Emma Sutherland
UT at Chattanooga
Graphic Design Major*



ACEOA AWARDS FOUR EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS FOR 2023 – *continued*



Chase Little
Troy University
Criminal Justice Major



Grace Hicks
Beacon College
Humanities Major

Congratulations to each of you, and good luck in your field of study!

Scholarship Guidelines

ACEOA grants up to five \$1,000 educational scholarships each year.

Family members of conservation officers are eligible regardless of the type of degree they are pursuing.

Other applicants are limited to degrees in wildlife, conservation law enforcement, or fishery sciences.

Applicants should submit a letter of need describing degree goals and email and phone contact information.

Applicants should provide proof of enrollment from the school registrar's office and include a recent photo.

The deadline for submitting an application is July 15th.

Applications must be sent to:

ACEOA Scholarship
574 Roark Trace
Montgomery, Alabama 36116





Kidz Korner

By Carly Hentz

Mike Lunceford doesn't have a boat. He isn't a professional fisherman. He is Truman Hentz's Papa and number one fishing partner, so he is always ready to spend quality time with the eight-year-old. Luckily, there is a small lake on their church property, so it is easy to spend time searching for tadpoles, skipping rocks, or, most importantly, fishing.

Fishing became a passion for Truman somewhat by chance. He doesn't come from a family of fishermen, and it is definitely not a popular hobby in his circle of friends. He has tried it all: basketball, football, baseball, golf, and even a brief and unsuccessful stint with soccer. What all his pursuits have lacked is encouragement and confidence. As a child who has struggled in school and to build relationships, Truman desperately needed a positive outlet that would allow him to experience success. Enter a church pond and a patient family, and a love for fishing was born.

While opportunities to compete and practice in this sport are not as readily available as the batting cages or the football field, the community of people ready to pour into the next generation of fishermen is truly unmatched. From the National Crappie League Youth Rodeo representatives to The Alabama Wildlife Federation Youth Fishing Rodeo Team to the fishing pro at the local Bass Pro Shop, Truman was surrounded by experts who were not only willing to share tips and tricks but also encourage him along the way.

Fishing has even crept into Truman's academic life. His most treasured gift from his seventh birthday was an autographed copy of Mike Bolton's "Ultimate Guide to Alabama Fishing." Bolton, a family friend, has amassed a celebrity status with Truman as the definitive expert of all things fishing. Truman became an avid reader of the guide that was far beyond his current reading ability. Out of sheer will to learn and understand, Truman grew as a reader. Bolton's book has been shared with Truman's second-grade class and is even the subject of a book report featured in the halls of his school.

Truman's passion for fishing has transformed the free time of the entire family. He spends most weekends planning a fishing trip and convincing his loved ones to tag along. Even his 4-year-old brother owns a tackle box and rod and reel because of Truman. He has even been known to trick unsuspecting adults into an impromptu fishing trip. On a day out of school, he asked his Mimi for a picnic. Upon arrival at the lake, he revealed that he had hidden his fishing gear and was ready for an afternoon of fishing. During a family vacation to Destin, Truman barely saw the beach. He instead spent hours a day on the banks of a private lake, where his persistence finally paid off. Truman caught a nearly eight-pound bass that has been the topic of conversation for months amongst the people who love Truman. His eyes brighten, and his little voice fills with excitement whenever he can share news of his prize catch. Every fisherman he has met has graciously listened and encouraged as an eight-year-old tells an often embellished "you should see this fish" story.

Through hours of conversations with a seasoned generation of sportsmen, a respect for conservation has been subtly planted into this young fisherman's heart. Truman's love for fishing is matched by his commitment to caring for the places his beloved fish live. On church clean-up days, Truman insists on tagging along to ensure the lake he loves is well maintained. He has even crafted his own rake to help keep brush and debris out of the water so that his fish stay healthy. He is passing these ideals on to his friends and family out of the hope that his fishing holes are healthy for a lifetime of fishing. For eight-year-old Truman Hentz, that is a commitment for the long run. It is a big responsibility in exchange for a sport and a community that has given him so much. He is smarter, happier, and more confident than ever because a community welcomed him and nurtured a passion that will follow him for years to come.

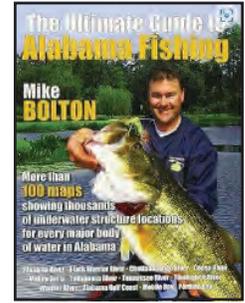


KIDZ KORNER – *continued*

Mike Bolton

Author of “The Ultimate Guide to Alabama Fishing” Mike Bolton has served as an outdoors writer for The Birmingham News more than 30 years and has spent thousands upon thousands of hours on Alabama waterways with not only the state’s best tournament and weekend anglers but pro anglers but as well. It was during those hundreds of fishing trips that he observed

the fishing locations and techniques used by Alabama’s top fishermen. Many of those top anglers were gracious enough to mark structure on maps and discuss at length their successful techniques on tape. All told, more than 80 fishermen contributed to this book.



2nd Place winner at the National Crappie League Kid’s Rodeo! These folks were so helpful and encouraging.



Mimi was tricked to thinking it was a picnic.



Tru finally catches the fish he’d chased all summer with his Papa.



Might be the one we threw back a few weeks ago!



Said it must have weighed 20 pounds...
A true fisherman!



School book report on fishing



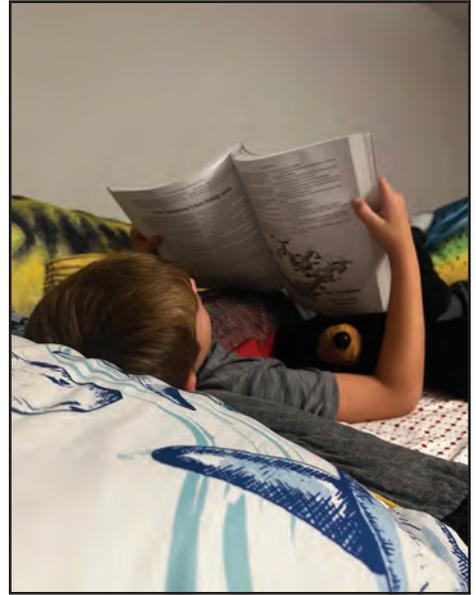
KIDZ KORNER – *continued*



All geared up for some fishing



There's lots of patience to be learned while fishing.



Studying Michael Bolton's book



Proper gear includes hat and waders like Papa's!



Little brother, Shep, gets in on the fun and hooks 1st fish!

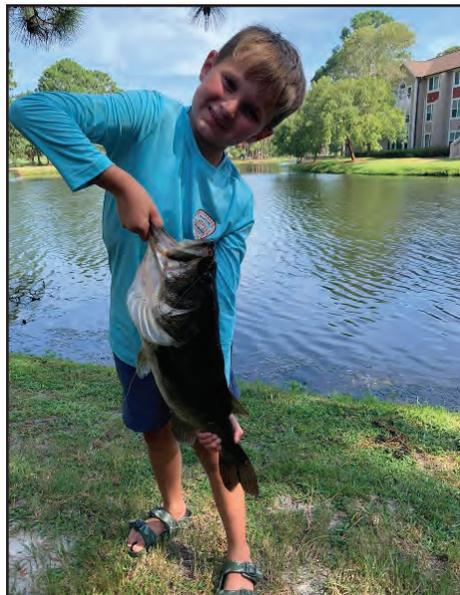




The Big Fish Story

It happened during a family trip to San Destin in the summer of 2023. Of course Truman brought his fishing gear because there was a pond on the property. As it turned out, Truman had rigged at least four rods to do various jobs as he had learned from watching the

YouTube channel on TV. Papa had no idea of the plan Truman had for fishing those few days. To his surprise, his grandson had decided to catch his own bait with one of the rigs. Truman landed an eight pound bass with using a small brim he had caught for bait. ●





Potential Record Shark Highlights 90th ADSFR

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

What better way to start Shark Week than to see a potential state record tiger shark weighed in at last weekend's 90th annual Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo at Dauphin Island.

Brett Rutledge brought a huge tiger shark to the scales on the first day of the rodeo, and the scales registered 1,019 pounds, eclipsing the current record of 988.5 pounds caught by Larry Eberly in 1990.

Almost as excited as Rutledge after the record-breaking weight was called was Dr. Marcus Drymon, assistant rodeo judge and professor at Mississippi State University, who was thrilled with the opportunity to examine the species. Drymon is considered an expert on this shark species that inhabits the Gulf of Mexico, and he has a team of researchers ready to collect data from any shark weighed in at the rodeo, which had separate categories for tiger sharks and bull sharks, both managed by NOAA Fisheries. In addition to Rutledge's shark, Eric Van Driessche weighed in a 656.4-pound tiger, and Cody Crumbley landed a 601.5-pounder. In the bull shark category, Conner Blake weighed in a 354-pounder, followed by Chris Phelps at 330.5 pounds and Nicholas Jordan at 207 pounds.

"My team is taking samples, specifically vertebrae, which is what we use to tell how old these sharks are," Drymon said. "When we do age-based stock assessments, the age structure of the population is critical. So, when we are able to perform research on these large individuals, it's good for us to be able to determine the health of the stock.

"But we will also take a host of other samples, like fin clips, muscle tissue and biopsies from the liver and spleen. We will look at stomach contents. Every sample that can possibly be used will be taken from these fish."

Many anglers are reporting more shark encounters offshore when fishing for reef fish or trolling for big game species. The sharks are preying on the hooked fish, and

anglers are reeling in half-eaten target species. Drymon said it depends on how you look at it when it comes to shark populations.

"To me, it's a perception issue," he said. "Are there more sharks in the water than 10 years ago? The answer is yes. The more important question to me is are there more sharks in the water than 40 or 50 years ago? The answer is no. It's what scientists call a shifting baseline. The farther we get removed from a virgin biomass of a population, the less accurate we remember what that population originally looked like.

"As these sharks were overfished in the 70s and 80s, their populations really plummeted. The populations are recovering now, which is a blessing. But many of the species have still not reached their target rebuilding goals."

Drymon said one example of a shark species that has been protected from harvest in recent years because of perceived low populations is the sandbar shark, which is one of the ridgeback species with a raised ridge of skin from the dorsal fin down its back. The dorsal fin is also very large and located closer to the nose than the tail.

"Everybody says there are a lot more sandbar sharks than 10 years ago, and that is the case," he said. "That species has been under a harvest moratorium for many years. As a result, populations have increased. That's really good. It's now time for the next round of stock assessments of sandbar sharks to assess what that population is and if harvest of that population can resume. It's important to remember that the goal of NOAA Fisheries is to maximize harvest of a population while ensuring its sustainable production."

Although the great hammerhead shark was not a category in this year's rodeo, Drymon was able to gain a great deal of data on a 14-foot hammerhead that was found on the shore at Orange Beach earlier this year.

"A large female, gravid (pregnant), was found washed



POTENTIAL RECORD SHARK HIGHLIGHTS 90TH ADSFR – *continued*

up on the beach,” Drymon said. “The folks there were nice enough to give us a call and see if we could make use of a sample like that, which of course we can.”

After Drymon and his team performed the necropsy, the hammerhead had 40 almost identical pups about 18 inches long.

“It’s unusual for us to see a female that is that big and gravid,” he said. “It’s incredible to see a female that size with that many pups. It’s an animal that we rarely have access to, so even basic information like how many pups can a gravid female have, that information is really, really useful. The size of those pups compared to the smallest free-swimming shark that we know of gives us valuable information when we go to assess the status of that shark population.”

The team examined, in detail, the adult’s heart, liver, esophagus, stomach, scroll valve, spleen, kidneys and pancreas. None of the organs exhibited any signs of trauma or had abnormal lesions or unusual parasites. Muscle tissue from the adult was removed, which can be helpful in determining feeding habits as well as heavy metal and/or microplastic contamination.

“By process of elimination, the most likely cause of death was an interaction with a fisherman, either commercial or recreational,” Drymon said. “The reason we say that is we know hammerheads, specifically great hammerheads, have what we call a high post-release mortality. Even if you catch that fish and let it go and it

swims off, there’s a pretty good chance it’s not going to make it. It has to do with their physiology, the size of their gills, blood chemistry, things like that. Inherently, they’re a vulnerable species to capture stress.”

Finally, several fin clips were removed from the adult and the pups. The DNA extracted from the adult fin clips will be used in a current study examining genetic population structure, including the number of breeding individuals in the population. Because the broods of many shark species are sired by more than one male, the fin clips from the pups will be used to determine relatedness of the siblings.

A video surfaced on social media earlier this year of a hammerhead in shallow water near the beach in the Florida Panhandle. Drymon said the likely scenario was the hammerhead was preying on a stingray.

“We know that hammerheads love to eat stingrays,” he said. “We suspect that one of the reasons they’ve evolved that head shape is because of that predator-prey interaction. Of course, stingrays are found in shallow coastal areas, so it’s not unusual for a hammerhead to be near the beach, swimming around, looking for a stingray.

“Seeing one like that is really special. My advice is to get out of the water and take pictures. Enjoy that like you would in a national park when you see a black bear from a distance. Hammerheads are one of nature’s fantastic animals. If you get to see one alive, that’s a healthy ecosystem.” ●



A potential state record tiger shark of 1,019 pounds was weighed in at last weekend’s Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo.

Photo courtesy of ADSFR



Conservation Enforcement Officer of the Year

Sergeant Bill Freeman was presented the Conservation Enforcement Officer of the Year Award at the 2023 Alabama Wildlife Federation Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards banquet. The Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) held the banquet, co-sponsored by Alabama Power Company and PowerSouth Energy, on Friday, August 4, 2023, at The Marriott Legends at Capitol Hill in Prattville. Governor Kay Ivey provided a congratulatory video specifically prepared for the 2023 Award Recipients.

The AWF Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards (GCAA) are the most respected conservation honors in Alabama. Over the past 50 years, AWF has pre-

sented these awards to individuals and organizations that greatly contribute to the conservation of Alabama's wildlife and related natural resources.

Bill Freeman is a Conservation Enforcement Officer serving in Bullock County. Sergeant Freeman has maintained a constant caseload, with over 145 cases, citations, and warnings issued in the last four years, with a 100% conviction rate.

He also serves on the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Committee on Minorities in Natural Resource Conservation. This group develops strategies to recruit, sponsor, and assist minority





CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR – *continued*

students who want to pursue outdoor professions. Bill guided the development of Tuskegee University's Outdoor Conservation Curriculum.

Sergeant Freeman also designs, coordinates, and delivers outdoor access opportunities to all Alabamians. He spearheads the Academics Afield Program at Alabama A&M, Tuskegee, and Auburn Universities. He also assists with the Adult Mentored Hunting Program, Go Fish Alabama, Trapping 101, and Firearms 101 Programs – all designed to Recruit, Retain, and Re-activate hunters and anglers.

One of his peers described him this way, “Anytime someone needs a helping hand, a reliable counterpart, a leader, a mentor, - Bill is the person to call.”

Presenting Sponsors for the event were Alabama Power Company and PowerSouth Energy. The Westervelt Company, Lockheed Martin, Alabama Farm Credit, and Alabama AG Credit → → → Land & Farm Lenders sponsored the food and refreshments for the event. Alabama Gulf Seafood was sponsored by the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission. Additional sponsor support was provided by the National Wildlife Federation, Southeast Region, David & Kelly Thomas, Ralph & Catherine Martin,

III, CDG Engineers & Associates, First South Farm Credit, Josh & Mary Virginia Mandell, Lee Thuston, Russell Lands, Stifel, and Central Alabama Electric Co-Op.

AWF's GCAA was created to promote leadership by example and, in turn, increase the conservation of the natural resources in the state of Alabama, including its wildlife, forests, soils, water, and air. The program is designed to bring about a greater knowledge and awareness of conservation practices and projects and to give proper recognition to those persons and organizations that make outstanding contributions to the natural resource welfare of their community and state.

The Alabama Wildlife Federation, established by sportsmen in 1935, is the state's oldest and largest citizens' conservation organization. The mission of the Alabama Wildlife Federation, a 501(c) 3 non-profit group supported by membership dues and donations, is to promote conservation and wise use of Alabama's wildlife and related natural resources as a basis for economic and social prosperity. To learn more about AWF, including membership details, programs, and projects, contact the Alabama Wildlife Federation at 334-285-4550 or visit www.alabamawildlife.org. ●





Hunting and fishing licenses On Sale

Hunting and fishing licenses for the 2023-2024 season went on sale August 21. To view this year's hard card designs, visit

<https://www.outdooralabama.com/licensecards>. #outdoors #alabama #conservation #hunting #fishing

2023-2024

HUNTING & FISHING LICENSES

ON SALE

AUGUST 21

Featuring six new hard card designs

VIEW DESIGNS

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Outdoor ALABAMA
GO HUNT. GO FISH. Get Outdoors!



BOATING SAFETY FOR HUNTERS (and other cold weather boaters)

By Paul Barnard, U.S. Coast Guard Heartland Safe Boating

Every year hundreds of thousands of hunters take to the water by boat to access their favorite hunting spots. Unfortunately, too many of those boaters never return safely from their trips and many more have avoidable close calls. Let's look at how to stay safe and legal when hunting ventures involve boating. Much of this is applicable to all cold-weather boaters as well.

Boaters who use any kind of motor on a boat under 39.4 feet are required to display red and green 112.5-degree side lights as well as an all-around white light that is visible for 360 degrees and not obscured by people, gear or any part of the boat. These must be purpose-built navigation lights. LED strip lights, solar garden lights and Christmas lights don't meet the requirement. Don't laugh, we have seen such!

What about light bars and spotlights? Oh boy, does this topic ever stir up controversy! Duck hunters often benefit from supplemental lighting to get to and locate their blinds. According to the Navigation Rules, supplemental lights are illegal if they do any one of 3 things. If they obscure the vessels navigation lights, if they interfere with boater's night vision or if they are of a color or character that can be mistaken for other lights prescribed by the Navigation Rules, they are illegal. Continuous use of LED light bars is likely going to be illegal based on the first two of the above. This is especially true when running navigable or higher traffic waterways en route to the blind. Intermittent use of a focused beam spotlight is likely the best strategy. Take a look at the image of the boat with the supplemental lighting. Legal or illegal, and why?

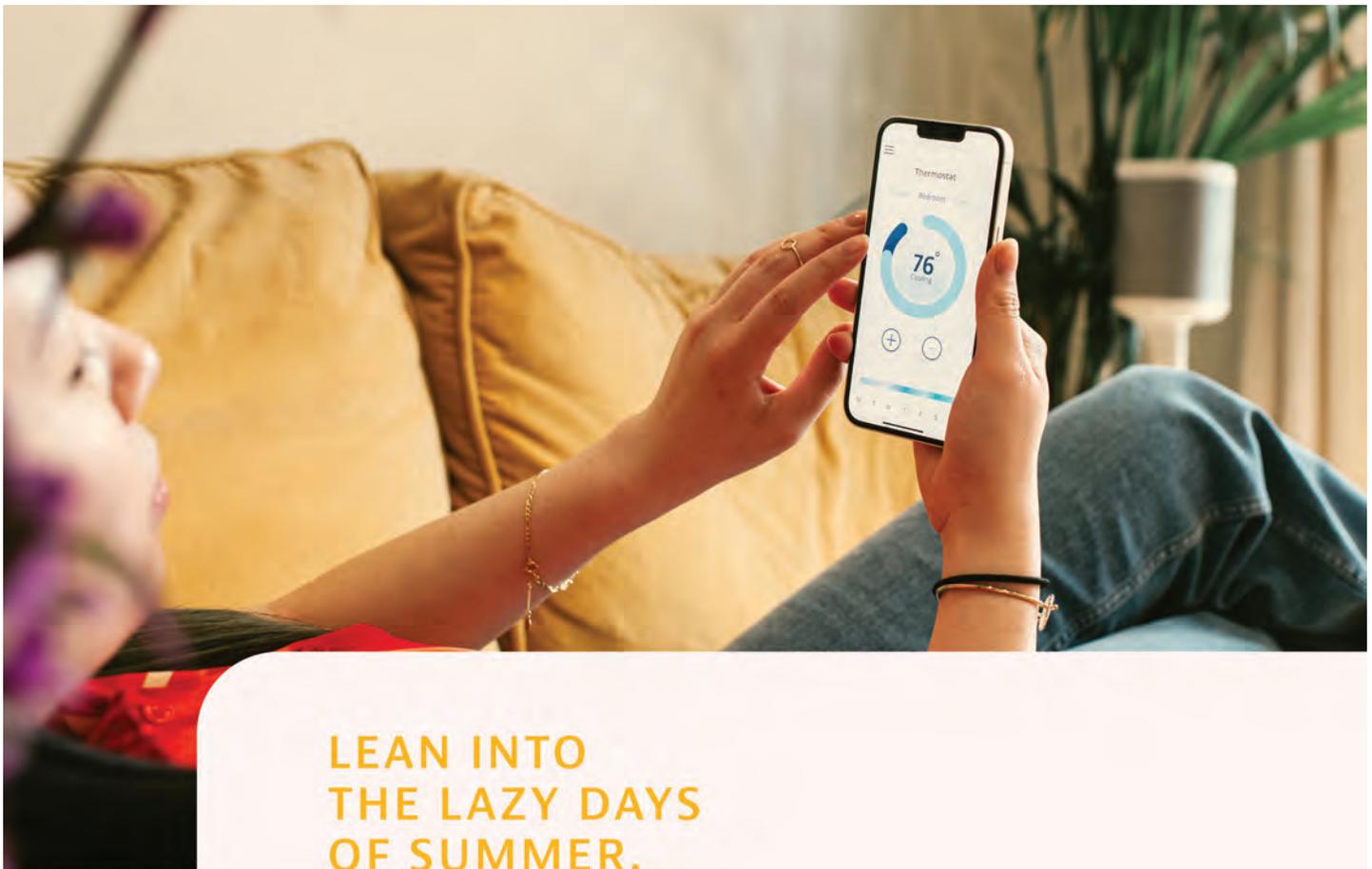
Hunting boats are often minimally equipped smaller boats with low freeboard. Hunters must often cross larger bodies of water to get to their best spots. They often hunt when the water is cold and the bitter winter winds stir up

angry seas. Transits may take hunters through fast flowing rivers and streams. The boats are frequently loaded with hunting gear like climbing stands, blind material and dozens of duck decoys. Hunters wear heavy clothes and waders. All of those factors combine to present an elevated risk of swamping, capsizing and drowning.

Ducks often fly when the winds are howling. Cold fronts may pass during hunting trips and bring treacherous conditions with them. Combine this with heavily loaded small boats, and it's a recipe for disaster. Avoid big water when the winds are high or are forecast to be high. Watch the weather closely, paying particular attention to the radar, wind forecast and tidal forecast in tidal areas.

Just as tropical storms create surge that delivers high water to our coastal areas, cold fronts blow the water out of our tidal areas. Unfortunately, hard groundings are common in tidal areas during hunting seasons. Look at the picture that the stranded hunters took when the combination of north wind and low tide blew the water out of the marsh.

Wear a Life Jacket, also known as a Personal Flotation Device (PFD). Just do it. Modern PFDs are comfortable, non-confining and affordable. Some of the inflatable PFDs are available in camo. They are camo when worn, but the bladder is bright yellow when inflated. They can easily be adjusted to fit over bulky hunting clothing. There are many other approved camo life jackets and flotation coats on the market. Coast Guard approved inflatable belt PFDs are so comfortable boaters may forget they even have one on. Check out the one in the picture. For boaters who won't wear a PFD, their PFDs must be kept readily available. They can't be buried beneath a mound of blind material and a pile of decoy bags.

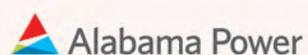


LEAN INTO THE LAZY DAYS OF SUMMER.

Do just a *little* less and make a difference.

When it comes to saving energy in the summertime, we've got one top tip: don't underestimate the power of little changes. From turning off unnecessary lights to bumping your thermostat up just a degree or two, it's the small things that can make a big difference.

Find more energy-saving tips at alabamapower.com/lazysummer.



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BOATING SAFETY FOR HUNTERS (AND OTHER COLD WEATHER BOATERS) – *continued*

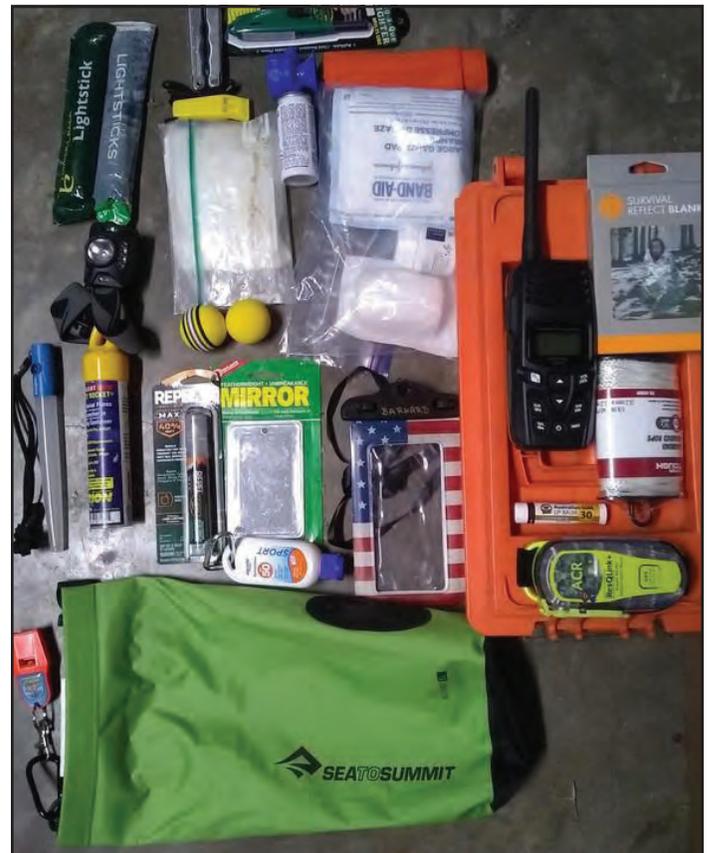
Boaters need to consider how they will communicate when something goes wrong. Too many hunters rely exclusively on a cell phone. Prime hunting areas are often beyond cell phone range. The kind of accidents that find hunters needing to call for help may also find their cell phone wet. It's always a good idea to keep cell phones in a waterproof enclosure. Most hunting skiffs aren't equipped with an installed VHF radio. In most of the Coastal regions of the country, a handheld VHF radio will have the power to reach Coast Guard antennas. A Personal Locator Beacon can provide emergency communications in areas without VHF coverage or phone coverage. There are reasonably priced commercial subscription-based satellite communication devices on the market as well.

Hunters often travel in periods of darkness. Beyond that, poor visibility conditions are prevalent during hunting seasons. The law requires boaters to travel at a speed that will allow them to stop in time to avoid an accident. Another way of expressing that is that boaters should not out-drive their line of sight. Many of the waterways

that hunters travel, snake back and forth and have tall vegetation growing along the banks, making it impossible to see other vessels. Boaters have to expect other boaters around those blind bends and waterway intersections, and throttle back. GPS is NOT a radar. It may show boaters where they need to go, but it won't show other boats. It seems each year we see fatal accidents involving boaters traveling at planing speed using their GPS as if it were a radar. Budget enough time to travel at a safe speed.

File a detailed float plan. Every year reports of overdue boaters come in with very little information about the voyage or the boat. There are a lot of float plan forms available on the internet. Hunters need to fill one out and leave it with a responsible person who can call authorities in the event they don't return on schedule. Be sure to leave a picture of the boat with the float plan.

Cold kills. Cold water and cold air kill. Cold water shock can set in when water temperatures are 70 degrees and below. People naturally and uncontrollably gasp when



BOATING SAFETY FOR HUNTERS (AND OTHER COLD WEATHER BOATERS) – *continued*

immersed in cold water. If you are under water without a PFD when you take that reflexive breath, you are in deep trouble. In cold water a PFD protects us in the initial stages and buys us time during the 10 or so minutes that follow when we have some useful motor control. Cold water has an incapacitating effect. Add in heavy, wet clothing and boaters may not be able to reenter their boats if they fall overboard. The danger of hypothermia persists when we are out of the cold water. Having a change of clothes in a waterproof bag can be a lifesaver.

Carry an emergency kit and prepare to be seen. Offshore boaters carry a ditch kit. Inshore boaters should carry a waterproof box or bag with safety, survival and signaling equipment. The kit should include flares, fire starter, flashlights, glow sticks, bug spray, sunscreen, a multi tool, some basic first aid supplies, cordage, signal mirrors, communication devices, emergency blankets, orange bandanas and anything else that might help hunters stay warm and dry or help draw attention. As hunters we dress so that we won't be seen, so having something that helps us be seen can be vital. The silver survival

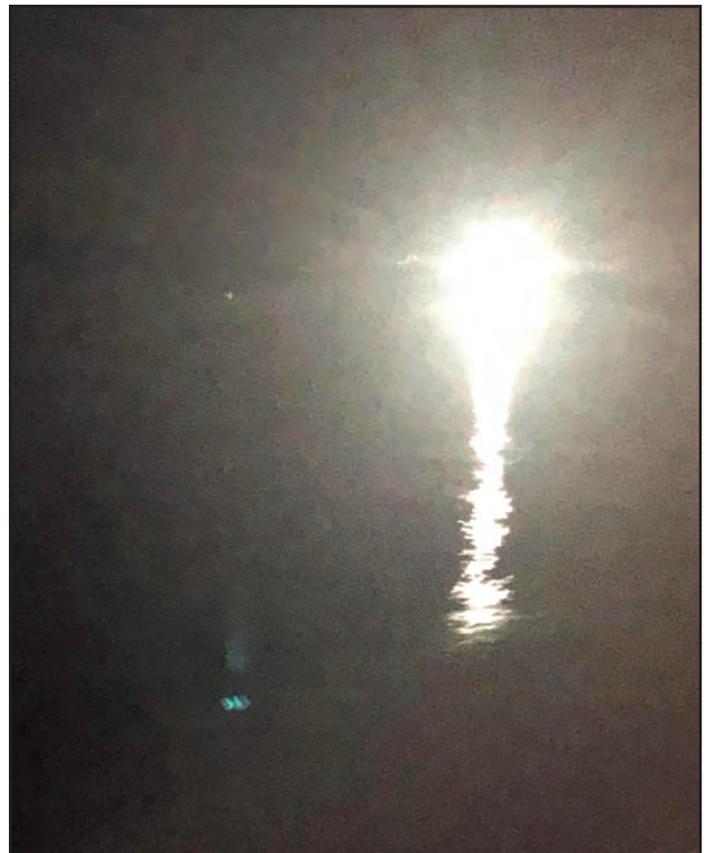
blankets check a number of boxes. They can keep hunters dry, and they also make a great search target. Keep this kit on deck and immediately available. Use jacket pockets for smaller safety, survival and signaling items.

Protect your best friend. Our beloved dogs are tough and good swimmers, but they can suffer hypothermia and can't swim indefinitely. A neoprene dog PFD will provide flotation and a little added warmth.

Whether hunting from a boat or engaging in other kinds of cold weather boating, cold water and fall and winter boating conditions have unique boating safety concerns.

A little extra preparation and attention to safety can go a long way toward ensuring hunters get to enjoy another day in the blind. Let's do a quick recap.

- Wear a PFD
- Watch the weather and respect cold water for the cruel killer that it is
- Travel at a safe speed
- Have a reliable means of communication
- File a float plan with a picture of the boat
- Carry a kit





Thermal Imaging Units Received in Honor of Conservation Enforcement Officer Greg Gilliland

By Joel Glover

One of the most important components of the working life of a Conservation Enforcement Officer is the ability to cultivate and maintain relationships. While that may sound simple enough, it is often full of challenges. Relationships between law enforcement officers and the public can be difficult for multiple reasons; however, they are imperative.

The sporting public and especially landowners need a positive relationship with the officers in their county. Conservation Enforcement Officer Greg Gilliland understood this and enjoyed good relationships with many Talladega County landowners. One such relationship was with Brian Chrichton, President of the Talladega Superspeedway.

Someone might ask what would the biggest, fastest, most competitive superspeedway in the world need with a game warden. You might be surprised. The fact is the superspeedway takes up a small amount of the 2700-acre parcel it calls home. Much of the remainder of the prop-

erty consists of wildlife habitat and the corresponding wildlife that comes with it. When you have that much acreage to try and monitor, a good relationship with your local Conservation Enforcement Officer is crucial.

After Greg's untimely death, Mr. Chrichton contacted the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officer Association (ACEOA), indicating they wanted to do something to honor Greg. Equip Alabama Wardens is a program of the ACEOA designed to provide tools and equipment needed by Officers to protect wildlife resources and safeguard landowners and the public. Specific equipment needs are identified by local Officers and vetted through law enforcement program administrators. Willing donors can contribute any amount toward purchasing a region-specific item and receive a 501(c)(3) confirmation of contribution for tax purposes. The ACEOA Board of Directors oversees the purchase of the intended item and the transfer directly to Officers in need. 100% of every donation to Equip Alabama Wardens goes directly to the item purchased. All items purchased become the property of the Department of Conservation, and all costs for administration of this program are covered by ACEOA income from advertising sales, membership dues, or other sources.





THERMAL IMAGING UNITS RECEIVED IN HONOR OF CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICER GREG GILLILAND

Officers in the surrounding area were contacted, and it was decided that the Talladega Superspeedway donation would be used to purchase four handheld thermal imaging units. The units basically allow one to see heat signatures at night. Conservation Enforcement Officers often work nights on various details. While it may be to apprehend a game law violator operating in the dark or on a search and rescue detail attempting to locate someone lost in the woods, the units are extremely beneficial.

Greg Gilliland was a close ally of the Talladega

Superspeedway, assisting them with the care and protection of their properties. The ACEOA and DCNR very much appreciate this valuable contribution to Greg's memory. This is just one of the many reasons that Greg will not be forgotten.

Brian Chricton, President of the Talladega International Speedway, stated, "Greg Gilliland was a special person who put others before himself. He was always ready to assist us in any way necessary." That is a testimony any Officer should strive for. ●





Tomato Pie with Blackened Quail Top Dish at AWF Wild Game Cook-Off Finals

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

A down-home dish that utilized Alabama native species of wild game and vegetables was crowned champion recently at the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF) Wild Game Cook-Off Finals at AWF's Lanark home.

The LeMay Farms team put together the winning Chandler Mountain Tomato Pie with Blackened Quail, made with home-grown tomatoes and bobwhite quail that prevailed in a tight competition with an array of delicious wild game and fish preparations.

The LeMay Farms team of Steve LeMay, Lake LeMay, John Davis, Charlie Carper, Joel Brown, Curtis Eatman and Tim Saunders also won the Best Presentation Award.

Joel Brown said the tomato pie recipe came from his mom while growing up near Dothan, although the tomatoes came from a different region in Alabama.

"The Chandler Mountain tomatoes are just good tomatoes," Brown said. "They're grown up near Steele. Steve LeMay went up and got the tomatoes. They grow acres and acres of tomatoes up there. If you ride on top of the mountain (in northeast Alabama), there are tomatoes as far as you can see. That rocky soil just makes good tomatoes.

"I grew up in Dothan eating Slocomb tomatoes, but that's too far to go. So, Chandler Mountain tomatoes it is."

Chandler Mountain Tomato Pie with Blackened Quail

- 1 pie crust
- 1 large Vidalia onion
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2-3 Chandler Mountain tomatoes, depending on size
- ½ teaspoon salt

- 1 teaspoon black pepper.
- 8-10 fresh basil leaves
- ½ pound mozzarella cheese
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce
- 2 cleaned bobwhite quail
- 1 teaspoon blackening seasoning
- 2 tablespoon butter

"You get a refrigerated, ready-made pie crust, or you can certainly make your own, and bake it until it's light brown," Brown said.

Slice the Vidalia onion and sauté in butter until translucent. Dice the tomatoes and allow to drain.

"I put the diced tomatoes in a single layer on a paper towel to soak up the juice so the pie is not soupy," Brown said. "I let the Vidalias cool a little and then add a layer in the pie crust. I mix the raw tomatoes in with the Vidalias and add a little salt and pepper. Then I'm going to add fresh chopped basil in that bottom layer. We grow basil, so we just pick the leaves, roll them up and chop them fine.

"The top layer is going to be grated mozzarella, mayonnaise and hot sauce. I like to grate a 1-pound block of mozzarella. I think it tastes better fresh grated. I mix in mayonnaise to get it thicker, kind of like you're mixing up pimento and cheese. I give that a good dose of black pepper and several dashes of hot sauce, whatever your favorite hot sauce is, whether it's Crystal or Tabasco. Then I spread it out on top of the pie. I bake it at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes or until the cheese on top is golden brown."

The LeMay Farms team got the dressed quail from



TOMATO PIE WITH BLACKENED QUAIL TOP DISH AT AWF WILD GAME COOK-OFF FINALS – *continued*

Otter Creek Farms near Ohatchee. Brown said he fillets the breasts and separates the leg quarters intact. He sprinkles the quail with the blackening season and lets them sit for about an hour before he fires up his flat-top griddle.

Blacken the quail in melted butter on the griddle. The leg quarters will take a little longer on the griddle to reach the desired doneness. When done, dice the breasts into half-inch chunks and spread on top of the pie. Serve the leg quarters on the side.

“Mom used to make tomato pies when I was growing up, and that’s similar to her recipe,” Brown said. “Tomatoes were big where I grew up in Dothan. My whole family loves them. I’ve got about 20 tomato plants in my yard. I’m a tomato fan.”

The Alabama Ag Credit team that was victorious at last year’s state final with a taco made with fried Lake Martin bass paired with a slice of Conecuh sausage continued to take advantage of the lake’s abundant bass resources. The team of Andrew Harp, Mallory Harp, Brooklyn George and Russin Wilson took the runner-up spot in this year’s finals with Secret Spot Spotted Bass Cakes.

Andrew Harp admitted he doesn’t have a formal recipe for the dish, that it’s all about experimentation until the desired outcome is achieved.

“We stayed with the spotted bass theme,” Harp said. “We really like the bass. We wanted to do something unique, so we turned it into a fish cake. Instead of a crab cake, we have a fish cake. We take bass caught yesterday. In the cake itself is mayonnaise, cream cheese, diced jalapeños, diced onions, diced bell peppers, minced garlic, fish and breadcrumbs. I don’t have any proportions, but I’ll tell you what I did and that might help with proportions.

“I use four huge dollops of mayonnaise per one block of cream cheese, two cups of fish, about a half-cup of mixed and cooked onions, bell peppers, jalapeños and garlic. Then I take about one can of breadcrumbs. I use a little Tony’s (Chachere) on the fish that I sauté in butter on the flattop. Everything we did was on the flattop, the fish and the vegetables. The key is to try to keep the fish as chunky as possible. Get all your mix done first and make sure it’s the consistency you want your cake to be. Then you add the fish and mix it as little as possible to make sure you have nice chunks of fish. I make the patties up

and let them sit. Then I sauté the patties in butter on the flattop and let them sizzle until you get a golden-brown crust on both sides.”

The runner-up team had a side of slaw made from green and purple cabbage with plain Greek yogurt, sugar to taste, diced onions, diced bell peppers and a couple of teaspoons of red wine vinegar. The dipping sauce was made with a combination of Sriracha mayonnaise, a tablespoon or two of honey, a couple of tablespoons of ketchup, yellow mustard and Worcestershire sauce.

The Palomar team of Todd Johnson, Beth Johnson, Maddie Johnson, Bruce Garrett, Robert Adair and Thomas Adair took home third place with its take on crawfish étouffée. Beth Johnson claimed this was a “secret” recipe but later admitted that it had already been published in two magazines.

Mudbug Bowl

- 1 stick butter
- 2 large onions (chopped)
- 1 large bell pepper (chopped)
- 1½ stalks celery (chopped)
- 2 pounds crawfish tails
- 2 tablespoons of liquid crab boil
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 can cream of celery soup
- 1 can Rotel tomatoes
- 1-2 tablespoons garlic powder
- ¼ cup parsley flakes
- 1-2 teaspoons salt
- ½ cup white rice
- 2 loaves round Hawaiian sweet bread
- 1 cup water

Start the preparation by sautéing the vegetables in butter. Boil crawfish tails in water with crab boil. Drain and add to sautéed vegetables. Add cans of soup and Rotel tomatoes. Add garlic powder, parsley flakes and salt. Cook until heated through. Cook rice. Hollow out the inside of the loaf of bread and fill with crawfish étouffée. Top with dollop of white rice and parsley flakes. Serves eight.

Although these were the winners in the competition, the scoring was extremely close with numerous delicious



TOMATO PIE WITH BLACKENED QUAIL TOP DISH AT AWF WILD GAME COOK-OFF FINALS – *continued*

dishes, including Snapper Ponchartrain with Shrimp and Crabmeat, Stuffed Pasta Shells with Venison and Wild Hog, Seared Duck Breast over Penne and Branded Elk with elk prepared four ways.

By the way, if you want to find more wild game and fish recipes or would like to submit one of your own, go to www.outdooralabama.com/WildEats and check out the variety of wild game, fish and seafood recipes available. ●



Steve LeMay watches as the winning Chandler Mountain Tomato Pie with Blackened Quail dish is sampled at the AWF Wild Game Cook-Off Finals.

Photo by Billy Pope





Expect to See Alligators Throughout Alabama

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

For those of us fortunate enough to have lived in Alabama a number of years, one of the benefits the vast majority of residents cherish is interaction with the abundant wildlife that inhabits the state.

Becoming familiar with the different animal species and their preferred habitat comes with experience and education. Most of those animals are harmless, but a few species need to be given distance and avoided. A case in point is the American alligator, which can grow up to 15 feet in length.

An American alligator was recently sighted in the Huntsville area, which many people consider to be beyond the home range of the animal. However, alligators have lived in north Alabama for at least 60 years, according to Chuck Sykes, Director of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division.

"The first documented sighting was at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge (near Decatur) in 1964," Sykes said. "They've been in north Alabama for a long time.

"I get it. People who are new moving into the area who are not used to it, I can see where they could be a little panicked the first time they see an alligator. But that is suitable habitat for alligators. There is not as much prime gator habitat as there is in the southern part of the state, but there is still quite a bit up north."

Jud Easterwood, WFF's Supervising Wildlife Biologist in District I in north Alabama, said some evidence exists that alligators were living in his district much longer than that.

"We've got alligators in Wheeler Refuge and Redstone Arsenal and the areas surrounding," Easterwood said. "We have historical accounts from the late 1800s of them being there."

In the middle of the 20th century, alligators were listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

(USFWS) and protected for 20 years until they were delisted in 1987.

"We know the population is there," Easterwood continued. "We see them at Swan Creek (wildlife management area) occasionally and at Brown's Ferry Nuclear Plant."

Recently, the housing boom in the Huntsville-Decatur-Madison triplex has encroached into areas that are suitable alligator habitat.

"They are building subdivisions literally in swamps," Easterwood said. "They're bringing in truckloads of dirt and topsoil to build these pads to put the houses on. They're building right up against the Redstone Arsenal fence. They're building these well-manicured ponds these houses are going to go around. That means fish and turtles, food sources of alligators, so everything is there for an alligator. It's perfect for them.

With the encroachment of subdivisions and other construction near the alligators' habitat, interactions between humans and alligators will arise. Folks moving into the area who aren't familiar with Alabama's native wildlife are sounding off.

"We have people moving in from all over the country coming to the Huntsville area, and they are not made aware that there is a breeding population of alligators here. When people see them, they freak out. They don't know what people in south Alabama know about living around alligators."

Easterwood said those people unfamiliar with alligators want the animals they see gone immediately, but WFF has a regulated protocol to determine if the animal is considered a nuisance alligator and merits removal.

"Is it approaching people?" he said. "Or is it just lying up on a bank? We have a protocol because the alligator is still a federally protected species. We don't get a phone call and then go out and kill it. Because the alligator is a federally protected species, the protocol we



EXPECT TO SEE ALLIGATORS THROUGHOUT ALABAMA – *continued*

use to determine if the animal is considered a nuisance is written in our state regulations. We do assess each reported nuisance situation, which is initially done over the phone. This initial phone interview allows for us to better understand the situational complaint and determine what the next steps should be.

“If and when warranted, we use a nuisance alligator specialist that we’ve worked with for a couple of decades. We know him and trust him. If we call him, he drops what he’s doing and takes care of the alligator. But we rarely have to take an alligator.”

Easterwood said he and the WFF staff try to educate callers about how to live with alligators in Alabama (www.outdooralabama.com/livingwithalligators).

“We give them the dos and don’ts of alligators,” he said. “Leave the alligators alone. Don’t harass them. Never feed alligators. Don’t throw fish scraps in the water. Don’t let your pets swim in those areas. Keep pets on a leash. If you know alligators are in the area, you probably don’t want to swim there either.”

“I’ve been telling people that if you have a wetland or pond big enough for an alligator, you’d better assume there is one just to be safe and approach that pond or wetland with that in mind. That’s what people in south Alabama, Florida and the low country of South Carolina do.”

The alligator education outreach is ongoing with assistance from the City of Huntsville, which is erecting caution signs in areas that are suitable alligator habitat. Huntsville already has a leash law for dogs.

Easterwood said alligators don’t make a distinction among prey animals. If they can capture it, it will be consumed.

“Alligators eat beavers, muskrats, deer, if they can catch it, or a coyote,” he said. “A dog coming through a shallow water swamp is no different from any of those animals. They are just natural prey to an alligator, not unnatural at all.”

“It’s about getting people to understand alligators are here; they’re not going to go away. This is important, and I’ve stressed this to a lot of people I’ve talked to: You can call us and say there’s an 8-foot alligator in your pond. If we determine it is a nuisance and remove the alligator,

there’s no guarantee that the next night a 10-foot alligator isn’t going to show up in that pond. The removal of an alligator should not change that line of thinking that if there is a wetland or pond, there could be a gator in it. That line of thinking is hard to get people to understand. It’s about education, and sometimes it’s hard to reach people, and sometimes it’s a hard message for people to receive. It’s like trying to get people to leave a baby fawn alone. How many people haven’t gotten that message? It’s a constant struggle.”

Sykes added, “Removing every alligator you see is not a feasible solution.”

Easterwood said some callers have suggested an alligator season in north Alabama similar to the seasons in south Alabama. Sykes said expanding the alligator season is not possible at this time.

“Just because people are seeing a few alligators in north Alabama, that doesn’t mean there are enough to sustain a huntable population,” Sykes said.

Sykes said with proper precautions, Alabama residents can relish the opportunity to observe nature and wildlife.

“Alabama is home to a myriad of wildlife species that can become nuisances, mainly if people allow them to be,” he said. “If you’re feeding raccoons cat food on your back porch, that can turn into a nuisance. If your garbage is out when bears are on the move, same thing. We have alligators at our place in Choctaw County. I do not allow my dog to swim in the slough when it’s warm outside. It’s just common sense.”

“There are simple precautions you can take that make living with wildlife cool and enjoyable.” ●



Although more abundant in south Alabama, alligators can be found throughout the state.

Photo by David Rainer



Shelby County Youth Dove Hunt

Recently, the ACEOA helped co-sponsor the Shelby County Youth Dove Hunt. All had food, fun, and fellowship, and we thank everyone who came out to participate!





SHELBY COUNTY YOUTH DOVE HUNT – *continued*





An Early Christmas

By Sergeant Kevin Hill

Christmas came early, and it wasn't snowing or even cold in the city of Bay Minette on September 4, 2023, which happened to be Labor Day. Just the opposite, it was humid and hot. Dove season was about to kick off in the south zone, and Sergeant Kevin Hill with the District 5 Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Law Enforcement Section called the ADCNR Pilot Frank J. Jirik, IV (a.k.a. Ziggy) to conduct aerial surveys for dove fields.

Ziggy was to meet Sgt. Hill at the Bay Minette Municipal Airport around 8:30 a.m. Sgt. Hill arrived a little early and parked his truck, then walked to the terminal building. Not seeing any lights on, Sgt. Hill returned to his truck when he heard a voice yelling, "Wait, I'm coming to let you in." Sgt. Hill turned around to see a tall, lean young man running up to the door, about out of breath. The young man wore a reflective yellow shirt and explained that he wasn't sure if he was supposed to work today. Sgt. Hill asked where he came from, and the young man said, "I ran to work from home." Sgt. Hill inquired where the young man lived, and the young man said, "Near the high school." Sgt Hill knew the high school was a good 5 five miles one way from the airport and was impressed that the young man exhibited such dedication to make it to work. Sgt. Hill asked the young man his name, and he replied, "Brett Pruett." Sgt. Hill told Brett that he was glad he made it to work. Brett then further explained that he was 23 and had grown up around the area.

Sgt. Hill heard a plane landing on the runway; it was Ziggy right on time as usual. Brett opened the doors and ran to the runway, greeting Ziggy and checking to see if he needed fuel. Another gentleman entered the terminal building and was greeted by Sgt. Hill. The gentleman said

he owned a plane in the hangar next to the terminal and saw Brett had made it into work. Sgt Hill inquired why Brett had no transportation to and from work. The gentleman replied, "Brett had an old bike in poor condition and had bad tires." The gentleman explained that Brett had been working at the airport for a while and was a great employee. Sgt. Hill learned that Brett lived with his mother in a trailer and that Brett took care of her, as well as the bills. Ziggy walked into the terminal and overheard what the gentleman said. Ziggy called Brett inside and asked him not to leave until he and Sgt. Hill returned from their flight. Ziggy pulled out his wallet and handed Brett a tip, stating, "You're getting paid holiday pay today."

While flying, Ziggy and Sgt Hill decided to help Brett. Ziggy told Sgt. Hill that every time he flew to Bay Minette, he would call for Brett, and he was always there with no complaints. Later, Ziggy and Sgt. Hill informed Brett that he was getting a new bike! They made a trip to the local Walmart and let Brett pick out a brand-new bike and lock. Brett had the biggest smile you would ever want to see, and as he was pushing the new bike to the register, an employee stopped him and asked, "I see you got a new bike! Are you excited?" Brett replied, "The best part of getting the bike is the Game Wardens are buying it for me!"

So, as you can see, being a Game Warden is not all about catching the poachers and writing a ticket. It is also about extending a helping hand when someone is in need. Often, that is all it takes to make the world a better place. Enjoy your bike, and keep working hard, Brett! ●





AN EARLY CHRISTMAS – *continued*





Dive For Debris

In partnership with the Down Under Diver Shop and Red Flag Surf & Dive, the Gulf State Park hosted its annual Dive For Debris at the Gulf State Park Pier on October 8, 2023. Water conditions were excellent, with light winds and clear water, making this the best dive to date. Thirty-three volunteer divers showed up for the call and entered the water for the cleanup under & around the pier. After completing the dive, all volunteers gather topside to help sort and weigh the debris collection.

Divers collected;

16.5 lbs of monofilament fishing line

31.3 lbs of lead weights

69.37 lbs of miscellaneous debris (plastics, fishing lures, glass, rod & reels)

The total weight collected was 117.17 lbs, making this the most successful dive to date.

After all numbers were recorded from individual divers, one lucky individual, who collected the most weight at 16.1 lbs, was awarded the overall Grand Prize. Logan Charles Langley, pictured with his father and Senior Ranger Alex Prickett, was awarded a Lifetime Saltwater Fishing License provided by the ACEOA. Other prize contributors were Ike's Beach Service, Soul Bowlz, Gulf Shores Beach Bike Rentals, The Hangout, and Down Under Dive Shop.

Peter F. Mitchum

Southwest District Ranger

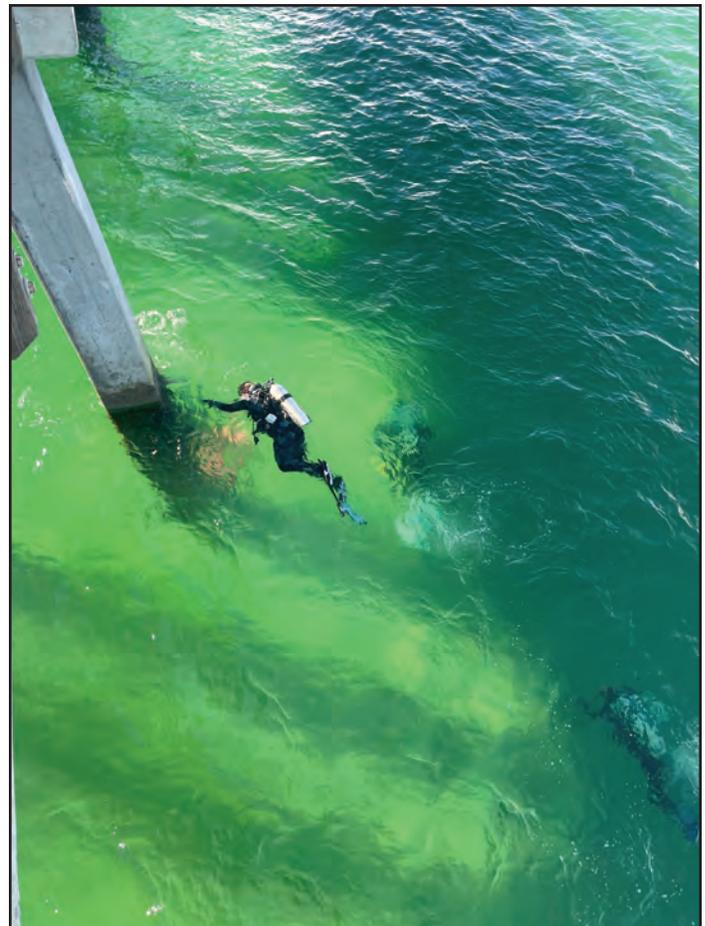
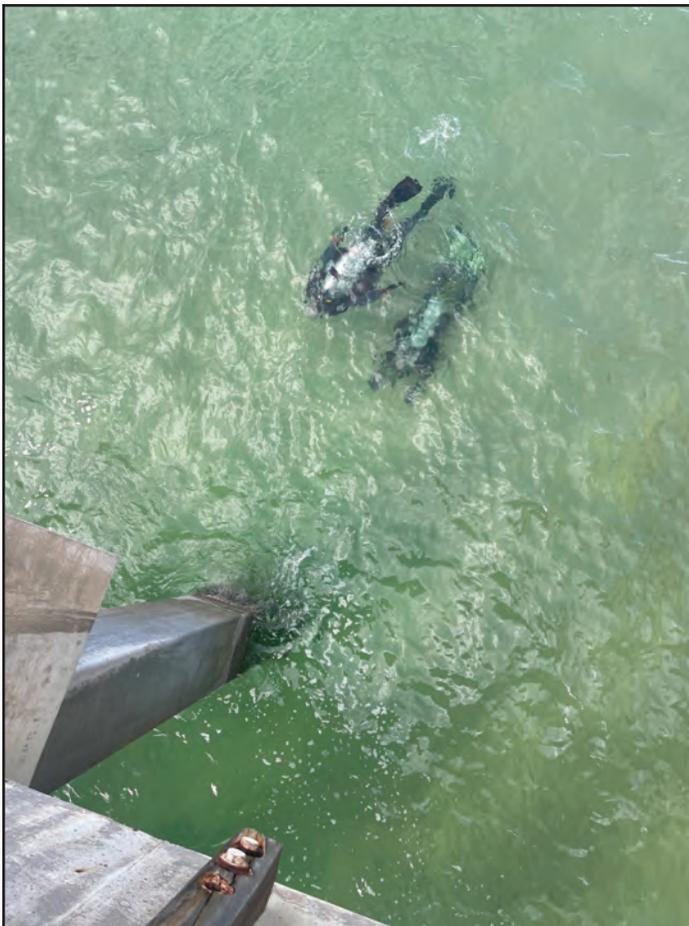
Alabama State Parks

O: 251.948.7275

C: 251.362.7577

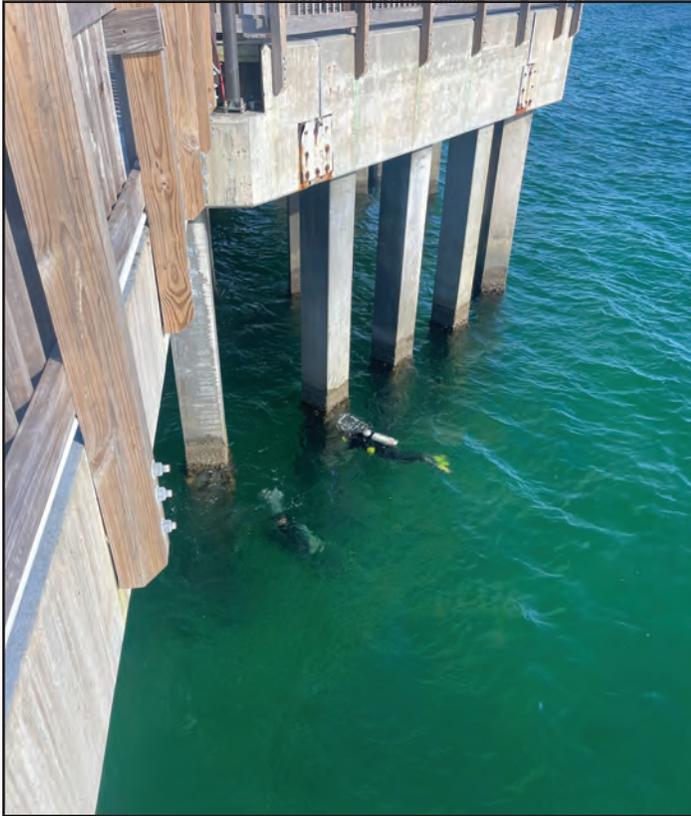
E: peter.mitchum@dcnr.alabama.gov

A: 20115 State Park Rd. | Gulf Shores, AL 36542





DIVE FOR DEBRIS – *continued*





DIVE FOR DEBRIS – *continued*





Maddox Optimistic about Upcoming Waterfowl Seasons

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) annual waterfowl survey indicates overall duck numbers are down, Seth Maddox remains optimistic about Alabama's 2023-2024 waterfowl seasons.

Maddox, Assistant Wildlife Section Chief for the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), said the USFWS survey occurred on the breeding grounds in the upper Midwest and Canada before the success of the hatch was known.

"The previous year we had some poor habitat conditions in the breeding grounds," Maddox said. "This year, it looks a lot better as far as more water on the landscape. So, even though the overall population is down, the hatch reproduction was probably really good because of the better habitat conditions. That means we should see a lot of young-of-the-year ducks coming down. We should have an increased fall flight for this year."

Maddox said the USFWS survey is conducted in May after the males and females are paired. The count is for paired ducks and lone males. In late May and June, the paired ducks start breeding, and the hen will produce a clutch of eggs that will hatch in about a month.

"After they hatch, the hatchlings will hang out with their mom," he said. "They feed themselves, but they will stay together. It takes about 45 days to grow flight feathers and be fully flighted. At that point, they are kind of on their own."

The start of the fall migration depends on the species with some patterns dictated by the length of the days and others by the availability of food and suitable habitat.

"As days get shorter, gadwall and blue-winged teal start moving south," Maddox said. "Mallards and green-winged teal are weather migrators, so as the temperatures

drop, they start moving south. But they don't all move at once. Some tend to hang around and tough it out as long as they can. Some go to traditional wintering areas right away. It's kind of a mixed bag for mallards, for example. Some might go straight down the Mississippi alluvial valley to their traditional wintering grounds. Some may hang out in Minnesota and Iowa until they are forced out by ice and snow. It depends on the individual bird and what it's traditionally done.

"The juvenile birds are more likely to keep pushing south. And it depends on the conditions during that southward migration. They may stop at different sites if there is really good food there and may hang on longer to build up those reserves. If they stop at a site and the conditions aren't good, not a lot of food on the ground, they will be going south quicker."

Alabama's most hunted and harvested duck, the wood duck, apparently had a good breeding season as well.

"We really had a good banding season for wood ducks," Maddox said. "It's our number one harvested duck statewide. I think we'll have a lot of wood ducks on the landscape this year. So, it should be a good wood duck year. We banded almost 900 birds this summer, which is a good number. The production looks really good, which is a byproduct of the wet spring and summer we had."

Although the Gulf Coast states have been in drought conditions this fall, Maddox said the conditions during the summer were much more favorable for the waterfowl habitat.

"Prior to the dry fall, we had a pretty wet summer," he said. "There should be plenty of food on the ground. On our waterfowl management areas, the crops and moist



MADDOX OPTIMISTIC ABOUT UPCOMING WATERFOWL SEASONS – *continued*

soil native vegetation are looking good. We had enough rain for those to grow and produce seeds. We should have plenty of food when they arrive.

“I’m not too worried about current conditions. Traditionally, October is our driest time anyway in Alabama. We should start getting rain in November, and that should open that food source up when those birds arrive here.

Maddox said the duck seasons in the northern Midwest have already opened, and he has heard some good reports of hunting in those areas with prairie potholes and abundant lakes.

Regarding Alabama’s early teal season in September, Maddox said it was feast or famine.

“The teal pushed through pretty quick,” he said. “We had one good weekend. If they were there today, they could be gone tomorrow. If you had water, you probably had teal. If you didn’t, you weren’t going to get any.”

The regular waterfowl season for ducks, coots and mergansers is set for November 24-25 and December 2 through January 28, 2024. The bag limit of six ducks is unchanged. The limit may include no more than four mallards (no more than 2 may be female), three wood ducks, one mottled duck, two black ducks, two redheads, one pintail, two canvasback and one scaup. The coot limit is 15 per day, while the merganser limit is five per day, only two of which can be hooded mergansers.

The goose season is currently open through October 28 and then will be the same dates as duck season. The aggregate bag limit for dark geese (Canada, white-fronted, Brant) is five per day. The limit for light geese (snow, blue and Ross’s) is also an aggregate of five per day.

“It’s the same story every year,” Maddox said. “We’re at the bottom of the funnel of the flyway. We’ll get gadwalls and ringnecks. They are going to come down because the

days are getting shorter. They should get here in early to mid-November. From there, we’ll get a mixing of other species, but it’s very weather dependent. The abundance of those other species will be determined by those winter weather patterns.”

Maddox said the number of waterfowl hunters continues to increase across the state, based on the number of duck stamps sold.

“We don’t have a physical duck stamp anymore, so we don’t have collectors buying stamps,” he said. “Last year we had a record year for the third year in a row for duck stamp sales at 38,396.

“Typically, what we see is opening day drives the bus. If we have a good opening day, we have increased participation. The weather drives a lot of that. If the weather is in the 80s, it makes for tough duck hunting. But I really gauge it on wood ducks because that’s our number one harvested species. The more wood ducks we have, the more hunters we have on the landscape.” ●



WFF’s Graham Peters, right, and volunteer Cannon Dukas crimp a band on one of almost 900 wood ducks that were banded this past August.

WFF Photo





K9 Luke

Date of Birth: 03/10/2010

End of Watch: 09/27/2023

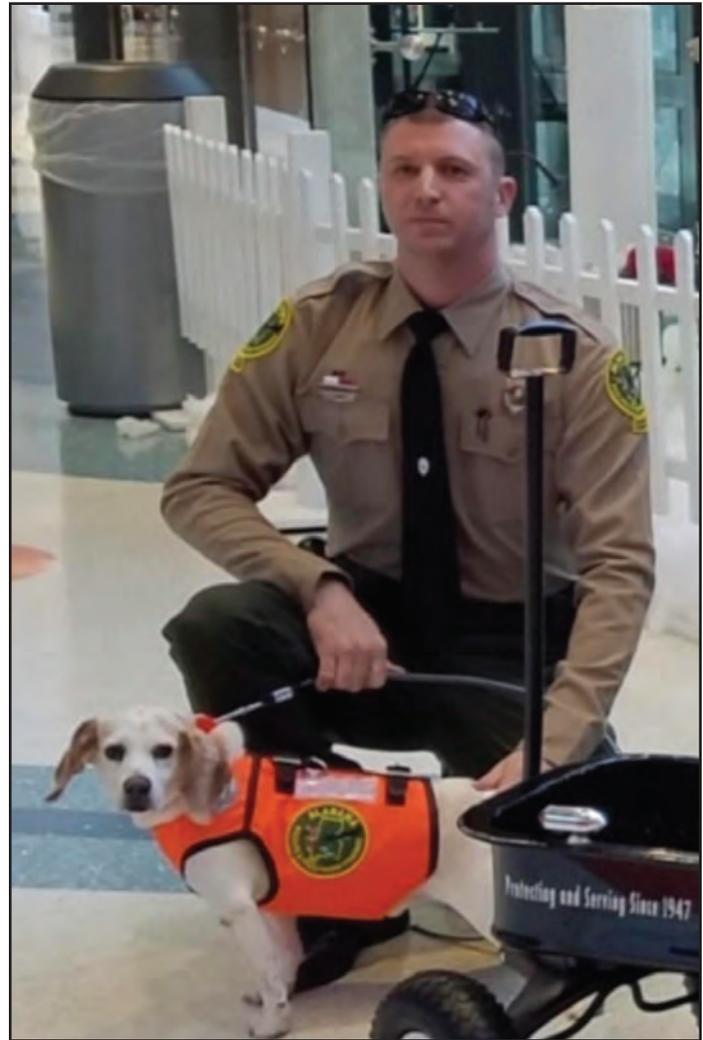
One of our K-9s, Luke, has ended his service to the people of Alabama and traveled across the rainbow bridge.

K9 Luke served in our Law Enforcement Section from 2017 through 2023 in District II. Luke specialized in tracking humans and successfully completed more than 200 tracks during his tenure, locating individuals who may have been engaged in criminal activities, people who were lost, and, in some cases, who had become injured far from help. Luke also contributed much of his time working at numerous public outreach events. Luke visited many schools, youth hunting and fishing events, hospitals, and so much more.

Although his tracking abilities were superb, he really had a knack for making everyone's day better, giving love to all that he met. One memorable event where Luke's service made an invaluable impact was in the spring of 2020 when he was asked to track a lost turkey hunter who had become injured and unable to walk. Being deep in the woods and not knowing where you are is a scary situation. However, Luke was able to track and locate the person in only about 15 minutes, which allowed us to get the imperiled hunter more than a mile out of the woods and to medical personnel in a fraction of the time it would have taken to accomplish this without Luke.

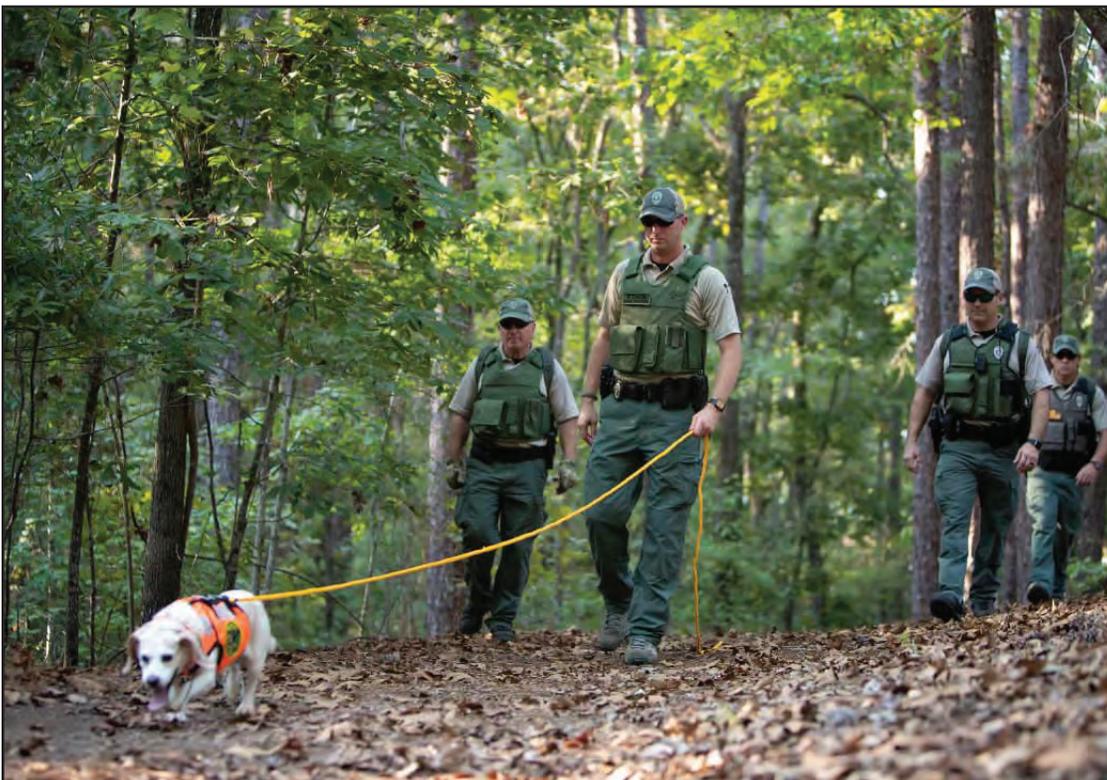
K9 Luke served us with more than six years of flawless dedication and will be missed.

Thank you from all of us, Luke, and especially your partner in the field, CEO Ben Kiser.





K9 LUKE – *continued*



Good boy, Luke, you were one of the best. Rest easy. We have the watch.



Officer Training

Remember those brand-new Game Wardens we showed you the other day? They got started right away with their initial firearms training, which took place recently in Shelby County. Game Wardens are law enforcement officers trained to respond, handle, and assist in various situations. Their primary duties

are to enforce game and fish laws, but they have full police powers and responsibilities. If you are interested in becoming an Officer with us, please know that hires occur as needed, so applications are always accepted and held for when openings arise. ●



Invasive Carp

Invasive carp ID signs will be installed at all public boat ramps along the Tennessee River this fall to help boaters and anglers identify bighead and silver carp if sighted in or harvested from the river.

Boaters and anglers are encouraged to report sightings and/or harvests of bighead and silver carp to ADCNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division by phone at (256) 353-2634 or by email at asiancarp@dcnr.alabama.gov. When reporting a sighting or harvest, please provide the following information: the location (GPS coordinates, if possible), the date and clear photos of the fish. If reporting the harvest of an invasive carp, it is very important that you do not release it back into the water.

Learn more at <https://www.outdooralabama.com/.../adcnr-installs...>





DeKalb County Youth Fishing with CASA

By Kevin Holsonback

ACEOA is a significant sponsor of many outdoor events involving Alabama's youth. Recently, the organization sponsored a youth fishing event in DeKalb County that was somewhat unique in nature. The reason was that the young boys and girls involved were part of CASA of North Sand Mountain.

CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates of North Sand Mountain, is an organization that provides abused, neglected, or abandoned children with a highly trained volunteer to advocate for the child's best interest before family courts in Jackson and DeKalb counties in Alabama. Their volunteers are recruited, screened, and trained by paid staff to work in conjunction with the judges, lawyers,

and social workers to help ensure the children receive appropriate care and support while navigating the court, child welfare, and foster care systems.

ACEOA provided a financial donation to help purchase food, drinks, and fishing tackle for the kids. A lifetime fishing license, provided by ACEOA, was also donated and given away to one child at the event.

The event took place at DeKalb County Public Fishing Lake, located in Sylvania, Alabama. There were 25 kids, ages 2-16, who showed up to enjoy food and fishing. Also in attendance were 25 family members of the children and 15 volunteers to assist with the festivities. ●





DEKALB COUNTY YOUTH FISHING WITH CASA – *continued*





Join Today!

The Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officer Association (ACEOA) seeks to conserve and protect our natural resources by serving the needs and goals of the law enforcement programs of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. This includes the divisions of Parks, Lands, Marine Resources and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. We are a non-profit 501C3 organization and all dues and donations are tax deductible. We encourage support of our efforts through membership, which is open to law enforcement officers of the Department of Conservation (officer memberships) and all other supporters (associate memberships).
Membership dues are \$25 annually.



Membership Application

Thank you for your contribution!

Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association

\$25 / Year

\$250 / Lifetime

Conservation Officer

Associate

Name: _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (____) _____ - _____ email: _____

Officers Only

Division:

State Parks___ State Lands___ Marine Resources___ Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries___

District: _____ County: _____

Mail Application to:

ACEOA

574 Roark Trace, Montgomery, AL 36116