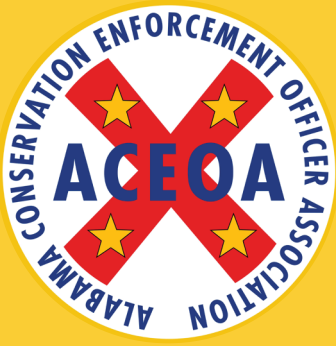


Issue 2, 2023



ACE Magazine

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ALABAMA CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



WILL TOWNSEND Gets Hunt of a Lifetime

see story



EDITOR:

Gayle Morrow

PUBLISHER:

Brent-Wyatt West
4142 Carmichael Court
Montgomery, Alabama 36106

SALES OFFICES:

ACEOA Tim Spease
4142 Carmichael Court
Montgomery, Alabama 36106
(334) 239-9021

ON THE COVER

It doesn't get much better than this! The story is written on his face! Will Townsend enjoys the turkey hunt of a lifetime surrounded by people who love and support him. ACEOA loves to donate to organizations who are the Dream Makers for kids like Will.



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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

2019-2022 ACEOA State Officers

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ACE Magazine

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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 Vance Wood, ACEOA President

Taking a look ahead and over the horizon, the future of ACEOA is bright. Our financial status is sound and our membership is growing. However, there is still much work to do and your Board of Directors is committed to carrying out the goals and mission of the Association. It takes time, effort, and input to do that. Everyone is an integral part of the Association.

Over the last year and a half, Board Members have traveled and met with many of you. It may have been at training or District and Division meetings. Meals were provided by the Association and Members were updated regarding PORAC, EAW, and the forward path being taken. As a result, many new membership applications were received. There were also numerous inactive

members, who reactivated their Memberships. Thanks to this effort membership has grown substantially and everyone is to be commended.

Several months ago, Vice President Joe Goddard and I received an invitation to attend the Louisiana Wildlife Agents Association (LWAA) Conference and network with their Association. There were many things shared and learned from each other, as well as relationships built.

Networking among other like organizations is a critical part of growth and development. Thanks to the opportunity given to us by the LWAA, you will see some inspirational and uplifting ideas put into action. Changes to our upcoming 2024 Conference will be one of them. Speaking of the 2024 Conference, the Board would like to thank ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship for his continued support. A registration flyer is in the works with all of the details and should be distributed to the membership by the time you read this letter. As we continue moving ahead, the Board and I look forward to the next horizon and what lies beyond. Thank you all for your continued support of the ACEOA!



“A well-ordered life is like climbing a tower; the view halfway up is better than the view from the base, and it steadily becomes finer as the horizon expands.”

- William Lyon Phelps - American Educator





Great Things Happening in ACEOA

By Jo Ann Johnson, Executive Director

Alabama surely has seen its share of rain this spring and summer so far and the heat and humidity are in full swing. The ACEOA has been actively working to support many outreach and education events that take place throughout the state during this time, rain or shine. As we head into fall, we are seeking opportunities to support conservation education and outreach as well as efforts to secure necessary equipment for our men and women in the field through our Equip Alabama Wardens Program.

Before I dive into the details of the support provided by ACEOA, I must give you an update on our membership. I am excited to report that 2023 has seen a 26% increase in the number of officers and associate members. Additionally, 17% of our membership this year is comprised of new members. And new officers and associates are signing on every day to support and walk alongside the ACEOA in its mission. We are truly grateful for every one of our members. Numbers can play a significant role in impact and influence and we are excited to continue growing our network to ensure issues affecting our natural resources, and the officers working to conserve and protect them, are heard.

One area of ACEOA focus is supporting youth and adults with disabilities in their desire to enjoy the excitement and fulfillment outdoor recreational activities provide. When children engage in physical activities outside, their brains release hormones that can help them to process their emotions. Outdoor activities also enable children to develop important social skills, such as cooperation and communication, as well as to foster self-confidence. Research also shows that exposure to nature and engaging in outdoor activities significantly reduces stress and lowers the risk of depression. Recent technology has led to the creation and availability of some amazing adaptive or modified equipment. But it can

often be quite costly to individuals and families already struggling financially to make ends meet.

Back in March, ACEOA provided funds to a partner nonprofit agency dedicated to providing grants for adaptive equipment for disabled youth ages 8-19. These funds were used to purchase a track chair for a young lady who is wheelchair bound. She is now better able to enjoy nature and wildlife activities with her family and reap the same emotional and developmental benefits as other children. ACEOA is seeking opportunities to expand these efforts so that more children and adults are equipped with resources to help them get outdoors.

Another exciting opportunity ACEOA provides is educational scholarships to college students. Every year, ACEOA grants up to five \$1000 scholarships. With tuition rates continuing to rise and the availability of general scholarships on the decline, ACEOA knows the importance of making this opportunity available. But did you know we receive few requests despite having a very simple application process? ACEOA members who have children attending college can receive a scholarship to pursue the degree of their choice. Additionally, scholarships may be awarded to non-members who have children pursuing degrees in conservation law enforcement or wildlife fishery sciences. Applicants should submit a letter of need with a description of their degree goals. They must include contact information, proof of enrollment, and a photo. That's it! If you know a college student who could benefit from this support, please share this great opportunity. Applications may be emailed to edaceoa@gmail.com or mailed to ACEOA, 574 Roark Trace, Montgomery, AL 36116.

As you know, Equip Alabama Wardens is a program of ACEOA which seeks to support officers' equipment needs that are not funded through any other source. Through the efforts of Reid Gaston and the ACEOA board, indi-

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GREAT THINGS HAPPENING IN ACEOA – *continued*

vidual and corporate donations to this critical program have continued to increase. Additionally, grant funds are being secured. Now, more than ever, ACEOA is positioned to fill the gaps when it comes to the equipment officers need to effectively do their job. We are actively seeking to identify individual and district needs for specific equipment so that we may use the contributions to make those purchases. Please submit all equipment needs requests to your ACEOA District Director.

As ACEOA enters the second half of the year, we are confident of the path we are on to continue positively impacting the protection and conservation of our natural

resources as well as the officers who work tirelessly to protect these resources for generations to come. We thank you, our members, for your support and welcome your ideas to make our association even stronger. One of our goals this year was to double our membership. We are well on our way to making this happen and you can help by sharing our great work with your friends, family, and neighbors. Encourage them to get involved. Share the stories of our outreach. The larger our membership, the stronger our influence, and the greater our impact to support conservation enforcement. ●



ACEOA is a proud sponsor of Kidz Outdoors.

Thumper and the Turkey Man

By Brad Townsend

I remember getting the call from Carol Clark with Kidz Outdoors asking if Will (aka Thumper) would be interested in going on a turkey hunt. Carol said that Doc (Kenneth Stephens) wanted him to come down to Kingdom Ridge Whitetails and go on a turkey hunt. Now, Will was not with me at the time, but I knew he would want to go. Then Carol threw in the last detail... He would be hunting with Eddie Salter! I remember jokingly saying to Carol... I don't know if Will wants to go but I sure do! To say that I have been totally bitten by the turkey hunting bug for most of my life would be an understatement and

getting the opportunity to take my son on a hunt with one of the legends of the sport is something I could have only dreamed about. Well, I talked to Will about it, and to no surprise, he definitely wanted to go.

So, I guess I'm getting ahead of myself a little in this story. I need to introduce you to my son. Will has cerebral Palsy. As a result of his condition, he has issues with muscle control and coordination. He has some visual issues that go along with it. He can stand and walk with a good deal of support and assistance, but his major mode of travel is via his motorized wheelchair. He has always loved the outdoors and has been my hunting and fishing buddy since he was a tiny fella.

Over the last nineteen years, he has been privileged enough to have the good Lord place people in his life that have helped facilitate a way for him to have truly awesome adventures. But what Will doesn't realize is that God had given him something special, something that just draws people to him. Will is one of the kindest-hearted and loving individuals that I have ever known. I could go on and on about what an honor it has been to be Will's father, but I guess that is just what dads do.

So, back to the turkey hunt. We confirmed everything with Kidz Outdoors and got some dates in mind. Now, it was off to the drawing board with one of my best friends, Jonathan Jones, to figure out how we can create a shooting system for a pump shotgun. Jonathan is the owner and operator of Alabama Gun Works. Jonathan has a true knack for creating some of the finest custom firearms and custom Cerakote finishes around. He, once again, knocked it out of the park with the design he came up with for a twenty gauge specifically for this hunt. Alabama Gun Works fabricated a lightweight and stable shooting system with custom-made trigger



Tom Turkey, Will, Doc, and Eddie "Turkey Man" Salter

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THUMPER AND THE TURKEY MAN – *continued*



Will gets a big hug from Carol Clark with Kidz Outdoors



What it's all about!

actuation devices. This helps Will overcome his muscle control issues and makes shooting a firearm a possibility for him. The system is lightweight enough that it can be broken down and transported by one person. That way Will and I can go hunting together safer and easier. Remember me saying earlier that the good Lord put people in Will's life... So we got the gun ready and zeroed in. I hand load ammunition and have as long as I can remember. It's something my dad taught me and something I love to show my kids how to do. So I loaded up some shells with the new TSS shot...These things are bad medicine for old Mr. Tom for sure.

The days crept by as we were waiting on the hunt. Will's anticipation was growing each day! When the day finally came, we headed to Doc's to meet up with Carol and Rick Clark, the crew at Kingdom Ridge Whitetails, and the turkey man himself, Eddie Salter! We pull up to the lodge, get all our stuff settled, get our camouflage on, and head to the woods.

Now, I have watched Eddie Salter on hunting videos ever since I was a kid and I can truly say he is just as

friendly and down to earth in person as he comes across on Television. He spent lots of time just talking and cutting up with all of us. With that being said, when it came time for the hunt the turkey man showed up and was on a mission to talk a lonely old gobbler into committing Harry Carey.

The first evening hunt came and went with turkeys being turkeys... tight-lipped and absent. We did have lots of deer around us all afternoon to keep us entertained though.

Back at the camp that evening we got to catch up with Doc, his son Brandon, and the rest of the Kingdom Ridge crew. These are some of the best people there are. Will had the pleasure of getting to know these fine people this past deer season. Not only did Will get the opportunity to take a really nice buck, but he also earned a new nickname...Thumper. This came about because anytime the words "there's a deer" especially if someone said, "There's a buck," "Will's leg would start jumping like Thumper from Bambi. So our guide, Greg "BooBoo"

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THUMPER AND THE TURKEY MAN – *continued*

Lawrence officially christened him with the nickname Thumper. The whole crew has treated our entire family just like a member of their family since day one. Again, remember me saying God has put people in Will's life... With our bellies full of delicious food and sore from all the laughter, we headed to bed. Before we go to sleep, Will thanks me for getting everything set up for him and tells me how much fun he is having. I tell him, "Buddy, I didn't do anything. I'm just glad I get to tag along with you on these adventures."

To say Ole Thumper was excited the next morning is a definite understatement. As soon as the alarm sounded he was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. We got ready, grabbed a quick bite for breakfast, loaded up, and rolled out with Rick and Eddie. We got to the blind and got set up before daylight. We got to witness the spring woods waking up. We heard a few distant gobbles but nothing close. One of the main challenges of turkey hunting with

someone in a wheelchair is it's almost impossible to move and reposition without getting spotted.

Well, the turkey man whipped out a new type of box call with an aluminum paddle and started to work on it. Rick and I instantly looked at each other and said almost at the same time, "Dang! That thing sounds good!" So we hear one answer from what sounds like a half-mile away. The next time Eddie hits him with the box call he has closed the distance some, but is still a long way off. So another twenty to thirty minutes go by and again when that box call made its sweet music the old boy gobbles. This time he's maybe one hundred and fifty yards away. Just on the other side of the field we are in. We are all getting ready and getting everything set up because surely if he's come this far he will be on top of us any minute. Then I can see him. He's all by himself and looks like a Volkswagen bug with both doors open as he's strutting on a ridge on the other side of the field.

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Thumper's gun, custom made by Jonathan Jones at Alabama Gun Works



Will and his dad, Brad Townsend



THUMPER AND THE TURKEY MAN – *continued*

I tell Will to get ready. I get the bird in the scope so Will can see him. Then that sorry joker comes out of strut and walks off...never to be seen or heard again that morning.

As we are getting packed up and waiting on our ride I can tell Eddie is one hundred percent in turkey man mode and the gauntlet has been thrown down. We all feel like we should try a different spot that afternoon. So after a quick bite of lunch, Eddie heads off with Doc and the guys. They go out for a new spot.

The group gets back and Eddie says he's found a spot that looks good and thinks we should head out soon and get set up. So again we head out to the woods with Rick and Eddie. When we get to "the spot" I can see why Eddie chose this spot. It's a shady area in some mature pines. It's on a ridge that has several roads intersecting on top of it and has turkey droppings everywhere.

We get the decoys set up and Will, Rick, and I get set up in the blind. Eddie gets set up about fifteen to twenty yards behind the blind. We let the area quiet back down from the commotion of us getting set up. Eddie starts playing his sweet springtime music again. We sit there with Eddie calling every so often just enjoying a beautiful spring day in Alabama. The three of us are swapping hunting stories in the blind and just taking it all in when I hear Rick say, "There's a turkey...no, make that two!" I look up and can tell instantly they are both Toms from their black bodies and bright red necks and heads. I get my binoculars up and those two have turned into four! They all have nice beards and are on a steady walk right toward us. I tell Will it's go time! We get the birds in the scope and watch them for maybe ten seconds. They are now at forty-five yards with the lead bird standing with his head craned up perfectly. Rick is on the camera so I ask what he thinks. He says, "Shoot him!" So Will does the deal. As soon as he touches the trigger actuator but-

ton the bird drops like a sack of rocks! Of course, I have to see that in recaps from Rick's camera and Will's scope camera. Why, you ask? Well in the haste to get the shot off I had gotten my face a tad too close to the gun stock. When that dude went off it felt like Iron Mike Tyson had hit me right square in the nose. As I'm realizing what happened and start to be able to see through my watered-up eyes, I can see the bird flopping on the ground. All of us in the blind start going nuts hollering with excitement. Will is about to flip himself out of his chair he is so excited. Eddie and I go out and get Will's bird...a nice two-year-old with a heavy ten-inch beard and respectable spurs. When we get back to the blind with the bird I hear Will say, "I didn't even have time to start thumping!"

As the pictures show, Thumper had a smile that you couldn't wipe off even if you tried. What they also show is some of those people that God has put in my son's life. I am so very thankful for each and every one of them and those who sponsor them.

We celebrated the hunt the rest of the day with the whole group from Kingdom Ridge and Kidz Outdoors and enjoyed a great evening of fellowship and laughter. After all, that's what it's about. Enjoying God's creations with people you love. It's never about the kill. It's about the journey it took to get there and the memories made along the way.

I would be remised if I didn't speak out about Carol and Rick Clark from Kidz Outdoors. These are two of the finest people around. Without them, this would not have been possible. The love and devotion they show these kids and young adults is truly something special. Coming from a parent with a child with special needs I can promise you they leave no stone unturned when it comes to making sure their kids have any and everything they need to be able to enjoy the outdoors. ●





Turkey Harvest Up; Debate Continues on Population

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

According to *Game Check* reports, turkey hunters in Alabama harvested almost 2,500 more birds during the 2023 season than the 2022 season. Whether that's an encouraging indication of the turkey population in the state is subject to significant debate.

Hunters reported taking 18,122 birds during the 2023 season, compared to 15,673 during the 2022 season and 14,947 during the 2021 season. Those are *Game Check* numbers, and Steven Mitchell, the upland game coordinator with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division, said the results of the annual post-season hunter survey are not yet available. Mitchell is concerned that hunters are not reporting their harvests through *Game Check* as mandated.

"Our compliance rate on reporting is not where it needs to be," Mitchell said. "Comparison of *Game Check* numbers with post-season harvest surveys gives us an estimated reporting compliance rate. Since implementation of *Game Check* in 2017-18, harvest reporting compliance has been increasing with each season. However, we are only averaging a 45% compliance rate over the last five years. That rate needs to be much higher. Compliance with harvest reporting is extremely important. We need the most complete and accurate data possible to help inform management of the wild turkey resource."

Chuck Sykes, WFF Director, also said this trend in turkey harvest cannot necessarily be construed as an increase in the turkey population.

"That remains to be seen," Sykes said. "That could be a really good thing, meaning that we've got more birds. But we've also got more hunters out there. To me, we've got more hunters who are taking more birds."

Sykes said he focused on the first 10 days of the past three seasons to illustrate the increase in hunters compared to turkey harvest numbers. During the opening 10 days of the 2021 season 3,808 hunters reported 4,488

birds harvested. The same time period for the 2022 and 2023 seasons showed significant increases in hunters (6,062 hunters in 2022 and 6,325 in 2023) and a corresponding increase in reported harvests (7,391 in 2022 and 7,845 in 2023).

"We've got more hunters each year, killing more turkeys," Sykes said. "So does that mean there are more turkeys out there. I don't think so. Only time will tell."

Sykes said what concerns him is the motivation of today's turkey hunters compared to previous generations.

"Back in the day, you hunted turkeys for the challenge," he said. "I'm not saying I didn't like killing turkeys, but it was different. I don't see that today. I'm not saying everybody. No matter what rules and regulations we put in place, no matter what science we come up with, we can't legislate or regulate morals and ethics. Rules and regs are only as good as people who abide by them."

Sykes said he studied the contacts the WFF Conservation Enforcement Officers had with turkey hunters during the first 10 days of the 2023 season, and it was disheartening.

"The number of citations written was embarrassing," he said. "More than half the counties had citations written in them."

Those game violations included hunting without a license, adults hunting during youth weekend, hunting prior to the opening of the season and using decoys the first 10 days of the season.

"But the biggest one was hunting over bait," Sykes said. "We had more than 80 citations written for hunting by the aid of bait in the first 10 days. If we wrote that many, how many were doing it? I think people's mindsets have changed to 'I just want to kill turkey under any circumstance so I can post the picture or video on social media.'"

"I hope I'm wrong. It just seems that the lines between right and wrong are very blurred right now."

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TURKEY HARVEST UP; DEBATE CONTINUES ON POPULATION – *continued*

Sykes said modern technology has become so sophisticated that the sense of fair chase has been marginalized.

“Like using a cell phone-activated trail camera, not just to scout, but to see a turkey and go try to kill him,” he said. “Back in the day, if a turkey didn’t gobble but once or twice on the limb, he had a good chance of making it. That was a defense mechanism. You might have hunted him all season. Now, with the cell phone-activated trail camera alerting you every time a turkey walks by, whether he gobbles or not, you can still kill him.

“I’m not saying all technology is bad. I’m using a .410 now that shoots better than 12 gauges that I hunted with for 25 years. You’ve got Thermacells and turkey loungers and lightweight guns. We’ve got to take into account that people are much more effective killers. If you throw out the illegal activities, just the legal hunting methods are making people much more effective killers, and I don’t think people are giving that the attention it needs.”

For veteran hunters who remember when the turkey population in Alabama was not abundant, an outing where a hunter heard a turkey gobble was considered a successful hunt.

“It doesn’t seem like that’s the case anymore,” Sykes said. “I think until people respect the bird and love the hunt and love the bird more than they love themselves,



Daniel Sims and his son, Fisher, head home after a successful turkey hunt. Photo courtesy of Daniel Sims

the birds are in trouble. People are turkey shooters now, not turkey hunters.

“I didn’t grow up that way, and a lot of people of our generation can’t understand that mentality. That’s what I see. Again, I hope I’m wrong. I will gladly say that I am.”

Meanwhile, Mitchell thinks social media does have one upside for Alabama’s Eastern wild turkey.

“Social media has drawn more people into turkey hunting,” Mitchell said. “I don’t think that is necessarily a bad thing. I think a lot of it has called attention to the plight of turkeys and the perceived turkey decline. I think or hope people have gained education through social media more than anything.”

Mitchell said turkey hunters during the 2023 season enjoyed relatively cool temperatures, which can mean more comfortable hunting conditions later in the season.

“It may have helped the gobblers as far as gobbling and displaying later into the mornings,” he said. “We also had an early spring as far as vegetation. From anecdotal reports I’m getting from around the state, nests were being observed earlier than previous years. Hopefully that translated into a good hatch. The earlier the nest, the more of a likelihood a brood will successfully hatch young.”

WFF personnel will conduct its annual statewide brood survey from July 1 through August 30, when all turkey sightings are noted on field reports that include gobblers, hens without poults, hens with poults, the size of the poults and poults per hen.

“Ultimately, that gives us a poult-per-hen count,” Mitchell said. “That gives an indication of how good our hatch was and juvenile recruitment into the fall population. Last year’s survey showed we were still below what researchers consider the threshold for sustainable population, which is two poults per hen. Unfortunately, we have been below that threshold for several years now.”

Mitchell said many of the hunters he has talked to about the 2023 season considered it a “pretty good” season with a decent amount of gobbling activity.

“Most of them don’t think it’s what it used to be, our numbers are not what they used to be, but they’re not panicking,” he said. “They’re still hearing gobblers and hunting gobblers, but that was the slight majority. Other have stated their hunting was way down in terms of hearing gobblers and gobbles.”

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TURKEY HARVEST UP; DEBATE CONTINUES ON POPULATION – *continued*

“Anecdotal reports from landowners and land managers have been varied. Some have said they have not noticed a drop in turkey numbers while other landowners have noted a decrease in turkey numbers over previous years.”

The 2023 season has been over for almost two months, but Mitchell said landowners and leaseholders can use the offseason to be proactive about increasing beneficial habitat for turkeys on their properties.

“It’s habitat first and predator control as basically a steroid,” he said. “It’s about getting that habitat in a healthier condition to provide benefits for the wild turkey. After that, they can provide more benefit through trapping predators.”

“Right now is a great time to identify habitat needs. A lot of times the limiting factor is brooding habitat

or bugging habitat for the poult. People may not like the look of a weedy mess around their property, but that’s where those young turkeys survive.”

Mitchell also said the density of weedy growth can be a detriment to poult survival as well.

“If a poult cannot easily move through that vegetation to forage for bugs and escape predators, that is not good,” he said. “The density of that vegetation is very important. If it’s choked up with grasses, you might look at prescribed fire or disking. Everything is important at ground level.”

“Thinning timber in places where sunlight is not getting to the ground will also help provide brooding and nesting areas. Everybody needs to think ‘habitat’ because that’s the key.” ●





Alabama State Parks

Have you been dreaming about walking along the sugar-white sand on Alabama's Gulf Coast or enjoying the cool mountain air of Northeast Alabama? With 21 parks covering more than 50,000 acres of land and water, there's a state park within a short drive for virtually every Alabamian. Now is the perfect time to visit our parks and enjoy "Alabama the Beautiful." You can also support our parks by donating to the Alabama State Parks Foundation.

Link: <https://asparksfoundation.org/give-today>

Our Contact Information

Alabama State Parks Foundation

64 North Union Street, Suite 538

Montgomery, AL 36104

(334) 557-0150

<http://www.asparksfoundation.org>





Butler County Natural Resources Youth Camp

By Paul E. Hudgins

For the 26th year, the Butler County Forestry Planning Committee's Natural Resources Youth Camp has offered a "hands-on" camp for area sixth grade students – at no cost. Once selected by their school to attend the camp, students spend three days and two nights at Mussel Creek Hunting Lodge, a rustic cabin located on private property in north Butler County. Campers leave behind their electronic devices to take part in this one-of-a-kind adventure.

The camp offers kids the opportunity to learn about Alabama's environment, how it relates to the everyday economy, as well as the important role it plays in our daily lives. The camp also provides students something to do from 7am to 11pm – and even later if you're the last one to get a shower.

The camp began with students being given a compass and a "crash course" on how to use it, as well as instructions on determining an unknown distance by "pacing." Once the newly acquired knowledge is ready for the test, students are taken out and dropped off in the woods and asked to find their way through the woods and back to the starting point on the compass course. While some students are becoming skilled at orienteering, others are

hearing about power line safety from Pioneer Electric Cooperative and home fire safety from the Greenville Fire Department.

After a hearty lunch, foresters with Larson & McGowin Forest Managers & Consultants gave this year's campers a course on "Tree Identification". Using the differences in overall appearance, leaf characteristics, and tree bark, they learn to identify different tree species. They were then given the opportunity to compete in a "tree relay" and the team that could identify the most trees were given some nice prizes.

Next on the agenda, students learn about the wonderful world of butterflies and how important they are for our need for pollinators. Next the campers hear about Hunter Ethics and Preserving Our Hunting Heritage from the South Alabama Hunter Education Instructor with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Students then find out how to identify wildlife "footprints." Using the *Project Wild* activity, "Making Tracks," a Wildlife Biologist with the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Wildlife Section, introduces students to the different types of tracks

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BUTLER COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES YOUTH CAMP – *continued*



made by Alabama wildlife. Following this presentation, a Wildlife Biologist with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, teaches the campers about fur bearer population management and trapping techniques used in Alabama. They learned how and what it takes to control nuisance animals by trapping as a safe and effective way to limit damage.

The final program on the agenda of the day is the importance of honeybees to our environment from a local beekeeper. Students get up close experience with bee keeping equipment.

Each evening, well after darkness falls, the students are loaded onto the FPC's tour trailer and driven through the deep dark forests of South Alabama. The purpose of these night-time excursions is to look for nocturnal wildlife, and again this year we were lucky enough to

call up a pair of owls that perched on a limb just above the students' heads.

Early on the second day, students are taught Trapping 101 with a retired Wildlife Biologist with the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Wildlife Section. Students learn what it takes to trap predators and the proper techniques used in this form of predator control. After learning about trapping, campers are treated to a live drone demonstration by the Alabama Forestry Commission. The campers are then presented with program on Plants in Native American Culture by the Environmental Protection Specialist with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

After these presentations, the students are treated to an educational demonstration from a few of Alabama's birds of prey by the Southeastern Raptor Center. Following the

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BUTLER COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES YOUTH CAMP – *continued*

birds of prey, campers are presented with “A Cooperative Critter Experience” by an Environmental Services Analyst and Wildlife Biologist, Jimmy Stiles. Students are given a hands-on, close-up encounter with some of Alabama’s local inhabitants. The next activity offers students a chance to explore and learn what really lives in a local creek with a Fisheries Biologist with the Auburn University’s School of Natural History. Campers take creek samples using nets, then look through these samples to make an evaluation of the creek’s overall “condition.”

After cooling off in one of Alabama’s creeks, the final activity of day is a presentation on Wilderness Skills and Survival and what the campers can do if they get lost while in the woods. To close out the “camp experience,” students are given the opportunity to shoot 22’s, black powder, skeet, and archery. This opportunity is pro-

vided by the Alabama Department of Conservation and the ACEOA and instruction is by Alabama Conservation Enforcement officers with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Once camp is over, the campers are given several Audubon Field Guidebooks and other nice prizes for “surviving” camp. Special awards are presented for the best shooter in each of the shooting sports events, as well as best shot in archery.

All these natural resources experience is funded in part by tremendous community support as well as grants from the Alabama Forests Forever license plate and various other sponsors. In a few years, when the campers look back at their time at Mussel Creek, we hope they remember us fondly and think of this camp as an experience of a lifetime! ●





Injury Can't Stop Cash at NASP State Championship

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

What do you do if you break a bone in your elbow three weeks before the 20th anniversary National Archery in Schools Program's (NASP) Alabama State Championship? If you're Jake Cash of Ashville High, you adapt and overcome.

Chris Cash, Jake's father, said his son tripped on a cable on the high school band's trailer and landed on a battery used to power equipment. The tip of Jake's elbow was broken, but, instead of surrendering his chances to compete, he and his coaches, Joshua Dollar and George Brightman, devised a way to work around the handicap.

"I started archery junior year so I knew I would have only two years to do it," Jake said. "I had already put in so many hours practicing. So, three weeks before state, I decided I didn't want to say I'm not doing it. One of my coaches told me it had been done before, and I was willing."

Cash is a right-handed shooter with an injured right elbow, so the coaches rigged a leather strap connected to the string that he could grip with his teeth. Adjustments to the bow's draw weight and a different aim point yielded positive results.

"There was certainly a learning curve to something unconventional like this. I grab the strap with my back molars and push my left arm out," Cash said. "The aim was pretty close to what it was before. We had to adjust the bow's tension to get me where I'm aiming on the target. I was aiming with my face more to the right than I usually would, so my arrows were hitting to the left. It took about halfway through the week for me to start shooting consistently. I had gotten the fundamentals of it and started fine-tuning some things."

Spring break occurred at an inconvenient time for Cash, who only had one day for the coaches to help him get acclimated to the new setup.

"I had to learn on my own because of spring break," he said. "Then the week after spring break was state

championship week. The first time people saw me doing it, they didn't expect me to get back to where I was."

Remarkably, Cash scored 285 out of a possible 300 during the competition, where archers shot rounds from 10 meters and 15 meters.

"It was a bit of a handicap, but I somehow pulled it off," he said. "I shocked myself with it. I was not thinking it was going to be viable for me to shoot. Fifteen meters is a long shot. That is what I struggled with. At 10 meters, a little mistake won't cost you much. But at 15, you make a little mistake and you've shot a seven or a six.

"Learning to avoid mistakes like that, like putting my mouth on the same spot on the tab with the same tooth, that was really the hard part of learning to shoot this way."

The NASP not only teaches youth how to enjoy the recreational aspect of archery, but it also provides valuable life lessons.

"This really taught me the value of dedicating yourself to something," Cash said. "If you stay dedicated, it will work out. This is my first year shooting, and I've already learned that practice will get you to places, especially when something like this happens a month before state. It's practice and dedication."

Jake's 285 score put him in the top 10 percent of the 2,000 shooters.

"He ended up in 22nd place," said Chris Cash. "I couldn't ask for any more than that. I told him I was proud, and I was impressed."

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division hosts and conducts the NASP State Championship at the Cramton Bowl Multiplex in Montgomery. Michael Bloxom, WFF Regional Hunter Education Coordinator who coordinates the Alabama championship, said NASP originated in Kentucky.

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INJURY CAN'T STOP CASH AT NASP STATE CHAMPIONSHIP – *continued*

“The archery program was actually invented by a math teacher looking for a new way to teach math,” Bloxom said. “That was in 2001, and Alabama was one of the first states to come on board with the program nationally. This is our 20th year. It started with 200 archers and has now grown to 2,000 archers this year.”

Archers from the 4th through 12th grades compete in seven regional events throughout the state, and the top shooters qualify for the state championship.

“We had almost 7,000 kids shoot in one of those regional tournaments,” Bloxom said. “The scores are ranked, and invitations are sent out to about 2,000 shooters for the state championship. The program is in about 400 schools throughout the state, and we give out about \$10,000 in scholarships at the state tournament. We also have the University of Montevallo here, giving scholarships to their collegiate archery team to the top shooters.”

Ray Metzler, who was a volunteer at this year’s competition, was the WFF Hunter Education Coordinator when Alabama joined NASP 20 years ago.

“We went from shooting in the pecan orchard at AWF (Alabama Wildlife Federation in Millbrook) with, I think, 224 shooters to now 2,000 shooters at the Cramton Bowl,” Metzler said. “We have 400 schools participating now. That’s good.”

NASP uses 10-ring targets similar to the Olympic-style scoring system with a 10 score for the bullseye and 1 point for the outer ring. Archers shoot a total of 30 arrows, 15 arrows from 10 meters and 15 arrows from 15 meters.



Jake Cash overcame an elbow injury to shoot 285 at the NASP State Championship.

Photo by Billy Pope

Scores are recorded after each group of five arrows. A perfect score is 300 points, which has not yet been achieved in the 20 years of the Alabama championship.

“We’ve had several 297s and 298s, so it’s pretty elusive,” Bloxom said. “The archers can’t use sights. All the kids throughout the program have to use the same bows, same arrows and same format. That keeps it an even playing field between your smaller schools and your bigger schools with more resources. The team score is derived from the scores of the top 12 shooters with at least four of the opposite sex, so it keeps it a co-ed program.”

The top shooters and teams from Alabama will advance to the NASP National Championship in Louisville, Kentucky, in May. More than 10,000 archers from across the country will compete in that tournament.

Bloxom said the National Wild Turkey Federation Alabama Chapter, the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association and Alabama Wildlife Federation are among the biggest supporters of NASP in the state.

“They have funded all our scholarships, and now we can offer free admission to all the parents and spectators,” he said. “The cost for the individual kids hasn’t gone up in more than 10 years. They get a T-shirt and get to keep their arrows, so it’s something they get to take away other than the experience.”

Bloxom said school kids who might not be drawn to play sports like baseball, softball, football or basketball have the opportunity to participate in a team sport with NASP.

“It’s a great program because archery is a sport that kids of all shapes, sizes and abilities can do,” Bloxom said. “We have shooters who have special needs and disabilities, plus your kids that aren’t your typical athletes. They may not be able to compete in the traditional sports, but archery is one of those things some kids just have a natural ability for. Once they have a chance to try, they find out they like it. Then they get good at it, and it gives them the opportunity to take part in a team sport where they develop discipline and confidence that they might not otherwise get to experience.”

“Here in Alabama, the Department (ADCNR) really supports the program. We do free teacher training. What we hope to do is create lifelong archers. We hope some of

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INJURY CAN'T STOP CASH AT NASP STATE CHAMPIONSHIP – *continued*

these kids will become bowhunters, competitive shooters or just shoot in their backyards. And every time they buy a bow or arrows, they will be helping wildlife conservation through the Pittman-Robertson Act. That's one component of it, but it's also teaching good skills, like discipline, responsibility and teamwork. The reason it's

a school program is it's not just archery; we're actually looking to improve academics as well."

Speaking of academics, Bentley Joiner of Fayetteville School was named one of 10 NASP Academic Archer Equipment Winners for 2023. Joiner was selected from more than 34,000 nominees nationwide. ●





The ACEOA is a proud cosponsor of the National Archery in The Schools State Championship. Annually the ACEOA contributes funding to assist the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Hunter Education Unit with various expenses in order to support this extremely large-scale event. Additionally, this year when requested the ACEOA contributed \$5,000 in matching funds towards multiple scholarships that were awarded at the event. The ACEOA believes in this program and the young people who represent their schools through archery. Continue to aim straight Archers!

2023 NASP Alabama State Championship Results Announced



Photo by Billy Pope, ADCNR

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2023 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – *continued*

Over the past year, thousands of student archers competed in regional tournaments throughout the state for a chance to draw their bows at the 2023 National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) Alabama State Championship in Montgomery on April 6-7.

During the event, nearly 2,000 archers from 115 schools competed for top honors and the opportunity to advance to the NASP Eastern National Championship on May 11-13, 2023, in Louisville, Kentucky.

This year, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division awarded \$10,000 in scholarships to select top archers. The top overall female and male archers each received a \$1,500 scholarship. First place high school female and male archers each received a \$1,000 scholarship, second place high school female and male archers each received a \$750 scholarship, and third place high school female and male archers each received a \$500 scholarship. The scholarships are funded, in part, by the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association.

“The Archery in the Schools Program teaches discipline, patience, and the life lessons required to be successful in both the classroom and at the archery range,” said Chris Blankenship, ADCNR Commissioner. “Their determination and dedication to both archery and academics will serve these students well in other aspects of life.”

In addition to the top archers, five students randomly selected from a list of all registered Academic Archers who shot during the tournament were each awarded a \$500 scholarship. Those students are:

- Anne Girby, Alma Bryant
- Evan Dockery, Cullman High
- J.C. Peacock, Grand Bay Middle
- Mason Gregory, Fairview High
- Mose Piper, Davidson High

Scoring for the state tournament is based on Olympic-style, target archery in three divisions – elementary, middle and high school. Competition is on team and individual levels. Perfect scores are 3,600 points for teams and 300 for individuals. If archers that place in each division have the same score, the ties are broken by comparing the numbers of 10s from the scoresheet. The archer with the most 10s is awarded first place.

Top Scores in the 2023 Alabama NASP State Championship

TOP OVERALL INDIVIDUALS

FEMALE: Mia Cornelson, Alma Bryant High, Score: 293
MALE: Jagger Lee, Vinemont High, Score: 293

HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION

Vinemont High, Score: 3,420
Alma Bryant High, Score: 3,412
Buckhorn High, Score: 3,383

MIDDLE SCHOOL DIVISION

Causey Middle, Score: 3,316
Cullman Middle, Score: 3,313
Vinemont Middle, Score: 3,275

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2023 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – continued



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DIVISION

East Elementary, Score: 3,152
Vinemont Elementary, Score: 3,130
St. Luke’s Episcopal School, Score: 3,079

INDIVIDUAL HIGH SCHOOL FEMALES

Mia Cornelson, Alma Bryant High, Score: 293
Caroline Miller, Vinemont High, Score: 293
Talah Coleman, Alma Bryant High, Score: 290

INDIVIDUAL HIGH SCHOOL MALES

Jagger Lee, Vinemont High, Score: 293
Evan Dockery, Cullman High, Score: 293
Mason McCury, Good Hope High, Score: 293

INDIVIDUAL MIDDLE SCHOOL FEMALES

Maddie Seidel, Cullman Middle School, Score: 291
AnnaLee McRae, Vinemont Middle, Score: 288
Katelyn Jowers, Cullman Middle, Score: 282

INDIVIDUAL MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES

Ethan Wheat, Causey Middle, Score: 291
Gunner Couch, Grand Bay Middle, Score: 288
Paden Roberts, Clarke-Shaw Magnet, Score: 288

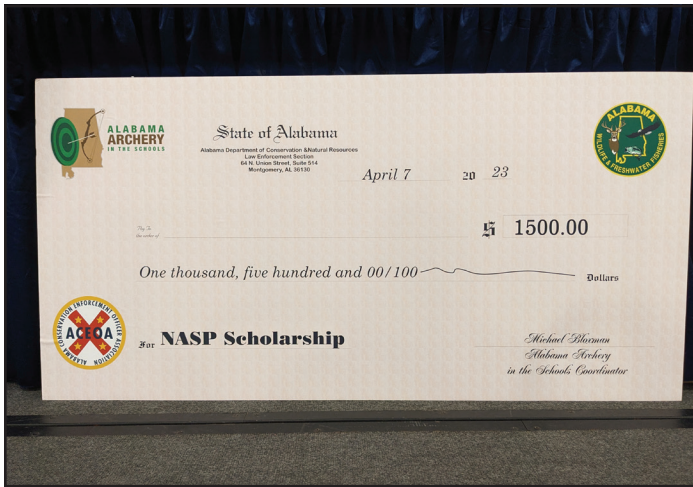
INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FEMALES

Kinsley Matson, East Elementary, Score: 278
Britton Smith, Elsie Collier Elementary, Score: 275
Brianna Baker, Vinemont Elementary, Score: 274

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2023 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – continued



Complete results for the 2023 NASP Alabama State Championship are available at www.nasptournaments.org. To view photos from the event, visit ADCNR's Flickr at www.flickr.com/photos/outdooralabama.

Alabama's archery program is coordinated by WFF through partnerships with various schools and supporting organizations in the state. Alabama NASP is an affiliate of the national program and promotes discipline, self-esteem and life skills for students in grades 4-12.

To learn more about Alabama NASP, contact WFF Regional Hunter Education Coordinator Michael Bloxom at (334) 242-3868 or Michael.Bloxom@dcnr.alabama.gov.

ADCNR promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources through four divisions: Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Learn more at www.outdooralabama.com.

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INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MALES

- Briggs Renfroe, Castlen Elementary, Score: 291
- Dawson Deloney, Highlands Elementary, Score: 282
- Cason Tarver, Saraland Elementary, Score: 276





2023 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – continued





Olive's Gafftop Creation Crowned at Alabama Seafood Cook-Off

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Imagine heading down to the shore at Orange Beach and scooping up enough sand fleas (mole crabs) for a fishing excursion to the Perdido Pass jetties, where all you catch are gafftopsail (gafftop) catfish.

Then imagine taking those gafftops, considered a nuisance fish by most anglers, and heading to Zeke's Landing to create the winning dish at the 8th annual Alabama Seafood Cook-Off.

That's basically what Brody Olive, executive chef at Perdido Beach Resort, did last week to claim the top prize at the Alabama Gulf Seafood-sponsored event, where four of the top chefs in Alabama were given an hour to create delectable dishes out of fresh Gulf seafood.

Olive and sous chef Luis Silvestre created "Fishing on the Rocks, the Jetties at Perdido Pass" with gafftop catfish smoked over scrub oak coal with flash-fried mole crabs, Gulf shrimp horseradish cream, pickled purslane and smoked paprika coral tuile.

"I'm kind of surprised," said Olive, who also won the Cook-Off in 2017. "We just went outside the box and had a little fun with it, pushing the envelope a little bit. We decided whatever happens happens, and it came together.

"To all of the fishermen out there, it's all about fishing and not necessarily catching. We served gafftop catfish, and there's some stigma about the fish. Some people throw it back. We took the catfish, cut the ribs out of them and smoked them over some scrub oak. We pickled a little purslane (leafy plant that some people consider a weed) that's common on the Gulf Coast. Our fish were pretty small, so we cooked up our bait too. We made a shrimp horseradish sauce that we pureed into a nice little foam. Then we had mole crabs, pompano candy, which is like a little softshell crab and added a little crunchy texture

to the dish. We added a little smoked black garlic sea salt and some chili flakes."

Olive, who won \$2,500 from the Alabama event, advances to the Great American Seafood Cook-Off in New Orleans later this summer.

Cook-Off judges were Jim Smith, founder and executive chef of The Hummingbird Way in Mobile and chairman of the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission; Chris Nelson, president of Bon Secour Fisheries; Susan Benton, a food writer and founder of gulfcoastrestaurants.com; and Jeffrey Compton, 2022 ASCO Champion and partner/executive chef of Armour House in Birmingham.

The dishes were judged in five categories:

1. Presentation, General Impression and Serving Methods
2. Creativity and Practicality
3. Composition and Harmony of Ingredients
4. Correct Preparation and Craftsmanship
5. Flavor, Taste and Texture

Each category was worth up to 20 points for a total of 100 points.

Sam Adams of (small batch) restaurant in Birmingham took the runner-up prize with her dish of "Mediterranean Summer Meets Birmingham." It featured seared Gulf red snapper over Gulf crab salad with boiled peanut hummus, cornmeal fried squash, fried capers, saffron beurre l'orange and herb salad.

"The snapper, I just wanted to keep simple to honor how good and fresh our red snapper is," said Adams, who was assisted by sous chef Brian Dyer. "So, I just did salt and pepper and seared it in a cast iron pan until the skin got crispy. Then I flipped it and finished it with some butter.

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OLIVE'S GAFFTOP CREATION CROWNED AT ALABAMA SEAFOOD COOK-OFF – *continued*



*Chef Brody Olive, right, and sous chef Luis Silvestre advance to the Great American Seafood Cook-Off later this summer in New Orleans.
Photo by Billy Pope*

“The hummus was made from peanuts from Alabama Peanut Company, and the summer relish was made from local produce,” Adams said. “The sauce was a beurre blanc with an orange wine. We had an herb salad with feta cheese for a little Mediterranean flavor.”

Although they didn’t come out on top, the other two dishes were delicious (I did my duty and grabbed a taste).

Laurence Agnew, the executive chef of Jesse’s Restaurant in Magnolia Springs and Fort Morgan, also ventured a little out of the box with his “Summer in the Spring” with dry-aged Gulf swordfish, magnolia-glazed Bayou Cora “nixtamalized” hominy, local summer vegetables with blue crab-stuffed heirloom tomatoes and bourride butter.

“At Jesse’s, we started dry-aging fish, specifically from the Gulf,” said Agnew, who was assisted by sous chef Brooke Ghioto. “We have a great spear fisherman who brings us whole fish every few days. Through trial and error and educating ourselves, we find the swordfish, among many other fish, does well when dry-aged. Swordfish was always a good fish to me, but it never really stood out.

“We dry-age it with the bone and the natural marrow. This one was dry-aged for 10 days, and then we grilled it over binchotan charcoal (used in Japanese cooking) with a little bit of magnolia wood. The fish has a nice unctuous taste with the natural fat of the swordfish. We served that with dent corn from Bayou Cora, which is right down from us in Magnolia Springs and nixtamalized, which means we cooked it in sodium hydroxide, which is a lye or alkaline mixture, to bring out the niacin in the corn and make it tender so you can make fresh masa with it for tortillas and hominy. We had tomatoes we stuffed with blue crab salad. We made a magnolia glaze with leaves from the magnolia in Magnolia Springs. When it goes with the fish and the charcoal, it kind of gives it a nice floral and umami flavor. We’re going to be using magnolia flowers in a couple of desserts at the restaurant. We’re using everything possible from Magnolia Springs and focusing on what’s available in the summer.”

Nicholas Song of The Depot in Auburn prepared an Alabama jumbo blue crab cake with heirloom tomatoes, miso dashi, Meyer lemon quick-pickled cucumber, Alabama royal red shrimp salad, local corn, and chili and cotija aioli.

“Everything in the dish is supposed to complement each other with sweet, savory saltiness and fattiness,” said Song, who was assisted by Morgan McWaters. “The crab is very buttery, very sweet, very rich. The shrimp is unctuous with a nice firm texture. We garnish it with micro greens and cilantro, so you get that really nice fresh taste. The miso dashi is made with kelp, which gives it a very umami flavor and a natural sea salt brininess. The seafood flavor is really going to come out of that broth.

“I’m kind of new to Alabama, so the goal is to use all this great seafood, all that’s local, all that’s fresh. I came from Hawaii, so the seafood is different in Alabama. Eating the freshest seafood from the Alabama Gulf is very inspiring. My executive chef, Scott Simpson, is teaching me about Alabama seafood, and he was the winner at the Alabama Seafood Cook-Off two years ago.” ●



2023 BCWMA Youth Hunt Successful

By Ken White

The 23rd annual Barbour County Management Area Youth Hunt was held Saturday, February 18th following a two-year hiatus due to the Covid Pandemic. How the youth and parents would respond after this layoff was the big question. A beautiful day featuring sunshine and moderate temperatures set the stage for what was to come. And come they did! 256 youth registered for a great day and evening in the outdoor world. Hosted by the Eufaula Lions Club, the Barbour County Coon Hunters Association, the Barbour County Wildlife Management Area personnel and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources-Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, this hunt is one of the top-five youth hunting events held nationally. It was a great family day of fun, fellowship, and memory-making as a good number of parents accompanied their youth. At no cost for our youth, this event offers a real outdoor adventure with events and activities scheduled for excellent fun and educational opportunities.

Venues this year included Archery, two venues for

Shotgun Clay Shooting, BB gun Shooting Competition, Turkey Calling, Turkey Target Shooting, Wilderness Survival Training, Sling Shot Shooting, Hog Hunting info venue, Compass Use and Map Reading and Tree Stand Hunting Safety Venue. Traditional hunting events included the choice of the traditional Squirrel Hunt with dogs or a Quail Hunt with dogs. For the 12 and older youth, a .22-cal. Rifle Shooting competition was an option to the regular hunting events.

Brayden Moss of Fortson, Georgia made the trip over and took top honors in the Boys Category. Taylor Stevens of Eufaula, Alabama won the Girl's Category. Each won a nice Rossi model RS22, .22-cal. semi-automatic rifle for their achievements.

The event opened with registration beginning at 9:30AM with the venues opening at 10:00AM thru 1:00PM. A hot-dog lunch was available starting around Noon which allowed the participants to work lunch into their schedule of preferred events to attend. The afternoon was filled

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Brayden Moss winner of Boys Division .22-cal. Rifle Shooting Contest



Taylor Stevens winner of Girls Division .22-cal. Rifle Shooting Contest

2023 BCWMA YOUTH HUNT SUCCESSFUL – *continued*



"No problems...we got this" (Slingshot Venue)



"Let Me Get My Balance Here" (Tree Stand Safety Venue)

with the traditional hunting events and at 5:00PM the hot-dog supper, introductions and awards presentations were held. This year's door prizes were full of great items but there were six everyone hoped to win. Three Savage model 64-.22LR rifles, 1 Rossi model RS-.22LR rifle, 1 Charles Daly Model 301-12 ga. shotgun and 2 Charles Daly model 301-20 ga shotguns were included and drawn randomly. These were in addition to the two rifles for the .22-cal. Rifle Shooting Contest and the BB-Guns for the BB-Gun Shooting Competition. Once the formalities were closed it was time for the evening event. A star-lit, cool evening oversaw the traditional wagon ride/coon hunt which took place through the woods of the Barbour

County Wildlife Management Area. It was a great ending to an even greater day of fun and excitement in the great outdoors.

The great members of the Eufaula Lions Club, the founding hosts of this event, served over a 1000 hot dogs, chips, sodas and water to a crowd, estimated at 425-450 persons, during the event. It takes a tremendous amount of planning, hard work and fund raising to put on an event of this size. Pat and Roger Kott, leading original founders and coordinators of this event, have retired and are now the Honorary Chairpersons of the event. Taking the lead and coordinating this vast event is now in the

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"This Works For Me, Officer (Tree Stand Safety Venue)



A Lovely View From Aboard The Trailer



2023 BCWMA YOUTH HUNT SUCCESSFUL – *continued*

more than capable hands of Conservation Enforcement Officer Johnny Johnson.

It takes a host of volunteers and local businesses that put their personal time, personnel, equipment, and financial support to make this the great outdoor experience it has become. With the support of the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association providing a grant and other local and area businesses contributing, the BCWMA Youth Hunt is the third-largest youth hunt of its type in the entire nation. The hosts would like to thank each volunteer that gave of their time and expertise to work with our area youth. A special thanks goes to Eufaula Country Outdoors for coordinating the firearm registrations, Baker Hill Tree Service for the three trucks and drivers they provided, and the individuals donating use of their time and personal trucks to pull the remaining trailers. Additional special thanks go to those individuals who donated the firearms and bb-guns.

Several Conservation Enforcement Officers from all

over south Alabama spent the day using their expertise to educate and explain the safety aspects involved with each venue. They also provided hands-on instruction to the youth as they needed it. The expanded Tree Stand Safety Venue proved to be a crowd favorite as the youth were taught on the various climbing options available to today's deer hunters. The good news is that many parents crowded in to hear the instructions and conversations as well.

Carl Childree, and his staff, did a great job in preparing the Barbour County Wildlife Management Area for the event, especially considering the rains we've had lately. CEO Johnny Johnson, chairperson of the event, extends his thanks and gratitude to all the volunteers, businesses and sponsors that donated dollars, time, and products to make this youth event possible. It was, simply put, a great outdoors day!

Mark your calendar as we hope to see you again, next year, February 17, 2024.

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2023 BCWMA YOUTH HUNT SUCCESSFUL – *continued*





MRD's Mancuso Receives Gulf Council Officer of the Year Award

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

For an inspiring example of starting at the bottom and working your way up, look no further than Chancellor (Chance) Mancuso of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Marine Resources Division (MRD).

Mancuso's humble beginning with MRD was on a part-time basis as a laborer, and, within five years, he was honored as the 2022 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Officer of the Year at last week's Council meeting in Mobile.

"I got hired in January 2017 as a part-time laborer," Mancuso said. "After about four or five months, I became a full-time laborer for about a year. During that time, I was able to go on patrol with several of the officers to feel it out to know that's what I wanted to do."

In June 2018, he was offered a Conservation Enforcement Officer (CEO) position with MRD and steadily proved his worth. As with other MRD officers, Mancuso's duties include enforcing state and federal fisheries laws and regulations in Alabama state waters and federal waters of the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone). He conducts boardings at land and sea to inspect gear and catch, as well as participating in outreach events to educate the public on current state and federal fisheries regulations.

Although it took a while for Mancuso to gain the enforcement position, he remembers an interaction when he was growing up in Fort Payne, Alabama, that made an impact on his future.

"Back when I was younger, I ran into a game warden at Walmart," he said. "Everything just kind of clicked. It seemed like something I wanted to do. I have a passion for the outdoors, doing whatever I can for conservation and protecting that for future generations."

Mancuso headed to the Alabama Gulf Coast right out of high school to play baseball at Faulkner State Community College, now a part of Coastal Alabama Community College. He then went to the University of South Alabama and earned a degree in criminal justice with a minor in biology.

"I love it down here," he said. "After I graduated from South, it was just one of those crazy opportunities. I stumbled upon this opening. It turned out to be the best decision I ever made. It's been wonderful."

When he got the CEO job, Mancuso was "low man on the totem pole" for two years.

"Everybody I worked with had a whole lot more seniority, so I had to show everybody I was willing to work hard," he said. "I made sure I was up on the regulations. My fellow officers used to question me on those to make sure I was up to date. They helped me out a lot. They helped me get to where I am today because they cared."

"And this award is awesome. I'm really grateful to the Gulf Council. But this is not just about me. It's about my fellow officers as well. We work together so well. This award wouldn't have been possible if it wasn't for them."

During 2022, Mancuso worked 296 hours of patrol under the NOAA Fisheries' joint enforcement agreement. On those patrols, he was involved in 208 state and/or federal cases. Mancuso also worked multiple TED (turtle excluder devices) details with NOAA as well as worked 10 Marine Mammal Protection patrols in 2022.

In one of the bigger cases he made, a subject was found with 42 undersize greater amberjacks. He also caught one of our federal gill net fishermen with illegal species on board.

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MRD'S MANCUSO RECEIVES GULF COUNCIL OFFICER OF THE YEAR AWARD – *continued*



Alabama Marine Resources Officer Chance Mancuso receives the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Officer of the Year Award from Joe Spraggins of the Gulf Council law enforcement committee.

Photo by David Rainer

Major Jason Downey, MRD's Chief of Enforcement, said Mancuso's work ethic is unparalleled.

"Officer Mancuso is always willing to put the time in to make the big case even if it means coming in on his day off or putting in the extra hours," Downey said. "He is always eager to learn and is one of our most knowledgeable officers. Officer Mancuso exemplifies professionalism while conducting his duties, and he is a model officer to his peers.

"He's motivated. He is our go-to training officer as well. He's great with our new officers. I like his style, the way he trains. If they model themselves after him, they'll be great conservation officers. Anything I ask Chance to do, he does it. And he does it with a smile on his face."

Colonel Scott Bannon, MRD Director, said hiring Mancuso was a great move.

"I'm very proud of Chance," Bannon said. "He's an extremely hard-working young man who has a passion for his job. Chance doesn't just go to work. He goes and gives it his all every day. He's kind of unique in the enforcement world because he started as a laborer just to get the opportunity to have some experience within the Division. He worked his way into qualifying for an

officer position, and he was selected. He wasn't selected because he was a laborer for us. He was selected because he's a guy who, even as a laborer, worked as hard as he could every day and showed that he has what it takes to do the job. That decision has paid off for us.

"He's a person who is out in the field and represents the Division and Department, and it's a very positive representation. We get calls from the public about encounters with our officers. With Chance, the calls are always positive. They tell us how good a job he is doing and how professional he is."

In other news, the Gulf Council voted to tweak the calibration numbers used to determine the red snapper quotas for the five Gulf states. In a final rule that will become effective on July 10, 2023, Alabama's snapper quota for private recreational anglers will increase from 558,200 pounds to 591,185 pounds. The overall Gulf recreational annual catch limit (ACL) was increased from 7.546 million pounds to 7.991 million pounds. The federal for-hire sector (federally permitted charter vessels) catch limit was increased from 3.192 million pounds to 3.38 million pounds.

"I'm still disappointed that NOAA chose to implement the calibration, but I am encouraged we get a bump up in the ACL that goes into effect on July 10," Bannon said. "Additionally, through the Gulf Council process, we have finalized a motion to change the calibration ratio to a number that is more favorable to Alabama. It may come into play before the end of the calendar year but more likely next year for the 2024 season. That motion would increase our catch limit to 664,000 pounds. I think that's closer to where Alabama needs to be in terms of harvesting red snapper."

The Council also voted to increase the Gulf annual catch limit for gray (mangrove) snapper after receiving the most recent Gray Snapper Stock Assessment. The assessment incorporates new recreational landings data and indicates that gray snapper are neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The newly recommended catch limit for 2024 and beyond is 5.728 million pounds. ●

Blue Springs Youth Fishing Rodeo Sets New Record

By Ken White

The morning of Saturday, May 25, 2023, found a great day breaking for the Blue Springs Youth Fishing event. Registration was scheduled to start at 8:00 am, fishing at 9:00 am, and weigh-in beginning at 11:00 am. By 7:00 am it was apparent the park entrance gates needed to be opened to reduce the double-line of traffic lining the highway. The weather was excellent, mimicking a fine spring morning with mild temperatures and a clear, blue sky. A perfect day for fishing! Were the kids raring to get out of the house, away from the computer and game consoles to go FISHING? To be sure, they were! An attendance record was set with 196 youths from 2-15 years of age registered for this event. The first 100 to register received a rod/reel combo just to get things started.

Once registration was completed the youth spread out to find their fishing spot. The pond at Blue Springs is not huge. When you get 196 youth anglers surrounding the banks in such close proximity to each other you would think utter chaos would prevail. That's another amazing item that comes with these youths. The help and encouragement they give each other is unreal and many new friendships are cemented before they leave the event. Even the adults, for the most part, take this cue from their kids and it becomes a most pleasant experience for all.

Blue Springs Volunteer Fire Department Chief Tyler Turner brought out their Pumper for the youth to see and enjoy (plus it provided a medium for emergency care, which thankfully was not required). He began the start of and ended the fishing with a long, loud blast of its horn and it worked just fine.

Three fishing groups, 7-under, 8 - 11, and 12 - 15 years of age were established to keep competition on a somewhat even level. For the 7-Under group, an adult was allowed to assist the angler with line-casting but, the angler had to land the catfish. The fishing was great and the weigh-in took a bit of time as some heavy

stringers were presented. In the 7-under age division, Jason Hamilton weighed in a stringer going 18 lbs. 9 oz. anchored by a huge 12 lb. 4 oz. cat almost as long as he was tall.

Jason is from Hamilton, Georgia, and his mom was asked if they were camping or with friends. She said they were camping for the first time at Blue Springs. They were looking for a quieter, more off the regular map site and Blue Springs had been recommended by friends who had camped there in the past. She and the family were impressed with the beauty and serenity the park offered.

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Blue Springs Volunteer Fire Department Chief Tyler Turner started and ended the fishing period with a long, loud blast from their pumper truck.

Photo Credit: Henry Miller

BLUE SPRINGS YOUTH FISHING RODEO SETS NEW RECORD – *continued*



Blue Springs Youth Fishing Rodeo Age 8 – 11 winners

L-R Jay Toole of Texasville, AL won First Place with a weight of 19 lbs. 11 oz.

Daniel Toole of Texasville, AL won Second Place with a weight of 12 lbs 07 oz.

Keaton Elder of Hartford, AL won Third Place with a weight of 12 lbs. 00 oz.

On a side note, she stated after they got set up and started looking about, Jason (an avid fisherman) got upset when he saw “NO FISHING PERMITTED” signs surrounding the pond. The pond was placed “off-limits” the week after being stocked prior to the event. His patience paid off, however, as he caught the tournament lunker! He was really enjoying Blue Springs, but he did remark the swimming waters were “REALLY COLD”!

Four-year-old Daniel Lassiter of Troy, AL weighed 12 lbs. 7 oz. to claim Second Place. Third Place went to five-year-old Eli Napper of Ozark, AL with 9 lbs.4 oz.

The 8 – 11 age division found great results as well. Leading the board was Jay Toole of Texasville, AL with 19 lbs. 11 oz. to take First Place. Coming in Second Place was Daniel Toole with 12 lb. 7 oz. from Texasville as well. Third Place was claimed by Keaton Elder, Hartford, AL with 12 lbs. 0 oz.

Leading the 12-15 age division was Davis Douglas of Kinsey, AL with a weight of 12 lbs. 8 oz. Right there with him at 12 lbs. 8 oz. was D’Norrio Wilson of Ozark, AL. With this tie they decided a friendly round of “SCISSORS, ROCK, PAPER” would be perfect to settle 1st and 2nd prize awards. Taking third place was Hunly Holt of Phenix City, AL with 11 lbs. 13 oz.

The ending came with a presentation of the awards following a hotdog lunch for the youth. It takes a lot of help to provide prizes, food, and all the other items needed to put on such an event. Sponsors, such as Chris Herring and The Gator Stop, located just north of Eufaula, covered the food costs for the event. Other sponsors providing additional prizes and support include Deep South Recycling, Ranger Trucking, Walmart, Willie T’s, Eufaula Mayor Jack Tibbs’ StrikeZone Lures, Lowell Hammock, Big Bite Baits, and “Donations by Order of the Judge”. A special “shout-out” goes to the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association for their continued major sponsorship.

You must have the help of those special folks called Volunteers to make an event like a fishing rodeo a success. It takes those willing, like Pat Kott and Jennifer Johnson, to get out and “hit the pavement” to get prizes and donations and procure the items needed. Pat, coordinator emeritus of the Barbour County WMA Youth Hunt, has been involved with youth outdoor events around Eufaula and Barbour County forever it seems. Jennifer is the wife of CEO Johnny Johnson and she assisted at the weigh-in recording all the weights as they were called out. It takes

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BLUE SPRINGS YOUTH FISHING RODEO SETS NEW RECORD – continued



Springs Youth Fishing Rodeo: Age 12-15 winners

Blue L-R Davis Douglas of Kinsey, AL won First Place with a weight of 12 lbs. 08 oz.

D’Norrio Wilson of Ozark, AL won Second Place with a weight of 12 lbs. 08 oz.

Note: Davis and D’Norrio tied with a weight of 12 lbs. 08 oz. They agreed a friendly game of “Scissors, Rock, Paper” would decide the first and second place winners.

Hunly Holt of Phenix City, AL won Third Place with a weight of 11 lbs. 13 oz.



Age 7 -Under Winners

L-R Jason Cooper of Hamilton, GA won First Place with a weight of 18 lbs. 09 oz.

His winning stringer was anchored by the Tournament Big Fish which went 12 lbs. 04 oz.

Daniel Lassiter of Troy, AL won Second Place with a weight of 11 lbs. 02 oz.

Eli Napper of Ozark, AL won Third Place with a weight of 9 lbs. 04 oz.



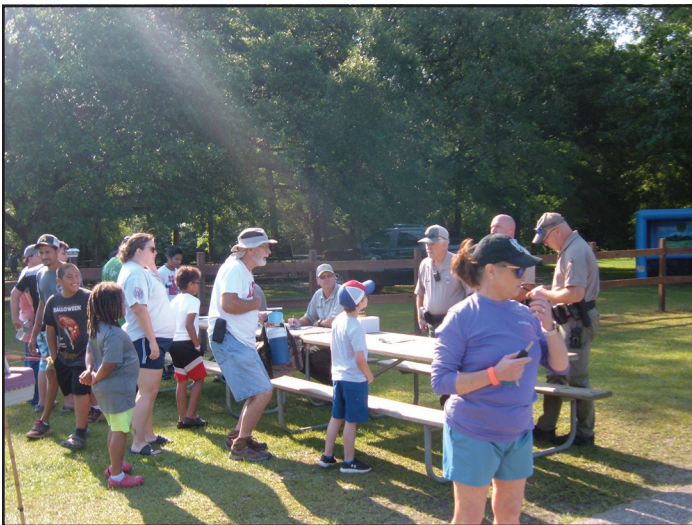
BLUE SPRINGS YOUTH FISHING RODEO SETS NEW RECORD – *continued*

those willing to donate their time for whatever you need them to help with or to do. Most times it takes your buddies and work associates to jump in and do what it takes to see an event is successful.

Leading the way for this event was CEO Johnny Johnson. He'll be the first to tell you he couldn't have done it without a lot of support. CEO Johnson's fellow officers were there helping. Lt. Vance Wood, Sgt. Blair Sistrunk, CEO Mike Heath, CEO Mike Jolly, CEO Larry

Doster, CEO Aaron Green, CEO Jerry Jinright, CEO Jason Sutherland, CEO Dan Quincy and CEO Nick Cochran did their part, ensuring all in attendance had a great day of fun and fishing.

A new event attendance record was set as 195 anglers representing 56 towns and seven states were registered in Blue Springs, AL, a very small out-of-the-way location in southeast AL but with a beautiful State Park just made for outdoor lovers.



BLUE SPRINGS YOUTH FISHING RODEO SETS NEW RECORD – *continued*





BLUE SPRINGS YOUTH FISHING RODEO SETS NEW RECORD – *continued*





Arnold Completes Transition from Non-Hunter to Hunter

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

After the 2023 spring turkey season, Adam Arnold considers his transition from non-hunter to member of the hunting community complete.

Although 33-year-old Arnold has held a fishing license for many years and has enjoyed using the Cahaba Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Public Shooting Range, he had never hunted until spring of 2018, when he participated in the Adult Mentored Hunting Program (AMH). The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division had just begun the now-popular AMH program in the fall of 2017.

As a CPA (certified public accountant), Arnold was in the middle of one of his busiest seasons when he took a break from his work computer and checked his personal email. One of the emails was from an AMH hunt with photos of successful deer hunts.

"That email talked about opportunities for turkey hunting," Arnold said. "I'd never done hunting, but I'd done a lot of target shooting. I decided to give hunting a shot. I applied for a mentored hunt. It was 10 o'clock at night, kind of an impulse thing."

Arnold was in luck. He was drawn for the mentored turkey hunt at Portland Landing in March 2018. He showed up for the hunt with nothing but hiking boots and the shotgun he used for shooting clay targets. He did purchase a turkey choke and turkey-specific shotshells but had never fired those shells.

When he got to the lodge, he was greeted by WFF Director Chuck Sykes, WFF R3 Coordinator Justin Grider, WFF Biologist Justin Gilchrist, other WFF staff and mentors. The first order of business was a safety talk, followed by a session to pattern his shotgun.

"They put us in a realistic turkey hunting position,

which was different," Arnold said. "All my shooting had been standing up, shooting clay pigeons. I was sitting with the gun propped up on my knee. That took a little getting used to. Then we fired on the range and patterned our guns. We learned more about the anatomy of the turkey and aiming at the target."

WFF staff then prepared a wild game feast of fried wild turkey, fried catfish and venison dishes.

"That was really cool to see the final product of what you harvest," Arnold said.

After the meal, more instruction from WFF staff followed, and the mentees were issued the camouflage clothing for the next two days of hunting as well as several turkey calls.

"We learned more about the reverse nature of turkey hunting," Arnold said. "You know, the gobbler usually calls the hens to him, and we're trying to call the gobbler to the hens. We learned about the different calls turkeys make, like the yelp, cluck, purr, cackle and gobble. It was a very informative couple of hours."

Early the next morning, Arnold went to the woods with Sykes, another mentor and another hunter, Charles Barrow. After hearing no gobbling, the group did a little scouting, and Sykes spotted turkeys in the distance. After a lunch of venison burgers, the hunters headed back out that afternoon.

The first turkey encounter was with a hen that responded to the calling as she walked a semicircle around the hunters.

"I was fascinated watching a conversation between a hen and a hunter," Arnold said. "That's when I got a feel for just how still you have to be, and how quiet."

With no gobblers in sight, the hunters made a move.

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ARNOLD COMPLETES TRANSITION FROM NON-HUNTER TO HUNTER – *continued*

After getting set up, one of the mentors whispered for the group to be still. He had spotted two gobblers coming in from their right.

“My heart starts pounding a bit,” said Arnold, who was the primary shooter on this hunt. “Then these two gobblers came in in full strut. They weren’t gobbling. We wanted to try to get a double, so we waited for the turkeys to get closer. Then they came to a point and started to go back. That’s when Al (Mattox, his mentor) gave me the instructions to take it. I took my shot. Then everything was in slow motion. Then everything went fast forward and the turkey flopped.”

The second gobbler hesitated after his partner hit the ground, barely long enough for Barrow to get off a shot as the turkey started to flee, resulting in a double for the hunt.

“I just remember a feeling of accomplishment in the moment and very thankful for the opportunity,” Arnold said. “I’d never seen a wild turkey up close. I thought, ‘Wow, this is what it’s all about.’ It’s a magnificent bird.

“We came to the lodge, and it was great having that community of hunters, learning about what everybody else saw and heard.”

Arnold’s hunting journey continued that winter when he purchased a Marlin lever action rifle for shooting deer out to 100 yards. One of his friends, Jim Dodson, had a farm and invited him to go deer hunting.

“I was sitting in a shooting house when 13 turkeys step out into the field,” he said. “I watched them peck around for 40 minutes and saw how they interacted with each other. About 30 minutes later, a medium-sized doe walked out. I texted my friend about the doe. He said if I wanted the meat, go ahead. So that’s what I did.”

Arnold took the deer to the processor and picked up the venison a couple of weeks later.

“I started cooking with it, and it was really awesome,” he said. “I’ve learned some really great recipes.”

Arnold then registered for one of the small-game hunts at the Cedar Creek Special Opportunity Area (SOA) and went squirrel hunting in the heart of the Alabama Black Belt. He got his first whitetail buck at his friend’s farm in 2020. He’s been on several other SOA hunts, one for antlerless deer and two dove hunts.

“Going on SOA hunts is really cool to me,” he said.



With the help of his friend, Jim Dodson, left, Adam Arnold harvested a turkey at the Portland Landing SOA in late April. Photo courtesy of Adam Arnold

“It’s cool to see the property. It’s cool to meet the other hunters.

“And sometimes something unexpected happens. I was on a deer hunt at Thigpen Hills and a pig came out. There’s no closed season on feral pigs, so I took a pig. I literally brought the bacon home.”

After several years of trying, Arnold was drawn for a 2023 turkey hunt at Portland Landing SOA, and he invited Dodson to be his guest.

Each Thursday before a scheduled hunt, the hunters can scout. Arnold and Dodson walked their assigned blocks for three hours and spotted three turkeys.

“I was out there with a friend who has a lot more turkey hunting experience than I have,” Arnold said. “We were able to make decisions together and came up with a good game plan.

“We got in the woods the next morning about 5:15, and it was the first time I’d ever heard a gobbler in the wild. It made the hair go up on the back of my neck.”

The partners had a close encounter with a gobbler that morning, but Arnold couldn’t get a clean shot. The second day of the hunt was fairly blustery, and the turkeys

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ARNOLD COMPLETES TRANSITION FROM NON-HUNTER TO HUNTER – *continued*

didn't cooperate. On the final day of the hunt, the hunters started early.

"We got to the property at 4:55, and we were amped up," Arnold said. "We hike in stealthily, and we hear them gobbling. We take a roundabout path to where they were. That gobbler was hammering on the roost. He flies down off the roost and the gobbling gets more frequent and pronounced. Then I heard this deep bass and rattling. I asked my buddy if that was drumming, and he said, 'Oh, yeah.'"

The hunters had hen and jake decoys set up, but the gobbling tom apparently didn't spot them and strutted past the set-up. The hunters made a quick move of about 100 yards, which they quickly second-guessed.

"Then we hear this pop, pop, pop," Arnold said. "It was a gobbler attacking our jake decoy. We thought, 'We blew it. We blew it. We blew it.' It went quiet for a minute, and we stayed in our position. I see a white tennis ball-looking object pop up. Four turkeys popped up. We were very still, but my gun was nowhere near pointed in their direction. I had to make a quick decision to pivot to my right. One started to strut, but he tucked when I moved. I shot him at 25 yards, and he flopped.

"My first turkey hunt was awesome, but my second hunt on the SOA was even better. It just magnified everything I'd learned from the first one. Walking away on that last day with bird in hand was incredible. I can't thank the program enough and what the mentors did. I never dreamed it would turn into this."

Grider remembers Arnold's 2018 turkey hunt very well. It was the AMH program's first event during turkey season. Since its inception, the AMH program has taken about 750 people on their first hunts.

"Adam and Charles harvested the first turkeys ever taken at a mentored hunt," Grider said. "Fast forward to the next season. Adam is deer hunting and doing everything we had hoped after we teach them about hunting.

"Now, five years later, he comes back to Portland and harvests a turkey on his own. It's really neat to see the program come full circle, utilizing those skills that we taught him on the Adult Mentored Hunt."

Visit www.outdooralabama.com/hunting/adult-mentored-hunting-program for more information on AMH or www.outdooralabama.com/hunting/special-opportunity-areas to learn more about the SOA hunts. ●





Calhoun County Keenum KID'S Fishing Event

May 21, 2023

On May 21st, 2023, we held our 10th Annual Keenum Kid's Fishing Event in Cooperation with Kenny Keenum from Calhoun County. There were approximately 158 youth and their parents in attendance that participated in fishing this privately owned, stocked lake. Kenny maintains the lake daily, in an effort to assist youth wishing to experience the many activities available in the great outdoors. Alabama Conservation Officers (CEOs Roche, Kiser, Dixon, Bassett, Davis), and Biologist Aide (Ginger Howell) work in cooperation with Mr. Keenum, and local volunteers in making the event possible. All youth, 15 and under received a door prize including fishing equipment, and other outdoor items. Door prizes were donated by local vendors/individuals,

and The Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association. One Youth in attendance had their ticket drawn for a Lifetime Fishing License donated by The Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association.

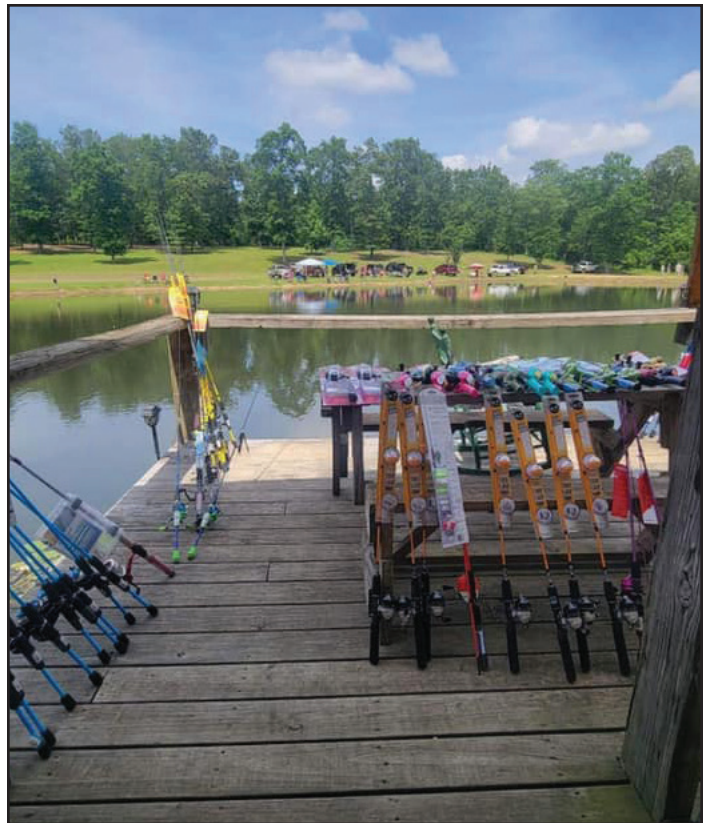
With the ability to give the kids and their families a place to enjoy the outdoors together, all the joyfulness of the children makes the efforts of everyone involved well worth it. Each child left this event with a door prize, a smile on their face, and memories that will last a lifetime. Mr. Keenum was extremely grateful to all that took part in assisting with this event and hopes to continue his tradition for many years to come.

CEO Senior, Billy Roche

L.E. Biologist Aide, Ginger Howell



CALHOUN COUNTY KEENUM KID'S FISHING EVENT – *continued*





CALHOUN COUNTY KEENUM KID'S FISHING EVENT – continued



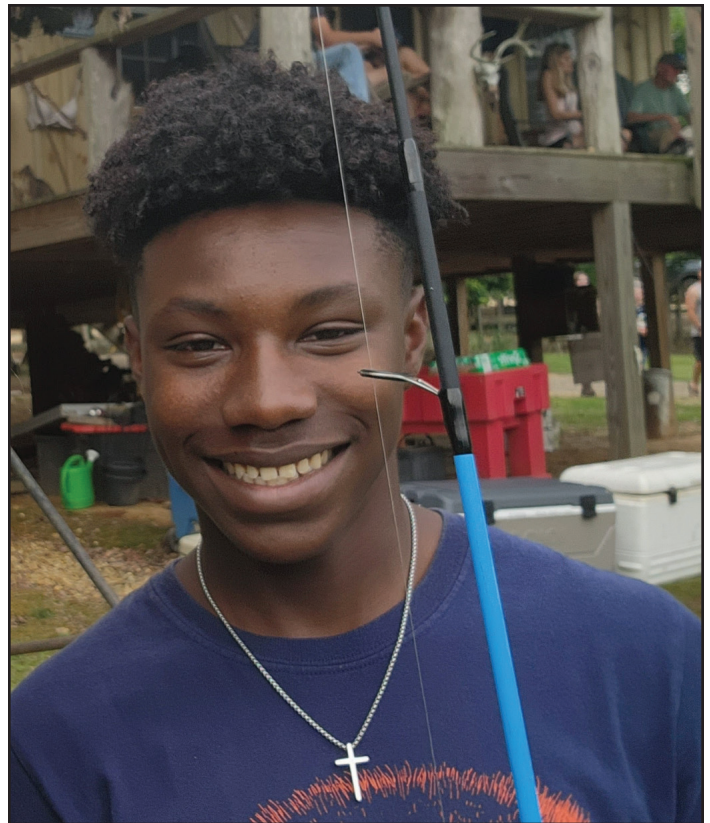


CALHOUN COUNTY KEENUM KID'S FISHING EVENT – *continued*





CALHOUN COUNTY KEENUM KID'S FISHING EVENT – continued





Coonhound Cabin Attracts Southern Heritage Show to Alabama

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Down a winding, tree-lined road on the outskirts of Clanton, Alabama, is a destination that attracts a select group of individuals and their canine companions. It's the Coonhound Cabin, which sits on 85 acres and provided the perfect site for this past weekend's AKC (American Kennel Club) Southern Heritage Hunt and Show for coonhounds.

Danielle Kunz and her husband, Kenny, purchased the property in 2018 and soon started to share their passion for the coonhound breeds.

"We started three years ago hosting coonhound events and a lot of kids' events because this is something kids just don't do anymore, hunt with coonhounds," Danielle said. "We live in Hoover, and we love bringing the city kids down here to hunt at night. They always have a good time. They said they didn't know you could walk around in the Alabama woods at night and not be afraid.

"We have had the Alabama State Coonhunters Association (ASCA) Youth State Championship two years in a row. We have sponsors who donate everything from hats, shirts, lights, boots and waders. If the kids come and don't have a coonhound, we let them borrow one of ours. We have members who will take the kids out on a cast, and we crown an overall youth state champion."

Several of those youth hunt participants have embraced the sport and have their own coonhounds.

Coonhound Cabin has hosted several UKC (United Kennel Club) and NKC (National Kennel Club) events, but last weekend's hunt and show is the first AKC event held on the property. Danielle said they are trying to attract the youth and women's world hunts to Clanton.

Danielle has been outdoors oriented all her life, hunting with her dad, Danny Fields, and five uncles near her hometown of Oak Grove, southeast of Birmingham.

"Down at Oak Grove on Toadvine Road, you hunt and you fish with your daddy and his brothers," she said. "We always had hunting dogs. We either had coonhounds, Walker-blue tick mixes, and squirrel dogs, feist dogs. We have a hunting club in Epps, Alabama. He would carry me on his hip to the treestand in the mornings, sometimes still in my pajamas. I've always been involved with outside and hunting.

"I waited until my son was 10 and daughter was 14 before we got our first hound, a blue tick named Harley."

Danielle later added Jewel, a redbone, to their kennels. Harley has since earned Grand Champion on the bench show, while Jewel is a bench and field trial champion. Danielle hired Kayla Cooper of Warrior River Kennels to perform obedience training with Harley, and a friendship developed.

"Kayla is an incredible trainer," Danielle said. "Training a hound is not easy, so she has helped me an enormous amount."

Cooper is also secretary/treasurer of the ASCA, one of the sponsors of the Southern Heritage event, which was held outside of Georgia for the first time in its 10-year history.

"Our association was created to represent the small game hunters in the state, particularly the raccoon hunters, and to preserve the heritage of coon hunting in the state and coonhound breeds that we have," Cooper said. "Every dog is created for a purpose. These dogs were selectively bred for hundreds of generations to actively pursue a raccoon. So, it is very important to us that these dogs continue to do what they were bred to do, which is something we don't get to see a lot anymore.

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COONHOUND CABIN ATTRACTS SOUTHERN HERITAGE SHOW TO ALABAMA – *continued*



Three of the coonhounds at the Southern Heritage Hunt and Show at Coonhound Cabin were, from left, Danielle Kunz's bluetick, Kayla Cooper's redbone and Madison Fancher's black and tan.

Photo by David Rainer

“The majority of Labradors are not duck dogs anymore. They are family pets. They make great family pets. You don’t see Dalmatians trotting under coaches. You don’t see terriers out riding on farms. But our coonhounds get to do what they were bred for, so it’s really important for us to preserve that.”

Cooper said of the seven coonhound breeds, the treeing Walker is the most common by a wide margin. Other coonhound breeds include the black and tan, bluetick, redbone, English coonhounds (redticks), leopard and Plott hounds. All breeds were represented at the Southern Heritage event.

“The Plott hound is the only breed not derived from fox hounds,” said Cooper, whose redbone, Chaos, scored an award of merit at the 2019 Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. “The Plotts are a German breed. They came over with the von Plott family to North Carolina.”

During last weekend’s event, night hunts were held on Friday and Saturday at nearby properties, which meant

the handlers were up until the wee hours of the morning. The hounds are scored on finding the trail, barking and treeing. If the hunters spot the raccoon, the hounds are awarded a plus. The raccoon is left unharmed to be treed another night.

The Southern Heritage event had a bench show, field trials and water race. A scented raccoon hide was dragged through the woods and hung in a large oak. The coonhounds were released, and points were awarded for the first dog to cross the line at the tree and the first to bark after crossing the line. A water race followed where four dogs were placed in boxes on the edge of Coonhound Cabin’s 2.5-acre lake. The scented raccoon skin was then tied to a cable that was pulled across the lake about 6 or so feet above the water line. The first dog to splash and swim across the pond to the tree receives the most points. If the dogs do not swim, no points are awarded.

“I’ve been to several water races, and we designed our race to go across the middle of the lake,” Danielle said. “When the dogs come out of the boxes, they’ll try to outsmart the system. If you give them bank, they will run around the bank, and they are struck if they do that. We wanted to make it so that it was shorter to just go straight across instead of trying to go around.”

Cooper hopes the Southern Heritage Hunt and Show will advance the ASCA’s mission to highlight the coonhound breed and gain the interest of the younger generations. Visit alabamastatecoonhu.wixsite.com/mysite to learn more about the ASCA or go to the association’s Facebook page.

“What our association really focuses on is spotlighting the youth,” she said. “You hear so many people say, ‘My grandfather used to coonhunt’ or ‘My dad used to coonhunt.’ Every year less and less hunting licenses are sold in Alabama. It’s definitely about the breeds we’re so passionate about and the sport we’re so passionate about, but it’s also about getting kids involved so there is another generation to take this on.”

Danielle added, “It’s just a lot of fun to work with the dogs. Hounds make great pets, too, but to see them enjoy doing what they were bred to do, it’s so much fun, and that’s what we try to show the kids.” ●



Clay Hills Farm Host Pike County Youth Fishing Rodeo

By Ken White

Clay Hills Farm and the Dorrill family once again opened their great facilities and pond to the youth of Pike County. Weather has plagued Clay Hill Farm and Pike County this spring and early summer. The two weeks preceding the annual Pike County event saw thunderstorms and heavy rains keeping everyone on edge. Then more rain was in the forecast for the day of the event. Hosting the annual Pike County Youth Fishing Rodeo for their 18th year, the Dorrills had it all under

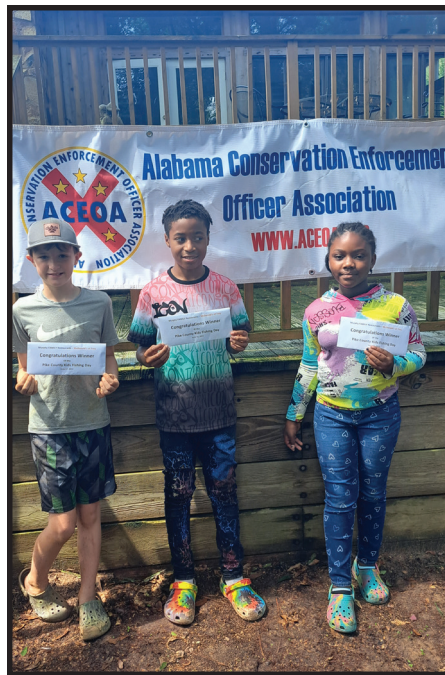
control. Mrs. Carol Dorrill had her workers clean the area of the wind debris, the area around the pond made ready and a group of young people came out for what turned out to be a great morning of catfishing. A cloudy sky, temperatures in the comfortable zone and fish that were biting made for a pleasant morning and no rain intervened.

Conservation Enforcement Officer Jerry Jinwright was the overseer of this event which he began about 20 years

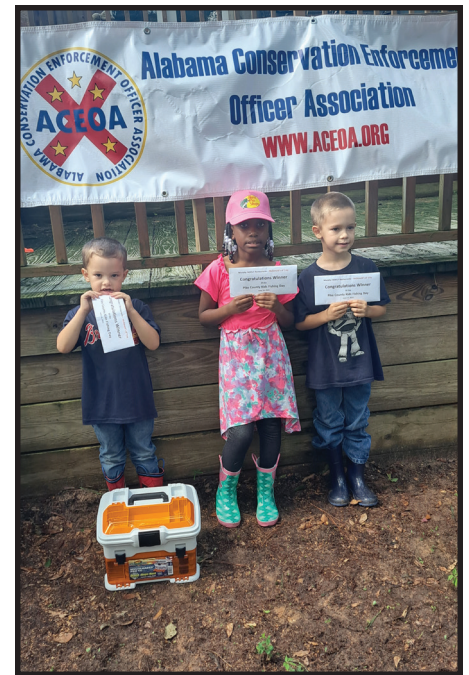
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Age Group: 13 – 15 Years (L-R)
First Place: Jaqueline Cano with 19.15 lbs., Second Place: Anna Kate Leigner with 13.40 lbs., Third Place: Rogelio Cano with 6.40 lbs.



Age Group: 9 – 12 Years (L-R)
First Place: Jariya Scott with 12.11 lbs., Second Place: Gregory Collins with 6.50 lbs., Third Place: Andrew Peters with 5.16 lbs.



Age Group: 5 – 8 Years (L-R)
First Place: Daniel Lassiter with 12.50 lbs., Second Place: Ayara Sky with 8.14 lbs., Third Place: Benjamin Lassiter with 5.14 lbs.

CLAY HILLS FARM HOST PIKE COUNTY YOUTH FISHING RODEO – *continued*

ago. The first couple of years the fishing event was held at Pike County Lake. When the lake was closed for maintenance purposes, he looked around for a new location and that's where John and Carol Dorrill, owners of Clay Hill Farm, stepped up to the plate. They had a nice pond located down in a beautiful woodland setting which was perfect for stocking catfish and letting young anglers experience the great outdoor world Pike County has to offer. Today, with Mr. John looking down, Mrs. Carol Dorrill and sons Lee and John IV continue this youth event. This event, traditionally held on the Saturday of Father's Day weekend, has become a memory-making event for many families over the years.

Registration for the event began at 7:00am with fishing scheduled to start at 8:00am and end at 10:30am. Age groups were set to keep competitors in a competitive range with 5-8, 9-12 and 13-15 groupings. Once the youths registered, they could head down to the pond to stake out their preferred fishing location and get set up for the action they hoped would come. The fish were cooperative and in a feeding mood so there was a bit of "catching" to go with the "fishing."

Following the fishing session came the weigh-in to determine the winners. While the winners were being determined, a bag lunch, provided by the local area Troy Walmart, tasted good after all the arduous work of "fishing." Once lunch was over, the announcement of the age-group winners began. Each winner, then, got to

select from a wide selection of available prizes. Once the winner's presentation was complete, a ticket drawing was held from the tickets which each angler was presented upon registration. Once the ticket holder's number was called out, and confirmed, the holder got their pick from the remaining prizes. The final ticket was special as it was a \$50 Gift Card sponsored by the local Troy Walmart and the winner was Lucas Weil of Ozark, AL.

Winners in the 5-8 age group were Daniel Lassiter with 12.5 pounds taking First Place, Ayara Sky with 8.14 pounds in Second Place and Benjamin Lassiter with 5.14 pounds winning Third Place. Winners of the 9-12 age group were Jariya Scott with 12.11 pounds in First Place, Gregory Collins with 6.5 pounds winning Second Place and Andrew Peters with 5.16 pounds winning Third Place. Winners in the 13-15 age group were Jaqueline Cano with 19.15 pounds winning First Place, Anna Kate Leigner with 13.4 pounds winning Second Place and Rogelio Cano with 6.4 pounds winning Third Place.

You just cannot put together an event of this nature without sponsor funding to help pay the associated costs. CEO Jerry Jinwright has found two very loyal sponsors and one organization that helps underwrite these costs. The local area Troy Walmart has provided the lunches, as well as the grand drawing prize for many years. Managers Deanna Grille and Sabrina Roberts were onsite to oversee the food and provide encouragement to all the attendees.

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(L-R) Anna Kate Leigner, Deborah Higgins-Davis and Carol Dorrill oversee Registration



(L-R) Lee Dorrill and John Dorrill IV continue the Clay Hill Farm traditions



CLAY HILLS FARM HOST PIKE COUNTY YOUTH FISHING RODEO – *continued*

Another familiar face onsite was Eddie Byrd the Director of Marketing and Community Outreach for Murphy Family Restaurants. Eddie had a double hand-full of McDonald gift cards he presented for a free meal to each registered participant of the event. Grateful acknowledgement goes to the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association for their continued funding for the event. This funding provided the prizes which were given away to the registered participants. A numbered ticket was given to each as they registered for the prize drawings that closed out the event.

It also takes personnel to assist in the general production of the event. It starts with the Dorrill family who offer use of the Clay Hill Farm pond and facilities to host the event. It takes volunteers such as Deborah Higgins-Davis and other friends of the family that show up to do whatever is needed, such as registration of the youth. It takes others to oversee the fishing event, offer on-hands help to the young anglers and their families and execute the weight-in. Several Conservation Enforcement Officers

were on hand to get those aspects covered. The value of those minutes these officers spend with the youth cannot be understated. Making a positive impression on these young people, as they teach how to properly tie a knot or bait a hook, can have a lifetime effect that we may never know or suspect. The officers in attendance for this event making those connections were Lt. Patrick Norris, Lt. Vance Wood, Sgt. Brad Givens, Sgt. Kirk Smith, CEO Jerry Jinwright, CEO Mike Heath, CEO Brad Nowling, CEO Dan Quincy, CEO Wes Croy, CEO Larry Doster and CEO Johnny Johnson.

While the crowd was not as large as events in the past, everyone had an enjoyable day of fun, fellowship, and great fishing. Weather had its impact, but it turned out to be a nice, spring-like morning simply perfect to get outdoors. Thanks again to the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association, Alabama Department of Conservation-Wildlife and Fisheries Division, Walmart, McDonalds and the Dorrill family for making it happen for our young people. ●





CLAY HILLS FARM HOST PIKE COUNTY YOUTH FISHING RODEO – continued



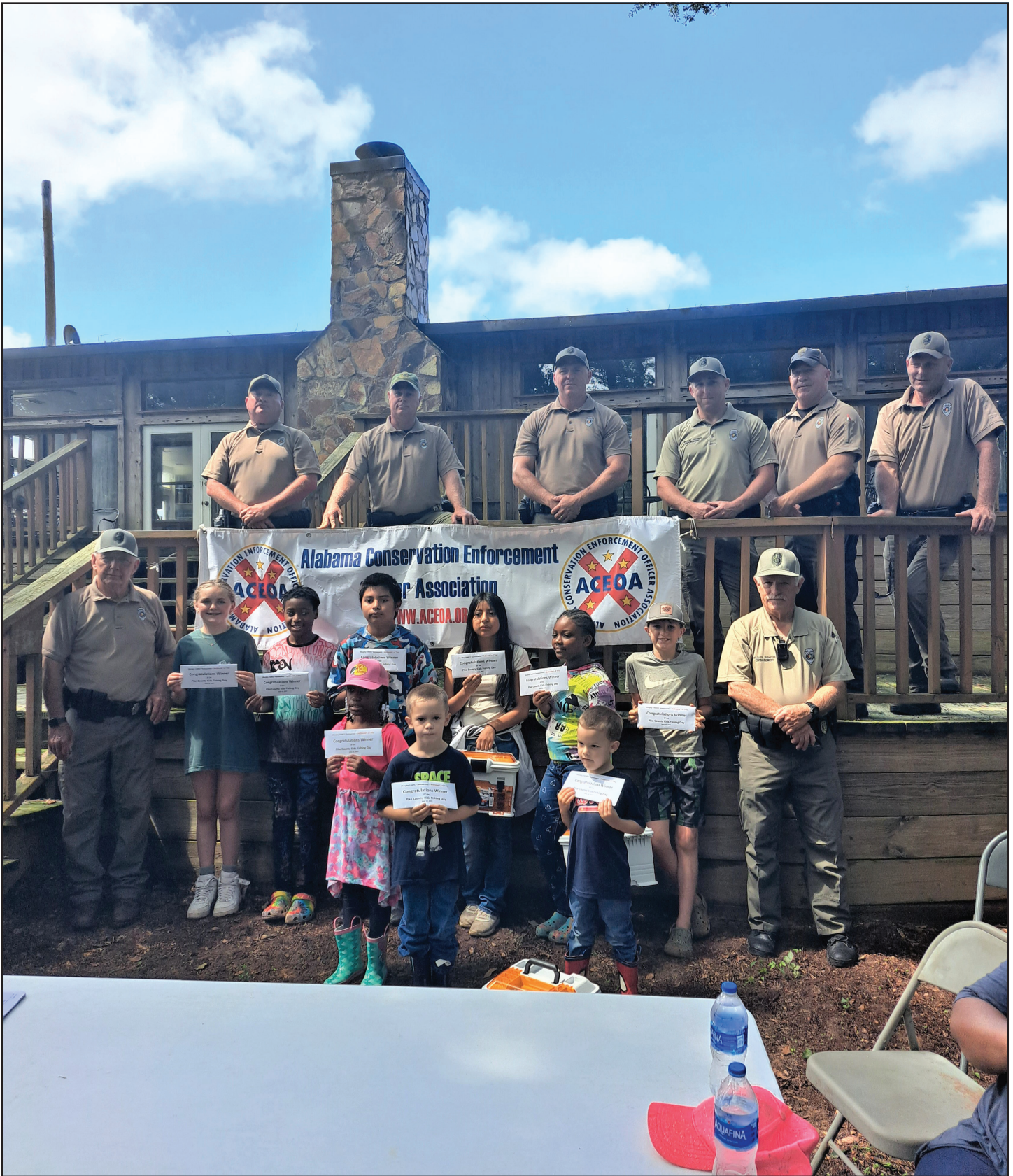


CLAY HILLS FARM HOST PIKE COUNTY YOUTH FISHING RODEO – continued





CLAY HILLS FARM HOST PIKE COUNTY YOUTH FISHING RODEO – continued



A Call For Help Results In A Happy Ending.....

In the late evening of March 2023, Conservation Enforcement Officer Katie Brown received a phone call from Bibb County Dispatch requesting assistance with finding a possible suicide victim near the Little Cahaba River in Brierfield, Alabama. The victim was said to be a middle aged, Caucasian female who had history of substance abuse. When the female did not return home earlier that day, her significant other contacted local authorities. A possible suicide became a concern due to the message in her last text messages sent to her significant other. The Kathy Stiles Freeland Bibb County Glades Preserve, adjacent to the Little Cahaba River, was the first choice to look for the female because it was a common location, she would go to clear her mind. When Bibb County Sheriff officers arrived at the Glades Preserve, they found her car abandoned. After contacting local fire departments to assist with conducting a search, everyone began to look for the female at the Preserve, along the riverbank, and surrounding areas. Bibb County dispatch is informed that the ADCNR, WFF, Law Enforcement section

has a K-9 unit that is specifically utilized to track humans. These highly trained K9s detects human scent and will direct their handler on the direction to go to find the lost. During the first hour of search, Bibb County Dispatch contacted Officer Brown, requesting a K-9 unit. Officer Brown then contacted K-9 handler, Lieutenant McHenry, and Conservation Enforcement Officer Robison to assist with the search. Lieutenant McHenry, along with K-9 Poundcake, Officer Robison, and Officer Brown met at the Kathy Stiles Freeland Bibb County Glades Preserve to obtain more information from Bibb County Sheriff officers regarding the lost female. After a plan was made, the search began. With Officer Brown and Officer Robison following, K-9 Poundcake and Lieutenant McHenry made way through the woods and along the riverbank in hopes to find the female. After hours had passed, the hope of finding the female was declining. That was until, a fresh footprint along the riverbank was found. K-9 Poundcake was able to detect a scent from what was expected to

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A CALL FOR HELP RESULTS IN A HAPPY ENDING..... – *continued*

be the female's footprint in the sand and dashed into a wooded area. In minutes, K-9 Poundcake and handler, Lieutenant McHenry recovered the female who was found lying face-down on the side of a hill. Lieutenant McHenry sprang into action and vocalized himself to the female to attempt to get a response. After he heard a few mumbling words, he realized she was alive. Officer Brown and Officer Robison aided Lieutenant McHenry with assessing her. Officer Robison called in to the Bibb County Sheriff's office to report the female was alive. He then sprinted to the gathering place of the assisting officers to direct them where to go. Officer Brown stayed with

Lieutenant McHenry and K-9 Poundcake to assist with further assessment of the female. After a short period of time, Officer Robison, Bibb County Sheriff officers, Bibb County EMS, and local firefighters arrived on scene and placed the female in a stretcher. After a brisk walk through the woods, the female was loaded into an ambulance and sent to a local hospital for care. Thankfully, the female did not have any life-threatening injuries and has since made a full recovery. Thanks to the strategic actions of K-9 Poundcake and handler, Lieutenant McHenry, a possible suicide call resulted in a happy ending. ●





Exceptional Baits Makes Debut at Exceptional Anglers Event

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources



Anglers and mentors line the shores at one of Oak Mountain State Park's lakes for the Exceptional Anglers event.
Photo by Kenny Johnson

June 1, 2023
Not only did exceptional anglers get to participate in the Exceptional Anglers event Gone Fishin', Not Just Wishin' at Oak Mountain State Park a few weeks ago, but a new bait company provided them with lures to land the numerous bass that inhabit the park's lakes.

The annual event teaches basic fishing skills to students with special needs from Alabaster and Pelham city schools and the Shelby and Jefferson county school systems. The bait company's name and mission made it

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EXCEPTIONAL BAITs MAKES DEBUT AT EXCEPTIONAL ANGLERS EVENT – *continued*

a perfect fit for the event. Exceptional Baits was launched to provide skills for people with disabilities.

“We help people with disabilities learn job skills, life skills and social skills,” said Equip’s Blake Huynh. “We actually launched our new company at the Gone Fishin’, Not Just Wishin’ event. We are making fishing lures, soft plastic baits, with people with disabilities. We’re also packaging that way, and we’re paying the individuals \$10 per hour, no matter how much they can produce so they can learn job skills.”

Chris Blankenship, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) said he looks forward to Gone Fishin’, Not Just Wishin’ each year and thinks Exceptional Baits is a perfect complement to the Exceptional Anglers event.

“Gone Fishin’ Not Just Wishin’ is one of my favorite events that we put on each year,” Commissioner Blankenship said. “It makes my heart full to see the huge smiles as the kids catch fish, some for the first time ever. It was also good to meet Blake and hear what they are doing at Exceptional Baits. The fishing event teaches kids how to fish and enjoy the outdoors, and Exceptional Baits is teaching people with disabilities life skills so they can work and take pride in earning a living. It sure is good to see that people of all abilities can fish and work and enjoy the quality of life we have here in Alabama.”

Huynh said Exceptional Baits was created under the non-profit Equip (equipservices.org), which has been established since 2018.

“Exceptional Baits is kind of a sister company that comes under the umbrella of Equip, where we can hire people with disabilities, train them on job skills and build that stamina,” he said.

Huynh said several of the current participants were significantly impacted by the COVID pandemic and are now just trying to get back into the routine of working.

“We’ve had a couple of participants who have come through with a lot of anxiety,” he said. “They were in a routine of working, but after COVID they just struggled to get back into the workforce. We’re trying to build that stamina so they can get back to working regularly.”

Huynh said Exceptional Baits combines his two passions into a productive outcome.

“I love to fish, and I also love to work with people with special needs,” he said. “I’ve been working with people with special needs since 2004, and I just wanted to bring my hobby into something that was new and would benefit them. It’s different, because not many people do this in the world of people with disabilities.

“I think the outdoors is difficult to have access to at times. I know other programs have been created to deal with that. This is just another opportunity for us to reinvest into the outdoors culture that exists in our area.”

Exceptional Baits currently offers five different styles of soft plastic lures – lizards, finesse worms, stick worms, Ned worms and a creature bait called the Grass Grenade.

“We’re working toward producing swim baits and flukes, and we recently just got in some new molds,” Huynh said. “We’re slowly working on building up colors, and we can also do custom colors. We let our participants in the program choose random colors and glitters at times just so they can have a say in creating some new baits. Then we take them fishing to try them out.

“From the Oak Mountain event, we’ve had a few orders

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Exceptional Baits come in a variety of shapes and colors and are made in Birmingham. Photo by Blake Huynh

EXCEPTIONAL BAITS MAKES DEBUT AT EXCEPTIONAL ANGLERS EVENT – *continued*

already. Our participants have not only gained great life skills from placing the baits in packages, packing them in boxes and adding the addresses, but they also are taking the boxes to the post office, requesting tracking numbers and talking about the rates and how we want to ship it to the customer. Teaching those life skills is one of the great bonuses of the new company.”

Huynh said the individuals at Exceptional Baits, which produces the baits in Birmingham, have a wide range of disabilities, and the job assignments are matched with their abilities.

“The individuals that do the injecting of the plastics are typically higher functioning,” he said. “The people packaging the worms typically have the more severe disabilities.”

Huynh said the participants gain a great deal of satisfaction when they are involved in the creative process.

“The most excitement comes when they create their own color and glitter pattern,” he said. “But they enjoy packaging. It’s a repetitive task. A lot of times, when working with people with disabilities, they excel at repetitive tasks and are able to concentrate and focus on the tasks, sometimes better than their typical peers. We have taken them fishing and plan to do it again soon. Even if they’re not catching anything, they enjoy using something that they’ve made.”

“From the financial side, they love to get some money from it. They can make something where they have struggled to get or hold a job. That’s huge for them. And I can see some awesome pride in the ones producing the baits.”

Huynh said the feedback from customers who have purchased the baits online at equipservices.org/exceptionalbaits has been positive.

“They’ve all told us they are high quality baits and are very similar to the major brands when it comes to quality,” he said. “Several of the vendors said they planned to order more. And I have personally been using them and have had great success with them as well.”

Huynh hopes to expand the production and display products at retail shops in the Jefferson/Shelby County areas. Discussions are being held about selling the baits at Alabama State Parks.

“I think the most important thing about Exceptional Baits is all the money that is generated through this is

going right back to paying for materials and supplies or funding the paychecks of the participants who work there,” he said. “The money coming into Exceptional Baits goes right back to those with exceptionalities. We are paying them a meaningful wage as well. I love the exposure we’ve had in the outdoor world and the interest they’ve gained in wanting to go fishing more. I had one of the participants ask if we could go fishing next week. He wants to go back to Oak Mountain.”

Huynh said the Exceptional Angler event was the perfect setting for his workers to see the results of their labor.

“Gone Fishin’ is an event I’ve attended multiple years, and I think it’s great to expose youth with disabilities to fishing and get them more comfortable with it,” he said. “Many of the students I worked with in previous years had never even seen a fish up close. When we’re there, most people catch one. That’s huge for the participants to have success when fishing. It’s fun fishing, but if you’re not catching anything ever, you can lose interest. But the event sets them up for success, and they always want to go back. They look forward to it all year long.”

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A pair of workers at Exceptional Baits sort the soft plastics to get ready to package. Photo by Blake Huynh



EXCEPTIONAL BAITS MAKES DEBUT AT EXCEPTIONAL ANGLERS EVENT – *continued*

“It’s a great time with great volunteers and businesses that support it. And we have fried fish too. I encouraged my students to try it.”

Gone Fishin’, Not Just Wishin’ sponsors include the ADCNR’s Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, Alabama Power Company, Spire Energy, Alabaster City Schools, Bud’s Best Cookies, Buffalo Rock, City of

Pelham, Consolidated Pipe and Supply, EBSCO, Golden Flake, Hadaway’s Good Little Farm, HPM, the Humber family, Jefferson County Adapted Physical Education, Jefferson County Board of Education and Transportation, Oak Mountain State Park, Pelham City Schools, Pelham police and fire departments, Shelby County Commission, Shelby County Schools, and Tyson Foods. ●





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

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