

Issue 1, 2023

# ACE Magazine

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ALABAMA CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



**District Park Ranger Pete Mitchum  
Named ACEOA Officer of the Year**

*see story*



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ON THE COVER

Join us in congratulating Alabama State Park Ranger Pete Mitchum as the 2022 ACEOA Officer of the Year. Ranger Mitchum serves as the Southwest District Ranger based out of the Gulf State Park. Over the past year, Ranger Mitchum has strived to enhance the professional standards of Parks Division Rangers and collaborated with local first responders to insure the safety of park visitors.



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# 2019–2022 ACEOA Board of Directors

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Jo Ann Johnson

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## ACE Magazine

Gayle Morrow – *Editor*

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## About Us

### — Who is the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers 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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# A Note from the President

*By Vance Wood, ACEOA President*

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Winter is almost gone and spring is in the air. Turkeys will be gobbling and fish will be spawning, and your ACEOA Board is hard at work! Members should have already received their membership renewal letters. Please make sure you have updated your personal email address if you have not done so recently. This will assist the Board with notifications and is also necessary for the PORAC policy for active Officers. PORAC is the Legal Defense Fund provided by the ACEOA for Conservation Enforcement Officers who are active members. A big thank you is due to Executive Director Jo Ann Johnson for researching and reactivating this benefit.

There will not be a conference this year due to a lack of venue availability and time. Vice President Joe Goddard and Laura Walls are working diligently to secure a venue for 2024 along our Gulf Coast. Joe is in the process of arranging for a guest speaker that you will not want to miss. There will be something for everyone and the Board is working hard to make the next ACEOA Conference the best ever.

Funding is steady however the Board is always looking for new sources. One additional source is in developing an online store that sells branded merchandise. Items bearing the ACEOA logo such as shirts, mugs, hats, and so on, will be available for purchase by the public. Funds generated from sales will be split pending a contract between the ACEOA and the vendor. One aspect of a contract will

provide a discount for Member purchases. It is a work in progress, so bear with us.

EAW Chair Reid Gaston met with the Board recently and provided an update on the Equip Alabama Wardens Program. Reid and his volunteers are in the process of activating EAW Chapters in Mobile, Birmingham, and Huntsville. Members who have contacts that may be interested in volunteering or donating to EAW are encouraged to forward the names and contact information to your District Director, so that information can be passed along to the EAW Board. Reid has worked diligently to kick-start this program, so if you get a chance to meet or talk with him, please tell him thanks.

The Legislature is soon to be in session and the ACEOA will be monitoring and providing updates on any bills that pertain to law enforcement and personnel matters. One matter of interest is the Tier 2 Retirement Plan for State Employees. The Board understands that Tier 2 negatively impacts many of our Members and their families. In years past the Board has advocated for the return of the Tier 1 Retirement Plan and is committed to working with the ADCNR Commissioner's Office, all ADCNR Division Directors, and State Legislators to see it progress. If you have any questions or concerns, please direct them to your District Director.

Thank you all for ensuring that the natural resources we enjoy today, will be here tomorrow for our next generation of Alabamians. ●





# What's Happening with ACEOA

*By Jo Ann Johnson, Executive Director*

It's hard to believe we are already approaching Spring! Turkey season is right around the corner and soon the dog days of summer will set in. I, along with the Board of Directors, met in February to prioritize all the ways the ACEOA strives to support our members and educate Alabamians, through outreach, on the proper care of our natural resources. Thanks to Tim Gothard and the Alabama Wildlife Federation for always so graciously hosting our board meetings.

I am most excited to announce that ACEOA is joining dozens of other law enforcement associations throughout the country, to provide Legal Defense Fund coverage to its active-duty member officers. Lawyers are expensive and one small case can put a family in financial hardship in no time. This essential coverage is free to member officers and provides financial support and legal representation in the event an officer finds himself involved in litigation for actions taken in the line of duty. The only way to be covered under this plan is to BECOME AN ACEOA MEMBER! If you have not already joined, now is the time.

Equip Alabama Wardens now has a driving force behind it to bring in funding for much-needed equipment for officers. That force is Reid Gaston. Mr. Gaston is passionate about ensuring our officers have the tools and resources necessary to do their jobs. He is raising funds for law enforcement equipment as well as fostering partnerships with businesses to equip officers with the latest top-notch resources needed for search and rescue operations. Funds to purchase this equipment are critical to officers' capabilities to protect natural resources and the citizens of Alabama. Mr. Gaston has convened

an advisory board, representative of each district, to identify and prioritize EAW fundraising strategies and other activities throughout the year. I am proud to work alongside Reid in these efforts.

As many healthy non-profit organizations do, ACEOA is always looking to diversify its funding sources. We never want to find ourselves in a position where we are relying on one funding source to help us accomplish our mission. Keeping in line with our fellow conservation enforcement associations throughout the U.S., ACEOA is establishing an online store for members and the public to purchase items such as hats, t-shirts, hoodies, and the like with the ACEOA brand. A portion of the sales will be dedicated to increasing the impact of existing outreach and education events as well as funding new activities for youth and people with disabilities throughout the state. This new online store will also result in a new and revived look to the ACEOA website.

Due to a demanding travel soccer schedule and the holidays, I was only able to sit in a deer stand a few times this past deer hunting season.

Interestingly enough, I took two huge wild hogs, but no deer. However, you will get no complaints from me as I cherish every second I get to breathe in the "woods" air, trek through muddy trails as the sun rises and sets, and sit quietly for hours watching Alabama's wildlife and foliage at its finest. Since joining the ACEOA, these experiences have had new meaning for me. I now know, I cannot take these experiences for granted. There are men and women working day and night to ensure I can keep having these moments and I am now working for them. ●





# Alabama State Parks' Mitchum Named Enforcement Officer of the Year

*By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources*

**D**istrict Park Ranger Pete Mitchum, with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' State Parks Division, was told to wear his Class A uniform to work recently, and he didn't know why. He complied and found out that Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association (ACEOA) President Vance Wood was on his way to meet him.

Wood, a Conservation Enforcement Lieutenant with the Department's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division, showed up at Gulf State Park to present Mitchum with the ACEOA Enforcement Officer of the Year Award.

"That was kind of a surprise," Mitchum said. "While we are not conservation officers, we are officers who work for the Conservation Department. The ACEOA covers the enforcement personnel in all four divisions – State Parks, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Resources and State Lands.

"It was an honor to receive it. There are about 200 enforcement officers in the Conservation Department, and there is probably somebody out there that deserved it more than me, but I am grateful for the award."

Director Greg Lein said Alabama State Parks is proud to have Mitchum considered for the ACEOA award.

"We think he's a great recipient of the award," Lein said. "I think the thing we're most pleased with is the fact that he was nominated by his own people, which says a lot about the kind of leader he is. They respect him and respect his leadership to a degree that they wanted to nominate him. We're proud to have him as a part of our team."

Mitchum's law enforcement career began in 1994 with a sheriff's department in South Carolina, his wife's home state. He worked patrol, K-9 and narcotics before being hired by the U.S. State Department in 2006 as a police advisor to advise and mentor the Afghanistan National Police.

"The whole concept was to teach an Islamic police



*ACEOA President Vance Wood and Ranger Mitchum*

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## ALABAMA STATE PARKS' MITCHUM NAMED ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR – *continued*

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*In attendance for the presentation was State Parks Director Greg Lein, State Parks South Region Operations Supervisor Lamar Pendergrass, Park Rangers Alex Prickett and Carson Mullinax, ACEOA President Vance Wood.*

force democratic policing,” said Mitchum, who said he’d always wanted to be in law enforcement since Mobile Police Officer Dan Buck gave him a short ride in a squad car when he was 7 years old. “It sounds challenging, and it was. I think we did a lot of good over there. I made a lot of longtime friends.”

After eight months at home, a friend called and asked him about being a bomb-detection dog handler back in Afghanistan. Mitchum only had experience with dual-purpose police dogs, not bomb dogs. After some convincing, he headed back overseas.

“Got my dog, and we were searching cars and buildings,” he said. “I had a really awesome dog (a Belgian Malinois named Brutus). He was a sharp, sharp dog. He received several recognitions while we were over there. It was all the dog. I was just holding the leash.

“The camp (near Kabul) got hit in 2015, and he devel-

oped a little PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Loud noises made him shut down. They retired him, and the general at that time was kind enough to fly him back to the states to be with me. That was pretty awesome.”

About six months later, he got a call about job openings as a WFF Conservation Enforcement Officer.

“I had always wanted to do this, but the stars never lined up,” Mitchum said. “Fast forward, I get hired as a game warden.”

Mitchum went to Perry County to start his WFF career, then moved to Escambia County before ending up in Mobile County.

The District Park Ranger’s position with Alabama State Parks was being developed, and Mitchum was intrigued by that possibility because of his appreciation for the State Parks System. Although the COVID pandemic



## ALABAMA STATE PARKS' MITCHUM NAMED ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR – *continued*



*Brutus*



*Pete Mitchum with friends*

delayed the process, he was hired to that position to cover the Southwest District, which includes Gulf State Park and Meaher State Park at the head of Mobile Bay.

“Meaher is easy,” he said. “We have a great staff up there. The Gulf State Park is a big park with more than 28 miles of trails, six beach accesses, the Gulf State Park Pier and the campground. That can keep any man busy.”

Mitchum oversees two park rangers and six security personnel with another park ranger scheduled to join the staff on February 1.

“First and foremost, we’re ambassadors for the park,” he said. “Our park users see us all over the place. I initially had a misconception of what we actually did. I’m thinking it was mainly guest relations, which is a big portion of it, and riding the trails and beaches. But it’s so much more. We have to consider the hospitality/tourism side of it because we are in the hospitality/tourism business. That’s our bread and butter. But we’re also law enforcement and deal with break-ins, burglaries, narcotics and other drugs, DUIs and traffic problems. And we have hurricanes, like Hurricane Sally that hit the first year I was here.

“We put on so many hats. At times, we may have to

put on a maintenance hat. We may be out cutting trees and clearing trails after a hurricane. We may be helping put up road signs or a fence. It’s not the norm. We have to be very versatile, very fluid in our day-to-day activities. But that’s what makes this job so great. You get to do it all. I ended up where I was meant to be. I love it down here. I’m truly blessed to be here.”

Mitchum said visitors come from all over the world to experience what Gulf State Park has to offer.

“You can hit close to 30 miles of trails and see bobcats, turtles and deer,” he said. “Then you can drive a half-mile and walk onto sugar-sand beaches and see all the marine life. Then you can go out on the pier and catch a wide variety of fish. There’s no other place like it.”

Mitchum’s District Park Ranger position hasn’t been the only change to the Parks’ State Personnel register for enforcement, according to Lein.

“The most important is the Park Ranger entry level position,” Lein said. “That is now open for continuous recruitment, and it’s been rewritten to clarify the approach we take to law enforcement now. We are always



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## ALABAMA STATE PARKS' MITCHUM NAMED ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR – *continued*

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looking for good officers and would love to add to our Park Ranger staff around the state.

“As Commissioner (Chris) Blankenship was saying the other day, the park ranger job may have the most complicated law enforcement responsibilities in the Department,” Lein said. “They do such a diverse array of work, and they’re doing it in a hospitality setting. They’re almost like policemen in a city, managing for those normal enforcement duties, like speeding, DUIs, domestic disputes. Then we have the regulations about the conduct of guests in park. Then we have the natural resources, making sure they’re not being abused. That’s a lot.

“They have to be really tactful. They have to educate our guests on why the speed limit is important, that there are cyclists on the road and wildlife in the park. The same goes for going into the campground to enforce quiet hour. We don’t want to alienate our customers who we depend on to make our State Parks great, but we won’t tolerate behavior that detracts from the enjoyment of our beautiful parks by our other guests.”

Visit [www.alapark.com/law-enforcement-career-opportunities](http://www.alapark.com/law-enforcement-career-opportunities) for more information. ●



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# 2022 Henry County Youth Dove Hunt

*By Henry County CEO Larry Doster*



*All the young hunters are decked out in camo and eager to get on the field for some shooting action!!*

The Henry County Youth Dove Hunt was a success again this year, even though Mother Nature did try to dampen it a little.

Originally the hunt registration was full with about 82 youth and 60 adults signed up to hunt. The rain and continuous threat of rain kept some hunters from coming out, but we still had a large crowd of about 52 youth and 38 adults to show up to enjoy the food, fellowship and dove hunt.

Everyone was hopeful of getting drawn for a door prize, and especially the lifetime hunting license to be given away, sponsored and paid for by the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association.

As always, Mrs. Charlotte Doster, the landowner, was there to welcome everyone. Mr. and Mrs. Harnidge Elliott, Mr. and Mrs. Hannon Hall, and Ricky Brooks grilled sausage and hot dogs for lunch. The soft drinks and bottled water were donated by Coca-Cola of Dothan.



*Janan Doster registered youth female hunter, Kathryn Moore, from Ozark, Alabama as District 4 Wildlife Biologist looks on.*

## 2022 HENRY COUNTY YOUTH DOVE HUNT – continued



Seth Brown with sons Thaddeus on the left and Titus on the right, from Geneva, Alabama.



Jimmy Julian with his daughter April, from Robertsdale, Alabama. April had just taken her first dove of the afternoon!! Great shooting!!

ACEOA provided funds to purchase shotgun shells and other door prizes, and the funds to purchase one lifetime hunting license. Tackleshack Outdoors shop in Troy donated door prizes. Great Southern Wood and Pea River Electric Cooperative provided the funds for the second lifetime hunting license that was given away on September 24, 2022 at the second youth hunt.

Brandt Alex Cureton, of Headland, won the lifetime hunting license given away at the first hunt on September 10, 2022.



District 4 Wildlife Biologists, Adam Pritchett on the left and Andrew Green sign in all the adults and youth hunters.



This is Kathryn Moore and her dog, Abbie, from Ozark, Alabama



Larry's wife, Janan Doster, registered all the youth for a chance to win the lifetime hunting license and other door prizes.



Door prize winners were, Brandt Cureton, Lifetime Hunting License, Kayla Head and Alex Hughes, orange safety vest, Jackson Renfroe, knife sharpener and John Duncan, camo t-shirt.



## 2022 HENRY COUNTY YOUTH DOVE HUNT – continued



Winner of the second lifetime hunting license was Jayden Greer of Opelika, Alabama with District 4 Biologist Adam Pritchett. This license was paid for by Great Southern Wood, Abbeville, Alabama and Pea River Electric Coop., Ozark, Alabama.



Lucky Young Man!!! Winner of the Lifetime hunting license given away by the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officer's Association is Brandt Cureton from Headland, Alabama on left with Henry County Conservation Officer Larry Doster.

Jayden Earl Greer, of Opelika, won the lifetime hunting license given away on September 24, 2022. Congratulations to those lucky winners!

District 4 Wildlife Biologists, Adam Pritchett and Andrew Green registered the hunters, and Janan Doster registered the hunters for the lifetime license give-away drawing.

District 4 Biologist Adam Pritchett and Henry County Conservation Officer

Larry Doster gave a safety talk to all the hunters prior to letting them go to the field. Safety First!

We hope everyone had a great time and look forward to seeing you again next year!



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# Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee Landowner Tour

*By Joel Glover*

Nestled in central Alabama about forty-five miles north of Montgomery and sixty miles south of Birmingham is a small county that holds just over 10,000 people and an abundance of trees, water and wildlife. Many years ago, the members of the Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee donned Coosa as the TREASURE Forest Capitol of Alabama. That is a distinction earned through the hard work of landowners throughout the county and the promotion of the TREASURE Forest Program by the members of the Coosa County Forestry Planning Committee (CCFPC).

The TREASURE Forest program has been around since the mid '70s and is unique to Alabama. The idea of Bill Moody the Alabama State Forester at the time, the program was an effort to bring foresters, wildlife biologists and forest land owners together in an attempt to better manage properties in the state. The TREASURE Forest program is a multiple use program in which private landowners select a primary and secondary objective for their property. In a nutshell, the program recognizes landowners who have made significant accomplishments toward the goals they have set for their property. Any landowner who has 10 acres of forest land is eligible for the program. Over time landowners work toward their goals. That's where the members of the CCFPC come in.

The CCFPC is made up of natural resource professionals and other interested persons who can assist



*Alabama Extension Forester Lori Eckhardt discusses brown spot needle blight in loblolly pines.*

landowners with the selection of objectives. Possible objectives include forest management, wildlife management, Recreation, Education or Aesthetics. A property visit from a forester and/or wildlife biologist can assist landowners in defining their objectives. In addition, the resource professionals can provide recommendations to help landowners reach their goals. They can also avail landowners of possible financial assistance available from the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Soil and Water Conservation District to assist them in achieving their goals.

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## COOSA COUNTY FORESTRY PLANNING COMMITTEE LANDOWNER TOUR – *continued*

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The 2022 fall CCFPC landowner tour was held on the Robinwald Property in Rockford. The tour began with Miss Lily Howell singing the national anthem. The 70 people in attendance were welcomed to the property by Alabama Extension Regional Wildlife Specialist and CCFPC member, Drew Metzler and County Extension Coordinator Sharon Haynes. Conservation Enforcement Officer (CEO) Joel Glover gave a brief history of the CCFPC and informed



*Miss Lily Howell sings the national anthem to open the Coosa County Landowners Tour.*

the group that Justin Knight would be serving as the new CEO of the county. Glover reminded the crowd that he and CEO Knight needed everyone's help in protecting the wildlife resources in the county. The group boarded trailers to move to one of the four stops on the tour.

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Wildlife Biologists Brian Grice and Landon Johnson provided a presentation on trapping and discussed the role that trapping predators can play on properties being managed for wildlife. Research has shown that the timely removal of species such as raccoons and coyotes can benefit the survival of other species. They demonstrated various types of traps and how to set them. They informed the group of the availability of trapping seminars across the state.

The next stop was with Alabama Extension Forester Lori Eckhardt who discussed a somewhat new topic of brown spot needle blight in loblolly pine. Although brown spot has long been known to occur in longleaf pine, finding it in loblolly is a somewhat recent problematic development. Controlling an outbreak can be difficult in an older age stand. Anyone noticing a yellowing and



*AWF Stewardship Biologist Claude Jenkins discusses the benefits of native grasses for wildlife*



*Michele Isenberg discusses vegetation management in pine stands.*

thinning of the crowns in their loblolly pine stands should contact their forester or the extension service.

Michele Isenberg, the CEO of Habitat Solutions in Dadeville was on hand to discuss mid-rotation releases in pine stands. This treatment is often prescribed in stands with a very thick understory which can compete with the trees for nutrients and can make other management techniques difficult. Michele explained situations where a chemical release would be advantageous. Mid-rotation release normally consists of applying herbicide, often with aircraft, to remove undesirable vegetation and promote tree growth.



## COOSA COUNTY FORESTRY PLANNING COMMITTEE LANDOWNER TOUR – *continued*



*ADCNR Wildlife Biologists Brian Grice and Landon Johnson discussed how removal of predators via trapping can improve desired wildlife populations.*

The last stop of the day featured Alabama Wildlife Federation Resource Stewardship Wildlife Biologist Claude Jenkins who discussed the benefit of native grasses for various wildlife species. Claude discussed site preparation and planting of native grasses. He explained that native grasses are normally clump grasses which allow small wildlife species such as quail to move through the grass feeding on seeds while the grass provides cover hopefully shielding the birds from predators. He also discussed how the grasses do not require fertilization and are best maintained with fire.

Although the TREASURE Forest Program began almost

50 years ago, the need for good forest stewardship never ceases and thankfully many landowners throughout the county are committed to earning their certification. When several accomplishments have been achieved, the property is inspected and an application is submitted to the TREASURE Forest Committee of the Alabama Natural Resource Council. The members of this group review the accomplishments and if they are sufficient the property and landowners are certified as a TREASURE Forest.

Coosa County landowners, Pierre and Lacy Lebeau and Stanton Langley were recognized as having earned the coveted title of TREASURE Forest. In addition, Mike O'Brien and Brad, Teresa Mitchell, and Joy Morris received Forest Stewardship awards and tour host Tommy Robinson received Tree Farm Certification.

Property tours like this one are an excellent way for landowners to learn of various forestry and wildlife management practices they may be able to implement on their property. In addition, it gives them access to wildlife and forestry professionals who can assist them with their property management. The members of the CCFPC appreciate the assistance of the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association in helping us provide these beneficial tours to landowners. Working together we can build a better Alabama. ●



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# Governor Ivey Joins in Celebration of New Boating Access

*By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources*



*With a recreational boat in the background, Governor Kay Ivey celebrates the opening of Demopolis City Landing. Photo by David Rainer*

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey recently joined in the celebrations of major improvements in boating access in west central Alabama and at the Gulf Coast with ribbon-cutting ceremonies at Demopolis City Landing and The Launch at ICW.

Governor Ivey joined local leaders and dignitaries on the banks of the Tombigbee River on Thursday to open Demopolis City Landing, enabling the area to capitalize on the increase in fishing participation and providing the ability to host local, regional and major fishing tournaments on the Tombigbee and Black Warrior rivers.

“I am honored to be here to cut the ribbon on the

new boat ramp here in Demopolis,” Governor Ivey said. “Truly, this first-class project demonstrates the efficiency of Alabama cooperation. Working together with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), the City of Demopolis and Marengo County brought this \$3 million investment to west Alabama, which will provide millions of dollars of economic benefit to our Black Belt region of the state.”

The Demopolis City Landing provides a four-lane boat launch with 53 paved parking spots, three handicapped

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## GOVERNOR IVEY JOINS IN CELEBRATION OF NEW BOATING ACCESS – *continued*

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parking spots, green-space parking for hundreds more and 250 feet of docking space.

“Here in Alabama, we are presented with the unique opportunity to not only use our state’s bountiful natural resources to grow our economy but to improve the quality of life of Alabamians through the encouragement of the use of our outdoor recreation,” Governor Ivey said. “This project will allow the Demopolis community to capitalize on great fishing on the Black Warrior and Tombigbee rivers. In fact, with this facility, Marengo County can now host regional and national bass tournaments to help promote access to these waters. Our friends at Alabama Power Company and B.A.S.S. (Bass Anglers Sportsman Society) have continued their longstanding partnership by providing a pavilion for a much-needed space for organizations, from local bass clubs to the largest tournaments, to hold their weigh-ins. And folks, I have participated in a bass weigh-in, so I know that having some space will be yet another plus.

“I fully expect to watch the tourism industry grow even more after the opening of this boat ramp here in Demopolis. We’re known as ‘Alabama the Beautiful’ for

a reason, and this opening will allow more of our families, from far and near, to get out and experience our great state. Folks, this project is not an end but just the beginning. In the next few weeks, Commissioner (Chris) Blankenship and the Conservation Department will be developing more boating access like here in Demopolis, but I know this one here in Marengo County will be tough to beat. May God continue to bless each of you and the great state of Alabama.”

Marengo County Commissioner Jason Windham said the project went through many starts and stops before it reached fruition.

“I was about ready to throw my hands up, but Freddy (Padilla with Alabama Power) said you’ve got to finish it; you’ve got to do it,” Windham said. “Land the plane and get this project started.”

Bids for the project came in double the original estimate. To continue the project and complete the landing, ADCNR increased the funding they were providing, and the Marengo County Commission, the Marengo County Economic Development Authority, the Marengo Parks and



*Conservation Commissioner Chris Blankenship emphasizes the need for new access to public waters and public lands for hunting and other recreational use. Photo by David Rainer*

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## GOVERNOR IVEY JOINS IN CELEBRATION OF NEW BOATING ACCESS – *continued*

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Recreation Board, the Demopolis Parks and Recreation Board and the City of Demopolis formed a coalition to help fund the additional local match for the project. Alabama Power and B.A.S.S. provided funding toward the construction of two pavilions. Local businesses and companies provided other assets to complete the pavilions.

“It’s been an amazing adventure and amazing journey,” Windham said. “What we figured out was that when the City of Demopolis and Marengo County need to come together, they do. I’m proud to stand here today and say we landed the plane.”

Demopolis Mayor Woody Collins added, “If we tried to thank everybody, we’d be here for hours. There were so many people behind the scenes that have contributed. We know who you are, and we appreciate you so much.”

Commissioner Blankenship said he and Deputy Commissioner Ed Poolos traveled to Demopolis and met with Padilla and Demopolis and Marengo County officials and quickly recognized the need for the launch facility and what it could mean for this area.

Commissioner Blankenship and Deputy Commissioner Poolos returned to Montgomery and met with ADCNR

staff to devise a plan to find funding for the project and move it up in the priority list of other projects scheduled around the state. They also worked with the (U.S. Army) Corps of Engineers to speed up the permitting process to allow the work to proceed.

“The passion these guys have for their community and their plan to do something big like this was contagious,” Commissioner Blankenship said. “None of us had the money to do this project alone, but we figured that if we all pulled together, we could get it done. As with any project like this, there were challenges, but any time I called Jason or the mayor, these guys were great, and we worked through every problem. When the bids came in double, I was so thankful we were able to work together to make this happen. The river above flood stage, the bids over budget, soupy soil, rock that had to be drilled to put the pilings down, relocating endangered mussels and other issues were handled quickly and professionally, which goes to show that, if you’re interested in working together and want to make things happen, you can.”

Commissioner Blankenship said the improvements in access to Alabama’s great outdoors have numerous benefits that may not be readily recognized.

“Alabama is truly blessed with woods and waters from one end of the state to the other,” Commissioner Blankenship said. “The Black Belt is such a beautiful and important part of our state. I’m glad to be here to dedicate this new facility. With the spectacular fishing in all the various waterways, demand for boating access is through the roof here in Demopolis. Building public access is a priority for me as the Commissioner. Acquisition of public hunting land and other public recreational lands, building tournament-style boat ramps and piers, trail-building and blueway creation are all in progress around the state.”

Expanding outdoor recreation is one of the biggest opportunities that we have to retain workers in Alabama,” he said. “Having a facility like this in west Alabama will really help this part of the



*Governor Ivey joins local officials to cut the ribbon at The Launch at ICW in Orange Beach. Photo by Hal Yeager*



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## GOVERNOR IVEY JOINS IN CELEBRATION OF NEW BOATING ACCESS – *continued*

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state capitalize on the natural resources that God so richly blessed this area with.”

On Friday, Governor Ivey and Commissioner Blankenship headed to Alabama’s beautiful Gulf Coast and the dedication of The Launch at ICW (Intracoastal Waterway), just across the canal from The Wharf.

The new launch facility provides a great deal of access to the Gulf Shores-Orange Beach area with about 200 trailer parking spots and a multiple-lane boat ramp. The \$19 million project was a joint effort with GOMESA (Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act) funds from the State of Alabama and Baldwin County. Governor Ivey committed \$10.1 million in state GOMESA funding, while the Baldwin County Commission committed an additional \$8.1 million in county GOMESA funding. Another \$750,000 from local county funds supported the project.

With more than 1,700 feet of water frontage, the 47-acre property in Orange Beach has a ramp capable

of launching six boats at once with docking facilities. In addition to lighted parking, that facility has six covered pavilions with picnic table seating, a grand pavilion, and more than a mile of concrete sidewalks and boardwalks throughout the pavilion and launch areas.

“This large capacity boat ramp was much needed in Coastal Alabama,” said Commissioner Blankenship. “The project was done first-class. The design and beefy materials for the piers, boardwalks, pavilions and restroom facilities were designed to withstand the numerous tropical events that impact this area. It was built right and should be here to provide access to our great boating and fishing resources for decades to come. The Launch at ICW was a dream of Senator Chris Elliott and others. We had numerous conversations on how to make it happen. I am so glad to be here today with Governor Ivey to see this dream is now a reality.” ●





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# Soil Analysis — A Critical Component of Food Plot Success

*By Dana Johnson*

*Dana Johnson has a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Science and is employed with the USDA as a Wildlife Specialist. Dana has over 20 years of field and research experience managing wildlife and assisting landowners with producing quality wildlife habitats. He has authored numerous articles on issues ranging from animal damage to food plot preparation. For more information about feral hog management, call Dana at 334-301-1417 or email [dana.k.johnson@usda.gov](mailto:dana.k.johnson@usda.gov).*

**F**ood plots are an important factor in a quality wildlife management program and provide many benefits to hunters and landowners alike. Food plots attract and increase the chance of harvesting wildlife species such as deer, turkeys, doves and even wild hogs. During the summer months, food plots are used to provide essential wildlife habitats and high-quality forage to increase antler development and help pregnant doe during gestation. Food plots can also provide suitable bugging areas for turkeys as well as cover and feeding areas for quail.

With the many benefits food plots provide, one must do their research and carefully prepare the very ingredient responsible for a food plot's success or failure – **soil**. Between seed, fertilizer, time, and equipment costs, planting a one-acre food plot can cost more than \$250. Many people buy the same commercial mix every year, spread 4 bags of 13(N)-13(P)-13(K) (N-Nitrogen; P-phosphorus, and K-potassium) per acre and expect everything to grow vibrant and healthy. If the plot soil pH is below 5.5 or above 7.4, all that money may have been wasted, not to mention the cost of fertilizers that may have been unnecessary.

A successful food plot program requires knowledge of the soil and what it has available by way of nutrients for a plant to not only grow but thrive. Cation exchange

capacity, pH, available phosphorus, nitrogen, and potassium are all important factors to consider. Each has a direct effect on the production and attractiveness of a plot. A soil analysis provides all the information you need to get a food plot management plan together to ensure maximum forage production. A soil analysis is low cost and one of the most important pieces of information when planting food plots.

## ***What does a soil analysis tell us and how do we get one?***

A soil analysis is the best way to start a good nutrition plan for each plot so the crops grown can provide the most attractive and nutrient rich foods for the wildlife. A soil analysis will identify limiting factors in forage production such as pH along with macronutrients like phosphorus and potassium. The minimal cost of a soil analysis upfront can save thousands of dollars in wasted fertilizer and seed down the road. An analysis will also steer how a seed and fertilizer budget should be allocated for each field. Think of it as a risk management tool for food plots.

Crops require different nutrient needs along with optimal soil type. If clover or other inoculated legumes are going to be planted alone, nitrogen does not need to be present. However, phosphorus and potassium are

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## SOIL ANALYSIS – A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF FOOD PLOT SUCCESS – *continued*

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*Black belt clays have a high CEC and water holding capacity. Unfortunately they can have an alkaline pH. A soil test will tell you this important information.*

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necessary, each at different levels. Common winter cereal grains like wheat, rye, and oats do require nitrogen at higher levels. The pH is also extremely important in crop production and nutrient availability and a soil analysis will provide that information. Some plants grow better in a pH of 5.7 to 6.2 while others may prefer a more neutral pH of 7. If you know the pH of the soil, it may affect the decision about what crops are planted in which plot.

How a soil sample is collected is just as important as the final lab results as improper sampling can lead to invalid results. The first factor in taking a good soil sample is to have good spatial variability over the entire plot. This will give a good sample of the field and provide a representation of what is most predominant in that plot. This means that the final 2 lbs. of soil sent to the lab should include soil from the entire plot. Collecting one scoop of soil from the middle of the plot and sending it in for analysis only provides information on that spot. Collecting samples from many sites in the plot will provide a more accurate result for interpretation. Most wildlife openings are under ½ acre and in these smaller plots, a minimum of three various samples should suffice,

but five samples are recommended, especially in plots one acre or more.

The depth at which each soil sample is collected is also a factor in producing a good soil analysis. Collecting a hand full of soil from the top layer does not indicate what is happening at the root level. Some plants have shallow root systems. Yet others, like wheat, can penetrate many feet below the soil surface. An analysis of the top 6 inches may show nutrient values much different than what is 12" to 18" below the surface. Nutrients such as nitrogen can move many feet through the soil, but potassium may only move a few inches and phosphorus does not move at all. It is imperative to collect a sample that represents what is happening at the surface as well as one to two feet below.

Soil scientists use a soil probe to collect soil at varying levels. A probe is the fastest and simplest way to take soil samples from numerous plots quickly and is worth the cost. Soil test probes come in all lengths but one that will take a minimum 12" plug is recommended. The probe is pushed into the ground and the plug is easily removed. Soil probes can range from \$50 to \$200 each. The higher

## SOIL ANALYSIS – A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF FOOD PLOT SUCCESS – *continued*



Soil Probe



Auger

cost products tend to be heavy duty and have the added footstep that aids in penetrating deeper into the soil, making them ideal for sampling heavy clays.

Another collection tool that works well in sandy or loam soils is the small diameter dirt hole auger. These augers attach to cordless drills and are easy to use. I recommend the ones with the 1.5" bits as they don't put as much strain on the drill. They can be found at many big box stores and the ones with smaller bits work great. They are very affordable, costing between \$15 to \$30. It takes a little more time to collect a sample, but it works effectively. The only issue that may arise with this tool is when trying to collect samples from a harder soil texture. Attempting to drill through dry clay soils down to 12" can prove a little difficult.

There are many other ways to get samples such as using a spade or shovel. These methods work but are very time consuming. No matter which method is used,

make sure to collect plenty of 12" or deeper samples per plot. Put each sample in a bucket and mix well. Once the sample is thoroughly mixed, put a small amount into a container to submit to the lab. Labs only need a pound or two of soil for each analysis and many have their own containers and forms they require for submission. Depending on the time of year and the soil lab, it can take more than 2 weeks to receive your analysis. Remember, the analysis is only as good as the sample provided.

### ***Understanding the Results***

Each lab will send the data from your soil samples in its own format. There is little consistency between each lab, but most will have the soil group which is correlated to the cation exchange capacity, pH, and macronutrient values. Next to these values, the report will indicate very low, low, medium, high, very high and sometimes extremely high levels for that nutrient. Some labs will provide recommendations on lime applications if the soil pH is too acidic. Nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium recommendations may be included as well.

Two unique soil analyses, recently conducted, are detailed below. The first analysis was conducted using soil collected from the vegetable garden at my personal residence. The other is from soil collected at a hunting property I've managed since 1999. Each location has different soil types, determining the way I approach



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## SOIL ANALYSIS – A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF FOOD PLOT SUCCESS – *continued*

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managing soil pH and fertilization requirements. The soil analyses from each property also demonstrate how different crop fertilization needs can vary so widely on the same property.

The first soil analysis is in illustration 1, Lab No. 10832, sample designation Phillips. This has been a garden site for 25 years and has never had a soil analysis completed. Soil types consist of blackbelt clays with a high cation exchange capacity (CEC - the capacity of a soil to retain nutrients.) Every year, a base 13-13-13 fertilizer has been laid. The soil analysis shows a pH of 7.5, extremely high phosphorus, and very high potassium. For growing general vegetables, the analysis recommends 120 lbs. per acre of nitrogen and no phosphorus or potassium.

Based on the soil analysis, the pH needs to be lowered, because both phosphorus and potassium are unavailable to the plant in this alkaline soil. This can be done by adding elemental sulfur, aluminum sulfate, or iron sulfate. Plants will start absorbing these nutrients once the pH is lowered to 7.0 and down to 6.0. Additionally, the inclusion of ammonium nitrate can lower the pH level of this soil.

A few simple math calculations are then necessary to determine the amount of fertilizer recommended. For this plot, the results from the lab indicate a recommendation of 120 lbs. of nitrogen per acre. A 50 lb. bag of 32-0-0 means this bag is 32% nitrogen, hence the number 32 in the name. To know how many bags will need to be purchased, simply multiply the number of lbs. per bag. In this case, that would be 50 multiplied by 32%. The result is 16 which means each bag contains 16 lbs. of nitrogen. Divide the amount you need, 120 lbs. by 16 lbs. and 7.5 is the result and the number of bags you need to purchase for one acre.

In the same soil report, in illustration 1, Lab no. 18030, sample designation “Garden” has a pH of 7.6, but the lab recommends 120 lbs. of nitrogen, 120 lbs. of phosphorus and 60 lbs. of nitrogen. Already knowing that 7.5 bags of 32-0-0 is needed, the phosphorus and potassium must now be customized. To get 120 lbs. of phosphorus, use 5.21 bags of 0-46-0 or triple super phosphate and 2 bags of muriate of potash which is 0-0-60. I round up to whole bags as the extra spread over an acre will not hurt the crop.

When submitting a soil analysis, it is important to specify what crops are desired to be planted in the soil.

To illustrate the point that different crops require different amounts of macronutrients, refer to the same illustration with lab number 18031 sample designation “Road Garden” and notice the nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium recommendations for three different crops. Tomatoes, other vegetables, and watermelons all require different amounts to maximize their crop potential. If this entire field was going to be planted only in watermelons, 80 lbs. of nitrogen and 70 lbs. of phosphorus are needed. Potassium is not recommended. If vegetables, other than tomatoes were to be planted in this field, 120 lbs. of nitrogen, 120 lbs. of phosphorus and 60 lbs. of potassium are recommended. Finally, if tomatoes are to be planted, 120 lbs. of nitrogen, 110 lbs. of phosphorus and no potassium are the recommendation from the analysis.

The second soil test report, completed in October 2022, is from a hunting plantation in Macon County I’ve been managing since 1999. The soil types on this 1000-acre property include all four soil groups. They include sandy soil, loams and light clays, soils with high organic matter, and finally blackbelt clay. Eight of the sixteen plots were tested as they are analyzed on a two-year rotation schedule. The results indicated the pH ranged from 5.1 to 7.7 and fertilizer recommendations were different for nearly every plot. Lab recommendations were calculated on pounds per acre and then adjusted based on field size.

Soil analysis was used to make specific decisions regarding each plot on this property. Two plots were not planted at all but only limed. Lime takes approximately 3 to 6 months to raise a soil pH a full point and would still yield a low nutrient uptake by plants. If these fields had been planted and fertilized as normal, money would have simply been wasted on fertilizer and seed. The same holds true for another plot that was determined to be highly alkaline. In the spring, elemental sulfur will be added to this plot as the addition of sulfur can only create an impact when the soil temperature is above 50 degrees. Ammonium nitrate could also be used to lower the pH, but one must also consider the cost of fertilizer in the planning process.

The remaining plots received specific added amounts of nutrients based on the soil analysis recommendations. Two plots had lower pH and it was recommended to add one ton of lime per acre. The landowner and I decided to





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## SOIL ANALYSIS – A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF FOOD PLOT SUCCESS – *continued*

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lime and plant anyway in the hopes that by mid-January the pH will have adjusted enough to allow for nutrient uptake by the plants. Other plots received similar recommendations of additions of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. We completed our calculations of the nutrients needed for each plot, based on the contents of nutrients in a bag, and purchased accordingly.

### ***Soil Analysis: Is It Worth It?***

You now might be thinking you have to be a mathematician to know how to properly plant a food plot for maximum wildlife benefit. Planting food plots is already a difficult task getting the equipment ready and rounding up the manpower to plant multiple plots to be ready by hunting season. Why, then, do we make it more complicated, collecting soil samples, sending them to a lab and waiting two weeks to get a report with seemingly random numbers you don't understand. It can be tedious and time-consuming figuring out what each plot needs based on the soil analysis and trying to locate a store that carries all the different fertilizers recommended.

The simple answer is yes. But why? You can spread all the fertilizer you want over a food plot, but if the soil pH isn't in a specific range, the nutrients simply will not make their way to the plant for it to thrive. Nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are not in a form available to the plant if the pH is not within a specific range. The cation exchange capacity (CEC) in soil is also important and the lab uses this to calculate recommended fertilizer amounts. Sandy soil holds fertilizer different than that of heavy clays. Sandy loams and light clays are much different than blackbelt clays. The soil analysis takes the soil type into account and allows the lab to make the best recommendations for the contents of fertilizer to be applied. If the plant cannot absorb the nutrients provided, then you have wasted your money purchasing the wrong kind of fertilizer.

Some nutrients may be in amounts that are toxic to plants and the environment. If you have a pH of 5.1 and apply too much nitrogen to the acre, the plant cannot take it up because it's in what is called an unavailable form. Nitrogen also moves easily through soil and can leach

into the environment with unintended consequences. For example, nitrogen can move below the root zone with excessive rain and directly impact water quality. This happens much more frequently on sandy soils than on clay.

Phosphorus is another example of a nutrient that can be toxic when not applied appropriately. Phosphorus does not move in soil and if the pH is very acidic or alkaline, phosphorus will also be unavailable to the plant and will remain stagnant until the pH is adjusted to a range that allows it to move. Many wildlife food plots can have excessive phosphorus because it has not been absorbed by the planted crop. Plants will not grow because the excessive phosphorus amount does not allow the plant to absorb nutrients like zinc, copper, and calcium. Extremely high phosphorus levels can even kill plants.

Food plot plants need Potassium for the adenosine triphosphate (ATP) that produces plant energy. This nutrient moves well in a soil solution, but not to the extent of nitrogen. Where nitrogen can move feet in soil, potassium may only move inches. Just like Phosphorus, if the pH is not within a specific range, plants will not absorb Potassium. Continued applications of Potassium can create excessive amounts and lead to toxicity issues. Too much Potassium will prevent plants from taking up much needed micronutrients to thrive such as magnesium, iron, zinc, and calcium.

### ***Conclusion:***

Conducting a soil analysis every two to three years is a cost-effective risk management tool for planting food plots that will thrive and benefit wildlife populations. Collecting and submitting a soil sample for analysis is logical and can save a landowner and hunters a significant amount of money. Deer and other wildlife will choose the most nutritious forage. On the other hand, plants that do not gain nutrients from the soil lose palatability. If you want to draw deer and/or other wildlife to your hunting area, collect a soil sample, send it to an accredited lab, and follow the recommendations; it is well worth the effort. To find a soil analysis lab near you, contact your local extension office for further information. ●



# Conecuh County Jakes Day

*By Micky Tait*



**O**n November 12th, 2022, the annual Conecuh County Jakes Day event was held in Evergreen. A total of 111 youths participated this year. The event is hosted by Tommy and Kaye Hall at their residence. Although this event is considered an NWTF event, the ACEOA has proudly sponsored this event over the years and has since become a main sponsor.

Alabama DCNR provides shooting sports activities and outreach for the event. Enforcement Officers from District 5 were present to assist youth in archery and shooting sports events. The youth arrive and are divided up into groups. Each group visits each station/activity and rotates around.

This year, activities included archery, a .22 caliber rifle range, a shotgun with skeet range, a DCNR Enforcement violator trailer, a turkey calling class, a BB gun range, a zip line, a cane syrup making station, and a bounce house. After each group has had a chance to go through each station, lunch is provided for all in attendance. During breaks and after lunch, everyone has a chance to view all the animals the Halls have on their property

as well. As all are getting their meals, many prizes are given out to the youth.

Many of the youth that attend are first-time shooters in archery and firearm stations. Some that come stated this event is the only time they get to participate in such activities and look forward to it every year. It proves to



## CONECUH COUNTY JAKES DAY – *continued*



be a great event every year with many happy youths in attendance.

This event would not be possible without the help of numerous volunteers, the ACEOA, NWTF, numerous donors, AL DCNR, and most importantly, Tommy and Kaye Hall. They take very little credit but do most of the work with no intention of receiving praise. The Halls put

many hours in throughout the year between coordinating with donors, and volunteers, gathering prizes, prepping for the provided meal, and preparing their home and property for the event. It's people like the Halls that help pass on the love for the outdoors to future generations simply doing so to see the smiles and witness the joy of all youth that come. ●



# Wildlife Experts—Not!!

By Joel D. Glover, Certified Wildlife Biologist Conservation Enforcement Officer

**B**elieve me when I tell you I have heard from many individuals who had some interesting ideas about wildlife. Wildlife is one of those things many folks feel as though they are an expert on. While I have a Master's degree in Wildlife Ecology and 36 years of field experience, I do not consider myself a wildlife expert. However, I do know enough to understand that many folks I have talked with definitely aren't wildlife experts.

While working a deer hunt on the Coosa Wildlife Management Area (WMA) many years ago, there were several hunters gathered around the deer checking station. The check station, the area where hunters are required to bring deer they have taken on the WMA for biologists to examine them, can be an enlightening place in that many wildlife "experts" tend to gather there.

On this day the conversation had turned to the presence of armadillos on the WMA. One of the fellows made the comment that you used to never see armadillos in the area. He looked at me and asked if I knew how they had gotten here. I had not understood his question was rhetorical. However, as I began to answer his question, he cut me off and informed me and everyone within earshot, that armadillos moved from one area to another by jumping up and hanging on to the underside of vehicles

as they passed over them. I'm sure a picture of my face at that time would have been a funny sight. The "expert" went on to explain that if you will listen when you run over an armadillo you can hear it jump up and grab hold of the car. I knew it would be fruitless to try to explain to the man that one of the defense mechanisms often employed by the armadillo is to jump up when startled. While that might work when trying to avoid a predator, it probably isn't the best move when being straddled by a Chevrolet.

As I was contemplating whether or not I should refute the "expert's" story, another onlooker stated he wished he could catch some armadillos and transport them to his home county which didn't have any.

As I was scratching my head about that, he continued saying he would like to have them in his county because he heard they ate fire ants and he needed something to eat fire ants. While I wanted to tell the fellow, his plan was not only illegal but would only add an armadillo problem to his fire ant problem, I found myself distracted wondering how far the guy would drive trying to straddle armadillos so they could get a free ride to his county! I am sure by now his wish has come true and he has an abundance of armadillos—and fire ants!



# ADCNR's Message: Outdoors Is for Everyone

*By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources*

**T**he Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) is making every effort to convey the message that our state's great outdoors is for everyone.

"The Department tries to create an atmosphere that is safe, welcoming and accommodating to all individuals," said Justin Grider, ADCNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division R3 Coordinator.

Grider and Billy Pope, ADCNR's Communications and Marketing Director, were analyzing license sales data and discovered an encouraging trend. License sales increased across the board, and license sales for people of color had increased significantly since 2019.

Grider said many people realized the outdoors was a safe place to spend recreation time during the COVID pandemic.

"People who had never enjoyed the outdoors discovered the outdoors during the pandemic," Grider said. "People who had lapsed and hadn't been outdoors in years were able to spend some time outdoors. I also think people who relied on meat sourced from grocery stores were made aware of how fragile the supply chain could be, so they turned to learn about hunting to provide that source of organic protein. That led to a spike in interest with new audiences to include everyone.

"The cool thing about it is that even since the pandemic, those percentage numbers have remained high. It's not like folks just came in 2020. They came and realized

what our natural resources have to offer and realized the Department caters to everyone."

The license data also provided the geographical areas where most of the hunting and fishing licenses were sold. The Department then provided numerous outreach programs in the areas that were not as highly represented in that data.

"We looked at the data and focused on the areas that needed attention, where people hadn't previously interacted with the Department," Grider said. "That included the Adult Mentored Hunting Program, the Firearms 101



*WFF's Sgt. Bill Freeman prepares a deer harvested at Oak Mountain State Park for processing.*



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## ADCNR'S MESSAGE: OUTDOORS IS FOR EVERYONE – *continued*

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Program, the trapping program or the Go Fish! Alabama Program and many other community engagement efforts.

“We tried to meet people where they were. In doing so, we looked to staff those events and use volunteers who were representative of people from the communities so those individuals could see themselves doing those activities and have somebody to look up to in that role.”

Funds generated from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses are crucial for supporting ADCNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. License sales for outdoors activities provide a vital funding source through the Pittman-Robertson Act, where an excise tax on firearms and ammunition is collected and then divided to states according to their number of license sales and the size of their state.

R3 is a national program that addresses ways to boost hunting and fishing participation – Recruit, Retain, Reactivate. Grider said he has proof that those outreach efforts have been successful.

“We have several examples of individuals who came to those workshops and are now volunteering, helping as mentors,” he said. “We are increasing our representation from those previously underserved audiences. We can now connect with them and develop relationships.”

Grider said it seems the portrayal of the nation in the news media focuses on polarization and tension between groups, but he doesn't think that picture is completely accurate.

“When you zoom into real-world examples, like one of our workshops or outreach events, that couldn't be farther from the truth,” he said. “We have people from all over the world with different backgrounds, different belief systems, different political opinions. All those things are set aside to focus on doing something outdoors, whether

it be target shooting, hunting, fishing, trapping or many of the other outdoor recreation activities. People can put those differences aside and bond on those common themes. It's been incredible. I think it speaks to the healing capacity the outdoors offers. What it does for your health. And it builds foundations for building relationships with people who may not look like you, think like you or act like you.

“We will keep seeking partnership opportunities with user groups who are interested in being involved with the Department and have an interest in outdoor recreation. We want to be available to everyone. It's an open-door policy. We have staff who are great at making those connections.”

Some of those partnerships include outreach events at the Montgomery Biscuits and Huntsville Trash Pandas minor league baseball parks. Advertising sponsorships include Auburn University Football as the Countdown to Kickoff radio show title sponsor and Troy Sports Properties, providing in-game and radio advertising for football, basketball, and baseball games.

“By being represented at these events, we can invite them to the workshops and outreach events and have face-to-face interactions, which increases the likelihood that people will get involved in workshops, engage with the staff and be comfortable reaching out to the Department for information about hunting, fishing, hiking, kayaking or target shooting,” Grider said. “Again, it's meeting people where they are and making those connections. I'm really proud of our staff, volunteers and partners and their willingness to get involved, step outside of their comfort zones and try new things. It really





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## ADCNR'S MESSAGE: OUTDOORS IS FOR EVERYONE – *continued*

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speaks to the outdoors as being a common place where everybody can meet in the middle.”

The [outdooralabama.com](http://outdooralabama.com) website also added Google Translation to increase access to new audiences to highlight the numerous outdoors facilities, like shooting ranges, the most archery parks in the nation, some of the most beautiful parks in the nation in the Alabama State Parks System, and saltwater fishing opportunities, including the Gulf State Park Pier and Fort Morgan Pier.

Sgt. Bill Freeman, WFF Conservation Enforcement Officer, said even if you take the COVID spike out, the license sales to people of color have seen a 17% increase since 2019.

“I think a lot of our outreach efforts have helped to contribute to that,” Freeman said. “We’ve really done a lot with our HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) with our mentored programs. I really think they’re seeing our Department in a different light. Our programs are welcoming and making access easier for all people.”

Freeman cited an example, a fishing event held at the lake at Gateway Park Golf Course in Montgomery

“We planned that event with Montgomery Parks and Recreation because more minorities had access,” he said. “It was a huge success. I think these events are starting to turn the tide in terms of minority participation.

“And I recently attended a seminar among female hunters and anglers, and providing protein for the family was very high on their lists. Our younger generation is much more conservation-minded and wants to know where their food comes from.”

Freeman, who has been presented several diversity awards from SEAFWA (Southeastern Association of Fish

and Wildlife Agencies), said that theme was evident at a recent mentored deer hunt at Oak Mountain State Park with a group of students from Alabama A&M and Tuskegee University.

“They were really interested in the meat-processing aspect of it,” he said. “They’re hunting but for different reasons than my generation, the baby boomers. The mentored hunting program is a such a great program because all these kids have never hunted or fished. But once they do it, they’re so enthusiastic and happy. They have a different outlook on what they actually thought hunting was. They are more nature minded. They like being in nature. They understand why we’re hunting. We’re not hunting for trophies. We’re hunting to help manage a deer population. If you present it like that, they get it.”

Freeman said another mentored hunt is planned for February 3-4 in Bullock County with A&M, Tuskegee and Auburn University.

“I think we had 11 hunters at Oak Mountain,” he said. “Now we’re getting overwhelmed with students who want to sign up to learn about our natural spaces. They are just like sponges. They care about the water, the land and what they’re eating.

“I can’t say enough about our programs, and I can’t say enough about the R3 program, because I’m seeing it work. We’re reaching audiences we’ve never reached before. We’re going to the Black Belt region with fisheries education. We went to Perry County, where people had never seen a game warden and didn’t know anything about our Department or what we do. I’m very excited about this work.” ●





# Shelby County Youth Dove Hunt

*By Joe Goddard, ACEOA Vice President - Photos by CEO Jeff Shaw*

The first annual Shelby County youth dove hunt was a great success. Conservation Officers from District 3, staff members from around the State, and many volunteers helped pull this large hunt together on September 3.

Everyone worked tirelessly for weeks leading up to the event, including landowners and local businesses, to host the first annual youth dove hunt on State Shooting Range Shelby.





## SHELBY COUNTY YOUTH DOVE HUNT – *continued*



Various activities started the morning, such as archery, laser shot, feathers and furs identification, air bow range, skeet shootings, and many other outdoor activities. There were 109 adult and youth hunters participating and everyone had an opportunity to take a dove at some point throughout the day.

The weather was perfect for dove hunting, even with an occasional thundershower to cool things off. With the help of local sponsors and landowners, every youth

received a door prize, a box of ammo, and a mojo wind dove. Door prizes consisted of hunting caps, shirts, Yeti coolers, thermoses, kayaks, shotguns, deer feeders, game cameras, and many other great prizes.

Also, with support from the ACEOA, every youth had an opportunity to win a lifetime hunting and fishing license. Without the help of local Game Wardens, staff, volunteers, local businesses, landowners, and the ACEOA, this event would not have been possible. ●



# Lake Guntersville State Park's Eagle Awareness Provides Great Winter Recreation Opportunity and Celebrates Conservation Success Story

*By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources*

About 50 years ago, only 480 nesting pairs of bald eagles were left in the United States, with the last nest in Alabama documented in 1962. Thankfully, a great deal has changed since then, and so many eagles winter in our state that the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) has a hard time counting them.

To celebrate the remarkable recovery of our nation's emblem, Alabama State Parks will again host Eagle Awareness Weekends at Lake Guntersville State Park. The three-day 2023 events are scheduled for January 20-22, January 27-29, and February 3-5.

Greg Lein, Alabama State Parks Director, said packages are available for those who wish to attend the Eagle Awareness Weekends that include lodging, two breakfasts, one dinner, a welcome packet, VIP access to presentations from experts in eagles and other raptors, discounts at the restaurant and gift shop, and photo excursions around one of Alabama's most beautiful state parks. Lein suggests making reservations as soon as possible.

"Our lodge, campground, and chalets often fill up quickly for these weekends, so we encourage people to



*Bald Eagle in Colbert County by Steve Letson*

make reservations and join us at Lake Guntersville State Park for what we believe will be another amazing year of Eagle Awareness Weekends," Lein said.

Eagle Awareness programs began in the mid-1980s at Lake Guntersville State Park. At that time, guests were only viewing eagles that had migrated from other states to Lake Guntersville for the winter months. Today, thanks

## LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK'S EAGLE AWARENESS – *continued*



*Bald eagle Lake Guntersville by William Stewart*

to Alabama's bald eagle restoration efforts, participants are viewing a mix of resident and nonresident eagles that are making use of the lake and forest habitats during the winter.

Mercedes Maddox, Nongame Biologist with the ADCNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division, is one of the presenters during the Eagle Awareness Weekends, and she said the statewide recovery of the bald eagle is an amazing story.

"Historically, we had a large population of eagles in Alabama, just like the rest of the U.S.," Maddox said. "But as early as the late 1800s, that population started to decline. That was primarily due to human intervention in what some people perceived as a competition for food. They thought we were competing for the same food."

The Bald Eagle Protection Act was passed in 1940 that provides criminal penalties for persons who "take,

possess, sell, purchase, barter, offer to sell, purchase or barter, transport, export or import, at any time or any manner, any bald eagle ... [or any golden eagle], alive or dead, or any part (including feathers), nest, or egg thereof."

However, during World War II, the use of the pesticide DDT became widespread, which had devastating effects on fish and animal species, especially eagles. Maddox said the harmful effects of DDT weren't realized for decades.

"It was viewed as this miracle insecticide," she said. "Soldiers would spray it directly on their bodies. It was used for agricultural processes for insects eating crops. As DDT worked its way up the food chain, the concentrations became heavier and heavier. By the time it made it to the top of the food chain, it was having direct and indirect impacts on bald eagles. One of the things it caused was the eagles' eggshells to thin. They would lay the eggs, but when they sat on the nest to incubate them, the eggs would crack and never hatch. The eagles were building nests, laying eggs and producing no young."

DDT was banned in 1972, but by that time, the eagle population had plummeted to about 1,000 birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed bald eagles as endangered in 1967.

The WFF's Nongame Wildlife Program started in 1982 and became part of a multi-state effort in the Bald Eagle Restoration Program in 1984.

"We used a technique called hacking to grow the bald eagle population," Maddox said. "Hacking is where biologists force an immature bird to take its first flight in a desired area. They would take eaglets from Florida and Alaska and release them in specific locations with depleted populations. The goal was for the eagles to imprint on those areas and return when they became sexually mature."

Alabama has six hacking towers, one in north Alabama, four in the central part of the state and one in south Alabama. The first eagle taking flight from one of the hacking towers occurred in 1985 at Lake Guntersville. Maddox said Alabama participated in the hacking pro-

## LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK'S EAGLE AWARENESS – *continued*

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*Juvenile Bald Eagle at Guntersville Dam by Jim Flynn*

gram until 1992. During that time, 91 eagles were released from hacking towers throughout the state.

“There was a nest attempt in 1987, but the first successful nest occurred in 1991,” she said. “That was the first successful nest in 30 years. It was a huge, huge success for the program as a whole. At that time, there were so few, we were able to do statewide nest surveys.”

When the aerial surveys were discontinued in 2006, Maddox said that 77 nests were known to be in Alabama and that successful nesting activity has continued to increase.

“You can now find eagles in every single county,” she said. “It’s so great talking to people, and they tell us, ‘When I was growing up, we never saw an eagle, but now I see them all the time.’ That just goes to show you the success story in Alabama and being a part of that.”

Alabama’s restoration program was funded through the Pittman-Robertson Act, which levies an excise tax on firearms and ammunition that is apportioned to state wildlife agencies for conservation efforts, hunter educa-

tion programs and the operation of archery and shooting ranges.

“We do some aerial surveys, but we don’t do statewide surveys because there are so many nests that we can’t keep up with them,” Maddox said. “We fly along the Tennessee River every year to count eagles and look for nests. There is a huge concentration of eagles along the Tennessee River.”

“It is one of the top recovery stories in the nation, I would say. I will be talking about the history of bald eagles at Lake Guntersville. It’s an exciting story to tell.”

While most of the focus has been on the bald eagle, Maddox also pursues research on the golden eagle.

“A lot of people don’t know we have golden eagles that winter in Alabama,” she said. “The Golden Eagle Project began about 10 years ago. It’s a multi-state project as well, as with any good conservation effort. So, partners are heavily involved in this. We use simple game cameras to monitor where eagles are occurring throughout the state. We’ve set up cameras at 21 different locations dur-



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## LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK'S EAGLE AWARENESS – *continued*

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ing the program. We've had golden eagle sightings at 10 locations, with the most southern location at Upper State Special Opportunity Area near Jackson. That was around Christmas in 2020, so that was a special Christmas gift. The areas where we consistently see golden eagles are Skyline, Freedom Hills and Oakmulgee wildlife management areas (WMAs) and the Talladega National Forest."

Maddox said several golden eagles have been captured and fitted with transmitter tags to track their movement to determine migration pathways and habitats the eagles are accessing in Alabama. She said 19 tags have been attached since 2013 and six are still active.

"One of those tags still active is on a bird we've named Natchez, a bird that was captured at Freedom Hills," she said. "She travels from way up in Canada near Hudson Bay. Other birds migrate to northern parts of Ontario, and others go to Newfoundland. They migrate a long way to get to Alabama every winter."

Maddox said people will often confuse golden eagles with immature bald eagles, which have not developed the telltale white heads. Several tips can help the casual observer determine the species encountered, according to Maddox.

"Golden eagles are most often found in forested areas," she said. "They feed on carrion, which is one of their primary food sources in the winter, but they also feed on small mammals."

"Bald eagles are found around water because they primarily feed on fish. So, if you see a large brown bird flying over the water and trying to capture a fish, it's probably a juvenile bald eagle, especially if you see it during the summer. Bald eagles can be seen feeding on roadkill, but you'll most likely see them by the water, trying to capture fish."

Because the statewide aerial surveys have been discontinued, Maddox said WFF depends on the public to report eagle sightings and nesting activity.

Email [mercedes.maddox@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:mercedes.maddox@dcnr.alabama.gov) to report any eagle activity or possible violations of the Bald Eagle Protection Act, which was amended to include golden eagles.

For more information about the Eagle Awareness Weekends at Lake Gunterville State Park, please email [indya.guthrie@dcnr.alabama.gov](mailto:indya.guthrie@dcnr.alabama.gov). ●



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# A Shocking Case on Pea River

Catching someone illegally shock-fishing or “shock-fishing” is a case every Game Warden would love to make. Shock-fishing normally occurs in isolated areas and it is easy to dispose of the equipment by dropping it overboard. Officer Jason Sutherland received several complaints of someone shocking on the Pea River during the Summer of 2021. He patrolled the area multiple times but never made contact with anyone he suspected of shock-fishing. Then, while working the opening weekend of dove season in Pike county, he received a call from Lt. Grady Myers regarding a possible “shocking” complaint called in by a concerned citizen. Lt. Myers asked Sutherland to call and follow up with the complainant. The complainant advised Sutherland of possible illegal shocking being done on the Pea River in Geneva County, gave him descriptions of two vehicles believed

to be involved in the illegal activity, and also advised they were possibly shocking sometime that day. Officer Sutherland thanked them for the info and traveled immediately to Geneva County.

After doing some looking around, Sutherland discovered a vehicle that fit the description the complainant had given. It was at a boat ramp called Stokes Landing near Samson in Geneva County. He quickly found a good hiding place for his vehicle about a quarter mile from the boat ramp and took off on foot. Being in such a hurry he left without a bottle of water, and it was 98 degrees at midday. It was a busy holiday weekend, so the boat ramp was really active. Luckily, he was able to slip through the woods and hide in some thick brush right beside the boat ramp without being spotted. Every time the parking



## A SHOCKING CASE ON PEA RIVER – *continued*



lot became vacant, he would slip over to the vehicles to get tag numbers and pictures of the suspects' vehicles.

Not knowing how many suspects there were and what he might encounter, Officer Sutherland decided to call another officer to be on standby. Officer Ryan Rhodes and Sgt. Patrick Norris were working together and agreed to be on standby near Stokes Landing. While doing surveillance throughout the afternoon, Sutherland noticed the same vehicle, a two-tone Ford F-250 entering the parking lot and then leaving again. This happened several times throughout the afternoon and he believed it was the suspects' lookout.

This went on for hours and Officer Sutherland was extremely hot and, of course, thirsty. All afternoon he kept running scenarios through his head: Would they send the first boat out without any fish or the shocking equipment? If they did, would he have the other officers stop and detain them? Would the first boat come out with nothing but fish, and no shockers, and call back to

the other boat advising the coast is clear? Regardless of how it happened, and how hot and thirsty he was, he wasn't leaving until he made contact. Almost four hours later, and after watching many boats put in and take out, the F-250 swings through once again when the parking lot was quiet. A few minutes later Sutherland heard a boat coming in, and then another. Two boats pulled up to the ramp. He wondered if this could be the guys he was looking for. Surely, they hadn't come out together with all the fish and equipment. Two guys got out of the boats and start walking up the ramp toward the parking lot. Sure enough, they went to the trucks that were described by the complainant as the suspect vehicles. One guy yells to the other, "Hurry up man! We gotta get the hell out of here! Let's go!" Officer Sutherland knew then that it was about to go down. He watched and waited until they loaded both boats and pulled up into the parking lot. They all exited the trucks and began strapping down the



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## A SHOCKING CASE ON PEA RIVER – *continued*

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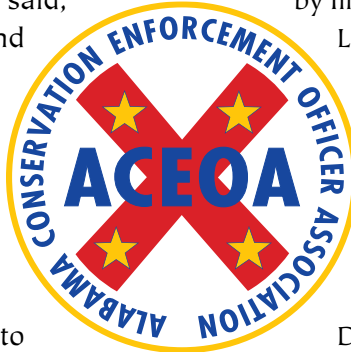
boats and equipment, with one guy repeatedly saying, “Hurry up! Let’s go!”

Sutherland called the other officers and said, “Come on, come now!!” Officer Sutherland walked out and identified himself as Officer Rhodes and Sergeant Norris pulled up. He began asking the fishermen if they’d had any luck, noticing both boats had fish and only one boat had a couple of fishing rods. Five guys, lots of fish, and only two rods and reels are all good indicators of shocking.

State law requires hunters and fishermen to submit to the inspection of all equipment. During the investigation, the officers recovered a shocking device inside a tackle box, heavy gauge wire and chains, and forty-four flathead catfish. Two of the five men did not

have fishing licenses. All five admitted to participating in the illegal activities. Arrests were made for Taking Fish by Illegal Methods (shocking) and Fishing Without Licenses, and a warning was written for an expired boat registration. All defendants entered guilty pleas in court and paid fines totaling approximately \$3500.00.

Officer Sutherland said, “Was it worth the wait? You better believe it! For such a rural area, with small rivers, and hardly any commercial fishing, this case was HUGE! Dedication and commitment and loving what we do finally paid off. I may never make a case quite like this again in my career, but it’s one I’ll never forget. A big thanks to Officer Ryan Rhodes, and Sgt. Patrick Norris for the backup.” ●





# Ivey Praises Last Round of NFWF–Funded Projects

*By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources*

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*One NFWF project recently funded will work to protect the beaches and sand dunes at Dauphin Island. Photo by Billy Pope*

**T**he final phase of funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (NFWF-GEBF) has been approved for projects in Alabama to mitigate the 2010 Deepwater Horizon (DWH) Oil Spill. Alabama Governor Kay Ivey hailed the funding of the projects that total more than \$47 million.

“As we celebrate Alabama’s 2022 slate of NFWF projects and announce the final allocation of Alabama’s portion of the Gulf Environmental Benefit Funds (GEBF), we recognize another landmark in Alabama’s recovery from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill disaster,” Governor Ivey said recently. “The \$356 million awarded to Alabama in criminal fines, managed by NFWF and implemented by

the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), funded some of the first Deepwater Horizon Restoration Projects in Coastal Alabama.

“Together, these investments tell a story of significant accomplishments that will go a long way in protecting Alabama’s diverse coastal ecosystem for decades to come. Whether it be our investments into maintaining the coastal reefs that support our thriving red snapper fishery or our land conservation efforts to protect game and non-game species in places like the Perdido River Corridor, Fort Morgan Peninsula and the Grand Bay Savanna, there is no doubt Alabama has made the absolute most of these funds.”

## IVEY PRAISES LAST ROUND OF NFWF-FUNDED PROJECTS – *continued*

The most recent projects include Phase II of the Dauphin Island East End Restoration with an allocation of \$26,066,000.

The construction component of the Dauphin Island project will restore approximately 1.5 miles of beach shoreline and approximately 85 acres of beach and dune habitat on this crucial 14-mile barrier island that protects a portion of the Alabama Gulf Coast. The tentative plan is to renourish and extend the 2015-2016 beach restoration project to provide healthy beaches and dunes. The East End beach protects the Audubon Bird Sanctuary and other upland resources from beach erosion from storms. Sand has migrated to the west, which has caused wider down-drift beaches and growth of



*The Dauphin Island Audubon Bird Sanctuary also will receive protection from the NFWF project. Photo by Billy Pope*

a sand spit south of the Isle Dauphine Golf Course. The project will protect an additional 50 acres of beach and dune habitat as well as a maritime forest and a freshwater lake within the Dauphin Island East End Bird Sanctuary. These habitats provide important foraging and nesting habitat for migratory and beach-nesting birds. The island is a significant trans-Gulf migratory bird stopover. Dauphin Island also protects valuable habitats for marine resources that include fisheries, oysters and seagrass beds in Mississippi Sound and lower Mobile Bay. To date, NFWF has awarded nearly \$70 million in GEBF funds to nearly a dozen projects to enhance and protect this vital island.

The Gulf Highlands Conservation Acquisition project

received \$8.2 million in additional funding to expand the project footprint to include the adjacent Beach Club West property. The goal of the entire project is to acquire, conserve and manage the largest privately held, undeveloped Gulf frontage beach and dune habitat. This habitat will benefit nesting sea turtles, migratory birds and shorebirds, and the endangered Alabama beach mouse. The purchase of this property will also prevent the likely

development on the property of a residential condominium complex.

Phase II of the Lower Fish River Watershed Restoration received slightly more than \$9 million in funding to continue the work of Phase I by implementing designs to reduce the sediment and nutrients that flow into Weeks Bay, which will improve the

water quality and benefit the bay habitat. Severe erosion and nutrient enrichment have impacted tributaries within the Lower Fish and Magnolia River watersheds; this has negatively impacted seagrass beds and oyster reef habitats.

Phase II of the Wolf and Sandy Creek Headwaters Restoration received \$2.788 million for stream restoration, bank stabilization, invasive species removal and monitoring and adaptive management. To reduce sediment runoff into Wolf Bay, the project will restore nearly ½ mile of instream habitat and 50 acres of wetlands through invasive species removal. Wolf Bay is an important habitat for juvenile fish, shellfish and oysters, and

## IVEY PRAISES LAST ROUND OF NFWF-FUNDED PROJECTS – *continued*

the project will restore habitat as well as water quality degraded from nutrients, erosion and sedimentation. The three project areas are the stretch of Wolf Creek north of the OWA property that proceeds to the Beach Express, an area near Swift Church Road and Hilltop Lane, and along Sandy Creek in the western section of Foley near U.S. Highway 98.

A \$1 million funding component will be used for Alabama Coastal Adaptive Management, which will be overseen by ADCNR for continued maintenance, repair, rehabilitation or replacement of active projects funded by GEBF, as well as for expanding the ecological benefits of the projects to ensure the long-term viability of these efforts during unforeseen changes.

Funding for these projects in Alabama brings the total awards from the GEBF fund to more than \$356 million.

“I thank the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for their partnership and dedication to the restoration and protection of Alabama’s natural resources and for their capable and dedicated management of the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund,” Governor Ivey said. “While this marks the completion of our allocation of the NFWF

portion of the BP Settlement, our work continues to restore Coastal Alabama.”

Governor Ivey recognized the efforts of ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship, Deepwater Horizon Restoration Coordinator Amy Hunter and the ADCNR staff in their work to provide benefits for the citizens and protect the natural resources of the Alabama Gulf Coast.

Hunter expressed pride in what ADCNR has been able to accomplish with the NFWF-GEBF projects.

“This milestone in DWH restoration project implementation offers us an opportunity to look at the benefits of a suite of projects across Coastal Alabama,” Hunter said. “When you consider things from a geographic standpoint, you see benefits to communities and places like Dauphin Island, Bayou la Batre, Wolf Bay and Weeks Bay. From a resource perspective, you see a snapshot of how improving water quality and protecting habitat combine to benefit fish and oyster populations. It is a privilege to do this work on behalf of the citizens of Alabama. I hope the benefits of this work and access to our natural resources will be enjoyed by future generations for a long time.”

Since the disastrous Deepwater Horizon oil spill, NFWF has made significant contributions to the long-term sustainability of critical coastal resources in Alabama.

The GEBF has invested more than \$44 million in Alabama to bolster fish populations through habitat creation and improved monitoring and management. These projects have created more than 1,000 acres of reef habitat in Alabama coastal and offshore waters, including 800 acres of nearshore oyster reef and 250 acres of artificial reef habitat for red snapper and other reef fish species. The funding includes monitoring of fish populations off Alabama to benefit all fishing sectors – commercial, for-hire and private recreational.

Since the mitigation efforts



*A wide variety of birds that inhabit the Alabama Gulf Coast will benefit from the NFWF projects. Photo by Billy Pope*



## IVEY PRAISES LAST ROUND OF NFWF-FUNDED PROJECTS – *continued*

began, the GEBF and the State of Alabama have leveraged other matching funds to support a total conservation impact of more than \$555 million to benefit natural resources negatively affected by the 2010 oil spill.

GEBF funding has also been used by ADCNR and its partners to acquire and permanently protect approximately 7,500 acres of important coastal habitat in Alabama.

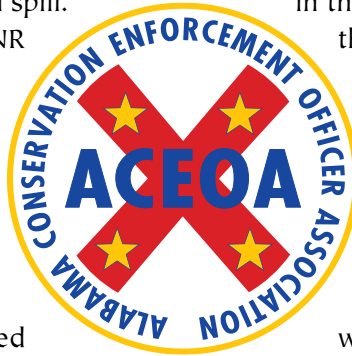
One lesson learned from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill was the necessity to strengthen coastal resilience in a variety of ways, including shoreline restoration. The western shore of Mobile Bay has averaged more than 2 feet of shoreline loss annually. Erosion caused by storms, marine traffic and natural degradation has caused an 11% decline in shoreline acreage since 2001. Almost \$120 million in GEBF funds have been used to support shoreline restoration to go with more than \$20 million in NFWF’s Coastal Resilience funding to ensure

Alabama’s beautiful coast will be minimally impacted due to storms or unexpected environmental threats.

Watershed restoration was another key component in the numerous NFWF projects, which included the help of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, which aided in identifying and prioritizing restoration activities to improve water quality along the coast.

Through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service, GEBF funding of \$14.5 million has been used to work with farmers and ranchers in coastal Alabama to implement conservation easements and best management practices on more than 30,000 acres to enhance water quality and improve habitat.

Visit <https://www.alabamacoastalrestoration.org> for more information on coastal restoration projects in Alabama. ●



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# Old Brady Making Memories Hunt

*By Darlene Comstock*



**T**he Old Brady Hunting Club members and volunteers are already busy planning the 2023 Making Memories hunt and wondering how they're going to top the hunts from years past. However, Darlene Comstock says it always seems to happen.

"From the first year, we had it we knew it had to be called the Making Memories Hunt. There are many laughs shared, tears shed, and memories made at this hunt" Darlene said. "We always say, 'How can we top that?' It's not that we try intentionally, but somehow every year something great happens that we reminisce about until the next year. Then another event happens that just touches your heart in a way you can't begin to imagine. We wonder who it's going to be this year, and somebody always has that big moment. The name is very fitting."

The Making Memories hunt, hosted by Old Brady Hunting Club started with one small request.

Darlene's dear friend and coworker, Tisha Johnson, was expecting a daughter in May of 2004. Tisha and her husband Wade are avid fishermen but not hunters so she ask if I would take her daughter hunting if she ever showed interest; Darlene being an avid hunter immediately said absolutely. About halfway through Tisha's pregnancy, they found out the daughter had spina bifida.

"She told me that it looks like hunting will not be an option," Darlene said. "That put a knot in my throat that I couldn't swallow, I told her when that baby gets here, if she ever asks to hunt in her lifetime, I'll take her and let her watch the deer, we don't have to shoot. But, you tell me and we'll get her out there."

## OLD BRADY MAKING MEMORIES HUNT – *continued*



Fast forward 6 years later Kerstan sparked an interest in deer hunting. Darlene began to wonder how they could get her wheelchair in the woods but knew there had to be a way.

“I thought there may be more parents who would like their child to have the ability to hunt but don’t know if it’s even a possibility. Just to get through an average day is such an obstacle that adding hunting in the woods on roads that aren’t that good, is just not an option for most of them.” Darlene said.

Comstock contacted members of Old Brady, who wholeheartedly agreed to make the club available to Kerstan and others in similar situations.

At the first Making Memories hunt 10 years ago, 14 with disabilities were able to experience the deer woods. The club now has the ability to take up to 30 hunters. The hunt in December 2022, had 32 hunters.

“It’s a big deal,” Comstock said. “We have to have shooting houses that are wheelchair accessible, and spacious enough for a wheelchair, a parent, and a guide. The first year we built one for Kirsten. Now we have 27.”

“It’s such a big production. We make them feel like they are king and queen for the day.”

The day starts with an amazing opening ceremony where the hunters are introduced to their guide, then



## OLD BRADY MAKING MEMORIES HUNT – *continued*



Santa Claus appears with gifts for each hunter, followed by a big lunch, then they head to the woods. Some of the hunters are equipped with adaptive equipment to be able to fire the rifle with assistance from the parent or guide.

“It takes a lot of people,” Darlene said. “We put two guides per hunter, one in the shooting house and one sitting on the camp’s main road just for safety if the need arises.” We have a command center that is used for guides and hunters to sign out and back in for safety. The club members and volunteers not guiding wait for evidence of a successful hunt. Several trailing dogs are available if needed.

Darlene said a family of five from Huntsville has been coming to the hunt for several years, but one of the five

had not been able to take a deer as of this past year. “All of her brothers had taken a deer, but Sarea Caudle had never harvested one,” Darlene said. “She was determined to get one this year. By the grace of God, she did. She started Facetiming from the stand. Other hunters, who were a pretty good distance from her, started texting me at the camp to say they could hear her cheering, yelping and laughing; they said it was amazing, priceless and an emotional moment to hear” Darlene said.

“When the deer start coming into the camp we have a large group of people there to cheer for them. When they get out, they’re screaming with excitement, and we get all these hugs and tears of joy from the parents, grand-

## OLD BRADY MAKING MEMORIES HUNT – *continued*



parents, or us because we're so excited for them. It'll do something to you that you just can't shake. You just want more, so it pushes us. Kerstan was the why we started, but now all of our guests have become the 'why' because we don't want to live our lives without having this hunt for them. The guests and their parents who attend

this event are such a blessing in my life". Darlene Said

This event would not be possible without the support of many businesses and volunteers. The 25-person committee works hard to plan all year long. The number of volunteers it takes to host an event of this magnitude is enormous. Behind-the-scenes planning takes a year, the day before the event Baldwin EMC sends 10+ staff to help set up and get the grounds ready for the weekend. Local churches donate cakes, businesses donate money or items for door prizes, and this list goes on and on.

The Making Memories Deer Hunt is typically scheduled annually for the second weekend in December. The Making Memories Facebook page gives potential hunters an avenue to contact the organizers. Applications are sent out in late August or early September. Those applications are reviewed by a board, and the hunters are selected. [makingmemorieshunt@gmail.com](mailto:makingmemorieshunt@gmail.com)







# Outdoors With Friends

By Leisha Martin

There's a lot of truth in the saying that "birds of a feather flock together". The same is true for sportsmen. Especially when that group of hunters shares a passion for the outdoors and the will to help others experience the same. That is exactly what happened ten years ago in Troy, Alabama.

It didn't take long for an idea to turn into a reality. With the evidence all around us of so many who are handicapped, disabled, mentally challenged, veterans, wounded warriors, victims of stroke or other debilitating illnesses, the decision to form the non-profit organization "Outdoors With Friends" (OWF) was made and finalized.

Every December, usually the second weekend, the hunt is held. Beginning on Friday morning and ending on Saturday night. Now everyone knows you don't plan weddings, babies, showers or even a hunt on the Saturday of the SEC Championship game, therefore, you can mark your calendar for the weekend following the game.

Of course, there's a lot of work and preparation that

must be done. That's where the founders of this organization really get to work. Terry McPherson and Greg Ricks begin securing land owners and guides for each of the participants. Don Wambles, along with the men's ministry of Southside Baptist Church of Troy get busy planning meals and snacks. It's apparent that some SBC ladies put in a good many hours as well.

Registration begins at 10 am on Friday and by 2 pm the hunters have been paired with their guide and are headed to their designated stand. Great care has been taken to place each participant in a stand that accommodates them - Those in wheelchairs in ground blinds or boxes, and those who are able walk stairs to above-the-ground boxes. The guide is careful to show respect and consideration to their hunting partner.

The landowners who have donated their property are awesome. OWF could never say enough about how generous they are to allow these folks to come sit their stands



## OUTDOORS WITH FRIENDS – *continued*



and shoot (usually) whatever they want. That's not the case when dealing with the general public. Therefore, the hearts of these landowners are not the usual. They, just like the OWF committee, share that love and desire to help those less fortunate. This event couldn't take place without them.

The excitement grows as calls begin to come in as shots are heard ringing throughout the woods. It starts with the guide calling the landowner, who calls another landowner who lets the group in charge of skinning know what's coming in. The anticipation grows until the last truck pulls in and a final count is made. Because this is called "hunting", the calls aren't always confirming a kill. There is the occasional miss or a hit that isn't recovered. Rest assured that each and every shot is investigated to make sure a wounded animal is found, even if it takes hours. Taylor Greene is the 'main man' on tracking.

Don't think this event is only about hunting. Not only is it the desire to introduce people to hunting and/or help



them get outdoors, but it is also a goal to introduce them to Jesus. Each year there is a speaker who will share their testimony on Friday evening. Chaplain Dwayne Hughes was the most recent. As a veteran himself that loves to hunt, his story is one that can relate to so many as he

## OUTDOORS WITH FRIENDS – *continued*

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shares how finding God changed his whole life and how God can do the same for you.

Nothing warms the heart more than to see the smiles and excitement on the faces of these hunters as they come in. A few years ago, veteran Gabriel Sistrum shot his first deer! He fell in love with hunting and has been

back every year since. He scored a six-point at the last hunt. Some began coming when they were small children. Austin Turner is a perfect example. He is now in his teens and his love for hunting is almost as big as his love for others. The list goes on and on.

Pictures are taken and lots of hugs and high fives are shared as their harvest is placed near the four gambrels set up where they can watch as their deer (sometimes a hog) is skinned, cleaned and placed in their cooler on ice for them to take home.

These participants, some new and some repeating, always leave having shared a special time with friends. Some old, some new. Those who harvested share with those who didn't. They will go home with meat and memories. Those who worked behind the scenes to make all this happen? Well, they leave with hearts that have been blessed and memories that will last a lifetime.

“Live in such a way that those who know you but don't know God will come to know God because they know you.” ●

# Canoe Buck

By Nick Williams

The first year they implemented the 10 days of season in February I had a rough year. I shot a large buck on a ridge not far from here with a single shot .243 as he was chasing does and I watched him go down. I was on the other side of a small but deep creek and had to get down and walk 200 yards or so to find a ford. By the time I got back to where he was supposed to be, he was gone without a trace. I was disgusted. So disgusted I sold the gun the very next day.

The next time I had a chance to hit the woods I was still licking my wounded pride. Doubt lingered as to how well I had hit the deer, and I'd spent a lot of sleepless nights replaying the shot. I was frankly sick of deer hunting. I decided to just grab my \$50 single-shot 20 gauge, hoist the canoe onto my '97 GMC Suburban, and go shoot a few squirrels and scout a place I hadn't been to that year.

On the way out the door, I had the nagging thought that it was still deer season and that on the property I was hunting it was legal to harvest a buck with a firearm that day.

I put 2 slugs in my breast pocket.

The woods were wet from a rain the night before, and it was a little warm and muggy. Squirrels were scarce. I didn't have any clear idea of where I was headed, but

out of habit, I crept my way about half a mile from where I had dragged my canoe ashore to an old Indian shell midden. I had killed a few pigs there before and bumped a few deer off of it. This midden wasn't on the edge of the water

like many. It was on the edge of where dry ground met the riverswamp, several hundred yards off of the main channel. Palmettos grew thick on it, and it formed a sort of dry island surrounded by tupelo swamp. Anything bedded on it could watch the dry ground for

danger and quickly dematerialize into the swamp if an intruder stumbled through the area.

There was a large red oak that grew on the edge of it. As I got closer to the midden, I concocted a theory that maybe it would hold a few squirrels in its crown.

I slipped to about 40 yards off of the midden and sat down with my back to a small bay magnolia, figuring I'd sit for 10-15 minutes and rest and plot my next move.



Photo by Nick Williams

As I sat, I kept replaying that miss in my head.

As I indulged in rueful recollections, a buck materialized on top of the midden. You always read about an ear flick, or hearing footsteps. Not this time. It wasn't there, and then all of a sudden it was.

For a second I was in complete shock. Out of instinct



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## CANOE BUCK – *continued*

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I sat very still and tried to get a read on his body language. He looked around and then turned to lick his hindquarters like a dog.

My thoughts turned to the slugs in my breast pocket. I was able to oh-so-slowly retrieve one, and with bated breath and tensed muscles, ease the action open without it making a click.

Excitement built. I just might make this happen! The slug entered the chamber. The stock found my shoulder. The buck continued to groom himself. The hammer came back. The bead found the deer.

He was quartering hard away from me. My point of aim was not far forward from his hip. For a brief second, I considered that I had never fired a slug from this gun and that I had only a single bead as an aiming aid. Last week's hunt loomed in my mind.

I fired.

He didn't fall. He didn't dash. He walked slowly away from the midden up a hill towards a patch of yaupon and titi bush. Somehow the second slug found its way into the breach and through the air. The deer kept walking and was quickly out of sight in the brush. I sat beneath

the bay magnolia in a mix of residual shock and the by-now-familiar feeling of disgust. Why didn't I wait for a better shot angle? Why didn't I bring my rifle? How long should I give him?

My back began to cramp. Oddly, the only time it has ever done that was in the minutes after shooting a big buck. I guess it's a combination of muscle stress from holding a position and adrenaline fading out.

I laid down on the ground and closed my eyes, intending to rest for a second. A crash brought me straight back up. I listened to the unmistakable sound of a deer expiring in thick brush.

My dad slipped away from work to help me drag him back to the canoe for a picture. It was the biggest buck either of us had personally seen come off of a WMA, and it remains the biggest I've killed on that property. Both slugs had found their mark, making him the most thoroughly gut-shot deer I had ever had the pleasure of cleaning. He was also the first buck I ever paddled out in a canoe, which may explain my fascination with that method of access from there on out. ●

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# WoodmenLife Kid's Fishing Rodeo

*By Jennifer Tait*



**O**n September 17th, 2022, Representative Jennifer Tait and COA Ashley Kitzinger with WoodmenLife held a Kid's Fishing Rodeo at Rolland Cooper State Park in Camden, Al. The A.C.E.O.A. made a gracious donation to help put on the event. This was a free, community-wide event for kids 13 and under; and that quickly evolved into a multi-county event after publicizing began. Participants were asked to bring their own fishing pole and life jacket, and a parent/guardian must be present. They were welcome to bring their own bait, tackle box, bucket, chair, or cooler but cold water and fresh bait were provided.

Rolland Cooper's facilities were recently upgraded with

a new T-dock that sits on the beautiful, Alabama River in the heart of Wilcox County's prime, natural resources. Registration began at 9:00 am for those who had not pre-registered; then parents and kids were welcomed at the Pavilion where popcorn & snow cones were available to enjoy during the wait for fishing to kick-off at 9:30. There were a total of 25 kids to register. Not all are pictured, some arrived just after group photos were taken and fishing had begun.

The T-dock was perfect for families and kids to pick a spot while sitting on buckets and coolers. There were plenty of spots for bank fishing as well. Wilcox County

# St. Michael's Iron Horse Foundation



*Organizations supported by St. Michael's Iron Horse Foundation along with many others including disabled veterans' events sponsored through various organizations. We also host 1<sup>st</sup> Responders events with various groups.*



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## WOODMENLIFE KID'S FISHING RODEO – *continued*



Officers Bill Spinks and Sergeant Micky Tait assisted kids with baiting poles and helping to get fish off hooks. The fish weren't biting too well but most children participating were able to catch at least one fish, several caught two or three. Fishing was originally planned to last 2 hours, until 11:30 am but it quickly got hot and the bites were slow, so we ended fishing at 11:00 and headed to the Pavilion to cool off and do an awards & prizes ceremony before serving lunch.

Zebco rods + reels, tackle boxes, t-shirts, donated giveaways from local businesses, and so much more filled an awards table but the biggest treasure from each child was the gold medallion trophy proudly hanging from their necks. They were so nice and such an awesome keepsake! They looked like they came from the "Fishing Olympics" with a red, white and blue ribbon, jumping fish on the front, and the event name and date engraved on the back.

Every 25 participants walked away with a medal, a WoodmenLife Kid's Fishing Rodeo certificate, a prize or giveaway, and the biggest smile you've seen since





## WOODMENLIFE KID'S FISHING RODEO – *continued*



Christmas morning. The feedback was tremendous, and kids were saying “they can’t wait for next year” as they were saying their “thank you and goodbye!” Everyone had such a fun morning outdoors; through fellowship and fishing, and simply enjoying our beautiful

resources with friends, family, and an outstretched community at Rolland Cooper State Park.

We certainly intend to do this event every year and have already started planning for 2023! This event would not have been possible without the help of WoodmenLife, A.C.E.O.A, The Wilcox Chamber of Commerce, WL Chapter 1916 Camden, AL, Black Belt Treasures, and Rolland Cooper State Park, especially June and Cliff for all their help, support, and excitement in planning this event!

And last but not least, local media personality “Big Daddy” (James Lawler) and “The Getting Outdoors Show with Big Daddy” for all of the pre-event planning, marketing, and outreach to ensure we would “fill up that T-dock with kids!” ●

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# Record-Setting Year for Alabama Saltwater Anglers

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Alabama's saltwater anglers have been on a record-setting pace with 11 fish entering the record books from October 2021 to October 2022, and two of those records remained on the books for only months.

Scott Bannon, Marine Resources Division (MRD) Director with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), said the only year that compares with the recent spate of record fish is 2006, when 13 records were set.

"When I looked at the number of records, what was interesting was that two of them were broken twice," Bannon said of the sheepshead and permit categories. "That's kind of unique over our history. I think several things contribute to that. If you look at the number of license sales and boat sales, there are more people taking advantage of the fishing opportunities we have in Alabama. That means more people on the water, more trips on the water, so there are more opportunities to break these state records.

"In addition to that, you're really seeing people begin to do more of these deep drops and more offshore trips with better electronics. Boats are more efficient. There are confidence levels and safety with more people going offshore, so we're seeing these fish that we haven't seen historically. I think this is great news for Alabama. I think it shows the benefits of having such a great saltwater fishery, both inshore species and offshore species."

One species familiar with Alabama anglers that had the record broken twice was sheepshead. Wesley Olsen landed a huge sheepshead that weighed 14 pounds, 4 ounces, but it didn't stay on top long. Kendale Jeans reeled

in a monster sheepshead that hit the scales at 16 pounds, 6.6 ounces.

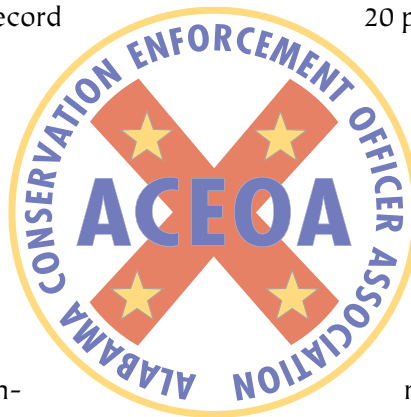
The other twice-broken record came from a fish not seen as often, permit, a cousin of the Florida pompano in the jack family. Pompano and permit look very much alike, although pompano don't grow nearly as large, topping out at around seven pounds. Permit that weigh 20 pounds are fairly common in south Florida.

Annalise Wilson set the Alabama record in October 2021 with a permit that weighed 6 pounds, 0.54 ounces. In August 2022, Patrick Willis landed a permit that weighed 8 pounds, 2.4 ounces.

"Historically, we haven't seen as many permit, but I think now people are starting to target them and pompano more often," Bannon said. "I think that's a product of social media, where people are sharing their fishing tips, how to rig for these type fish and where to fish for them.

"That's good and bad. There is higher effort on these species, but I believe that could be because of the cost of fuel. More people are taking inshore or closer-to-the-beach trips."

The prime time to catch sheepshead in Alabama is fast approaching. Sheepshead spawn in the nearshore waters during the early spring before scattering. Before the spawn, the fish hang around inshore structure and feed on barnacles and other crustaceans. Sheepshead are often found around rock and concrete jetties and pilings as well as petroleum platforms, bridges and oyster



## RECORD-SETTING YEAR FOR ALABAMA SALTWATER ANGLERS – *continued*

reefs. Sheepshead have some serious front teeth to chisel barnacles off structure and to crack crustacean shells.

“Those are two big sheepshead,” Bannon said. “It’s amazing to see two big sheepshead like that, but that 16-pounder is an extraordinary fish. I don’t know, maybe we’ll start seeing more of these extraordinary fish with more people learning how to fish for these species. People are learning to fish more specific and not as generic.”

Another record fish was Chase Mitchell’s jolthead pogy that weighed 9 pounds, 2.88 ounces.

“The pogy is a fish we’ve never had a category for before last year, when the record was established,” Bannon said. “Now that record has been broken. Again, I think it’s because of the change in effort, style of fishing and areas being fished.”

Also going into the Alabama record books is a black jack caught by William Atkins at 13 pounds, 1.6 ounces; a blackline tilefish caught by Gavin Dunnam at 1 pound, 6.4 ounces; a horse-eye jack caught by Bennie Goldman Jr. at 30 pounds, 4 ounces; a red cornetfish caught by Wayne Akin at 2 pounds, 5.4 ounces; a silvery John Dory caught by Mark Russo at 5 pounds, 0.28 ounces; and a lizardfish caught by Nelson Wingo at 1 pound, 11.2 ounces.

In other saltwater fishing news, the 2022 red snapper season ended on December 31 with a private recreational harvest of about 464,000 pounds of fish, well below the quota of 1.12 million pounds.

“I think those numbers are due to the initial slow start to the season because of the weather, gas prices and people returning to other activities now that we’re past the COVID season for the most part,” Bannon said.

Under a final rule from NOAA Fisheries that went into effect on January 1, 2023, Alabama’s private recreational anglers will see a 51% decrease in the 2023 red snapper quota to 558,200 pounds.

Bannon said the reason for the quota reduction is NOAA Fisheries is using a calibration factor to account for the differences in the red snapper harvest estimates between the federal and Alabama’s data collection programs.

Bannon notes that snapper fishing off the Alabama Gulf Coast has changed in the past decade. Under previous federal control, anglers only had days to fish. During the recent state-managed seasons determined by each



*Alabama saltwater anglers caught some large and unusual fish last year.*

state’s federal quota, anglers had much more leeway in deciding when to fish.

“The larger fish were targeted pretty heavily over the past several years,” he said. “Now what we’ll be seeing is a relatively normal fishing pattern of legal-sized fish (16 inches minimum total length) close to shore. The research done through the University of South Alabama and Dr. Sean Powers shows that recruitment is good, which means there are young fish coming up in the system and occupying those reefs. We don’t look at where those big fish are. We look at the recruitment coming back into the system. We still see big fish, but they are more elusive because there are not as many of them close to shore.”

Bannon said the traditional opening of private recreational red snapper season will again likely be the Friday before Memorial Day. That season will be based on the NOAA Fisheries calibration numbers, but Bannon hopes that will change at some point in 2023.

“We’ve submitted more information to NOAA Fisheries and will work through the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council to potentially make changes to that calibration number that are more favorable to Alabama,” he said. “We will still have a productive season. I think people will have opportunities to fish if the weather is good.

“Of all the turmoil in the world, at the end of the day, fishing is still good in Alabama.” ●



## 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).  
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# The Legend of Thumper

*By Rick Clark*

**M**y wife Carol and I founded KIDZ OUTDOORS many years ago, and we have met some incredible KIDZ. This story is about one young man who touched our hearts during the 2022-23 deer hunting season. We met him as Will Townsend, but he will be known in the hunting arena as “Thumper” from now on.

We had the opportunity to spend some time with him and his family in Briarfield, Alabama at the Kingdom Ridge Hunting Lodge. Our hosts were the Stephens family consisting of Doc “Yogi” Stephens, his son Brandon, grandson Spencer, and Greg “BooBoo” Lawrence (Doc’s brother-in-law). Did you notice how nicknames seem to stick when you are loving what you do and fellowshiping with good, Godly people?

Will is in a wheelchair. His dad, Brad Townsend, takes him hunting any time they have a chance. Thumper earned his nickname the first morning of the hunt.



When the first deer appeared, Greg said, “I see a deer,” a strange thumping sound emanated inside the blind. Will’s adrenalin spiked with excitement – just like it does with most hunters. This caused his foot to start thumping the floor. It got worse when they spotted a shooter buck. Unfortunately, the buck had been fighting and his antlers were broken up. Greg told him they could do better so they passed on him. Every deer they saw caused the thumping to begin (many deer are seen at Kingdom Ridge). I believe Will was exhausted by the end of the day. His dad said that he slept well that night.

After lunch, the rain started but it didn’t stop Thumper

## THE LEGEND OF THUMPER – *continued*



from hunting. That evening a really nice 8-point appeared at the feeder. The normal thumping continued until Will asked Greg, “Can I shoot him?” When Greg said ok, the thumping increased to hyper-thumping. This amazing young man made a great one-shot kill and the celebration began. The cold rain couldn’t put a damper on our excitement. Will said it was the best buck ever. While we were taking photos, my wife, Carol, asked Will to show her the leg thumping. His comment was, “I don’t think I can do that on command!”

I can’t wait to see his next buck because, with the help of the good Lord, Kingdom Ridge, and Kidz Outdoors, I believe it will be even better.

If you would like to see the TV episode of Thumper’s hunt, go to YouTube and search Mass Pursuit TV then look for Hammer. There are several other Kidz Outdoors shows archived there as well. I have the best job in the world! ●



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