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ACE Magazine

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ALABAMA CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



2022 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

ACEOA PROUDLY SPONSORS ARCHERY IN THE SCHOOLS

See Story on 13



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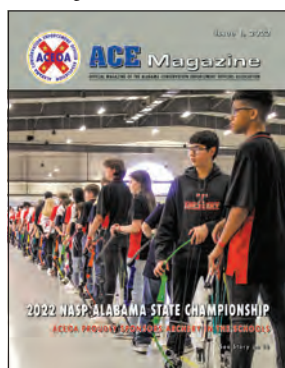
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ON THE COVER

Over the past year, thousands of student archers competed in regional tournaments throughout the state for a chance to draw their bows at the 2022 National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) Alabama State Championship in Montgomery on April 7-8. During the event, more than 1,700 archers from 97 schools competed for top honors and the opportunity to advance to the NASP Eastern National Championship on May 12-14, 2022, in Louisville, Kentucky. Of the teams that competed in the state tournament, 35 have registered to attend nationals.



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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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Kevin Dodd

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A Note from the President

By Vance Wood, ACEOA President

I hope this message finds you all doing well. In speaking with many different members from various Divisions, there seems to be a lot going on. Training is one of the main topics, as many agencies strive to stay ahead of the curve. Aside from the annual Law Enforcement CEU requirements, many Divisions are training new Conservation Enforcement Officers for their respective roles and duties in their assigned responsibilities. With that said, I would like to say welcome to the Conservation Enforcement Officer Family to the many new faces. Whether you are working for State Parks, Marine Resources, State Lands, or Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries you are in what is considered by many to be the best Law Enforcement Career going these days. Our jobs are highly sought after and revered by many. I know you all will do well.

There are also many new achievements and works ongoing with each Division. Saltwater and Freshwater Anglers are seeing improvements in many public access areas across the state. New and updated boat ramps, parking areas, and restrooms have been added or renovated. Our already beautiful State Parks are growing and getting even more attractive. Public hunting land has seen tremendous growth and the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division's Firearms 101 Classes are proving a huge success. Many other outreach programs are being conducted by each Division and their success is a direct reflection of every Conservation Enforcement Officer who pitches in to help with a smile and a can-do attitude.

Recently, the ACEOA assisted with the Governor's One-

Shot Turkey Hunt. This event helps to recruit potential businesses to locate their resources here, by showcasing Alabama's great outdoors through the pursuit of Eastern Wild Turkey. The event was a huge success and also raised funds for the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Foundation to support wildlife and fisheries scholarships and outreach programs. Outdoor recreational opportunities abound in Alabama, and to be able to showcase such is a direct result of your diligent work. Remember, Conservation Enforcement Officers are the Tip of the Spear when it comes to the front-lines of protecting our natural resources and those who enjoy them.

The Equip Alabama Wardens Program continues to grow. Currently, some changes are being made to the website and EAW has partnered with Townsquare Media to handle the marketing of the program. This endeavor will help expand the program even more. In the future, you may look forward to a recruiting and informational visit by your elected State Officers and Board of Directors to give further updates on ACEOA activities and missions. Most importantly, we want to hear from members about their concerns and ideas. As we continue to grow, it is important to keep our fingers on the pulse of our Association and that is you. Thank you to each and every one of you for your hard work and dedication to protecting our great outdoors for future generations!

*Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers
"Protecting Our Resources and Citizens Since 1907"*





Executive Director Comments

By Kevin Dodd, ACEOA Executive Director

One hundred and fifteen years ago, future-minded citizens worked to form the Alabama Department of Conservation so that generations to come might enjoy abundant fish and wildlife resources. It is ironic that many years later, present-day citizens enjoy more abundant hunting, fishing, and wildlife-related opportunities than those who worked to safeguard them in 1907.

Almost 35 years ago, several conservation officers agreed to form the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association whose mission largely paralleled the DCNR. Whereas rules for state government often prevent certain purchases or actions, the ACEOA remains unbound by most of those restrictions. Whether the need was hotdogs for kids hunting events, specialized regional equipment for enforcement programs, or correspondence to politicians advising of conflicts in conservation issues, your ACEOA has held true to the original mission of educating the public on conservation resources and enhancing DCNR law enforcement programs. It's important to keep your mission close at hand.

Eons ago, the Wildlife and Fisheries Division had an officer who liked to sing his own praises a bit too much. He was quite charismatic and convincing in the numerous stories of his arrests and prosecutions and many of the local citizens thought he hung the moon. His testimony in court sounded like passages from Mark Twain with catchy phrases and plenty of colorful adjectives. His

undoing came one day when the judge tired of hearing him state in case after case, that he was so close to the suspect when he shot that he “*saw the fire erupt from the gun barrel.*” The judge later rolled her eyes and murmured that the officer was “*all hat and no cattle.*” Through his misguided efforts to magnify his testimony, the officer lost sight of the more important principle of maintaining personal credibility.

We all have similar moments in our careers where we lose sight of our mission. Some years ago, I attended a workshop with an Assistant Chief Game Warden from California. He proudly showed us pictures of him and his officers rappelling from a helicopter into a National Forest. Cool as the pictures were, the officer couldn't explain to us how that related to their resource protection goals. He too, *had no cattle.* Throughout the history of the Alabama DCNR, resource management and protection have remained the core goal. Despite the showcasing of our officer's “*Swiss Army knife*” skill sets, they are, rightfully so, first and foremost conservation officers intent on safeguarding the fish and wildlife resources. Make sure your focus remains true to that mission. Don't lose sight of your cows.

This marks my final column as Executive Director of the ACEOA. I am grateful for the privilege to have served these past five years and leave with full confidence in your Board members. I wish you the best in your career.





In addition to our annual support of the Archery in the Schools program, ACEOA provided an additional \$5,000 in state match funds for presentation of educational scholarships for deserving young archers.

2022 NASP Alabama State Championship Results Announced

*By Captain Marisa L. Futral, Hunter Education Coordinator
Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
Law Enforcement Section*

Over the past year, thousands of student archers competed in regional tournaments throughout the state for a chance to draw their bows at the 2022 National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) Alabama State Championship in Montgomery on April 7-8.

During the event, more than 1,700 archers from 97 schools competed for top honors and the opportunity to advance to the NASP Eastern National Championship on May 12-14, 2022, in Louisville, Kentucky. Of the teams that competed in the state tournament, 35 have registered to attend nationals.

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

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2022 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – *continued*



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

- Carson Starnes, Cullman High
- Cody Butler, Fairview High
- Mattie Cleckler, Chilton County High
- Niko Menzel, Buckhorn High
- Savannah Drake, Vinemont High

The scholarships are funded through NASP with matching dollars from the state tournament admission fee of \$2 per person. In 2022, approximately 5,000 spectators attended the state championship.

This year's state championship also saw a return to in-person competition after being canceled in 2020 and held virtually in 2021 due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

"I'm thrilled that the archers can once again compete in person at the state championship," said Marisa Futral, NASP coordinator for WFF. "Nothing compares to drawing your bow alongside other archers from across the state. Congrats to everyone who competed and good luck at nationals!"



Scoring for the state tournament is based on Olympic-style, target archery in three divisions – elementary, middle and high school. Competition is on team and individual levels. Perfect scores are 3,600 points for teams and 300 for individuals.

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2022 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – *continued*

Top Scores in the 2022 Alabama NASP State Championship

TOP OVERALL INDIVIDUALS

FEMALE: Caroline Miller, Vinemont Middle, Score: 293

MALE: Forrest Calvert, Cullman High, Score: 296

HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION

Alma Bryant High, Score: 3,411

Buckhorn High, Score: 3,376

Vinemont High, Score: 3,353

MIDDLE SCHOOL DIVISION

Vinemont Middle, Score: 3,370

Cullman Middle, Score: 3,301

Causey Middle, Score: 3,287

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DIVISION

East Elementary, Score: 3,076

Elsie Collier Elementary, Score: 2,953

St. Lukes Episcopal School, Score: 2,949

INDIVIDUAL HIGH SCHOOL FEMALES

Alexis Sartin, Vinemont High, Score: 293

Brie Cassani, Buckhorn High, Score: 291

Kendra Case, West Point High, Score: 290

INDIVIDUAL HIGH SCHOOL MALES

Forrest Calvert, Cullman High School, Score: 296

Will Bolzle, Cullman High, Score: 294

Chase Wilcox, Alma Bryant High, Score: 292

INDIVIDUAL MIDDLE SCHOOL FEMALES

Caroline Miller, Vinemont Middle School, Score: 293

Maddie Seidel, Cullman Middle, Score: 289

Addison Holcomb, Vinemont Middle, Score: 288

INDIVIDUAL MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES

Easton Cook, Saraland Middle, Score: 291

Brayden Clark, Cullman Middle, Score: 288

Jagger Lee, Vinemont Middle, Score: 286

INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FEMALES

Frances Mate, Excel Academics, Score: 276

Presley Latham, East Elementary, Score: 273

Stefany Garcia, Dixon Elementary, Score: 265

INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MALES

Briggs Renfroe, Castlen Elementary, Score: 278

Gunnar Couch, Breitling Elementary, Score: 269

Mason Branch, Dawes Intermediate, Score: 268

Complete results for the 2022 NASP Alabama State Championship are available at www.nasptournaments.org. To view photos from the event, visit ADCNR's Flickr at www.flickr.com/photos/outdooralabama.

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

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

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

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2022 NASP ALABAMA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS ANNOUNCED – *continued*



ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship (left) and National Wild Turkey Federation State Chapter President Craig Scruggs (back row, right) with the Alma Bryant Hurricanes Archery Team who took first place in the high school division of the 2022 NASP Alabama State Championship. Photo by Cody Eason, ADCNR.



ADCNR and Alabama State Parks Support Those Walking the Appalachians from Alabama to Maine



MONTGOMERY, Ala. – Did you know legendary conservationist Benton MacKaye’s original vision for the Appalachian Trail (AT) called for it to run the entire length of the Appalachian Mountains by linking Maine and Alabama?

Conservationists in Alabama and Georgia have been working for the last few decades to turn this dream into a reality by adding approximately 314 miles of the Pinhoti Trail to the iconic AT.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) supports this effort, including the idea of one day hopefully placing the AT’s southern terminus at Cheaha State Park, the state’s highest peak.

“There’s something magical about the idea of linking Maine’s highest peak with Alabama’s highest mountain,” said ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship. “Hikers who complete this feat would have the satisfaction of having traveled the entire length of the Appalachian Mountains in America, and it would also realize Benton MacKaye’s original idea of linking Maine with Alabama.”

The Pinhoti Trail meanders through several Alabama counties, both north and south of Cheaha, mostly through the Talladega National Forest. The trail continues into north Georgia via the Georgia Pinhoti Trail, traversing the Chattahoochee National Forest and ultimately connect-

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ADCNR AND ALABAMA STATE PARKS SUPPORT THOSE WALKING THE APPALACHIANS – *continued*

ing with the Benton MacKaye Trail. The MacKaye trail provides the final link to the current southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail at Springer Mountain, Georgia.

Extending the AT into Alabama may require amending federal law and navigating federal bureaucratic obstacles, but that hasn't deterred advocates from working to make this extension a reality. In recent years Alabama has seen more and more of annual thru hikers start their journeys in Alabama.

"That is really the point behind our efforts. We have worked over the years to buy missing properties in Alabama for the trail, like Indian Mountain, and see trail constructed, and now the word has gotten out and hikers are showing up and making independent decisions to start their thru hike in Alabama" said State Parks Director Greg Lein.

Lein has thru hiked the Appalachian Trail and appreciates the idea of fulfilling Benton MacKaye's vision. "We simply want to support thru hikers who wish to attempt their start or finish their personal journey in Alabama, and Cheaha State Park is an easy and convenient place to support hikers," he said.

District Superintendent Renee Raney supported the concept: "Cheaha State Park has a store, lodge, cabins and a campground which are all ready to serve and support hikers and their families embarking on this great adventure. The milder winter and spring conditions in Alabama certainly make for a better starting option in February, March or April when the northbound thru-hiking pilgrimage typically gets underway."

After all, there is plenty of precedent. The AT's southern terminus has changed several times, from its original location at Mount Mitchell in North Carolina to its current

location at Springer Mountain in Georgia. The northern terminus also moved from Mount Washington in New Hampshire to Mount Katahdin in Maine.

Moving the southern gateway of the Appalachian Trail to Mount Cheaha would not only help alleviate current AT congestion, but provide a new economic and tourism engine for areas of Georgia and Alabama. The AT currently stretches 2,190 miles and, with its extension to Mount Cheaha, it would become 2,504 miles long.

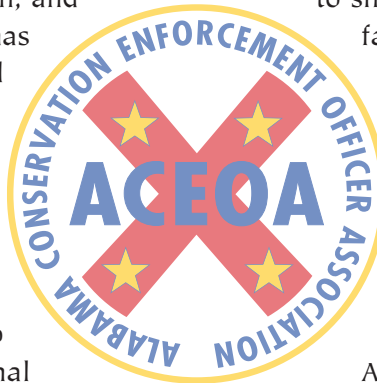
"Hikers can now purchase a medallion for \$10 from the Cheaha camp store that can be put on their packs to show their support for extending the world-famous Appalachian Trail to Alabama," said Tom Cosby, an advocate for the AT2AL movement.

T-shirts and stickers with the AT2AL message can be found in the camp store as well, and all proceeds will benefit the Alabama State Parks. "Our goal is simply to raise awareness in the hiking community that bringing the AT to Alabama is, really, a culmination of Benton MacKaye's original dream from 1925 — and a reminder that the Appalachians begin in Alabama," Cosby said.

Dr. Jeff Hayes, a fellow advocate for the AT2AL movement, also shared supportive sentiments.

"I grew up hiking in Alabama, thinking the trails here were nothing special," Hayes said. "After attending college in Maryville, Tennessee, and hiking extensively in the Smokey Mountains, then later hiking the full length of the Appalachian Trail, I realized that those trails, while older and more developed, are no more special than ours. Then when I hiked the entire Alabama section of the Pinhoti

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ADCNR AND ALABAMA STATE PARKS SUPPORT THOSE WALKING THE APPALACHIANS – *continued*

for the Pinhoti Steering Committee, I became convinced that our Appalachians, too, are on par with those along many sections of the Appalachian Trail.

“We should bring the Appalachian Trail to Cheaha State Park, a worthy peer to Baxter State Park, both holding the highest point in their respective states,” he added. “We should do this not just because the visionaries who gathered in the first Appalachian Trail Conference in 1925

thought the Appalachian Trail should extend to Cheaha, but because leaving out the Southern Appalachian deprives hikers – day hikers, weekenders, and long-haul – of the full range of scenic Appalachian beauty. The Appalachian Trail is incomplete without our mountains. Let’s finish the job started almost 100 years ago and bring the Appalachian Trail home to Alabama.”

About Alabama’s State Parks System

The Alabama State Parks is a division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and maintains 21 state parks encompassing approximately 48,000 acres of land and water in Alabama. The parks range from Gulf Coast beaches to the Appalachian Mountains and provide opportunities and facilities from basic day-use activities to resort convention lodging, restaurants, and golfing areas. These parks rely on visitor fees and the support of other partners like local communities to fund the majority of their operations. Make reservations at www.alapark.com/online-reservations and learn more at www.alapark.com. Partners Pay the Way.

About Alabama’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) has four divisions: Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. An administrative department of the State of Alabama created by statute, the Commissioner, appointed by the Governor as a member of the Cabinet, advises the Governor and Legislature on the management of freshwater fish, wildlife, marine resources, state lands, state parks and other natural resources.



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This Is Your Lucky Day

By Joel Glover

Hunting licenses are the lifeblood of Conservation Departments across the country. Many landowners and hunters mistakenly believe the Department of Conservation is funded from the state's general fund which is funded by tax money. I know several people believe this since several of them have claimed that they pay my salary. The truth is, if they aren't buying a hunting or fishing license, they aren't financially supporting our department. Way back in 1937 some wise men came up with the Pittman-Robinson Act as a way to fund conservation efforts. The act placed an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and other hunting equipment. The manufacturer pays the tax and the money goes into a fund managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). When a state department of conservation sells a license, the USFWS matches the cost of the license using a three to one match. As you can see hunters in effect pay their own way. Although hunters and fishermen pay into the fund, everyone who enjoys wildlife reaps the benefits. I feel it is safe to say that without the sale of hunting and fishing licenses conservation departments would likely cease to exist. Therefore, checking licenses are a high priority.

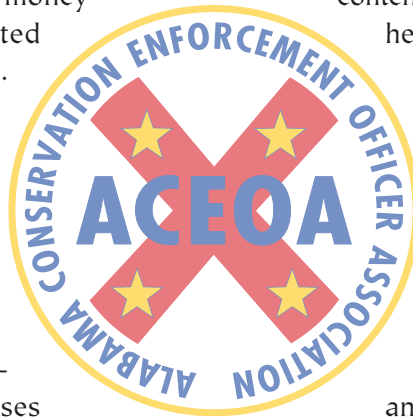
While checking a fellow on the Coosa Wildlife Management Area (WMA) I asked to see his hunting license and management area license. He immediately pulled out his wallet and retrieved his hunting license. The hunting license was valid. I again asked to see his WMA license which is also required for hunting on the

WMA. The man was starting to get upset because he was positive he had purchased the license yet was having trouble finding it. Of course, this would not be the first time someone had sworn to me they had purchased a license when they had not. Many people do not understand why officers do not believe them when they tell them they have everything they need. If they were lied to as much as we are, I feel they would better understand it. While I did not necessarily doubt whether or not he had purchased the license, it was beginning to look like he wasn't going to find it.

Eventually he took everything out of his wallet and the contents nearly covered the hood of his truck! Yet, he still could not find the necessary license.

After the fellow had spent several minutes searching his wallet and his vehicle but still could not find the document, I told him I was going to issue him a citation. I explained that if he could prove he had the license prior to receiving the ticket then I would request that the ticket be dismissed. He wasn't happy but stated he understood. I asked for his driver's license and he handed it to me. I took the license and as I rotated it in my hand I noticed the back of the

license was not slick like the front. I flipped the license over and there stuck on the back of his driver's license was, you guessed it, the man's WMA license! I held the license up and asked the fellow, "Does this look like it?" He was sure happy to see it and to tell the truth, so was I. It was definitely his lucky day!





Federally Permitted Charter Boats Get 79-Day Snapper Season

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

NOAA Fisheries announced over the weekend a 79-day red snapper season for for-hire vessels with federal reef fish permits in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The season for federally permitted for-hire vessels (charter boats) will open seven days a week at 12:01 a.m. on June 1, 2022, and will close at 12:01 a.m. on August 19, 2022.

The 2022 season for private recreational anglers opens the Friday before Memorial Day (May 27) and runs each extended weekend from Friday through Monday until Alabama's annual quota is projected to be met.

NOAA Fisheries said the total Gulf of Mexico red snapper recreational quota is 7,399,000 pounds whole weight. The private angler sector is allocated 57.7%, and the for-hire sector is allocated 42.3% of the quota.

Although the 2022 quota for the Gulf of Mexico federal for-hire component is 3,130,000 pounds, the annual catch target is 2,848,000 pounds whole weight, which is 91% of the quota and provides a buffer to keep the sector from harvesting more than the quota. The quota for red snapper in the Gulf for both the commercial and recreational sectors is 15.1 million pounds.

Meanwhile, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council), meeting recently in Orange Beach, had some discouraging news about one of the Gulf species that anglers target when red snapper season is closed – greater amberjack.

Kevin Anson, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Marine Resources Division (MRD) representative on the Gulf Council, said recent amberjack assessments have raised concerns about the hard-fighting species that tends to congregate around structure in deeper water.

“The amberjack assessments going back the last 20 years have been indicating the stock is undergoing overfishing and/or is in an overfished status,” Anson said. “We have implemented several management measures for the last 5 to 7 years to try to improve the stock. They have not provided any benefits that we can see at this time. We reduced the number of season days. We increased the size limit. We reduced the bag limit (one fish per angler), and we just haven’t seen any improvement in the stock.

“We’re going to have to make some tougher decisions at the Council to get it where it’s not overfished or undergoing overfishing. In the short term, we’re going to be looking at management that will try to get us to a point where we don’t exceed the annual catch limit. That potentially is going to mean there will be a much shorter season length.”

Anson, MRD’s Chief Biologist, said increasing the size limit for amberjack, which is already 34 inches fork length, would likely be counterproductive. Bag limits could end up being reduced using the number of fish per vessel or number of anglers.

“There was some discussion at the time we increased the size limit that it could cause some additional mortality,” he said. “Bigger fish don’t handle very well when you’re fighting them, particularly in the summertime. Reducing the bag limit, although it’s an option, is not a very good option at this point. At the angler level or vessel level, you’re talking about fractional bag limits, and those are not very palatable to most folks.”

Anson said the Gulf Council will be working within a time limit to address the overfishing status of greater amberjack. Once the Gulf Council is notified of the overfishing status by NOAA’s Southeast Regional Administrator,

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FEDERALLY PERMITTED CHARTER BOATS GET 79-DAY SNAPPER SEASON – *continued*

the Gulf Council has two years to implement management measures to resolve the overfishing issue.

“There are no guarantees the management decisions we make will restore the stock or help us harvest below the annual catch limit, but we have to take some action different than our current management actions,” Anson said.

Although anglers who fish off the coast of Alabama are less affected, gag grouper is also overfished, which will impact our Florida neighbors.

“It’s in a similar situation (to amberjack),” Anson said. “We have to address the overfishing designation. There may be some season closures that we can do that will be more impactful. A reduction in the season is the easiest thing to do. We’re looking to Florida for some direction on how to handle this. The majority of recreational and commercial catches of gag grouper come from Florida.”

On the horizon, Anson said the Gulf Council will again be dealing with the reduced number of cobia, especially along the northern Gulf Coast. He said discussions outside the Gulf Council process indicate some anglers are talking about completely shutting the cobia season down to try to get the stock to rebound.

“I’ve heard more conversations about just closing it down. It’s so bad, the fishing forums and discussion said there shouldn’t be any hesitation to shut it down. But that has not been discussed at the Council. We have increased the size limit and reduced the bag limit, and it hasn’t done much. We’ve had discussions about going to seasons or discussing a fractional bag limit, like for amberjack,” Anson said.

When I moved to the Alabama Gulf Coast 30 years ago to cover the outdoors, the annual spring cobia migration was a big deal. Now cobia tournaments have shut down, and anglers rarely even see any fish cruising the coast, much less getting one to bite.

“It was pretty much gangbusters in the spring back in the day, depending on weather and water clarity,” Anson said. “That has disappeared. It’s a memory for those who experienced the fishery when it was better.”

Returning to red snapper, the method of determining harvest is still unsettled. NOAA Fisheries has recently



Charter boats with federal reef fish permits will have a 79-day red snapper season with a June 1 opening date. Photo by David Rainer.

implemented a fishing effort survey sent by mail. The newer survey estimates two to four times more fishing trips than the previous effort survey method, which utilized landline telephones as a means for contacting coastal recreational saltwater anglers. Currently, data from historical Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) and Alabama’s Snapper Check are used to estimate snapper harvest.

Anson said the Snapper Check program estimated Alabama’s private recreational anglers landed 939,143 pounds during the 2021 red snapper season, which was below the 1.12-million-pound quota. Since 2018, annual Snapper Check estimates have been very close to or just above the annual quota, which has ranged from 986,000 to 1.12 million pounds. Several people who spoke during the Gulf Council’s public testimony period said they were

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FEDERALLY PERMITTED CHARTER BOATS GET 79-DAY SNAPPER SEASON – *continued*

concerned that snapper were harder to catch this year than in recent years and were concerned that catches were leading to local depletion.

“Some people are worried about red snapper and use the term of ‘localized depletion,’” Anson said. “Our contention is we’ve been penalized in the assessment, and we were never harvesting at the level we could. That’s why we ended up with such big fish and so many fish that it was easy for folks to catch a limit.

“When people are talking about the fish that are missing, they’re talking about the fish that are closest to shore. A large proportion of private recreational anglers do not travel too far from shore, and charter boat owners have been selling two or three trips a day during most of their season for several years. You can’t get out very far on four- or six-hour trips. Within the first few weeks of the season, most nearshore places, those within 20 miles from shore, get picked over and have smaller fish. That’s just how it is, but a large portion of the fish off Alabama are beyond that distance.”

As a reminder, anglers landing red snapper in Alabama with private boats are required by law to complete one landing report per vessel trip of their harvested red snapper through Snapper Check before the fish are removed from the boat or the boat with the fish is removed from the water. Reporting of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish also is mandatory. Owners/operators of federally

permitted charter vessels no longer need to report the harvest of these three species in Snapper Check due to the implementation of a federal electronic reporting system this year. Also, all recreational anglers and charter vessels, state and federally permitted, in possession of Gulf reef fish are required to have an Alabama Gulf Reef Fish Endorsement.

The best and easiest way to comply with the reporting requirement is through the Snapper Check feature found on the Outdoor AL app. The app is available from Apple and Android stores. Reports can also be submitted online at www.outdooralabama.com. Paper reports and drop boxes are no longer available. Visit www.outdooralabama.com/saltwater-fishing/saltwater-reef-fish-endorsement for information about the Reef Fish Endorsement.

Also, don’t forget the DESCEND Act goes into effect this year. The act requires all vessels that are fishing for reef fish in federal waters to have a venting tool or descending tool on board and ready to use when fishing. The venting tool is used to release gases from the fish’s swim bladder to allow it to return to the reef naturally. The descending device is used by attaching the fish to the device and lowering the fish and device into the water to a certain depth before releasing it. The goal of the Act is to reduce the effects of barotrauma to the fish, which will increase the survival rate of discarded fish and improve the sustainability of the resource.



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Another Benefit of Trapping

By Vance Wood

Everyone already knows about the most common benefits of trapping and how that works concerning wildlife management, but here is another. Kids! The Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division along with the Alabama Trapper's Association, the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association, and a host of other landowners and volunteers sponsor Youth Trapping Workshops all across Alabama. These events help to teach children about the benefits of trapping and how to be responsible trappers. This can also lead to them being more responsible with other things.

Recently, I was asked to help coordinate a Youth Trapping Workshop in Pike County Alabama by State Representative Wes Allen and Commissioner Russell Johnson. Everyone worked together to secure land to trap upon, a site to hold a classroom, meals for



those in attendance, and door prizes for the young'uns. When February came around and it was time for the class my nine-year-old daughter, Mac asked if she could attend. Little did I know how trapping was about to change her life. Now, of course, she is a Daddy's Girl and that is alright by me. We do just about everything outdoors related under the sun together, however, I did not expect the effect trapping would have on her.

Well off to trapping class we went and she was plugged in from the get-go. She was observing and following instructions, soaking everything up like a sponge. She stayed in State Wildlife Biologist Andrew Green's and Richard Tharp's hip pockets. When class ended, the excitement and enthusiasm did not. Her Mom, Traci is also a State Biologist and she told her mother all about

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ANOTHER BENEFIT OF TRAPPING – *continued*



what she had learned. She really looks up to her Mom, after all, she has been on NatGeo and Daddy has not. (She's still a Daddy's girl! Ha! Ha!) So here we go off to school on Monday morning, after a full weekend of trapping. On the way to school, Mac asked if we might go to Fleming's Supply and get some trapping supplies that afternoon. I told her that if she was really that interested, we would see. I also added that she would have to not neglect school or chores if we did. The wife and I believe

in supporting her interests, but school and education come first.

The wife was surprised to hear of Mac's request and was equally supportive, so we were off to Fleming's after school. I will not say what Mac got me for, but she was like a kid in a candy store and it adds up. We went home and prepared the traps, letting them rust up a little bit for a few days. Then we prepared a fire the old-fashioned

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ANOTHER BENEFIT OF TRAPPING – *continued*



way and dyed then waxed the traps. We set our first trap line and after several days had an old ringtail, then the big catch was a coyote! Now that was exciting, but as Paul Harvey would say, “Now for the rest of the story.” Mac was always hard to get up for school. She was always up at the last minute and it was a struggle to get her on her way. Since she has been introduced to trapping, she goes to bed early and wakes up in time to run her trap line before school. After checking traps Mac gets ready for school all on her own without having to be told anything. She makes her own breakfast, fixes her snack for



school, and is rushing us out the door. Talk about WOW!!! Now she enjoys taking her friends trapping and showing them how to set and run a trap line. I can’t help, but smile and think, “Who would have thought?” Not only did she learn to be a responsible trapper, but trapping has made her a more responsible person and that is worth everything. Please take note. Take a kid on an outdoor adventure every chance you get and teach them to enjoy the outdoors responsibly, you will be glad you did!



Hayes Takes Top Officer Award at NWTF Convention

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Alabama's chapters racked up numerous awards at the recent National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) Convention in Nashville, and one of the state's game wardens was selected for a prestigious honor.

Conservation Enforcement Officer Drake Hayes of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division was named the NWTF's Wildlife Officer of the Year at the awards banquet.

The NWTF states the Wildlife Officer of the Year Award is given to individuals who have excelled and demonstrated exceptional performance in the following areas:

teamwork and innovation, attitude and leadership, and achievements and accomplishments.

One of those accomplishments involved Hayes' work during Alabama's 2021 turkey season, especially on opening day. Hayes had not only scouted areas prior to the season to search for possible illegal baiting; he was also training one of the Law Enforcement Section's new officers.

"I had located bait on multiple properties in Shelby County on opening weekend of turkey season," Hayes said. "I was in the middle of our field training officer program. I was training Officer (Trent) Robison, our officer for Bibb County at the time."

Hayes and Robison went to the first property well before daylight to be in position to listen for hunters who might be illegally hunting over bait.

"Where I found the bait, we had to cross a log over a very large creek that was over our heads," Hayes said. "You could cross the log and stay dry. But we had a significant amount of rain between the time I had located the bait and opening day. We heard the turkey hunters calling. We saw lights and activity and knew they were there at the bait. We get to the log, and it's completely submerged. You couldn't see the log; I just knew where it was. We had already put in so much work that we just had to go for it.

"The water is moving. It's looking like white-water rapids. I used a 6-foot stick to find the log, and we just had to feel with our feet where the log was. At this point, the water is up to

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WFF's Drake Hayes accepts the NWTF's Wildlife Officer of the Year award from NWTF CEO Becky Humphries and Board Chairman Harlan Starr at the convention in Nashville recently. Photo by Chuck Sykes.



HAYES TAKES TOP OFFICER AWARD AT NWTF CONVENTION – *continued*

our knees and cold. Opening day last year was pretty chilly, especially when you're walking through a creek."

Hayes and Robison managed to cross the log with wet pants and boots full of water to locate the hunters.

"We issued multiple citations, including hunting over bait," Hayes said. "Then we have to traverse the exact same log coming back. It was that or swim. We got to the next property and cited three individuals for hunting over bait. The next day, we worked a hunting over bait case in Bibb County.

"It was a very successful opening weekend. During the course of the season, we issued citations in nine hunting over bait cases, using an electronic call, several harvest record violations and other violations, like loaded guns in vehicles and multiple license violations. I think it was 25 turkey-related violations for the season. It was a very productive season for me, and I was able to have our new officer with me for the majority of those cases. He got to experience a unique and productive season."

Hayes had already been selected as the Alabama NWTF Chapter Wildlife Officer of the Year when he went to Nashville and was surprised when his name was announced as the national winner.

At the ceremony, Hayes said, "I would just like to thank God first and foremost. And thank Him again for all the blessings in my life, and thanks to the NWTF for this wonderful opportunity and for my family for putting up with my career choice – all the early mornings and late nights and everything in between. I would also like to ask for a round of applause for all the other officers and their families that are here as well tonight. Each and every one of them is just as deserving if not more than me."

That night is something Hayes said he will never forget and is honored just to be selected for the nomination and to be able to attend the NWTF Convention.

"It took my breath away when they called my name," he said. "It was very unexpected and such an honor to receive that award. Like I said, every officer was deserving of the award. I was blessed I was chosen."

WFF Enforcement Chief Michael Weathers applauded Hayes' honor and the recognition NWTF provides for his officers.

"We're happy to have a longstanding partnership with NWTF," Weathers said. "It's beneficial to us in that it gives us a platform to recognize our officers who routinely go above and beyond in the detection and prosecution of egregious turkey hunting violations in the state of Alabama. The ability to recognize those officers has a positive morale effect for the entire staff, which further encourages our officers to get out and protect an already fragile species that is so much a part of Alabama's hunting heritage."

The 2021 turkey season was also special to Hayes for a reason not related to his work in uniform. He swapped into camouflage to take his dad, Johnnie Hayes, turkey hunting.

"We had tried several years to connect with turkey for him," Hayes said. "We got close on several occasions but were never able to get him his first turkey. We finally got on a gobbling bird, and the stars aligned. There were no hens that I had to compete with. He was gobbling good on the roost. We were able to set up. I did a fly-down call, and we actually watched the bird fly off the roost and come straight to us.

"My dad was able to kill his first turkey in his late 50s. It was a very special moment to be able to call his first turkey."

As for the other awards Alabama NWTF chapters received at the recent convention, State NWTF President Craig Harris said the Alabama State Chapter received the L.A. Dixon Award for Outstanding Chapter with 7,500-9,999 members.

Local chapters in Tuscaloosa, West Mobile, East Alabama, Morgan County, Monroe County and Henry County were also recognized at the convention.

"We didn't get an award for it, but the Alabama State Chapter was financially, by far, the most successful last year," Harris said. "We raised way more than anybody else. Through our banquets and fund-raising, the Alabama State Chapter was the top state in the nation for net dollars with more than \$1 million raised. We were very proud of that. These funds are used at the local, state

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HAYES TAKES TOP OFFICER AWARD AT NWTF CONVENTION – *continued*

and national level for research and habitat projects and the preservation of Alabama’s hunting heritage.

“We have a lot of projects, research and habitat improvements going right now in Alabama.”

Harris also praised NWTF’s partnership with WFF on most of those projects.

“We’ve been good partners for many years,” Harris said. “Most everything we give Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, they’re able to get Pittman-Robertson Act funds, so it works out great.”

Chuck Sykes, an avid turkey hunter, said when he became WFF Director in 2012, he saw an opportunity to tap into the federal funding derived from an excise tax on firearms and ammunition that can be used for projects that involve wildlife management, wildlife research and hunter education.

“One of the first things I noticed after I got here was the (NWTF) state chapter had a program where biolo-

gists could apply for assistance for buying equipment and things such as that,” Sykes said. “I met with Phil Savage, who was then state president, and said we needed to be smarter with the money. I said set aside the money you want to spend. We’ll go through the process and select the projects y’all want to fund. Then write Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries a check. Then we can use it as state match, and we can quadruple the money, and we can do more things for turkeys and turkey habitat.

“That went really well, and I have had great relationships with all the presidents from Phil to Craig Scruggs and Craig Harris now. NWTF puts their money where their mouth is. Not only are they talking about helping turkeys and turkey habitat, they’re putting their money behind it. The NWTF is one of the best NGO (non-governmental organizations) partners the State of Alabama has. We’re extremely grateful for their participation and support.”

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A Trophy Is In The Eye of The Beholder

The buck stood still as a stone. He seemed to stare as the shooter exited his vehicle. It was as though he was mesmerized by the glint of light reflecting off the riflescope. He did not move when the bullet ripped through his chest, blowing Styrofoam out the other side!

For the majority of my career, I did not work a set schedule. The nature of game & fish work definitely does not fit within an eight to five framework. I did my best not to schedule any work on Sunday. However, sometimes the work came and found me. Early on in Coosa County, I made some good friends who remain so until

Unfortunately, many offers came with strings attached. I very much appreciated the ones that didn't.

One year as the deer season was in full swing, One of the landowners reported to me he was hearing some shooting fairly regularly along the county road every Sunday morning. Coosa county road 111, the Ridge Road as it was known locally, ran through their property. Although a normally rough dirt road, the thoroughfare received a lot of traffic, especially during the hunting season. I told him I would check into it. The best way for a violator to get caught is to set up a regular pattern. I suspected the reported activity might be one individual since it was indeed regular.

I contacted Conservation Enforcement Officer Hershel Patterson and Wildlife Biologist Gene Carver and informed them of the complaint and set up a decoy detail. Based on the information provided, I asked them to meet me on Ridge Road around 8:30 Sunday morning. Fortunately, there was a good place to set up the decoy however there was not a corresponding hiding place from which you could see the deer. We decided I would sit in the woods watching the dummy deer while Hershel and Gene covered each end of the road.

Sunday morning was not unlike a lot of mornings when I had a detail lined up in that I had not slept very well. I had breakfast with my family and traveled to Ridge Road. I unloaded the deer and

placed him in the spot I had chosen earlier. I thought the setup looked good but was afraid the deer might blend in with the surroundings so well it might not be seen. This was a common problem. I had seen many known road hunters roll past a decoy that just seemed to melt

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this day. They co-owned three hundred and fifty acres in north-central Coosa County. Each of these men was very gracious, allowing me to utilize their property to take both of my sons hunting and fishing. In my position, you received several offers to hunt and fish, however, you had to be very discreet about which offers to accept.



A TROPHY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER – *continued*

into the woods. There was a fine line between having the deer conspicuous enough that it was seen yet natural enough that it would get shot. The decoy was not there to lure a shot from a hunter but to facilitate a shot for the violator looking to break the law. I completed the setup and drove to where I had planned to meet the others and leave my vehicle.

Soon Hershel and Gene arrived. I told them I had already deployed the deer but was a little concerned that it might be hard to see. No sooner had those words come out of my mouth when a rifle shot split the early morning calm. I jumped in my truck and quickly made my way to the deer. There I saw a young man standing beside a pickup parked in the roadway. As I pulled up to him, he gently laid his rifle on the hood of his truck.

There was little need for discussion as I approached. I asked for his driver's license. He removed it from his

wallet and handed it to me and commented about how real that deer looked. As I wrote his citations he continued to make small talk telling me he had killed a doe earlier on his club and had decided to ride the road and see if he could find a buck. As I readied the bonds for his signature, he again commented how good the deer looked. At this point, I began to wonder if another deer had stepped in front of our ragged decoy with the pitiful little 3-point rack. The violator signed the tickets and looked at me and said, "Yeah, all I could see was that rack on my wall!" Now I knew he had shot something other than our deer. I told him I would have to keep the deer he shot but he could always frame his ticket and hang it on the wall. He laughed, got in his truck, and drove away. I looked at the little buck he had shot and realized that a trophy is in the eye of the beholder.



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Constitutional Carry Increases Demand for Proper Training

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Governor Kay Ivey recently signed legislation to make Alabama the 22nd state in the nation to adopt a constitutional carry law that eliminates the requirement for a person to obtain a concealed carry permit to lawfully carry a pistol. The new law goes into effect on January 1, 2023.

The state's constitutional carry law was among the topics of discussion last week during the Shooting Sports Showcase at the CMP Talladega Marksmanship Park. POMA (Professional Outdoor Media Association) and SEOPA (Southeastern Outdoor Press Association) hosted the event at the stellar 500-acre shooting range with Cheaha Mountain as a backdrop.

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Captain Marisa Futral, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division Hunter Education Coordinator, helped facilitate the shooting event with numerous firearms manufacturers, distributors, tourism representatives and outdoor media.

Futral said proper training is even more important and increasingly requested by the public because of the continued surge in purchases of firearms used for target shooting, hunting and personal safety.

"More and more people are buying firearms for self-defense, and they need a place to shoot, a place where they feel comfortable," Futral said. "They also learn at a place where they can return to shoot in the future."

One of the ways that happens is through the WFF's Firearms 101 – Introduction to Handguns classes that are held at public shooting ranges throughout the state.

At the Firearms 101 events, certified firearms instructors teach students the basics of firearms safety:

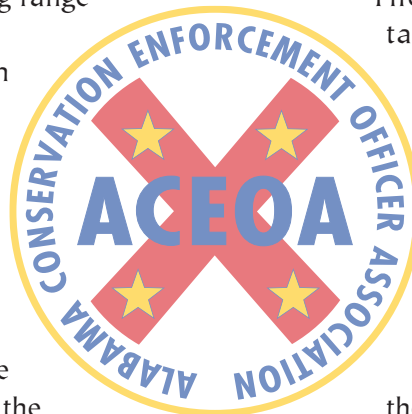
- Always treat all firearms as if they are loaded.
- Never allow the muzzle of the firearms to cover anything you are not willing to harm.
- Always keep your trigger finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target and you have made the conscious decision to fire.
- Always be sure of your target and what is beyond.

The participants learn the fundamentals of operating both a semi-automatic and a revolver. They learn how to load a magazine, insert the magazine into the handgun and manipulate the safety and slide release. Instructors ensure that the students follow all safety procedures and offer tips on the proper grip for best control of the firearm and accuracy. Students also learn malfunction clearance procedures and how to safely store their firearms when not in use.

"At our Firearms 101 events, you get lessons from certified instructors," Futral said. "Then you can go back to the same range where you learned to shoot that firearm and shoot more on your own or come back to a second class. This class offers one-on-one instruction, not just group instruction, so you get personal time with your own instructor. It's quite the bargain for the cost of a Wildlife Heritage License.

"All of our feedback from the classes has been positive. Everybody has been very complimentary of the instruc-

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CONSTITUTIONAL CARRY INCREASES DEMAND FOR PROPER TRAINING – *continued*

tors. We're doing our best to spread out across the state, so we're partnering with some county sheriffs' offices. If you haven't been able to find a class close to you, keep checking back on our website as we add more classes."

The next Firearms 101 classes will be held at the Cahaba River WMA Shooting Range near Helena on Saturday, April 16, 2022, and at the Swan Creek WMA Shooting Range in Limestone County on April 23, 2022. Visit www.outdooralabama.com/programs/firearms-101-introduction-handguns on a regular basis to check for updates.

To use WFF Public Shooting Ranges, Alabama residents are required to have a valid hunting, wildlife heritage, fishing, or WMA license for all range users between the ages of 16-64. For non-residents, a valid WMA license or non-resident hunting license is required for all range users ages 16 or older.

The participants learn handguns basics from their personal instructors with Smith and Wesson and Ruger .22 caliber handguns. WFF provides all necessary firearms, ammunition and safety equipment for the new shooters.

Speaking of Ruger, the Arizona company was one of the firearms manufacturers to display its products at the Shooting Sports Showcase, and Ruger's Public Relations Manager Paul Pluff was pleased that Alabama's constitutional carry bill has been signed into law.

"I think the fact that Alabama has become a constitutional carry state is going to be a benefit to current shooters but new shooters also," Pluff said. "It allows them the freedom to purchase that gun and carry it for personal protection. I absolutely think constitutional carry benefits far outweigh having to have a permit to carry. I think it's a positive thing for Alabama."

One of the trends in the firearms industry is the pro-

liferation of noise-suppressing devices on firearms. One of the exhibitors at the showcase was Dead Air Silencers, which provides an array of suppressors for most shooting and hunting firearms. I shot a suppressor-equipped rifle chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor, and the recoil was reduced significantly.

"Suppressors for hunters are game-changers in my opinion," said Dead Air's Rod Cleveland. "It controls recoil. It controls noise so you save your ears. I do think, from the hunting segment, we want to bring more kids into that. For kids and new shooters, suppressors take away the two things that bother them – recoil and noise. It's a huge benefit in that respect."



Outdoor writer Dick Jones fires a Sig Sauer P365 at the CMP Talladega Marksmanship Park during the Shooting Sports Showcase. Photo by David Rainer.

"Once you shoot suppressed on your hunting rifle, I don't think you'll go back."

Cleveland said the process to buy a stamp for a suppressor through the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) has been streamlined as of late December

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CONSTITUTIONAL CARRY INCREASES DEMAND FOR PROPER TRAINING – *continued*

2021. The ATF Form 4 is now available through E-File, and wait times for the \$200 stamp have been reduced.

“You can go to your dealer with the capabilities and have your photo and fingerprints transmitted to the ATF electronically,” he said. “It uploads into the ATF system to process it. Instead of taking eight to 12 months to get it back, a few folks are reporting getting their forms back in 60 days. This is the just at the beginning of this transition, so this is good news.”

During the event, attendees tested a variety of products from Sig Sauer, Taurus, Leupold, SCCY, Century Arms and Trailblazer Firearms, which meant plenty of spent brass was collected after the event concluded.

One of the points of concern I heard at the shooting event was the availability of ammunition for the rest of 2022.

Craig Kelley, a manufacturer’s representative for Hornady Manufacturing for decades, said demand and the availability of components are stressing the ammo manufacturers.

“In talking to Hornady, we think we will see some relief in hunting rifle ammunition by the end of 2022,” Kelly said. “It’s kind of disheartening. There’s been a shortage in the system, from distributors to retail customers. In general, the trade is out of product. We’re starting to see some relief on the popular handgun calibers and the

5.56 (mm) and .223 calibers. Those will probably catch up first because they can be manufactured more quickly, and you have domestics and imports.

“For hunting ammunition, there’s a real shortage of brass. Powder and primers are in short supply. It’s a perfect storm for the conditions we have in the market right now. Hopefully you’ll see some hunting ammunition by the time hunting seasons open this year. But before you see it in quantity on the shelves, it’ll be a while. And it’s not that manufacturers are not producing the products. Hornady has shipped between 15 and 20 percent more product this year compared to the prior year.”

Not only is availability going to be a problem for consumers, Kelley warned prices are going up considerably.

“While Hornady has only gone up one time since COVID started, I know some of the major manufacturers have gone up four times,” he said. “So, when product does become available in quantity, people are going to have sticker shock with prices up 30 to 40 percent.”

While Kelley certainly doesn’t advocate hoarding of ammo, he does suggest a reasonable purchase now if your caliber is in stock.

“I wouldn’t wait until June or July to see if it’s in stock,” he said. “If your retailer has it now, I would advise getting one or two boxes to be sure you have your hunting ammo.”



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Edwards Case

By CEO Sr. Kevin D. Kirby, Marshall County

In October 2020, I conducted surveillance on a vehicle containing hunting paraphernalia parked at a TVA restroom facility. This specific location is in the TVA Dam Reservation, with no hunting zone. After several hours of observation, I contacted Wesley Grant Edwards in the area within 100 yards of his vehicle. He possessed a bow and was attempting to hide a doe he harvested. Edwards was charged with 9-11-241 Hunting without Permission.

On October 15, 2021, CEO Sr. Bobo and I observed Edwards's vehicle parked in the vicinity of the same location from 2020. We contacted Edwards walking out in shorts and a T-shirt. He stated that he had been exercising and was not hunting. After conducting a preliminary interview, Edwards left the scene. We discovered camouflage pants, a shirt, and a crossbow (attachment), that was hidden behind a log in the vicinity where he exited the woods. CEO Sr. Bobo contacted Edwards and an

accomplice later in October, Edwards and his accomplice provided a written confession of the Hunting without permission incident that occurred on 10/15/2021 and hidden clothing and crossbow. Warrants were served on Edwards for 9-11-241 (hunting without permission) and 9-11-51 (hunt without a license). During a patrol of Guntersville Dam on December 26, 2021, CEO Sr. Bobo and I observed Edwards's vehicle at the TVA no hunting zone. He had launched a small flat bottom boat, and the boat was observed on the bank of the no-hunting zone. We contacted Edwards and another accomplice in the no-hunting zone and charged them with 9-11-241 (hunting without permission).

Wesley Edwards was found guilty on 2 counts of 9-11-241 and 1 count of hunting without a license. There was a \$2,125 fine plus court cost, 24-month probation, 30-day suspended jail sentence, and loss of hunting privileges until January 2023.





EAW Receives Grant for Automated External Defibrillators

Reid Gaston, Equip Alabama Wardens Industry and Landowner Council Chairman presented Automated External Defibrillators to Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Law Enforcement Captain Heath Walls. AEDs are a vital, life-saving asset in rural areas when conducting public outreach events and training exercises, responding to natural disasters, or assisting with search and rescue. The AED units were purchased with a grant obtained by the Equip Alabama

Wardens Program from the Alabama Power Company Foundation. Thank you Alabama Power Company Foundation and Equip Alabama Wardens!

To learn more about the Equip Alabama Wardens 501c3 Program and how you can help, please visit www.equipalabamawardens.org

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Equip Alabama Wardens Receives Sonar Equipment

Thanks to the Alabama Power Foundation's contribution to the Equip Alabama Wardens Program, several Conservation Enforcement Officers are better prepared to protect our natural resources and Citizens. Part of the contribution facilitated the purchase of 5 Lowrance Sonar Units. Sonar Units aid in the detection of illegal fishing gear, search and recovery of drown-

ing victims, and increases an Officer's ability to safely navigate with the use of GPS mapping software. Special thanks also to the Staff of the Prattville Bass Pro Shops for sales and installation.

(Pictured here is District 1 Conservation Enforcement Officer Ernie Stephens, patrolling Smith Lake and familiarizing himself with the new sonar unit.)



Black Bear Cubs Collared in Northeast Alabama

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

To say Traci Wood has a passion for bears would understate her love for the small black bear populations on opposite ends of the state in northeast and southwest Alabama.

A beaming Wood, State Wildlife Grants Coordinator with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division, recently was among a team of biologists and researchers who were able to place collars on a trio of bear cubs in DeKalb County near Mentone.

A research program under State Wildlife Grants is continuing to monitor the black bear populations in the state. In its fourth year, the study looks at cub survival and den habitat.

"We're evaluating the types of den structures the sows are using," Wood said. "We are collaring cubs when they are 7 weeks of age, around the 5-pound mark. It's basically a GPS collar. We also insert a PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tag into them. That collar expands as they grow. After six to nine months, that collar will fall off.

So, if we trap that animal later, the PIT tag will identify as a cub we had previously collared.

"What that collar also tells us is if that cub has died. If they die, we receive a transmitter signal, and we can find the location of the den and try to determine the cause of death. This will give an indication of how cubs are recruiting into the population."

When the cubs become adults and are collared again, the research team gathers a great deal more information about bear habits and habitat.

"It tells us where they are going, if they're having cubs in the future," Wood said. "Hopefully, it's a long-term look at the life ecology of a bear from when it's born to its reproductive age."

The previous summer, WFF and the Auburn University research team, with Hannah Leeper as the research associate in the field, trapped females and attached GPS collars to determine where they made their winter dens. With the dens located, the team was able to find the cubs this spring near Mentone.



WFF's Traci Wood prepares to return a black bear cub to its den in northeast Alabama. Photo by Billy Pope.

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BLACK BEAR CUBS COLLARED IN NORTHEAST ALABAMA – *continued*

The team will move to the Mobile area this weekend to start performing den checks to hopefully find cubs to collar.

“The cubs in southwest Alabama are born at different times than north Alabama cubs,” Wood said. “We really don’t know why. It could be due to genetic reasons. Those cubs should be big enough to attach cub collars.”

Although the study is focused on the bear populations in those two areas, Wood said that doesn’t mean bears aren’t denning and birthing cubs in other areas of the state.

When den locations are determined, the researchers carefully approach the den to determine if the sow has given birth.

“When we approach, the mom usually gets off the den and runs off right away,” Wood said. “We go straight into the den, collar, weigh and measure the cubs and put them back. It’s a very quick process because we want to reduce the stress to the den and mom. We want her to come back as quickly as possible. We don’t want her to think we are a threat.

“She usually comes back within an hour, which is kind of surprising. I think she can sense – hear and smell – when we’re gone. That’s good news the sows are returning to the dens. Later, with the GPS, we can determine if the mom stayed at the den, or she may move her cubs to a different den.

“A couple of weeks after we collar the cubs, they are out of the den, walking around with mom. They’re big enough to keep up with mom, and they’re exploring and climbing trees.”

Wood said the bear population in northeast Alabama is doing great with sows producing large litters.

“It’s not uncommon to encounter three cubs on average in a den,” she said. “Those cubs are very healthy, look very pretty, and they’re surviving in that first year, which is the most critical period because they’re small, vulnerable to predators, and it is a lot of work to keep up with mom.

“Those cubs in north Alabama have very good habitat

as well. They have canyons, caves and rock outcrops. Because of the canyons, they’re not running into people, houses or barriers. Even though we’re not seeing many sows’ dens in caves, most of the time they den in windrows after a tree cutting. It’s very thick. That seems to be their preference. It’s very removed from people as well. We’re seeing high cub survival in north Alabama.”

After about a year, the yearlings will disperse, and Wood said some of the males travel into Georgia.

“They’re covering a very large range,” she said. “It’s a bigger picture than what you would think. The linkage between our bears in northeast Alabama and Georgia has very high potential because of the good habitat in that corridor.”

Unfortunately, the bear population in the Mobile area is facing many more hurdles to viability, mainly due to isolation and habitat.

“In the Mobile population, we are seeing more cub mortality,” Wood said. “It’s still a question mark for us on how to find answers and come up with solutions. They are a very genetically isolated population. They are surrounded by highways, the interstate and subdivisions. It has led to inbreeding and very low genetic diversity. It doesn’t bode well for them at all.

“Den habitat and habitat quality for the adult bears are not there. Their den is open, like a nest on the ground. There’s rarely coverage, exposing them to all the elements, not only predators but extreme weather like flooding in the (Mobile-Tensaw) Delta. All those factors play a part in cub survival. It doesn’t appear, at this stage of the project, that predators are the problem. It’s directly linked to the poor habitat. It leaves those cubs so vulnerable. They have a hard life from the get-go. But we’re trying to find the answers on how to protect that population.”

Wood said Auburn University has been a WFF partner for about a decade in this research on black bears, Alabama’s state mammal. Auburn leads the field work, trapping, collaring and tracking the bears as well as analyzing the data to provide a report to WFF.

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BLACK BEAR CUBS COLLARED IN NORTHEAST ALABAMA – *continued*

“This assists us in making management decisions for bears,” she said. “It helps us evaluate the status of black bears in Alabama. It’s very important work.”

WFF and Auburn estimate the population of the northeast Alabama bears at 30-35 individuals. The southwest Alabama bear population is estimated at about 125 individuals, although Wood said some people in southwest Alabama think bears are everywhere.

“There aren’t as many bears in the Mobile population as people think,” she said. “They’re seeing the same bears over and over. The fact that they have such a restricted home range in the Mobile population means those bears are basically traveling in a circle with a radius of about 10 miles. Bears are a common sight in the general Saraland area.”

However, Wood said a black bear could be spotted just about anywhere in the state, especially during the summer months.

“Once the mom kicks them out at about 18 months of age, the young adult males roam,” she said. “But it’s not only the yearlings but older bears as well. The males are probably going to be looking for a mate or looking for a new home range. They can travel 250 miles.

“We’re starting to get more reports from the Birmingham area. Some of the north Alabama males come down that corridor and turn up around Birmingham and Alexander City.”

Wood said it’s important to be “Bear Aware” and realize any sighting during the summer is likely going to be a male bear passing through.

“If you have garbage out or you’re feeding wildlife, you should remove that food source for about two weeks, and the bear will move along,” she said. “Their activity is extremely food driven. They’re like little teenagers and get into trouble. Removing the food source is the key.

“But treat the bears as wildlife. Treat them as if they are dangerous. Typically, they’re not aggressive. They’re just looking for something to eat. You don’t want it to imprint on your food source because it’s going to keep coming back. That’s when it becomes a problem, but it’s more of a human problem than a bear problem.”

Wood hopes being “Bear Aware” will reduce human conflicts and people can enjoy just seeing a bear.

Speaking of bear sightings, WFF has set up an online reporting system for citizens. Visit www.outdooralabama.com/black-bear/alabama-black-bears and click on the “Report a Black Bear Sighting” link at the top of the page.

“This helps us know where bears are popping up,” Wood said. “This helps us in where our research is focused. It helps us work with our citizens on how to be ‘Bear Aware.’

“People love bears because the cubs are so cute, but it’s not all rainbows and sunshine. It’s briars, mud and mosquitoes. It’s extremely hard work, but I love it.”



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WFF Requests More Tournament Reports for Updated BAIT Program

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Keith Henderson, Fisheries Development Supervisor with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division, is busy tweaking the annual BAIT report on bass fishing in the state.

The Bass Angler Information Team (BAIT) report takes bass tournament results from across the state and creates a comprehensive summary of the results. The report compares results on an annual basis and relates them to historical statewide tournament data, and also by reservoir comparisons, creating a ranking system based on different criteria.

Henderson has recently taken over the program and has been busy updating the tournament and BAIT website as well as restructuring the BAIT report.

"All the information we collect and what we analyze stays the same," Henderson said. "I'm working on getting this information to the public quicker."

Henderson has created a new interactive map on the website that allows him to share some of the summarized tournament data long before the BAIT report is published.

"We have updated our BAIT webpage and included the interactive map," he said.

"I upload some of the important data on the website before the final BAIT report is published."

The COVID-19 pandemic hasn't made that effort easier for Henderson and his cohorts.

"We've had a drop in participation, and in 2020 we had a COVID year with a huge drop-off in tourna-

ments," he said. "We had to decide what we could present and what we couldn't depending on the sample size of tournaments."

WFF uses five quality indicators to determine each year's rankings – percent success, average bass weight, bass per angler day, pounds per angler day and the length of time to catch a five-pound bass.



Alabama Bass Trail (ABT) Tournament Director Scott Dobbins, left, helps Jonathon Collins and Blake Hice, right, show off a winning limit at Neely Henry Lake. Photo courtesy of Anglerschannel.com

"Percent success looks at the percentage of time anglers catch at least one bass per tournament," Henderson said. "The average bass weight is derived from every bass weighed in. The bass per angler day looks at the number of fish that are weighed in per 10 hours of fishing. Pound

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WFF REQUESTS MORE TOURNAMENT REPORTS FOR UPDATED BAIT PROGRAM – *continued*

per angler day is the average bag weight per 10 hours of fishing. Length of time to catch a 5-pound bass calculates this estimate, and the reservoirs with the fewest hours gets a higher ranking.”

The statewide BAIT statistics showed a 14.03-pound average winning weight per five fish, 3.54 as the number of bass weighed in per angler per day, 7.67 pounds as the pounds of bass weighed in per angler per day, 2.17 pounds as the average weight of bass caught, 390 hours to catch a 5-pound bass, 9.58 pounds for the largest bass caught, six bass 8 pounds or larger were caught, and 180 bass were 5 pounds or larger. The species included in the report are largemouth bass, smallmouth bass and spotted bass.

“This allows us to rank the reservoirs by percent success (anglers catching at least one fish), overall catch, largest average size bass and time required to catch a bass 5 pounds or larger,” Henderson said. “We take all that into account to determine overall rankings.”

Henderson cautions that the rankings are not necessarily determining the best overall reservoir because it does not account for biological factors, but it gives anglers some idea of where they might have the most success.

The effects of COVID on fishing and fishing tournaments turned out to be a paradox. On one hand, the number of people fishing during the pandemic increased significantly. However, the number of bass tournaments were down significantly.

“People fished a whole lot during that time, but tournaments were pretty much shut down,” Henderson said. “We didn’t get nearly as much data during that period. There was a significant reduction in BAIT tournament

reports, especially during the prime fishing time. The preferred time for most anglers is in the spring. So, it makes it hard to compare 2020 to previous years, but we were still able to gather some important information.”

One notable victim of the lack of tournament reports was Wilson Lake on the Tennessee River as Wilson did not have the required five reports to be considered in the rankings.

“For the previous six years, Wilson held the highest quality indicator rankings in the overall category,” Henderson said. “The Tennessee River typically has some of the best fishing and is really popular with tournaments and bass fishermen in general. But we didn’t have enough tournament submissions to include Wilson in the quality indicator rankings.

“The reason for the five-report requirement is to increase our sample size and not make it dependent on one tournament at that particular reservoir, or what the weather was on that particular day. We want a good representation of what that reservoir is actually doing. And the more tournament reports we have for each reservoir distributed throughout the year helps to better represent the reality in each reservoir.”

In 2020, Weiss Lake in northeast Alabama on the Coosa River gained the top overall ranking with 50 points, edging Logan Martin Lake, also on the Coosa, at 49 points. Harris Reservoir (Lake Wedowee) on the Tallapoosa River had 42 points to 41 points for Lake Eufaula on the Chattahoochee River in southeast Alabama. Pickwick Lake on the Tennessee River rounded out the top five at 39 points.

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WFF REQUESTS MORE TOURNAMENT REPORTS FOR UPDATED BAIT PROGRAM – *continued*

One of the top bass fishing lakes in the nation, Guntersville Lake, was unable to crack the top five but for a different reason than Wilson.

“A side point to note is that most Tennessee River reservoirs, including Guntersville, have minimum length limits for bass,” Henderson said. “Sometimes that throws off the quality indicator rankings because you’re comparing Guntersville with a 15-inch minimum length limit to reservoirs where anglers can weigh in bass 12 inches.

“What that does is it decreases percent success and bass per angler per day. But the fish they do weigh in are larger and longer. It inflates the average weight and pounds per angler day. You have to keep in mind that every reservoir is a little different. Guntersville doesn’t always rank high in the overall quality indicators, but that is not necessarily a reflection on the quality of fishing.”

In the percent success category, Harris was first, followed by Lake Mitchell on the Coosa River, Logan Martin, Weiss and Lake Martin on the Tallapoosa.

In the bass per angler per day (10 hours of fishing) category, Logan Martin was best, followed by Martin, Weiss, Mitchell and Harris.

In the average bass weight, Guntersville came out on top, followed by Eufaula, Pickwick, Lake Jordan on the Coosa River and Weiss.

In the pounds per angler per day, Logan Martin prevailed, followed by Weiss, Pickwick, Martin and Eufaula.

In the hours to catch a 5-pound bass category, Eufaula was the leader, followed by West Point Lake on the Chattahoochee, Harris, Pickwick and Guntersville.

“The biggest takeaway here is we need people re-engaged in the BAIT Program,” Henderson said. “This data shows that if you just want to catch a lot of fish, Harris,

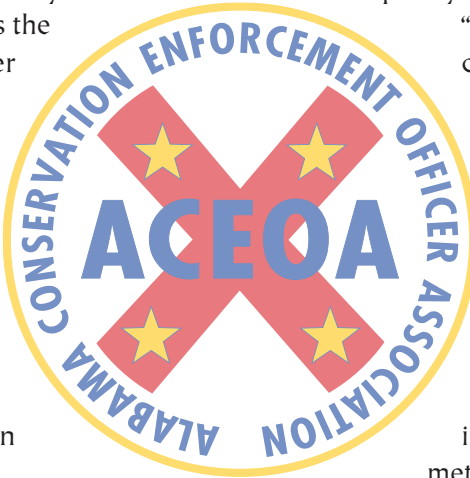
Mitchell and Logan Martin offer the best opportunities. If you want to catch larger and bigger fish, the traditional favorites are Eufaula, Guntersville, Pickwick and Logan Martin. If you’re trying to catch bass over 5 pounds, Guntersville, Pickwick, Eufaula and Harris rank highly. That is what we expect to see, so we know we’re getting some meaningful information through the reports.”

WFF has been administering the BAIT Program since 1986. Fisheries biologists compare the data from the reservoirs over time to provide a baseline for the historical quality of bass fishing.

“We can develop immediate trends by comparing the data to the previous year’s, and we can compare it to historical data,” Henderson said. “The quality indicators for 2020 decreased slightly from 2019 with the exception of percent success. That’s what we expected, because 2019 had so many more tournaments. We had so many more reports from the spring of 2019. For 2020, we don’t have that information. Even with that decrease, our metrics were still above our historical average except for the time to catch a 5-pound bass.

“Even with COVID, our 2020 numbers were still very close to 2019. I’m very pleased with the information we were able to obtain. Fishing in Alabama’s reservoirs is still great.”

Visit www.outdooralabama.com/tournaments to view upcoming tournaments and post your tournament on the website and view other important information regarding hosting tournaments in Alabama. Visit www.outdooralabama.com/BAIT for more information on how to become a BAIT member and to submit tournament results and to view the BAIT interactive map for the most recent information.



Officers Make Case with Help of K-9 Luke

On January 13th at approximately 9:00 AM Sgt. Bassett, the Game Warden for St. Clair County, received a call from a local landowner about individuals possibly hunting without permission on his land on Cook Springs Rd. Sgt. Bassett arrived on the scene and found a Ford Ranger pickup truck pulled into a closed gated entrance to the property. The truck also had a note on the windshield stating, “Out of Gas.” After observing the scene and noticing certain items through the vehicle window, it was concluded that the subjects were possibly hunting on the property. Sgt.

Bassett notified K9 Officer Ben Kiser who came to the scene to assist in locating the individuals. Officer Kiser arrived on the scene and placed K9 Luke near the suspect vehicle and K9 Luke immediately picked up the individual’s track which traveled across the road and away from the vehicle. K9 Luke located a recent cigarette butt approximately 25 yards from the truck which matched the same brand inside the vehicle. K9 Luke

led officers through the private property passing a shooting house where visible suspect tracks were observed and photographed for evidence documentation. This later became useful in determining the outcome of the case. K9 Luke continued successfully tracking for a total of 5 miles through dense undergrowth and mountainous terrain before returning to the suspect vehicle part of the scene. When returning to the suspect vehicle Sgt. Bassett and Officer Kiser observed two white males walking down Cook Springs Road. The subjects appeared to be exhausted, one was wearing no socks or shoes but both were wearing “Hunting” type clothing. The two subjects

walked back to their truck as Officers contacted them. The two suspects were read their Miranda Rights and began to talk to Officers about the incident. The suspects did not have any firearms for hunting; however, Sgt. Bassett knew that something was not right with the situation, so officers began to work the case. The two suspects stated that they had run out of gas and were walking to get help. Officer Kiser once again placed a tired K9 Luke on the edge of the roadway to reverse track their path. He then advised Sgt. Bassett to compare the photographs of



K9 Luke on track.

the track from earlier with the boots worn by one of the suspects. Approximately half a mile into K9 Luke’s second track, Kiser received a call from Sgt. Bassett for the search to be canceled because the suspects had admitted to illegally hunting on the property. Sgt. Bassett and Officer Kiser obtained a full confession of where the suspects had traveled on their property, which matched up perfectly with where K9 Luke had tracked. The location where the individuals had hidden their firearms in the ditch under a tree stump, as well as additional clothing and a black box containing a glass pipe used for metham-

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OFFICERS MAKE CASE WITH HELP OF K-9 LUKE – *continued*



Evidence - Rifles.



Evidence - paraphernalia.

Landowner permission, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia, and Hunting without a Resident Hunting License. The case is pending prosecution and the subject's identity is being withheld until adjudication with court proceedings.

This is another example of the Department of Conservation's Tracking K9's ability to assist officers in tracking individuals to better affect the outcome of any incident. WFF K9 teams are utilized in many situations to track not only suspects but injured hunters or lost victims who require assistance. This greatly reduces the time needed to locate them and get them much-needed assistance.

phetamine as stated by the suspects, were found. The two subjects were arrested and charged with Hunting without

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The graphic features a circular design on a topographic map background. The words "ALABAMA STATE PARKS" are arched across the top, and "YOUR DESTINATION" is arched across the bottom. Inside the circle, there is a yellow location pin with "AL" inside, a blue RV icon, a green mountain range icon, and a green campfire icon. The word "Staycation" is written in a large, green, cursive font across the center. Below the graphic, the text reads: "TO LEARN MORE AND TO BOOK YOUR RESERVATIONS VISIT ALAPARK.COM". To the right of this text is the Alabama State Parks logo, which includes a green mountain range, a yellow sun, and the text "Alabama STATE PARKS" with wavy lines below.



Autauga Youth Turkey Hunt

By Sgt. Jason McHenry

The United Special Sportsman Alliance is composed of a 100% volunteer staff from all walks of life, bonded together by a common love for their fellow man and their deep respect and appreciation of the world's natural resources. Through their efforts, they hope to enhance the image of the sportsman in the public eye and build lifelong friendships.

For over 10 years, the Mulberry Creek Hunting Club and United Special Sportsman Alliance have been taking critically ill and disabled youth on a free outdoor adventure of their dreams during Alabama Youth Turkey Season.

The goal of the hunt is to allow families to pause the stressful world of hospitals and high medical bills and let them ease into a world of peace among the woods and water, and hopefully, provide an opportunity to bag a big gobbler!

This year the ACEOA partnered with Mulberry Creek Hunting Club and the USSA to help provide the opportunity for one family to focus on the quality of life, family ties, and the wonders of our nature.

After a five-hour drive from Georgia, 13-year-old Jerimiah, 11-year-old Joshua, and their mother Jessica

arrived at the Mulberry Creek Hunting Club's camp house in Jones, AL. in Autauga County on the evening of April 18, 2022.

In preparation for the next morning's hunt, the boys were taken to the club's gun range to fire their shotguns while the camp chef prepared the family a steak dinner. After some range time and a good meal, the boys hit the hay to get some sleep before their first-ever turkey hunt.

When morning came, the boys, with their hunting guides, hit the woods just before daylight. The plan was to slip into a couple of hunting blinds on sites previously set up and scouted by the Mulberry Creek Hunting Club members.

During Joshua's hunt, he watched two jakes beat up on an old Tom and saw some hens feeding. Joshua passed on shooting one of the jakes hoping the bigger gobbler would come into shotgun range, but as with most turkey hunting adventures, the old gobbler wouldn't cooperate. Although Joshua didn't bag a bird, he was ecstatic to witness turkeys interacting in their natural environment.

Jerimiah also had a hunt of a lifetime that morning.

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AUTAUGA YOUTH TURKEY HUNT – *continued*



While watching some hens feed in the field he was hunting, he and his guide almost missed seeing a gobbler traveling with them just inside the tree line. Jerimiah's guide began calling and was able to get the Tom's attention. He added a gobbler call into the mix and the Tom began running right at the blind they were sitting in! Jerimiah clicked the safety of on his shotgun and made a perfect shot on the gobbler while he was in full stride. As Jerimiah

stepped out of the blind to retrieve his bird, he said, "My hands were cold, but I was very excited!"

As it turns out, Jerimiah had a lot to be excited about as his trophy was a double-bearded gobbler that weighed 23 pounds and had 1-1/4 and 1-3/16 inch spurs.

Following the whole experience, Jessica stated, "It was nice to see everyone so happy; watching the kid's target practice and make new friends. Everyone was beyond accommodating."



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Bannon Expects Return to 'Normal' Recreational Snapper Season

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Alabama's 2022 red snapper season for private recreational anglers will follow the same schedule as the 2021 season, but Scott Bannon, Director of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Marine Resources Division (MRD), would be surprised if the 2022 season closes in similar fashion.

is projected to be met. Right now, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Fisheries has not released the quotas for 2022.

"We anticipate our quota for this year will be similar to last year's, which was 1.12 million pounds," Bannon said. "If the fishing effort is 'normal,' and the weather is favorable, we'll fish probably 30 to 40 days, depending on the effort. We encourage people that if the weather is bad, don't go. Wait until the weather is better."

While this year's season is projected to last around 40 days, the 2021 season was open for 124 days due to several factors.

"Early in the peak season (middle of the summer), fishing conditions were problematic for a lot of people due to tropical weather, especially the smaller boats, so the effort was not what we expected early in the year," Bannon said. "Then as you get later in the year, people are drawn into other activities. School is in session. Your kids are participating in school sports. Hunting season becomes a priority for many people later in the year. So as long as we have quota, we will remain open. It just worked out last year that we closed the last Monday of the year in December."

Despite higher fuel prices, Bannon thinks if the weather is good in the upper Gulf of Mexico, red snapper anglers will be on the water.

"If the weather is perfect and the effort is high, I think

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The Alabama red snapper season for private recreational anglers opens May 27, the Friday before Memorial Day. Photo by David Rainer.

The 2022 season opens the Friday (May 27) before Memorial Day and runs each extended weekend from Friday through Monday until Alabama's annual quota



BANNON EXPECTS RETURN TO 'NORMAL' RECREATIONAL SNAPPER SEASON – *continued*

it could be like 2020,” he said. “When COVID-19 first hit and only outdoors activities were considered safe and healthy, a tremendous number of people went fishing because they couldn’t do anything else.”

The 2020 season lasted 44 days, and the 2019 season was open 35 days with similar quotas.

“Once we get through the peak summertime effort, it really levels off,” Bannon said. “It has spiked early and flattened out for the past several years.”

Anyone interested in the 2021 Snapper Check numbers can visit www.outdooralabama.com/mrd-fisheries-section/red-snapper-faqs for details.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) recently completed its first meeting of 2022, and the results were mixed, according to Bannon.

The SSC voted to change the red snapper overfishing limit from 25 million pounds to 18.9 million pounds. However, the allowable biological catch (ABC) was increased from 15.1 million pounds to 16.3 million pounds.

“Those recommendations will be presented to the Gulf Council,” Bannon said. “The Gulf Council will set the annual catch limit (ACL), which can be up to the ABC, or it can be lower. They’ll probably have discussions about it at the April (4-7) meeting in Gulf Shores (The Lodge at Gulf State Park).”

Alabama’s federally permitted charter (for-hire) fleet operates under the federal regulations and not the state-managed system that governs anglers fishing from state-licensed-only charter vessels and private recreational vessels. NOAA Fisheries has not set the federal for-hire season, but Bannon expects a June 1 opening with a season length of 62 or 63 days. The charter season is open seven days a week until it closes.

“The federally permitted charter boats are moving to an electronic reporting system, similar to Snapper Check,” Bannon said. “They have to report their catch for every species electronically after every trip. That’s going to really fine-tune the data for the federal for-hire boats, and it gives them, potentially, the opportunity to add more days to the season or additional days later in the year if they don’t reach their quota.”

The charter fleet was afforded two extra weeks of fishing last fall because NOAA estimated the fleet didn’t reach its quota during the summer season.

“NOAA Fisheries will receive charter boat reports daily,” Bannon said. “Before, they didn’t know how many were caught until well after the season was over. Now they’re going to get real-time data from the for-hires. I think it’s going to have a lot of benefits for the charter fishing fleet. It also works the other way. If the season is going really well, it can ensure that snapper are not overfished. Typically, with the season length the for-hires have, that has not been a problem, but it will help ensure they’re not overfished.”

“In Alabama, we work very hard to make sure our private recreational anglers and state charter boats don’t overfish the quota by using Snapper Check. And remember that amberjack and gray triggerfish are also required to be reported when landed in Alabama no matter where they were caught.”

Anglers landing red snapper in Alabama with private boats are required by law to complete one landing report per vessel trip of their harvested red snapper through Snapper Check before the fish are removed from the boat or the boat with the fish is removed from the water. Reporting of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish also

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BANNON EXPECTS RETURN TO 'NORMAL' RECREATIONAL SNAPPER SEASON – *continued*

is mandatory. Owners/operators of federally permitted charter vessels are required to possess an Alabama Gulf Reef Fish Endorsement, but they no longer need to report in Snapper Check due to the implementation of the federal electronic reporting system.

The easiest way to comply with the reporting requirement is through the Snapper Check app found on the Outdoor AL app. The app is available from Apple and Android stores. Reports can also be submitted online at www.outdooralabama.com. Paper reports and drop boxes are no longer available.

The U.S. Congress passed legislation called the DESCEND Act that goes into effect this year. The act requires all vessels that are fishing for reef fish to have a venting tool or descending tool on board and ready to use when fishing. The venting tool is used to release gases from the fish's swim bladder to allow it to return to the reef naturally. The descending device is used by attaching the fish to the device, which slowly lowers the fish to a certain depth before releasing it. The goal is to reduce the effects of barotrauma and increase the survival rate of discarded fish.

In conjunction with the DESCEND Act, the "Return 'Em Right" program is a new effort that aims to improve survival of released reef fish by providing anglers with both the knowledge and tools to help return fish to the reef habitat. Visit returnemright.org for more information on how to receive reef fish release gear (\$100 value) for free.

Anglers, both private and for-hire, have been concerned about the amount of discarded reef fish that are being eaten by sharks and bottlenose dolphins. Bannon said the only solution is to reduce the number of discards.

"I encourage people who encounter sharks and dolphins to avoid high-grading and culling," he said. "Keep those fish that are of legal size. There is no way to prevent

that from happening unless you minimize the number of discarded fish. Remember, the quota is based on millions of pounds of fish, not millions of fish."

For private recreational anglers, weekends are defined as 12:01 a.m. Friday through 11:59 p.m. Monday. The daily bag limit remains at two red snapper per person per day with a minimum size limit of 16 inches total length.

Anglers over the age of 16 must have a valid Alabama saltwater fishing license. Any Alabama resident 65 or older or a lifetime saltwater license holder must have a current saltwater angler registration. The saltwater angler registration is free and available at www.outdooralabama.com/saltwater-fishing/saltwater-angler-registration.

Also, all anglers 16 years of age and older who possess red snapper or other gulf reef fish are required to have an Alabama Gulf Reef Fish Endorsement, available at www.outdooralabama.com/saltwater-fishing/saltwater-reef-fish-endorsement.

"The reef fish endorsement is required when possessing any reef fish, including gray, or mangrove, snapper," Bannon said. "They are often caught in inside waters like Mobile Bay and Perdido Pass, and if you're going to keep them, you have to have a reef fish endorsement."

Bannon isn't quite sure how inflation is going to impact the red snapper season, but it will likely affect all aspects of the fishing trip.

"We don't know if the increase in fuel cost will reduce the effort," he said. "We understand that people will still go, but because of the extraordinarily high fuel prices it may affect the effort. And for the private angler, it will affect bait and everything associated with it."

"But I still believe, with our latest reef-building efforts, that we will have a good snapper season in Alabama this year."



Law Enforcement K9 Officer Flash

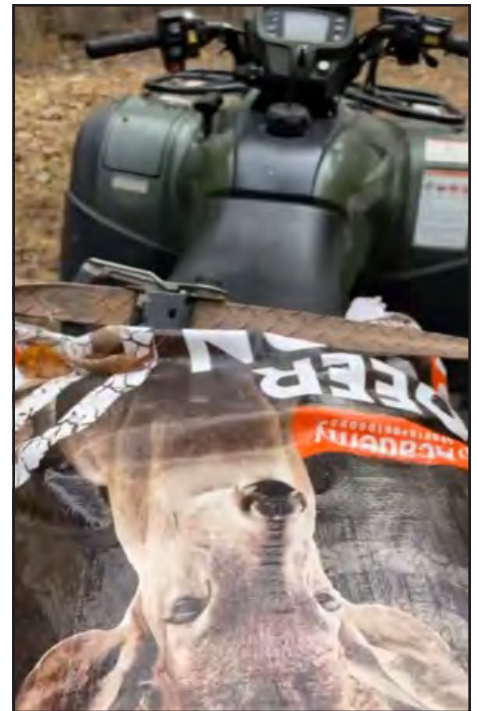
While working a hunting-without-permission complaint on the morning of Sunday, November 21, 2021, Lt. Kerry Bradford discovered an unattended All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) behind a storage building at the Old Zamora Temple in Irondale, AL. Upon inspection, Lt. Bradford discovered a bag of deer corn strapped down on the back rack of the ATV and fresh boot tracks on the logging road leading into the woods. Having probable cause to believe a hunter was in the woods unlawfully, Lt. Bradford contacted Officer Haris Inam and Officer Makemson with K9 Officer Flash for assistance. Officer Inam and Lt. Bradford secured and monitored the area until Officer Makemson arrived, responding from two counties away.

Once on the scene, Officer Makemson and Flash began their track. Officer Makemson worked Flash into the area where the ATV was parked. Flash began cold trailing and worked his way down the logging road. After cold tracking approximately 375 yards into the woods, Flash

and Officer Makemson located a cellular game camera, a pile of corn, and a climbing tree stand on Irondale city property. After searching the area, no hunter was located. However, the aforementioned evidence found by Flash and Officer Makemson led to the later arrest and conviction of the poacher who had hunted unlawfully and placed his equipment on Irondale property without the landowner's permission.

While continuing to search the area for the illegal hunter, Flash and Officer Makemson discovered a pickup truck parked in the woods close by on the adjoining property. Officer Inam and Lt. Bradford surveilled the truck while Flash and Officer Makemson began another track. Flash indicated immediately and remained on track for approximately 150 yards into the woods which ended at the base of the tree that the bowhunter had climbed. Officer Makemson announced himself as a State Game Warden and ordered the bowhunter to climb down as

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LAW ENFORCEMENT K9 OFFICER FLASH – *continued*



safely as possible. After a brief field interview, the bow-hunter was cited and released.

At the request for assistance, Officer Makemson and K9 Officer Flash traveled over two counties to assist in locating and apprehending two illegal hunters. During their tracks, Officer Makemson and Flash covered approximately four miles and located two poachers resulting in three (3) arrests that would have been impossible to make

without K9 support. Officer Makemson demonstrated a strong work ethic, a can-do attitude, and an eagerness to serve when assistance was requested from his fellow Officers. It is this Supervisor's opinion that the K9 unit is a valuable asset to our department, and Officers like Brett Makemson who are willing to serve as K9 handlers should be commended for going above and beyond the call of duty.



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Tuscaloosa Wants in on Bass Tournament Bonanza

By David Rainer, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Alabama is known for some of the best bass fishing in the world. Our state is blessed with an abundance of rivers, reservoirs and waterways teeming with numerous black bass species, which means bass fishing tournaments abound throughout the state. Except for one location – Tuscaloosa.

Stan Adams, Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports' Executive Director of Sports, and Adam Hollingsworth, president

of the University of Alabama (UA) Bass Fishing Team, want to do something about that, and it all starts with awareness.

"If you Google Tuscaloosa and fishing, what pops up is Chuck's Fish, a restaurant here," Adams said. "What we are doing is trying to find something that will have an economic impact on the area. We've got this river; how do we use this?"

Adams contacted Dr. Hobson Bryan at UA and Bob Hale at L&L Marine in Northport, and they told him Tuscaloosa County was missing out on millions in the economic impact that bass tournaments can produce.

"We're missing out on between \$1.3 million and \$3.5 million by not being able to have fishing tournaments on that river," Adams said. "We knew this was huge. My boss and I went to the Bassmaster Classic in Birmingham right before the COVID shut down and talked to Kay Donaldson with the Alabama Bass Trail."

Donaldson, who runs the hugely successful Alabama Bass Trail (ABT), was asked how to get an ABT event in Tuscaloosa to fish the Black Warrior.

"You guys are going to have to start having more tournaments," Adams said of Donaldson's response. "Show us you can do it, and we'll start talking about adding you to the trail."

Adams said residents around Lake Tuscaloosa, a lake formed by damming the North River, are not interested in expanded bass fishing, which means the focus will be on sparsely populated Holt Reservoir and Bankhead Lake on the Black Warrior.

"It's really a gold mine down here on the river," he said. "We're just trying to figure out how to

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Adam Hollingsworth of the University of Alabama fishing team shows off a nice spotted bass landed at Holt Reservoir near Tuscaloosa. Photo by David Rainer.



TUSCALOOSA WANTS IN ON BASS TOURNAMENT BONANZA – *continued*

market it. The more we market it, the more interest there is. That creates demand, and, politically, they're going to have to build infrastructure because of the demand."

Adams said he is talking to the City of Northport about building a boat ramp capable of handling larger tournaments.

"They have an area at Bankhead Dam where we want them to build a boat ramp that is six or eight lanes wide to accommodate a lot of boats and add parking," he said. "I know the state of Alabama is all about fishing, and this is one of the untapped areas.

"Right now, everything is about Alabama football, and we appreciate that. But that's just seven weekends a year. Fishing is our next focus. It can be a Monday through Friday deal, not just weekends. And we know fishermen come in days before the actual tournament, which has a real economic impact."

Hollingsworth said Adams reached out for some advice on how to boost the Tuscaloosa area's reputation for bass fishing. Holt Reservoir is a 3,296-acre impoundment in the picturesque Appalachian Highlands. Up river, Bankhead Lake is 9,200 acres and flows through Walker, Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties.

"I told them I would absolutely help because I've fished these rivers and lakes all my life," Hollingsworth said. "It's a very versatile place. You can be throwing a swim jig in one place or be throwing a Shaky Head or jig against a wall in another place. You're not limited. Holt has stained water with about 2- to- 4-foot visibility. If you go up to the dam (Bankhead), you get cooler water but with current. Going south, it's warmer and it cleans up a little too. I enjoy fishing Holt because there's a bigger population of fish, bigger fish as well."

While Hollingsworth is more than willing to help with the marketing, his role is actually fishing as a member of the UA team. Hollingsworth is considerably older than his UA fishing teammates. The 34-year-old former policeman, Army veteran and current member of the Army National Guard decided to go to UA to get his degree in criminal justice to further his career in law enforcement. He's graduating this week with almost a 4.0 average and plans to enter graduate school.

Before Hollingsworth became president of the UA bass fishing team, he helped get uniforms and graphics for the anglers' boats, and he started adding sponsors to fund the expenses.

"Being this old in college is kind of weird," he said. "I just try to be a role model for the other members of a team."

Hollingsworth said he's been hooked on fishing since he was limited to a cane pole and a bucket of minnows.

"I had a crappie rig and put a minnow on it and threw it out," he said. "A big ol' largemouth ate it. There were some people fishing right up from us, and their mouths dropped.

"That's what really sparked my love for it. I kind of got away from it when I was in the military. When I got back here in 2012, I started fishing again. I got with my buddy Dwayne Allen, and he showed me pretty much everything. I learned how to fish a swim jig from him."

Although Hollingsworth has a few plastic worms in his tackle box, they rarely see the daylight. Fishing slow is not his game.

"I like to fish fast," he said. "I'll get out a Shaky Head if that's the last thing I can think of to catch a fish. Most

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TUSCALOOSA WANTS IN ON BASS TOURNAMENT BONANZA – *continued*

of the time, I'm going to have a swim jig or a jerkbait in my hands. If it's early in the morning, I'll walk a Spook and throw a buzzbait. I like to move fast and cover a lot of water. In the summer, I will throw a crankbait."

The UA fishing team competes in the Strike King-Bassmasters College Series, the Abu Garcia College Series, the ACA (Association of Collegiate Anglers) Bass Pro Shop Series and the Southern Collegiate Series, which will hold its state championship at Lake Eufaula later this month.

"I went to Eufaula for the first time two years ago," Hollingsworth said. "That was the first time I'd seen gators on the water. I saw gators almost as long as the boat I was in. I thought, 'Oh, my gracious.' And I wasn't far from Lakepoint State Park."

After Eufaula, Hollingsworth and his fishing partner,

Travis Pattillo, will be headed to Michigan to fish in Lake Huron's Saginaw Bay.

"That's going to be a trip," Hollingsworth said. "We're going to have three teams there. I've never been there. Travis has never been there. What I've heard is it's a Disneyland of smallmouths. We were just warned about the waves. I'll have to learn how to drift fish."

While he's fishing in the South, Hollingsworth loves to fish for bedding bass.

"It's a game, and I like that challenge," he said. "It's a competitive thing between me and the fish. I'll lock onto a fish for an hour, especially if I see it getting madder and madder. When they flare their gills or turn sideways, you know it's on."



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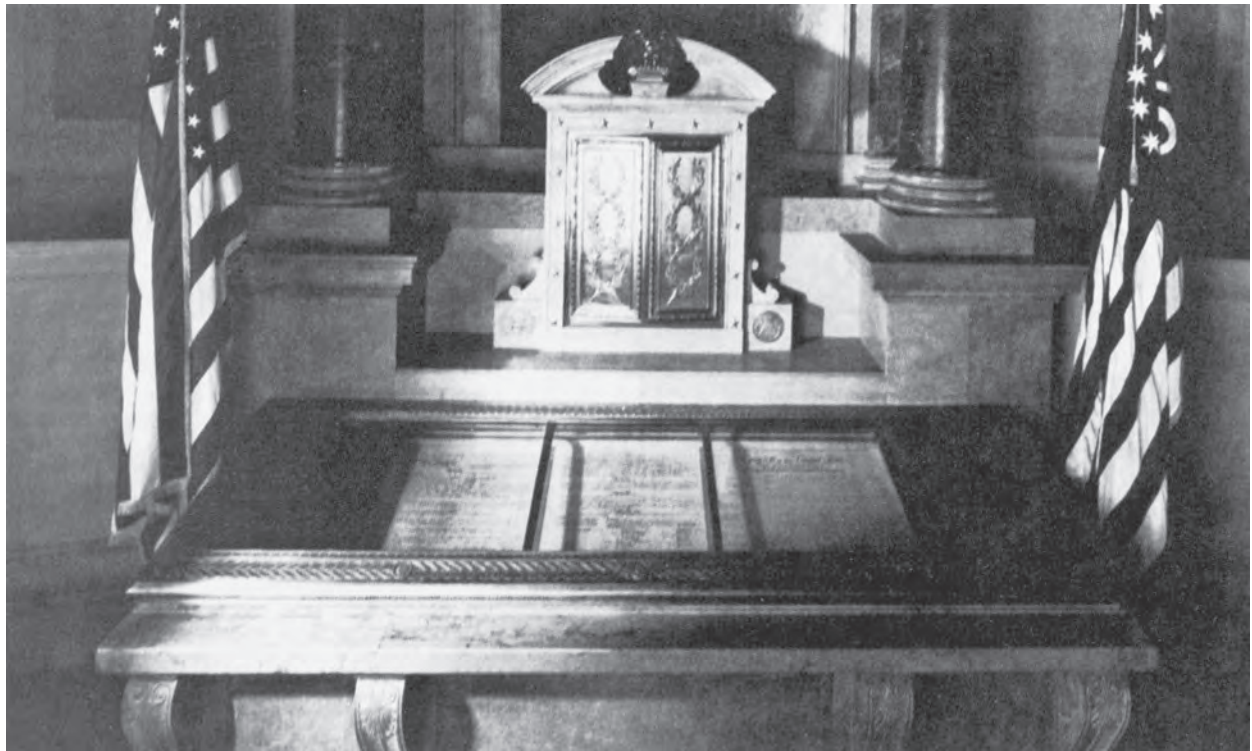
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