

2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT



**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT
OF CONSERVATION AND
NATURAL RESOURCES**



PHOTO: JORDAN WHITIS



**The Honorable Kay Ivey
Governor of Alabama
State Capitol
Montgomery, AL 36130**

Dear Governor Ivey:

I am pleased to submit the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (ADCNR) Annual Report for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2025.

Our State Parks Division experienced another great year as it welcomed more than 5.2 million guests and continued the implementation of numerous system-wide improvement projects. From increasing its educational efforts through a growing naturalist program to expanding its overnight accommodation offerings with new and renovated campgrounds throughout the parks system, Alabama State Parks is experiencing an unprecedented period of modernization and growth. One of the most anticipated projects in the works is the new 32-room lodge at Cheaha State Park. With its innovative design and modern amenities, we anticipate it will become a must-visit destination for outdoor enthusiasts from across the country when it opens in 2026. Another highly anticipated project currently in progress is the complete renovation of Lake Lurleen State Park near Tuscaloosa. We are equally as excited to reopen Lake Lurleen in 2026 as we are to cut the ribbon on the new lodge at Cheaha.

Improving access to outdoor recreation continued to be a priority of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division in FY 2024-2025, especially when it came to boating and fishing. More than 130 repairs or improvement projects were completed at boating access areas statewide, including major renovations to the following facilities: Mount Vernon, McIntosh Bluff, Chocolatta Bay, McCarty's Ferry, Claiborne, Riverview, Brown's Creek, Cotaco Creek, Triana, McFarland Park, and Foster's Ferry. In addition to expanding access to Alabama's abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, WFF was pleased to announce its Law Enforcement Section became the second state agency law enforcement section in the country to achieve national accreditation from the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation Program. Their efforts to achieve this well-deserved honor are highlighted in the feature article on page 72 of this report.

ADCNR's Marine Resources Division (MRD) was once again very busy managing the abundant fisheries along our Gulf Coast. Important species like red snapper, gray triggerfish, flounder, and oysters were monitored closely to balance the need to conserve these resources with our duty to provide access for commercial and recreational fishermen. Recent NOAA Fisheries research suggests that federal fishing effort estimates can be overestimated by as much as 40%, which can negatively impact state fisheries management decisions. In FY 2024-2025, MRD conducted a pilot study called AL Creel to collect essential data on recreational saltwater fishing activities for use in state fisheries management. AL Creel is scheduled for federal review in 2026 and has the potential to replace the federal fishing survey, enabling MRD fishery managers to generate more accurate recreational fishing estimates. If approved, AL Creel will benefit Alabama's marine fisheries as well as our saltwater anglers for decades.

ADCNR's State Lands Division (SLD) has a broad range of responsibilities and oversees a wide variety of projects. One of its major responsibilities in recent years is to provide administrative support for the disbursement of GOMESA program funds. This fiscal year, SLD administered more than \$45 million in GOMESA grants for 24 projects across coastal Alabama. These projects were focused on water quality improvements, sewer infrastructure, land acquisitions, and outdoor recreation access improvements. SLD also oversees the state's Forever Wild Land Trust program, which includes nearly 300,000 acres of public land available for outdoor recreation. Alabama's popular Forever Wild program provides thousands of Alabamians and visitors to our great state with quality access to hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, paddling, birding, and hunting. Additional annual SLD projects include a variety of public outreach events, such as camping and fishing weekends, youth hunting opportunities, sporting dog events, and many more.

These are just a few of the updates you will find in this report. Thank you for your support and leadership to our agency and the State of Alabama.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher M. Blankenship". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

**Christopher M. Blankenship
Commissioner**

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DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW



The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is an executive and administrative department of the State of Alabama created by statute. The Commissioner, appointed by the Governor as a member of her cabinet, advises the Governor and Legislature on management of freshwater fish, wildlife, marine resources, state lands, Alabama State Parks, and other natural resources.

Scope of Operations

The Department's scope of operations includes the administration, management and maintenance of 21 state parks, 23 public fishing lakes, three freshwater fish hatcheries, one aquatic biodiversity center, 162 public boat ramps, 35 wildlife management areas, seven special opportunity areas, 12 shooting ranges, 21 archery parks, a saltwater mariculture center, and 645,000 acres of trust lands managed for the benefit of several state agencies and the state's General Fund and the Alabama Trust Fund. Other departmental functions include maintenance of a State Land Resource Information Center and administration of the Forever Wild Land Trust program and management of approximately 300,000 acres of Forever Wild land. Additionally, through its Deepwater Horizon Restoration Section, the Department has overseen more than \$1 billion in projects through FY 2024-2025.

Organization

During Fiscal Year 2024-2025, the Department had four operational divisions and eight support sections. The operational divisions were Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Support sections were Accounting, Engineering, Communications and Marketing, Information Technology, Legal, Personnel and Payroll, Property Inventory, and Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Restoration. The Commissioner was advised by a 13-member Conservation Advisory Board. Division directors managed the Department's programs under their jurisdiction through authority delegated by the Legislature and the Commissioner. Throughout the fiscal year, the Department promoted wise stewardship, management, and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources. Active public education and voluntary participation programs were expanded, and new plans were implemented to achieve maximum multiple-use benefits consistent with resource conservation.

Department Goals

The Department's major goal is to promote the statewide stewardship and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources and to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy these

resources. Funding for the Department is generated through special revenues, which include federal money, cigarette taxes, user and license fees, mandated interest from endowment and federal regulations. The Forever Wild Land Trust received interest income from the Alabama Trust Fund. Specific revenue sources for the four operational divisions are as follows:

Funding

The Department's major goal is to promote the statewide stewardship and enjoyment of Alabama's natural resources and to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy these resources. Funding for the Department is generated through special revenues, which include federal money, cigarette taxes, user and license fees, mandated interest from endowment and federal regulations. The Forever Wild Land Trust received interest income from the Alabama Trust Fund. Specific revenue sources for the four operational divisions are as follows:

Marine Resources: Saltwater fishing licenses, fines, marine gas tax, and federal grants. Marine Resources also has an endowment, but it has not grown sufficiently to enhance operations.

State Lands: Management fees from the sale of timber, minerals and various leases on state lands administered under the Lands Asset Management Program. Further, the division receives additional federal grants that support specific programs.

State Parks: User-generated funds in the form of entrance, rental, lodging, golf, and other recreational fees, and funds received during 2022-2025 from the State Parks Bond proceeds. State Parks received a modest amount of funding from cigarette tax revenue.

Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries: Fishing and hunting licenses and permits; fines; waterfowl stamps; federal allocations from excise taxes on sporting arms, ammunition, archery gear and some fishing tackle; Innovate Alabama, the State general fund and federal grants. Interest income continues to be generated by the Game and Fish endowment fund for resident lifetime hunting and fishing licenses. Direct donations and voluntary state income tax refund check-offs for the Nongame Wildlife Program continue to increase from previous fiscal years.

CONSERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

The Conservation Advisory Board, created by statute, is composed of 10 members appointed by the Governor for alternating terms of six years and three ex-officio members in the persons of the Governor, the Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries, and the Director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. The Commissioner of Conservation and Natural Resources serves as the ex-officio secretary of the Board.

The Advisory Board assists in formulating policies for the Department of Conservation, examines all rules and regulations and makes recommendations for their change or amendment. By a two-thirds vote of the members present and with the Governor’s approval, the Board can amend, make any changes, repeal or create and promulgate additional rules and regulations. The Board also assists in publicizing the Department’s programs and activities.

Meetings

- The Advisory Board met three times during FY 2024-2025:
- March 8, 2025, at the Gordon Persons Building, 50 Ripley St., in Montgomery, Alabama
 - May 10, 2025, at the Troy University Trojan Center, Lamar Higgins Ballrooms, 321 Veterans Memorial Dr., in Troy, Alabama
 - May 29, 2025, at the Richard Beard Building Auditorium, Agriculture and Industries, 1445 Federal Dr., in Montgomery, Alabama

Conservation Advisory Board Members as of Sept. 30, 2025

Members	Hometown	Term Expires
Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman	Livingston	March 28, 2027
Greg Barksdale	Hanceville	September 30, 2029
Brock Jones	Tuscaloosa	March 28, 2027
Kevin Savoy	Dothan	March 28, 2027
Grady Hartzog	Eufaula	March 28, 2027
Raymond Jones, Jr.	Huntsville	May 9, 2031
Jeff Martin	Talladega	May 9, 2031
Ben C. Stimpson, Jr.	Mobile	September 30, 2029
Charlie Gray	Dauphin Island	March 28, 2027
Tim Wood	Selma	September 30, 2029

Ex-officio Members

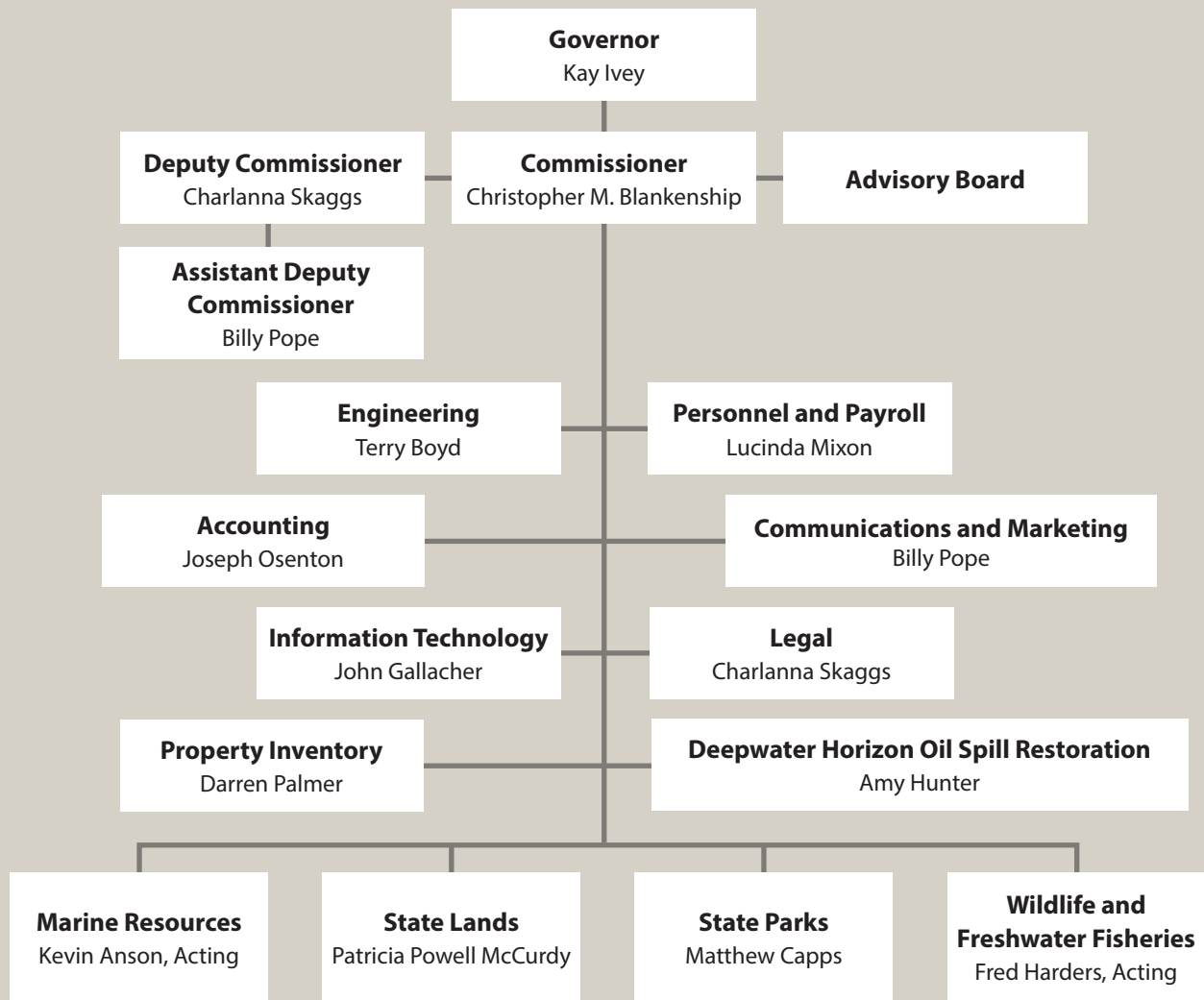
Kay Ivey, Governor, State of Alabama
Dr. J. Mike Phillips, Director, Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Rick Pate, Commissioner, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries

Ex-officio Secretary of the Board

Christopher M. Blankenship, Commissioner, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

BUDGETS 2026	ACTUAL 2025	BUDGET 2026	BUDGETED 2027
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	1,308	1,403	1,414
UNENCUMBERED CASH BALANCE FORWARD	156,971,869	146,418,507	85,106,288
Federal Funds			
0303 Marine Resources - Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission	1,125,535	1,385,000	1,150,000
0303 Marine Resources - Commerce	944,802	706,000	749,000
0303 Marine Resources - Interior	1,140,046	1,795,500	1,300,000
0304 Game & Fish - Interior	27,999,022	25,566,820	24,852,000
0304 Game & Fish - Misc	303,291	590,000	540,100
0305 Lands - Commerce	3,357,698	12,697,904	13,963,149
0305 Lands - Interior	0	525,000	525,000
1713 Restore Act	55,074,642	143,161,855	143,161,855
Total Federal Funding	89,945,036	186,428,079	186,241,104
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	0	275,500	3,721,000
Licenses and Permits	28,924,376	30,680,000	31,300,000
Land Management Fees	3,311,524	2,931,144	3,549,526
User Fees	50,571,343	58,371,333	64,503,992
Timber Sales	417,333	1,000,000	500,000
Fines	425,167	750,000	750,000
Trust Fund Interest (MR and WFF)	3,484,713	869,000	400,000
Other	15,191,293	14,645,900	12,827,894
Total Departmental Related Receipts	102,325,749	109,522,877	117,552,412
Cigarette Tax	1,675,000	3,000,000	3,000,000
Gasoline Tax	2,633,777	2,770,000	2,680,000
Use Tax Discount Cap	4,111,832	3,280,000	3,280,000
Sales Tax Discount Cap	8,240,000	8,479,000	8,733,000
General Fund (Outdoor Recreation Improvements)	9,375,000	9,200,000	0
GOMESA	40,447,620	35,000,000	35,000,000
Forever Wild Land Management	900,000	900,000	900,000
BP Oil Spill/NRDA Reimbursements	4,876,912	26,500,000	27,000,000
State Reservoir Management Fund	1,349,975	1,269,500	1,269,500
Total Other Receipts	73,610,116	90,398,500	81,862,500
Administrative Transfer	10,699,237	11,000,000	11,250,000
Actual All Receipts	276,580,138	397,349,456	396,906,016
BFY 2025-2027 Expenditures or Budgeted	287,133,500	458,661,675	469,606,774
Revenues verses Expenditures--Over(Under)	(10,553,362)	(61,312,219)	(72,700,758)
UNENCUMBERED CASH BALANCE	146,418,507	85,106,288	12,405,530
	Budgeted 2025	Requested 2026	Requested 2027
BFY 2025-2027 Expenditures/Budgeted	287,133,500	458,661,675	469,606,774
BFY 2025-2027 Federal Funding	89,945,036	186,428,079	186,241,104
BFY 2025-2027 State Funding	197,188,464	272,233,596	283,365,670

Department Organizational Chart as of September 30, 2025



FY 2024-2025 Budgets and Expenditures for Administrative Division

Section	Budgeted Amount	Actual Expenditures	Over/(Under)
Accounting	2,771,288	2,403,914	-367,374
Commissioner	942,132	811,114	-131,018
Engineering	461,630	366,793	-94,837
Communications & Marketing	1,218,217	939,614	-278,603
Information Technology	3,207,299	2,776,908	-430,391
Legal	1,409,764	1,231,538	-178,226
License	390,794	321,855	-68,939
Payroll & Personnel	1,523,169	1,470,909	-52,260
Property Inventory	260,903	233,606	-27,297
Contingency	473,784	0	-473,784
Totals	12,658,980	10,556,251	-2,102,729

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

ACCOUNTING

The Accounting Section is the central clearinghouse for all departmental financial data. Accounting maintains and records all receipts and disbursements for the Commissioner's office, the administration sections, and each of the four divisions.

Accounting is responsible for six internal functions: accounts payable, accounts receivable, budgeting, procurement, hunting and fishing license sales, and financial reporting.

Accounts Payable reviews and approves all payment transactions and transfer journal entries for the Department. More than 27,000 transactions are processed on an annual basis.

Accounts Receivable reviews and approves all cash receipts and investment transactions for the Department. More than 5,900 transactions are processed on an annual basis.

The Budgeting office prepares and submits the annual budget. It also processes budget modifications as required during the year. The Department expenses for FY 2024-2025 were approximately \$287 million.

Procurement provides purchasing assistance to each administrative section and to all divisions. This office is the liaison between ADCNR and State Purchasing.

The Hunting and Fishing License office is responsible for receiving revenues from license sales and certifying them into the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and Marine Resources funds.

Financial Reporting processes comprehensive annual financial report entries, closing entries, and reports on grants; calculates federal draws; and maintains grant budgets for the Department.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

The Communications and Marketing Section provided a variety of services for the Department, including writing news releases, publication and graphic design; editing, proofreading, and copywriting services; website development; video production; photography; email marketing; marketing analysis; and a weekly outdoors column sent to the media and published on the Department's website. Staff also coordinated special projects and events, including Outdoor Alabama hunting and fishing nights with two minor league baseball teams. Personnel included six full-time positions.

Accomplishments

- Managed the Department's email marketing and communication platform (GovDelivery) that is used to communicate with 1,576,103 subscribers distributed among 227 interest topics. Distributed communications included press releases, annual hunting and fishing license expiration reminders,

weekly outdoors articles, lapsed hunting and fishing license marketing incentives, and more. In FY 2024-2025, section email marketing and communications efforts generated \$847,945 in revenue from 19,151 license buyers.

- Developed targeted landing pages on OutdoorAlabama.com for various marketing campaigns, outreach programs, and licenses. Those landing pages generated \$832,291 in revenue from 17,574 license buyers.
- Helped coordinate the 2024-2025 annual hunting and fishing license auto-renewal campaign that generated \$2,529,876 in license revenue, which is a 9.43% increase over the previous year
- Partnered with ADCNR's State Parks Division, Alabama Tourism Department, and the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers Association (ACEOA) on the Outdoor Alabama Photo Contest. Staff coordinated a traveling exhibit of the winning photos in locations across the state, such as state parks, museums, and libraries.
- Developed and edited 145 press releases (including weekly outdoors articles) focused on departmental programs, public events, and hunting and fishing regulations
- Managed public information requests from local, regional, and national media outlets; nongovernmental and governmental agencies; and the public
- Managed the Department's official Outdoor Alabama social media platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and YouTube. Facebook continued to be the most effective social media platform to connect with our constituents. The Outdoor Alabama Facebook page has experienced steady growth over the past few years. In FY 2024-2025, the Outdoor Alabama Facebook page grew by 3,260 followers, bringing the total to 61,960. The total reach of the Outdoor Alabama Facebook page for the fiscal year was 5.8 million users. Follows are up 53.4% to 4,000. Content interactions for Facebook were up 199% at 67,200. Outdoor Alabama's other social media audiences included an additional 1,846 new Instagram followers for a total of 8,846; 4,670 X followers; and 8,280 YouTube subscribers. Added LinkedIn to our social media portfolio to reach professionals and college students, to add to outreach efforts to recruit new employees, and to promote the department.
- Oversaw and maintained content for two official Department websites – OutdoorAlabama.com and AlabamaForeverWild.com.

OutdoorAlabama.com
Users: 2,000,000
New Users: 1,900,000
Pageviews: 5,700,000

AlabamaForeverWild.com
Users: 77,000
New Users: 76,000
Pageviews: 191,000

- Served as the liaison with the website contractor to provide solutions for various website issues, as well as administrative and troubleshooting services for the Department
- Oversaw the planning and development of the new license sales system in conjunction with the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division's R3 Section
- Designed various promotional items, digital and printed marketing materials, various annual species reports, advertisements, maps, calendars, signage, business cards, retirement certificates, and vehicle graphics and wraps
- Shot photographs and video, both on location and in the studio, in support of Department programs and events. Section staff also maintained video and photo archives for various departmental projects and distribution to news media, outdoor writers, and print and digital publications.
- Created public surveys and produced reports through the Qualtrics survey platform in support of Departmental staff research

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Information Technology (IT) Section provides computer hardware, software, and networking services for the Department. Hardware services include setup and installation of computers and mobile devices, management of Department servers, and installation and support for printers, monitors, copiers, and scanners. Software services include web-based application development and maintenance; analysis, design, and support for the Department's E-Gov applications; support for all mainframe applications; and support and maintenance of Department websites. Networking services include support for all wired, wireless, and cellular technologies used throughout the Department. IT Section also provides support for email and cloud storage platforms through the Microsoft Office 365 Enterprise Agreement.

Facilities and Personnel

The IT staff consists of 19 employees: IT manager, programmer analysts (3), system specialists (6), system technicians (3), financial specialist (1), intern (1), contractor-filled positions (2), and retired state employees (2).

Specific IT projects for FY 2024-2025 included the following:

- Implemented new departmental DCNR IT policies and procedures
- Processed 9,250 support tickets for agency IT technical needs
- Continued public Internet Wi-Fi projects to State Parks under the bond project
- Continued deploying ADCNR Cisco WebEx Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) phone hub to facilitate the conversion of both external and internal offices to modernized cloud-calling services
- Migrated DCNR File Server to new server infrastructure, expanding overall storage capacity
- Continued to expand internet bandwidth for external office locations to facilitate cloud storage, communication and VOIP
- Completed department-wide upgrades to Windows 11
- Completed migration of all computers and workstations to Microsoft Entra
- Completed migration of all computers and workstations to Microsoft Defender for Endpoint to strengthen system security
- Played an integral role in DCNR Enforcement gaining accreditation with North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation (NAWLEA)
- Implemented numerous security enhancements to align with OIT security policies and procedures
- Redesigned, enhanced, and developed ADCNR's game breeders admin site, public websites, and supporting applications to meet current standards and technologies (in testing)
- Migrated from Global Human Resources System (GHRS) to Human Resource Management (HRM) and worked with Accounting and social business software (SBS) to implement the newly rewritten payroll voucher application that interacts with STAARS
- Redesigned, enhanced and developed ADCNR's Coastal Restoration websites (public and private) using current standards and technologies
- Rewrote the Conservation Advisory Board Access database, modernizing it as a web-based application
- Worked with WFF to test, enhance, and implement the newly rewritten ADCNR hunts admin public websites and supporting applications
- Converted Microsoft Access databases that track Parks and Participation Attendance (Parks facilities and golf rounds) to a website application
- Refactored and rewrote ADCNR's Pond Management website to enhance performance
- Worked with Tyler Tech to update and release Scientific Collection Permit and Hunter Ed application programming interfaces (APIs) to ensure web services are now using industry standards
- Updated and released Hunter Ed vendor API in beta-test with ReAcademics
- Changed Social Security Number requirement to last four digits only for Hunter Education applications to meet best security practices

- Automated the Hunter Education Instructor application and training process
- Worked with Tyler Tech and One Outdoor to streamline conversion to new license sales system
- Analyzed the current COORS/CORONA website and supporting applications to align with current standards
- Modified Game Check system to categorize Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Sampling Bonus Bucks that are reported
- Upgraded SQL server to increase performance and stability to meet best practices

LEGAL SECTION

The Legal Section provides legal counsel and advice to the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, division directors, law enforcement personnel, and other employees of the Department.

The Legal Section also performs work related to the acquisition of real estate for the Department, including procuring title evidence (title insurance, title opinion, title research), preparing deeds, issuing Attorney General Title Opinions, closing acquisitions, recording deeds, and obtaining the final title policies/opinions, tax assessments, and payment of taxes due.

The section handles ADCNR contracts and legal instruments of all types including, but not limited to, oil and gas leases, real estate leases, personal-service agreements, construction contracts, engineering contracts, easements, lease purchase agreements, State Parks concession contracts, and other documents as requested.

The section corresponds with and meets and advises members of the Governor's Office, the Alabama Legislature, and fellow state attorneys on matters of legal, legislative, or regulatory interest related to the Department.

The section drafts, reviews, and monitors legislation affecting the Department. It also drafts rules and regulations pursuant to the Alabama Administrative Procedures Act.

Litigation against the Department and its employees, as well as litigation initiated by the Department, is also managed by the Legal Section. This includes cases and appeals filed in state and federal courts, as well as those before state agencies and boards. Representation provided by the Legal Section includes all facets of conflict resolution and litigation, preparation of pleadings and briefs, and oral arguments.

PERSONNEL AND PAYROLL

The Personnel and Payroll Section provides comprehensive personnel-related services to the Commissioner's Office, Division Directors, Section Chiefs, and all employees of the Department. The Section serves as liaison to the State Personnel Department

for ADCNR's personnel actions and activities, ensuring compliance with state policies and procedures.

In addition to processing all payrolls and maintaining employee files and payroll records, the Section continues to support the advancement of ADCNR's workforce through several key initiatives, including performance management, internship opportunities, training and development, and employee relations programs.

Through these initiatives, the Personnel and Payroll Section continues to promote employee engagement, retention, and professional growth while maintaining the integrity of core personnel functions. For assistance with personnel matters, training opportunities, benefits, or payroll, contact the Personnel and Payroll Office at (334) 242-3501.

ENGINEERING SECTION

The Engineering Section assists the Department's divisions with professional planning and programming, architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, surveying, cartography, and related administrative services.

Facilities and Personnel

The Engineering Section had four employees during FY 2024-2025: one Conservation Engineering Services Chief, one part-time Conservation Construction Inspector I, and two retired state employees. The section's facilities are in Montgomery.

Accomplishments

During FY 2024-2025, the Engineering Section administered approximately \$18 million in contracts. Section programs provided the professional expertise required to reach Department goals. Those programs included outsourced and in-house design and construction, master planning, and site planning for Department facilities.

Engineering provided surveying assistance and technical advice on construction projects, boundaries, and property corners for Alabama State Parks and the delineation and location of oyster reefs, public access areas, wildlife management areas, state lakes, and other state-managed property.

PROPERTY INVENTORY

The Property Inventory Section is responsible for tracking all new assets acquired by the Department as well as the disposal of all assets once they have reached their end of service. This includes assuring that all new property is barcoded and entered into the State Inventory Database as well as tracked throughout its lifetime within the department.

The Property Inventory Section is also responsible for coordinating and implementing the Department's yearly internal inventory of property as well as the bi-annual audit by the State Auditor's office.

DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL RESTORATION

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Restoration Section (DWHRS) coordinates administrative and technical aspects of restoration in coastal Alabama associated with the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

The DWHRS participates in the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process, as ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship serves as the Lead NRDA Trustee for Alabama. Specific activities include Trustee Council meetings, participating in Trustee Implementation Groups, conducting public meetings related to NRDA activities, soliciting public input regarding potential restoration ideas, assisting with development of draft restoration plans and implementation of early restoration projects, and representing the interests of the NRDA trustees and the Governor's office.

The DWHRS assists the Commissioner related to his service as the Governor's designee to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (GCERC), established pursuant to the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act), which directs 80% of Clean Water Act civil penalties resulting from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill for restoration projects within the five Gulf states.

The DWHRS also provides administrative support to the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council (AGCRC), which was established by the federal RESTORE Act to oversee certain funds allocated directly to the State of Alabama.

In addition, the DWHRS staff assists the Commissioner and coordinates with the Governor's office in relation to efforts by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to distribute grant proceeds for coastal restoration from the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund (GEBF). This fund resulted from two plea agreements entered in early 2013 resolving the criminal cases against BP and Transocean arising from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

Significant accomplishments in FY 2025 included:

- Completed the Lower Perdido Islands Habitat Restoration - Phase II
- Completed Christopher M. Blankenship Dauphin Island Eco-Tourism and Environmental Education Area
- Completed Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge (Mobile Street Boardwalk and Parking Area)
- Completed Bayfront Park Restoration and Improvements - Phases IIa and IIb
- Continued support, as administrator, for the AGCRC implementing Alabama's Multiyear Implementation Plan (MIP) and State Expenditure Plan (SEP) as required under the RESTORE Act
- Completed construction on the Meaher State Park Improvements project that added a new large bathhouse facility, 4 cabins, and 46 full-service RV sites to the park amenities
- Initiated Amendment 1 to the Alabama Multi-Year Implementation Plan (MIP), addressing administrative updates to previously approved budgets and project scopes. This includes removing one previously approved project in Baldwin County and the addition of a new roadway improvement project in the county.
- Worked with the Federal RESTORE Council to develop Funded Priorities List 4 (FPL 4), which will allocate \$71,500,000 of Council-Selected Component funding to three Alabama projects and \$56,950,000 of Council-Selected funding to one joint Mississippi-Alabama project. The FPL4 process will be complete in fiscal year 2026.
- Continued administrative support of implementing Alabama's Center of Excellence at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab
- Administered 29 RESTORE Council-selected projects totaling \$161,105,793. Grants focused on water quality and restoration of sensitive habitats in Mobile Bay.

An overview of restoration projects benefiting the State of Alabama, organized by funding stream, is provided below. Additional project details are available at www.outdooralabama.com/alabama-coastal-restoration-program/alabama-coastal-restoration-about-us.

NRDA Early Restoration Projects

- Marsh Island Restoration Project (Portersville Bay) - \$11,280,000
- Dune Restoration Cooperative Project (Gulf Shores and Orange Beach) - \$737,202 (complete)
- Improving Habitat Injured by Spill Response: Restoring the Night Sky - \$345,051
- Gulf State Park Enhancement Project - \$29,221,693 (complete)
- Alabama Oyster Cultch Restoration - \$3,239,485 (complete)
- Alabama Swift Tract Living Shoreline Project - \$5,000,080
- Point aux Pins Living Shoreline Project - \$3,800,000
- Osprey Restoration in Coastal Alabama Project - \$57,251 (complete)

NRDA Restoration Plan I Projects

- Fort Morgan Pier Rehabilitation Project - \$3,256,993 (complete)
- Laguna Cove Little Lagoon Natural Resource Protection Project - \$6,400,000

- Bayfront Park Restoration and Improvements Project Engineering and Design - \$927,916 (complete)
- Dauphin Island Eco-tourism and Environmental Education Area - \$2,238,613 (complete)
- Mid-Island Parks and Public Beach Improvements Project - \$1,210,200
- Gulf State Park Lodge and Associated Public Access Amenities - \$56,283,612 (complete)

NRDA Restoration Plan II Projects

- Magnolia River Land Acquisition (Holmes Tract) - \$5,138,162 (complete)
- Weeks Bay Land Acquisition (East Gateway Tract) - \$3,252,192 (complete)
- Weeks Bay Land Acquisition (Lloyd Tract) - \$3,606,900 (complete)
- Lower Perdido Islands Restoration - Phase I - \$10,446,523 total for Phases I and II (complete)
- Southwestern Coffee Island Habitat Restoration Project - Phase I - \$1,650,450
- Restoring the Night Sky - Assessment, Training, and Outreach - \$486,639
- Toulmins Spring Branch Engineering and Design - \$479,090
- Fowl River Nutrient Reduction - \$1,000,000
- Weeks Bay Nutrient Reduction - \$2,000,000
- Coastal Alabama Sea Turtle (CAST) Conservation Program - \$935,061
- CAST Triage - \$1,521,935
- CAST Habitat Usage and Population Dynamics - \$1,631,696
- CAST Protection: Enhancement and Education - \$906,874
- Enhancing Capacity for the Alabama Marine Mammal Stranding Network - \$4,313,626
- Alabama Estuarine Bottlenose Dolphin Protection: Enhancement and Education - \$686,374
- Assessment of Alabama Estuarine Bottlenose Dolphin Populations and Health - \$3,245,129
- Colonial Nesting Wading Bird Tracking and Habitat Use Assessment - \$1,547,500
- Oyster Cultch Relief and Reef Configuration - \$480,262
- Side-scan Mapping of Mobile Bay Relic Oyster Reefs - \$104,229 (complete)
- Oyster Grow Out Restoration Reef Placement - \$2,332,197
- Little Lagoon Living Shoreline Project - \$260,999

NRDA Restoration Plan III Projects

- Bayfront Park Restoration and Improvement - Phases IIa and IIb - \$10,767,385
- Gulf State Park Pier Renovation - \$3,955,606 (complete)
- Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge Enhancement (Mobile Street Boardwalk) - \$3,227,212 (complete)
- Stewardship of Coastal Alabama Beach Nesting Bird Habitat - \$2,067,381
- Dauphin Island West End Acquisition - \$7,938,770 (complete)

NRDA Restoration Plan IV Projects

- Lower Perdido Islands Habitat Restoration - Phase II - \$10,446,523 total for Phases I and II (complete)
- Puppy Creek-Juniper Creek-Big Creek Watersheds Nutrient Reduction - \$1,520,000
- Stewardship of Coastal Alabama Beach Nesting Bird Habitat - \$4,740,456
- Improving Resilience for Oysters by Linking Brood Reefs and Sink Reefs - Mid-Lower Mobile Bay - \$2,800,000
- Oyster Grow-Out and Restoration Reef Replacement – 5-year Continuation - \$1,369,827
- Bayfront Park Restoration and Improvement - Phases IIa and IIb - \$2,200,000 additional funding
- Laguna Cove Little Lagoon Natural Resource Protection - Public Access Amenities - \$2,000,000 additional funding

NRDA Regionwide Trustee Implementation Group Restoration Plan I Projects

- Restore and Enhance Sea Turtle Nest Productivity - \$7,655,000 (\$1,000,000 allocated to Alabama)
- Regionwide Enhancements to the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network and Enhanced Rehabilitation - \$7,550,000 (\$500,000 allocated to Alabama)
- Regionwide Bird Nesting and Foraging Area Stewardship - \$8,510,750 (\$800,000 allocated to Alabama)
- Reducing Marine Debris Impacts to Birds and Sea Turtles - \$7,040,000 (\$1,402,000 allocated to Alabama)
- Conservation and Enhancement of Nesting and Foraging Habitat for Birds - \$24,000,000 (\$5,630,000 allocated to Alabama for Pilot Town Acquisition and Restoration)
- Improving Resilience for Oysters by linking Brood Reefs and Sink Reefs - \$35,819,974 (\$7,123,994 allocated to Alabama)

NFWF-GEBCF Projects

- Restoration and Enhancement of Oyster Reefs - \$3,750,000 (complete)



- D'Olive Watershed Restoration - \$12,781,000 (complete)
- Fowl River Watershed Restoration - \$2,789,305 (complete)
- Alabama Barrier Island Restoration Assessment - \$4,277,600 (complete)
- Alabama Marine Mammal Conservation and Recovery Program - \$1,881,412 (complete)
- Alabama Coastal Adaptive Management Program - \$1,000,000
- Coastal Habitat Restoration Planning Initiative - \$4,218,483 (complete)
- Enhancing Fisheries Monitoring in Alabama's Marine Waters - Phase I - \$1,456,471 (complete)
- Multifaceted Fisheries and Ecosystem Monitoring in Alabama's Marine Waters - \$1,916,602 (complete)
- Grand Bay Acquisition - \$7,477,500 (complete)
- Mobile Bay Shore Habitat Conservation and Acquisition Initiative - Phase I - \$256,855 (complete)
- Mobile County Conservation Acquisition - \$4,217,803 (complete)
- Alabama Artificial Reef and Habitat Enhancement - \$11,726,883 (complete)
- Alabama Coastal Bird Stewardship Program - \$1,410,368 (complete)
- Lightning Point Acquisition and Restoration Project - Phase I - \$5,903,100 (complete)
- Dauphin Island Conservation Acquisition - \$4,200,000 (complete)
- Fowl River Spits Restoration - Phase I - \$1,590,557 (complete)
- Fowl River Spits Restoration - Phase II - \$19,798,000
- Bon Secour/Oyster Bay Acquisition (Gulf Shores) - \$12,511,400
- Gulf Highlands Acquisition (Gulf Shores) - \$36,000,000
- Fisheries Monitoring Enhancement in Alabama's Marine Waters - Phase III - \$3,793,942 (complete)
- Little Dauphin Island Restoration Assessment - \$1,600,000
- Salt Aire Shoreline Restoration - \$12,700,000
- Mobile Bay Shore Habitat Conservation and Acquisition - Phase II - \$8,527,840
- Dauphin Island Bird Habitat Acquisition and Enhancement Program - \$4,525,000
- Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge Acquisition - \$5,866,177 (complete)
- Fisheries Monitoring Enhancement in Alabama's Marine Waters - Phase IV - \$2,413,374 (complete)
- Alabama Artificial Reef and Habitat Enhancement - Phase II - \$22,499,000
- Lightning Point Acquisition and Restoration Project - Phase II - \$16,578,000
- Restoration of the North Side of Dauphin Island - Phase I - \$714,162 (complete)
- Deer River Shoreline Stabilization - Phase I - \$748,264 (complete)
- Deer River Shoreline Stabilization - Phase II - \$15,955,000
- Bon Secour River Headwater Restoration - Phase I - \$1,504,526 (complete)
- Bon Secour River Headwater Restoration - Phase II - \$4,549,687 (complete)
- Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge Acquisition (Three Rivers) - Phase II - \$4,340,805 (complete)
- Dauphin Island Causeway Shoreline Restoration Engineering and Design - \$250,000 (complete)
- Dauphin Island Causeway Shoreline and Habitat Restoration - Phase II - \$28,362,000
- Lower Halls Mill Creek Protection - \$2,687,000
- Blackwater River South Tract Acquisition - \$4,836,701 (complete)
- Lower Fish River Watershed Restoration - Phase I - \$6,554,000
- Dauphin Island East End Beach and Dune Restoration - Phase I - \$1,260,449 (complete)
- Dauphin Island East End Beach and Dune Restoration - Phase II - \$26,066,000
- Wolf Creek Headwaters Restoration - Phase I - \$500,000 (complete)
- Wolf Creek Headwaters Restoration - Phase II - \$2,788,000
- Restoration of the North Side of Dauphin Island - Phase II (Graveline Bay Marsh) - \$6,437,000
- Dauphin Island Beach Nourishment Engineering and Design - \$1,143,000
- Beach Club West Conservation Acquisition - \$12,129,966 (complete)

RESTORE - Direct Component Projects (Bucket 1)

- Alabama State Port Authority Roll-on/Roll-off Terminal - \$29,935,331 (complete)
- Dauphin Island Aloe Bay Harbour Town - \$17,412,014
- Historic Africatown Welcome Center - \$6,375,969
- Redevelop City Docks (City of Bayou La Batre) - \$30,683,840
- Mount Vernon Water Treatment Plant - \$1,540,892 (complete)
- Mobile Greenway Initiative - \$14,351,234
- Northwest Satsuma Water and Sewer Project - \$3,938,520 (complete)
- Innovating St. Louis Street, Mobile's Technology Corridor - \$11,501,990
- Bayou La Batre Water Distribution System Upgrades - \$7,990,180
- Mobile County Blueway Trail Development - \$14,264,355
- Gulf Shores Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism and Sustainability - \$13,666,271 (complete)
- Baldwin County ALDOT Capacity Improvements - \$69,649,000
- Fairhope Working Waterfront and Greenspace Restoration - \$9,975,095
- Planning Grant for Amended MIP - \$524,197 (complete)

RESTORE - Federal Council FPL 1 Projects (Bucket 2)

- Coastal Alabama Comprehensive Watershed Planning Project - \$4,342,500
- Alabama Living Shoreline Restoration Program - Categories 1 and 2 - \$6,250,000
- Comprehensive Living Shoreline Monitoring Program - Categories 1 and 2 - \$4,000,000
- Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Restoration and Monitoring Program - \$875,000
- Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay, and Meadows Tract - Categories 1 and 2 - \$3,158,043
- Enhancing Opportunities for Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediments - \$3,000,000 (complete)
- Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Wetland Creation Site - \$2,500,000

RESTORE - Federal Council FPL 2 Projects (Bucket 2)

- Alabama Commitment and Planning Support Grant - \$3,850,000

RESTORE - Federal Council FPL 3a Projects (Bucket 2)

- Perdido River Land Conservation and Habitat Enhancements - \$26,800,000

RESTORE - Federal Council FPL 3b Proposed Projects (Bucket 2)

Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program:

- City of Orange Beach Stormwater Master Plan - \$250,000
- City of Fairhope Sanitary Sewer Overflow Mitigation - \$820,099
- Town of Dauphin Island Stormwater Master Plan and Drainage Improvements - \$421,470
- City of Fairhope Stormwater Infrastructure Inventory - \$487,500
- Coastal Alabama Water Quality and Sediment Baseline Monitoring - \$3,103,959
- City of Bayou La Batre North System Sewer Improvements - \$206,200
- Grand Bay Sewer Service - \$337,344
- Dauphin Island Sewer Collection Improvements - Phase I - \$975,652
- Three Mile Creek Improvements Project - USA Campus - \$154,705
- City of Loxley Corn Creek Tributary Restoration Project - \$2,214,515
- Norton Creek Sanitary Sewer Inflow and Infiltration Rehabilitation Project - \$7,425,653
- Fish River Watershed Sediment and Stormwater Improvements - \$150,000
- Justins Bay Hydrologic Connectivity Enhancement (Mobile Bay) - \$1,000,000
- Ecological Flow Decision-Support Development for Mobile River and Perdido River Basins - \$3,400,000
- Gulf Coast Conservation Reserve Program - \$1,000,000
- State and Offshore Sediment Resources Inventory (U.S. Department of Interior) Alabama Component - \$3,000,000

RESTORE - Federal Council Proposed FPL 4 Projects (Bucket 2)

- Coastal Alabama Regional Water Quality Program
- \$8,000,000
- Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Creation Site
(Implementation) - \$24,000,000
- West End Dauphin Island Alabama Renourishment and
Resilience (Implementation) - \$38,000,000
- Restoration of Grand Batture Island (Joint MS/AL Project)
- \$56,950,000

RESTORE - Spill Impact Component Pro- posed Projects (Bucket 3)

- Characterization and Delineation of Significant Sand
Resource Areas Essential for Beach Restoration, Offshore
Alabama - \$1,234,070
- Alabama Gulf Seafood Marketing Program
- \$2,997,422 (complete)
- Development of a Regional Strategic Plan for the Coastal
Alabama Region - \$681,361
- Replacement of Substandard Facilities at the Alabama
Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) Coastal
Office and Mobile Field Office - \$8,088,599 (complete)
- Extension of Effluent Force Main from Bayou La Batre Waste-
water Treatment Facility - \$21,073,770
- Three Mile Creek Watershed Restoration - \$23,981,437
- Aloe Bay/Mississippi Sound Water Quality Enhancement
Project - \$26,829,000
- Mobile County Dirt Road Paving Program (Sediment
Reduction) - \$10,395,914
- Bayou La Batre Collection System/Lift Station Upgrades
- \$15,701,150
- Mobile Area Storm Water Mapping and Resiliency Planning
- \$3,899,593
- Perch Creek Area Sanitary Sewer Trunk Line Cured In-Place
Pipe - \$8,670,394

- Storm Water Management Improvements for Toulmin
Springs Branch and Gum Tree Branch - \$1,222,744
- One Mobile: Reconnecting People, Work, and Play Through
Complete Streets - \$2,287,500
- City of Chickasaw Sewer Rehabilitation Project - \$2,887,476
- Longevity, Stability, and Water Quality Improvements (Bon
Secour) - \$585,160 (complete)
- Orange Beach North Sewer Force Main Upgrade
- \$5,998,795 (complete)
- Fairhope Sewer Upgrade - Phase I - \$13,515,000
- Expansion of the Orange Beach Wildlife Rehabilitation and
Education Program - \$1,192,255
- Environmental Restoration of Cotton Bayou and Terry
Cove - \$539,026 (complete)
- Auburn University Gulf Coast Engineering Research
Station - \$14,395,000
- Lillian Park Beach Habitat and Shoreline Protection
- \$2,460,382
- Fairhope Area Community-Based Comprehensive Land
Use Plan - \$720,694 (complete)
- Canal Road Improvements East of State Route 161
- \$5,670,037 (complete)
- Little Lagoon Restoration Project - \$6,175,557
- Fort Morgan Parkway Trail Extension - \$7,591,608
- Meaher State Park Improvements - \$4,583,500 (complete)
- Alabama Point Seawall Repair - \$112,323 (engineering
and design)
- Planning Grant to Amend SEP - \$514,043

RESTORE Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program (Bucket 5)

- Alabama Center of Excellence - \$8,464,464

MARINE RESOURCES DIVISION



The mission of the **Marine Resources Division (MRD)** is to manage the state's marine fishery resources through research, enforcement, and education for the maximum benefit of the natural resources and the citizens of Alabama.

MRD consists of the Fisheries, Enforcement, and Administrative sections.

The **Fisheries Section** participates in a wide range of activities in support the Division's mission. The section's primary responsibility is to offer recommendations for the appropriate size limits, bag limits, and season length for species of fish and invertebrates under its jurisdiction based on research of growth, reproductive capabilities, environmental parameters, and abundance estimates. To meet this responsibility, section staff conduct monitoring programs to gather the necessary data. Programs are divided into fishery-based and science-based programs. Fishery data is collected from commercial sources such as vessels or seafood dealers and recreational sources such as individual anglers and charter boats. Data collected includes location of catch or fishing, trip length, number of anglers, fish lengths and weights, and aging structures of harvested fish. Scientific data is collected by section staff conducting long-term monitoring programs using gear such as seines, trawls and gill nets. The section also oversees habitat creation and restoration activities focused on oyster reefs and inshore and offshore artificial reefs. Marine aquaculture is conducted at the Claude Petet Mariculture Center (CPMC) and serves to produce finfish for supplemental stocking in local waters. Data collected through multiple programs, with staff working with the public as well as with state and federal agencies along the Gulf, determines the status of state and federal marine resources.

The **Enforcement Section** is responsible for patrolling Alabama's shorelines, coastal waters, and adjacent federal waters and enforcing state and federal laws and regulations relating to the conservation and protection of marine resources. Officers also enforce boating safety as well as hunting and freshwater fishing laws and regulations. The section coordinates extensively

with other state and federal agencies in cooperative enforcement operations, investigations, training, public safety, search and rescue, and other natural resource issues. In FY 2024-2025, the Enforcement Section employed 20 conservation enforcement officers.

Each year, the Fisheries and Enforcement sections participate in outreach programs to educate the public on Alabama's marine resources and current management. Events vary in size and participation, with some involving a single staff member while others include large portions of Fisheries and Enforcement staff. Staff may collect data, give presentations, or answer questions at fishing tournaments, fishing club meetings, Rotary and other civic organization meetings, school events, individual class requests, and business meetings where companies are working to make their employees more aware of conservation. In FY 2024-2025, MRD hosted a public oyster season informational meeting and a series of public meetings discussing a variety of potential regulation changes. These meetings are designed to provide information directly to the public with an opportunity for the public to provide valuable insights regarding their observations during fishing and how pending management changes may impact their access to the resource.

The **Administrative Section** is responsible for accounting support including billing and payroll, fishing license sales, and assisting with public inquiries. The Division is housed within two facilities, one on Dauphin Island and the other in Gulf Shores. In FY 2024-2025, the two facilities supported 65 full-time employees, one retired state employee and six part-time laborer positions.



FISHERIES SECTION

Staff monitored oyster densities on Alabama's public oyster reefs to assist in the development of the 2025-2026 oyster season. To estimate the number of young and adult oysters on the reef, staff collected 179 quadrat samples from public reefs using SCUBA gear. In 2025, the estimated number of legal-sized oysters on Alabama's oyster reefs decreased by 53% compared to 2024. The commercial season was open 58 days, which was 17 fewer days compared to the previous season.

The 2025 red snapper season for private vessel anglers was the eighth year of an alternative management system whereby each state along the Gulf used data collection systems to monitor harvests against their respective harvest allocations issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service. During FY 2024-2025, harvests were monitored through Alabama's mandatory Snapper Check reporting program to ensure compliance with the 664,552-pound allocation for the 2025 season. The 2025 season opened on May 23 with a seven-day-a-week format through June 30. The season transitioned to a weekend only (Friday through Monday) format starting July 4, 2025. On August 29, the season reverted back to seven days a week for the remainder of the season.

During FY 2024-2025, anglers provided section staff with 358 fish, representing multiple managed saltwater species, to sample for age structures, length, sex, and weight. This data is necessary to fishery biologists because it conveys the size-at-age of fish being harvested. Knowing the age distributions of harvested fish assists staff with determining appropriate regulations for each species.

Section staff participated in the NOAA Fisheries' Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) during FY 2024-2025. This survey gathers catch information directly from recreational saltwater anglers. The information is combined with that from the NOAA Fisheries' mail survey to determine recreational catch estimates and stock assessments for many managed finfish. Staff surveyed 8,130 anglers at various marinas, public boat ramps, and shore sites.

Staff also participated in the new state fishing survey, Alabama Creel (AL Creel). This survey gathers catch information directly from recreational saltwater anglers at dockside as their trips are completed. Additionally, weekly phone or email surveys were gathered from private anglers and state for-hire licensed vessel captains/owners (not federally permitted vessel captains/owners) to assess their fishing activities from the previous week.



BILLY POPE

The catch and fishing effort information is combined to determine weekly recreational catch estimates for many managed finfish. During FY 2024-2025, staff surveyed 1,255 vessels at various marinas, public boat ramps, and shore sites. Staff also conducted 16,183 phone calls with licensed anglers to collect fishing effort information between January and August 2025. Additionally, 1,010 state for-hire fishing effort surveys were completed by 223 for-hire vessels. The AL Creel program is scheduled for NOAA Fisheries review in 2026. If the review confirms that the survey meets the nationwide survey consistency requirements, AL Creel will replace the NOAA Fisheries APAIS and fishing effort mail surveys.

Fisheries Section staff continued to participate in an at-sea observer program that was implemented June 1, 2022, and funded by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC). The program is expected to run through 2026 and consists of a staff member riding on charter boats that target marine reef fish species. Staff assessed fish at time of release and noted discard methods and the release condition of fish released. Staff also tagged priority reef fish before they were released. Priority species include red snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack. During FY 2024-2025, 72 observer trips were completed, 3,590 reef fish were observed, and 1,496 reef fish were tagged. Of those tagged fish, 61 were recaptured by anglers and reported to MRD.

The CPMC continued its fish stocking program. Three fish species were raised between October 2024 and September 2025: Florida pompano, southern flounder, and spotted seatrout. Florida pompano releases totaled 77,000 fish. The spawning of Southern flounder resulted in 126,491 fish being released in local waters during spring 2025. Spotted seatrout were also spawned, and 78,000 fish were released into coastal waters. Additionally, infrastructure upgrades were completed, which included the installation of a new water exchange system to maintain better and more consistent water quality.

Fisheries staff used gill nets, otter trawls, and seines to gather a variety of recreationally and commercially important marine species for information about their abundance and ages. Staff completed 260 field days with the sampling gears in Mobile and Perdido bays and the Mississippi Sound. Gill net sets were deployed on 100 days. Seine and otter trawl sampling activities were used for 160 days. These sampling activities provided necessary data for establishing population trends for a variety of species, including those that are key indicators of ecosystem health and those that are harvested commercially or recreationally. These sampling activities began in 1981, and the accumulated data represents one of the oldest continuous datasets of its kind for the Gulf.

The Division received approximately \$7,600,000 in additional funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for phase two of a multi-year grant that supports multiple artificial reef planning, creation, and enhancement projects.

Staff continued artificial reefing activities to enhance the availability and quality of reef fish habitat and increase recreational and commercial fishing opportunities. From January to November 2025, staff inspected 514 artificial reefs prior to deployment in the offshore reef permit zones of Alabama.

The Division, with assistance from ADCNR's State Parks Division and the Baldwin County Commission, maintained seven public boat launch sites in Baldwin and Mobile counties. In FY 2024-2025, funds from the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) were used for renovations to the Billy Goat Hole Boat Launch including new boat ramps, finger piers, and an Americans with Disabilities Act compliant elevator and ramps to the concession stand facilities.

ENFORCEMENT SECTION

During FY 2024-2025, MRD enforcement officers continued their commitment to protecting Alabama's marine resources and ensuring compliance with fisheries regulations. They conducted 2,725 commercial angler inspections, 27,861 recreational angler inspections, logged 17,136 patrol hours, and completed 7,974 vessel boardings.

Officers continued participation in a range of outreach activities aimed at enhancing educational opportunities and fostering better relationships with the public and commercial entities. These events focus on both recreational and commercial fishing communities, academic institutions, charitable and special needs organizations, public service initiatives, and seafood marketing events. Through these efforts, officers engaged with more than 26,000 individuals, fostering awareness of key conservation principles and responsible resource stewardship.

In addition to their time in outreach events, MRD officers spend a lot of time educating the public during inspections of anglers and vessels. In the course of those inspections, officers encounter a small percentage of the public that is in violation of state or federal laws. In FY 2024-2025, officers issued more than 2,500 citations and warnings for conservation-related violations. Several of the more serious cases required comprehensive investigations, some of which resulted in the confiscation of equipment and the forfeiture of commercial fishing licenses. Officers also collaborated with other state and federal agencies to investigate interjurisdictional fisheries violations. These collaborations highlighted standards of professionalism and dedication shared with officers from other states which were instrumental in achieving successful investigation outcomes. The outcomes of these partnerships strengthen resource conservation in the Gulf.

The Enforcement Section entered its 23rd Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). The JEA provides the Division critical funding and equipment to support the enforcement of federal fisheries laws and regulations. The most recent agreement included funding for

patrol vehicles, outboard engines, and vessel maintenance and repairs. It also supported underway and dockside patrol operations targeting federal enforcement priorities, including Gulf reef fish management, marine mammal protection, and turtle excluder device compliance, as well as training opportunities for patrol officers.

MRD officers continued participating in joint investigations with the NOAA OLE regarding Gulf reef fish, marine mammals, sea turtle protection, and international unreported/undocumented seafood. Additionally, staff conducted joint patrols with uniformed NOAA Enforcement officers.

During FY 2024-2025, enforcement officers participated in Dolphin Drone Operation, a joint undercover operation lead by NOAA. Plainclothes MRD officers assisted NOAA regional drone operators in conducting aerial surveillance of dolphin cruise vessels operating out of Orange Beach. The primary objective was to obtain video documentation of potential dolphin harassment by recording dolphin behavior before, during, and after interactions with the vessels. The dolphin drone joint detail was conducted twice, and each operation was carried out at three-day intervals. Two details were conducted in 2025, June 24-26 and August 19-21. During the first operation, a summary settlement offer was issued for two vessels that committed violations. During the second, two notices of violation and assessment (NOVA) were issued – one to each boat found in violation of the marine mammal harassment laws. These cases are the first of their kind for NOAA OLE.

The Enforcement Section continued to enhance its training program during FY 2024–2025 by incorporating innovative and specialized training opportunities and by developing in-house instructional capabilities. These efforts have increased the section's self-sufficiency and its ability to provide training support to other agencies. The section continues to reach out to our partners for fishery-specific training such as marine mammal handling from the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. The section cur-

rently has certified instructors in patrol boat operation, survival swimming, and firearms instruction. Officers also participated in United States Coast Guard rescue lift training, which focused on the procedures and safety requirements for recovering injured individuals from vessels. This training provided hands-on experience with helicopter lift operations from various boating platforms that further improved officer readiness and response capabilities.

The Enforcement Section continues to maintain the Coastal Remote Monitoring System that consists of 34 strategically positioned cameras located throughout Mobile Bay, Perdido Pass, and the Intracoastal Waterway. This expanding system enables officers to remotely monitor multiple locations in real time using internet-connected laptops from their patrol vehicles. High-definition video from all cameras is securely stored for up to three months, providing valuable evidentiary support for legal proceedings. The system is also shared with local law enforcement and federal partners, enhancing interagency collaboration and assisting in the successful resolution of multiple cases.

FUTURE ISSUES

The federal management of red snapper and other reef fish continues to be a high priority in the fishing community. MRD will conduct the certification process of AL Creel by NOAA Fisheries. The transition to AL Creel will allow for more timely harvest estimates for red snapper and other important finfish species to be used in stock assessments and monitoring activities to ensure maximum access for the public.

MRD is also developing a shrimp fishery management plan as part of a request from Alabama shrimp processors who are seeking sustainable certification status for the state's shrimp fishery. Certification will enable Alabama shrimp processors more access to markets/stores where the public wants to purchase certified sustainably harvested wild seafood.



MARINE RESOURCES 2024-2025 BUDGET

FUND 0303 (Seafood Funding)
FUND 1402 (NRDA Funding)

BUDGETED ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURES	BUDGET	EXPENDITURES
PERSONNEL COSTS	\$4,637,104.00	\$4,109,557.45	\$270,000.00	\$27,952.55
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	2,039,360.00	\$1,703,620.82	\$115,400.00	\$10,944.85
TRAVEL-IN-STATE	35,730.00	\$5,851.40	\$9,800.00	\$0.00
TRAVEL-OUT- OF-STATE	\$27,000.00	\$10,055.72	\$7,210.00	\$0.00
REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE	\$1,651,191.00	\$1,069,948.18	\$0.00	\$0.00
RENTALS AND LEASES	\$105,000.00	\$48,629.61	\$3,800.00	\$0.00
UTILITIES AND COMMUNICATION	\$413,017.00	\$202,178.08	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	\$455,000.00	\$285,178.08	\$0.00	\$0.00
SUPPLIES, MATERIALS & OPERATING EXPENSES	\$956,838.00	\$666,888.20	\$79,600.00	\$0.00
TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT OPERATIONS	\$1,110,000.00	\$416,699.26	\$5,500.00	\$2,112.27
GRANTS AND BENEFITS	\$3,508,581.00	\$798,517.13	\$0.00	\$0.00
CAPITAL OUTLAY	\$5,600,500.00	\$369,943.04	\$0.00	\$0.00
TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT PURCHASES	4888,100.00	\$234,012.48	\$0.00	\$0.00
OTHER EQUIPMENT PURCHASES	\$744,775.00	\$180,623.45	\$20,000.00	\$0.00
ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSFER	\$890,100.00	\$890,100.00		
TOTAL	\$23,062,196.00	\$10,991,919.44	\$513,310.00	\$41,009.67

Fund 0303 (seafood funding) is MRD's general budget. Fund 1402 is funded through the federal Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program (NRDA Restoration Program) that distributes restoration funds from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement.

* Budget and Expenditure numbers are for Fiscal Year 2025 through the 13th Accounting Period



THE MARINE RESOURCES DIVISION CONDUCTS FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PILOT PROGRAM

In FY 2024-2025, ADCNR's Marine Resources Division (MRD) conducted a pilot study to collect essential data on recreational fishing activities along the state's Gulf coast for use in state fisheries management. The study initially consisted of weekly phone or email surveys gathered from private anglers and state for-hire licensed vessel captains/owners (not federally permitted vessel captains/owners) to determine their fishing effort from the previous week. In addition to the phone and email surveys, dockside surveys of recreational saltwater anglers were added to the project to collect catch data. The catch and fishing effort data were combined to determine weekly recreational catch and landing estimates throughout the season for many managed finfish.



Alabama's new survey is modeled on the LA Creel survey used by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to estimate effort for Louisiana's saltwater anglers. The new Alabama Creel survey (AL Creel) is a partnership between NOAA Fisheries, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and MRD.

Each week a call list of randomly selected licensed anglers was created. The list included individuals who purchased an annual, 7-day, or lifetime fishing license and/or a Gulf Reef Fish Endorsement. Residents 65 and older who signed up for the free Angler Registry during the license year were also included on the call list.

In 2024 and 2025, phone numbers and email addresses representing nearly 900 private recreational saltwater license holders were sent to a call center hired by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Select anglers also received the survey through an email that requested the survey be completed within 24 hours. The majority of anglers who completed the survey did so by phone.

MRD staff also generated a weekly call list of licensed state for-hire (not federally permitted) charter vessels and surveyed the captains of those vessels by phone. When contacted, anglers and captains are asked if they conducted a recreational saltwater fishing trip in Alabama or were on a vessel that ended their recreational fishing trip in Alabama during the prior week. If fishing activity occurred during the week, additional questions are asked including the day(s) of the week fishing occurred, whether fishing occurred on a boat or from shore, if on a boat whether the boat was a private boat or a for-hire vessel, the area fished (inshore, nearshore or offshore waters), the time the trip ended, and if the access point where the shore fishing ended or where the vessel returned to shore was open to the public. During the calls, angler emails were verified or collected (if not provided during their license purchase). Up to five call attempts were made for each angler or captain. In January 2025, 11,827 private angler and 749 state for-hire effort surveys were completed out of the 26,000 private anglers and 1,100 state for-hire charter vessel captains who were called.

In early 2025, MRD transitioned to full and ongoing implementation of the AL Creel program when staff added the new dockside survey of recreational saltwater anglers and anglers fishing on for-hire vessels, while continuing the phone and email surveys. The dockside survey helps determine the average catch rate by species and

location fished. MRD's dockside survey is voluntary and anglers who participate are asked seven questions about their fishing trip. Harvested fish are also weighed and measured when possible. The survey questions include number of anglers in the fishing party, whether the fishing trip was part of a tournament, area fished, bottom type fished over, species targeted during the fishing trip, and the species and number of fish kept and/or released. Weekly catch and harvest estimates for many recreationally important finfish are produced by comparing effort and catch information collected through the AL Creel survey to the total number of saltwater licenses sold during the year. The catch estimates are essential to stock assessments, particularly since recreational catch numbers can be higher than commercial catches of many species in the Gulf.

The AL Creel program phone/email survey and dockside survey are designed to be fast and efficient at gathering the critical information needed for marine fisheries management. The brevity of both surveys reduces the reporting burden for the angler and provides time for MRD staff to interview more anglers, which can lead to more accurate estimates and potentially reduced operational costs. Since its implementation, the AL Creel program has been conducted concurrently with NOAA Fisheries' Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS). After an initial review of the AL Creel program in 2025 as compared to the APAIS, MRD's efforts were more efficient and MRD staff completed more angler interviews.

Recent research conducted by NOAA Fisheries suggests the fishing effort estimates generated by the federal survey can be overestimated by as much as 40%. An overage by that amount leads to harvest overestimates and can negatively impact fisheries management decisions, particularly for offshore species important to Alabama's anglers. MRD has implemented the AL Creel program with the hope that it will replace the federal survey.

The AL Creel program is scheduled for NOAA Fisheries review in 2026. If the review results in the program meeting nationwide survey consistency requirements, AL Creel could replace APAIS and enable MRD fishery managers to generate more accurate recreational fishing estimates that would help in developing more timely management strategies to promote sustainable fishing practices and protect Alabama's marine resources. MRD thanks all anglers who fish along Alabama's Gulf coast and have voluntarily participated in AL Creel. ■

STATE LANDS DIVISION



The **State Lands Division (SLD)** manages undeveloped, state-owned trust lands that are specific as to their identity as well as to the income beneficiary. The land management program includes Sixteenth Section and Indemnity School Lands of approximately 30,000 acres; approximately 7,000 acres of Department of Mental Health trust lands; Muscle Shoals Grant Lands of approximately 8,000 acres; and other state agency lands, including submerged lands (inland and coastal), of approximately 600,000 acres. Resource uses include oil and gas exploration and development, coal leases, timber harvests, agricultural leases, hunting leases, and commercial uses. SLD continues its efforts to identify additional means of revenue generation through management of these trust lands.

The Forever Wild Land Trust (FWLT) program is administered by SLD at the direction of that program's Board of Trustees. Division personnel provide administrative support including coordination of the assessment and appraisal process, land acquisition transactions, budget preparation, and annual reporting to the Governor and Legislature. In addition to these administrative services, SLD coordinates management of Forever Wild's 294,044 acres, as well as complementary tracts owned by SLD.

SLD conducts sales and leases of excess state-owned lands pursuant to the State Land Sales and Leasing Act. This law establishes a procedure aimed at ensuring the state receives full fair market value for lands that state agencies sell or lease and that the process is open, competitive, and subject to public scrutiny.

SLD maintains the state Land Resource Information Center (LRIC), which is a database of lands owned by the State of Alabama and its departments, agencies, and institutions. The database offers search capabilities, providing members of the public the ability to readily access information about state-owned lands. The LRIC database can be found on the Open.Alabama.gov website and searched by following the state properties and then state land links. The LRIC currently contains more than 7,175 land records.

Animal and plant species and areas of biological significance that make up the rich natural diversity of our state are identified

and inventoried as part of the Alabama Natural Heritage Database maintained by SLD. This effort, which includes more than 8.21 million records, provides important biological information to conservation organizations, developers, government agencies, and the public. It also complements SLD's role in evaluating land acquisition nominations submitted to Forever Wild and implementing a multiple-use management strategy designed to maximize public access to Forever Wild tracts.

SLD operates three facilities dedicated to conservation and land stewardship educational programs and a fourth dedicated to sporting dog field trials, habitat restoration, and hunting programs for youth and individuals with physical disabilities. Located in Spanish Fort, the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center serves as a gateway to outdoor recreation, conservation education, and land stewardship in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta. The Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (Weeks Bay Reserve), located in Fairhope on Weeks Bay, is an estuary of national significance, and the Weeks Bay Reserve staff members conduct education and outreach, research, coastal training programs, and stewardship activities related to the estuary and its watershed. Located in the eastern portion of Alabama's Black Belt region, the Wehle Land Conservation Center (WLCC) in Bullock County is funded in part through the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust. The M. Barnett Lawley Forever Wild Field Trial Area (FWFTA) is located south of Greensboro in Hale County.



SLD oversees the administration of Alabama's Coastal Area Management Program (ACAMP), which was approved by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1979 as part of its national Coastal Zone Management Program. ACAMP's purpose is to promote beneficial management of the lands and waters located in Alabama's coastal area through a comprehensive and cooperative program designed to preserve, enhance, and develop these valuable resources for the benefit of present and future generations. SLD works in cooperation with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) to implement ACAMP and receives federal Coastal Zone Management Program grant funding from NOAA to support ACAMP and other federal coastal resource programs. SLD's Coastal Zone Management activities, as well as research activities and educational programs at the Weeks Bay Reserve, complement the Division's responsibilities for managing submerged lands, including promoting public trust resource awareness and the understanding of riparian/littoral area development and associated impacts on private property and public use of Alabama's tidal waters.

SLD administers a regulatory program that manages impacts and improvements to public tidal submerged lands in conjunction with ADEM and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and their respective jurisdictions on state and federal waters. The SLD regulations are designed to balance the rights of riparian property owners with the public use of those tidal submerged lands for navigation as well as fishing and other recreational uses.

SLD supports the ADCNR Commissioner and the Governor in the administration of grants and programs funded by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA). This act directs the

U.S. Department of the Interior to distribute a portion of revenues generated from offshore oil and gas leases in federal Gulf waters for purposes such as natural resource restoration, coastal protection, implementation of conservation plans, and other efforts to mitigate impacts of Outer Continental Shelf activities. SLD staff conduct an annual solicitation for project proposals, executes grant awards for projects approved by the Governor, and monitors GOMESA project implementation and compliance.

SLD manages its responsibilities through a Land Management/Administrative Section, which includes Land Stewardship/Enforcement, Asset Management, GOMESA Grant Program, Submerged Lands Regulation, Recreational Programs/Facilities, and the Natural Heritage Program, as well as its Coastal Section, which implements Coastal Zone Management Program activities and operates Weeks Bay Reserve. In FY 2024-2025, SLD employed 45 employees, including part-time or seasonal employees, in support of its programs.

Examples of various program and facility accomplishments during this past fiscal year follow:

ASSET MANAGEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Generated \$34 million in revenue for distribution to state agency/entity beneficiaries including, but not limited to, the Alabama Trust Fund (\$27.6 million), Department of

Education (\$1.5 million), State of Alabama General Fund (\$935,000), Alabama Historical Commission (\$268,000), and Department of Corrections (\$178,000)

- Assisted state agencies with revenue generation on state-owned lands through initiation of leases and sale of excess property pursuant to the Land Sales and Leasing Act's appraisal and bid process
- Administered revenue-generating activities on state-owned trust lands, including timber sales and issuance of hunting leases, shellfish aquaculture easements, riparian easements, river-crossing permits, submerged/upland pipeline rights of ways, dredge permits, farming/hay leases, oil and gas leases, and coal leases
- Continued a statewide leasing process associated with the 2025-2030 Hunting Lease Auction in which 140 tracts were offered for bids to generate revenue. This continued process resulted in 131 current leases that are expected to generate more than \$374,000 annually for state agency beneficiaries.
- Contracted for longleaf pine restoration on 225 acres at Perdido River Wildlife Management Area (WMA)
- Conducted harvest preparation activities for future thinnings and final harvests at Cougar Pit and Lookout Mountain school trust tracts
- Completed tree harvests of 35 acres at Saragossa, 30 acres at Cougar Pit, 65 acres at Piper Cut-Off school trust tracts and 45 acres at the SLD-owned Frey Tract. Harvests at Saragossa and Cougar Pit furthered efforts to respond to Southern Pine Beetle concerns.
- Contracted for and in process of final harvests of 250 acres at the Jacinto Port tract

FOREVER WILD LAND TRUST ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES

- Administered and fully closed acquisition of four tracts across three counties adding a total of 344 acres to the program. These acquisitions leveraged approximately \$568,640 in federal grant funds. The closed program acquisitions included the following:
 - o Bon Secour River Wetlands Addition with National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program grant funding (67 acres, Baldwin County)
 - o Freedom Hills WMA – Sutton Hill Addition (17 acres, Colbert County)
 - o Freedom Hills WMA – Sugar Camp Branch Addition (240 acres, Colbert County)

- o Red Hills – Section 23 (20 acres, Monroe County) (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pittman-Robertson grant funded an additional 57-acre adjacent acquisition)

- Provided administrative support to improve the awareness and understanding of FWLT and the outdoor recreation opportunities it provides for the public
- Reviewed 29 nomination inquiries that resulted in 15 willing-seller tract nominations being processed and evaluated for potential acquisition by the FWLT Board of Trustees
- Provided administrative support to continue the Board of Trustees' initiative offering annual cooperative funding to counties in which Forever Wild acreage is located

FOREVER WILD RECREATIONAL AND LAND STEWARDSHIP ACTIVITIES

- Attracted more than 3,942 visitors to the M. Barnett Lawley FWFTA through 19 youth hunts, 11 days of physically disabled hunting, and 34 sporting dog field trial/hunt test events involving approximately 2,713 sporting dogs. Additionally, the FWFTA hosted Alabama Audubon field trips including one in conjunction with the Alabama Black Belt Festival. The FWFTA also served as a site for law enforcement training events. Together, all of these FWFTA activities brought almost 4,100 visitors to the tract and surrounding area.
- Completed numerous facility additions at the FWFTA, including completion of the 5,000-square-foot Blankenship Event Center with an adjacent 4,000-square-foot pavilion. Other enhancements included barn area and stables expansion to accommodate 48 horses and the installation of 2.5 miles of new fencing to better separate participating dogs from roadways.
- Furthered ADCNR's Campus Conservation Program (CCP) in partnership with the SLD by hosting students from the University of Montevallo, University of West Alabama, and Tuskegee University at the FWFTA. Students participated in a Waterfowl Workshop and Wing Shooting Clinic, in addition to interacting with staff biologists and enforcement personnel regarding land management techniques. Students also participated in CCP field-based learning opportunities in partnership with the SLD at its Wehle Land Conservation Center, which is managed in coordination with Forever Wild acreage.
- Expanded on existing public access opportunities by offering 36 open woods days at the FWLT Sipsey River Recreation Area, and offered 25 open gate days during the hunting season at Old Cahawba Prairie, Splinter Hill Bog, and Lillian Swamp tracts

- Maintained approximately 392 miles of public recreation trails for activities such as horseback riding, hiking, biking, and canoeing at the Shoal Creek Nature Preserve, Walls of Jericho, WLCC, Splinter Hill Bog, Old Cahawba Prairie, Jacinto Port, Coldwater Mountain Complex, Dothan Park Trails, Grand Bay Savanna, Cahaba River Park, Perdido River Complex, Freedom Hills Complex, Indian Mountain Complex, Mobile-Tensaw Delta WMA, Gothard-AWF Yates Lake WMA, Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, Coosa County WMA, Tannehill Complex, Blakeley Addition, and Coon Creek Forever Wild tracts. For individual tract locations, visit alabamaforeverwild.com.
- Received 186 reservations for shelters and camping platforms associated with the Bartram and Perdido River canoe trails
- Performed annual informational kiosk updates including maps, guidelines of use, and hunting regulations at various Forever Wild tracts statewide
- Continued a citizen science habitat monitoring project at three locations (Grand Bay Savanna, WLCC, Old Cahawba Prairie) that invites visitors to photograph the habitat from a fixed camera bracket and share via social media, creating a long-term photo documentation of the landscape and attracting additional visitors
- Employed both chemical and mechanical methods for control of exotic plant species as well as various trapping techniques for removal of invasive animal species including the removal of approximately 1,485 feral hogs on various tracts throughout the state
- Completed thinning harvests of 350 acres at Uchee Creek SOA and 300 acres at Old Cahawba Prairie Complex tracts
- Contracted for and in process of thinning 375 acres at Autauga WMA, 250 acres at Freedom Hills WMA, 300 acres at Little River State Forest Special Opportunity Area (SOA), 350 acres at Red Hills WMA, and final harvests of 175 acres at Autauga WMA and 350 acres at Gothard - Yates Lake WMA. Harvests at Autauga WMA, Red Hills WMA, and Yates Lake WMA were conducted as part of Southern Pine Beetle efforts.
- Contracted for 125 acres of thinning and 265 acres of final harvest at Portland Landing SOA, as well as 215 acres of thinning and 70 acres of final harvest at Lowndes WMA
- Conducted harvest preparation activities for future thinnings and final harvests at AWF Gothard - Yates Lake WMA, Skyline WMA, Uchee Creek SOA, Shelby County Park, and Turkey Creek Nature Preserve tracts. Initiated activities at Shelby County Park as part of Southern Pine Beetle response.
- Contracted for 125 acres of shortleaf pine restoration on Lauderdale WMA

- Conducted prescribed burns on almost 7,808 acres of public land statewide to maintain and enhance natural plant communities. Several fires were coordinated with ADCNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) Division.

NATURAL HERITAGE SECTION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Performed biodiversity survey work, conducted habitat assessments, participated in trail planning, and continued collecting detailed GPS and GIS (geographic information systems) data for existing Forever Wild tracts to aid management and research on these tracts
- Maintained Geographic Information System (GIS) server software that provides the public an interactive map of Forever Wild holdings and ADCNR facilities. This software is also being used to improve geographic information transmission within SLD and the Department.
- Maintained the Natural Heritage Section database, which is partially funded by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) State Wildlife Grant. The database is accessible via a secure internet website for more than 2,700 approved users and currently contains more than 8 million records of plant and animal species occurrences throughout Alabama.
- Continued to increase the number of specimens in the Natural Heritage Section Herbarium collection to 10,700. Most of those have been digitized, photographed, and databased.
- Continued coordination of USFWS Section 6 funding to support research benefiting at-risk plant species. Administered \$97,338 in federal matching funds, including subawards to Alabama universities.
- Coordinated fulfillment of grant awards for land acquisition and habitat restoration through the National Coastal Wetland Grant Program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Cumberland Plateau Stewardship Fund

GULF OF MEXICO ENERGY SECURITY ACT (GOMESA) ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Provided administrative support to the GOMESA program by overseeing the disbursement of funds and providing support to the awarded entities
- **Announced 24 new project awards totaling \$45,454,848 including the following:**
 - o Argosy Large Artificial Reef (ADCNR - Marine Resources Division) – \$2,500,000
 - o Baldwin County Perdido Bay Boardwalk

and ADA Improvements (Baldwin County Commission) – \$2,530,000

- o Baldwin County Solid Waste Disposal Authority Orange Beach Recycling Convenience Center (Solid Waste Disposal Authority of Baldwin County) – \$1,500,224
- o Bay Minette Nature Park Master Plan and Engineering Design (City of Bay Minette) – \$1,000,000
- o Chickasaw Stormwater Rehabilitation Project Phase 2 (City of Chickasaw) – \$2,000,000
- o City of Mobile Brookley by the Bay: Southern Activation Zone (City of Mobile) – \$3,500,000
- o Citronelle Youth Field Lighting Enhancement (City of Citronelle) – \$1,280,000
- o Creola Public Safety Building (City of Creola) – \$2,000,000
- o Creola Wetlands Acquisition (City of Creola) – \$350,000
- o Dauphin Island Multi-Park Access Improvements (Town of Dauphin Island) – \$1,400,000
- o Foley Nature Parks Expansion (City of Foley) – \$1,500,000
- o Gulf Shores Waterway Village Pedestrian Park (City of Gulf Shores) – \$3,606,465
- o Gulf State Park Campground (ADCNR - State Parks Division) – \$5,000,000
- o Lillian Sustainable Stormwater and Parking Lot Improvements (Lillian Recreational Park) – \$396,340
- o Loxley Youth Soccer Complex (City of Loxley) – \$1,000,000
- o Magnolia Springs Restoration Project (Town of Magnolia Springs) – \$878,346
- o Mobile County River Delta Marina and Campground (Mobile County Commission) – \$2,000,000
- o Mobile Riverfront Phase I Amendment (City of Mobile) – \$4,000,000
- o Renovation of the Daphne Recreation Center (City of Daphne) – \$4,000,000
- o Satsuma Gunnison Creek Kayak Boat Launch and Boardwalk Improvements (City of Satsuma) – \$2,013,473
- o Silverhill Oscar Johnson Park Improvements (Town of Silverhill) – \$1,500,000
- o Town of Perdido Beach Comprehensive Drainage Improvements (Town of Perdido Beach) – \$307,670

- o University of South Alabama Lower Alabama Beach Education Facility (University of South Alabama) – \$250,000
- o University of South Alabama's Delta and Coastal Alabama Wildlife, Fisheries, and Carbon Flux Observatory (University of South Alabama) – \$1,500,000

• **Closed out previously awarded grants for the following completed projects:**

- o Bayou la Batre Utilities Septic to Sewer Improvements Projects A and B (Bayou La Batre Utilities Board) - \$2,427,300
- o Beach Club West Acquisition (ADCNR - State Parks Division) - \$4,029,615.83
- o Dauphin Island Aloe Bay Living Shoreline, Habitat Protection and Public Access Amenities (Town of Dauphin Island) - \$2,211,700
- o Marsh Debris and Shoreline Cleanup (City of Orange Beach) - \$1,314,500
- o Mobile County Water, Sewer, and Fire Protection Authority Septic to Sewer Phase II Parts A1 and A2 (Mobile County Water Sewer and Fire Protection Authority) - \$3,697,500
- o Mount Vernon Boat Ramp Improvements (ADCNR - WFF) - \$2,042,404.07
- o Sediment characterization and geochemistry distribution within Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound (Geological Survey of Alabama) - \$755,304
- o Spanish Fort Mobile Causeway Shellbank Acquisition (City of Spanish Fort) - \$2,216,700
- o The Launch at CR6 Public Park & Boat Launch (Baldwin County Commission) - \$4,820,000
- o West Fowl River and Heron Bay Land Acquisition (ADCNR - SLD) - \$5,116,130.50

COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Administered and provided technical support for 14 sub-awards totaling more than \$1,381,188 in NOAA grant funding to benefit projects and activities in Mobile and Baldwin counties
- Promoted sustainable tourism and improved public access in Alabama's coastal area through the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Supported multiple municipal planning efforts, including comprehensive planning, zoning, and mapping updates, stormwater management, and subdivision regulation updates (Town of Dauphin Island, City of Daphne, City of Satsuma, and South Alabama Regional Planning Commission)

- Supported the Baldwin County Commission in creation of the Meadows Park Public Recreational Access
- Sponsored People Against a Littered State's (PALS) annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup. Organized, in partnership with PALS, the 37th annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup. During the event, SLD staff provided volunteers with supplies to clean up waterways and shorelines across Alabama. More than 2,750 volunteers participated at 29 locations throughout Mobile and Baldwin counties. Since the program began in 1987, more than 907 tons of trash have been removed from Alabama's waterways and shorelines.
- Assisted Geological Survey of Alabama in its administration of the Coastal Geospatial Data Group, increasing opportunities for data sharing and to improve management of coastal resources
- Supported aerial mapping of gulf-fronting shorelines through the Geological Survey of Alabama
- Published and distributed biannual Current Connection newsletters in partnership with the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP)
- Supported research conducted at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab to understand interactions of oysters and predatory oyster drills in restored reefs
- Furthered watershed planning efforts undertaken by the MBNEP
- Provided funding for ADEM's Coastal Program
- Continued use of NOAA Inflation Reduction Act funding to enhance capacity as well as conservation and resilience efforts in the coastal zone. NOAA Capacity Building funds also used to initiate a masters/graduate university student internship program.

SUBMERGED LANDS REGULATORY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Coordinated with federal, state, and local governments as well as individual property owners regarding potential impacts to state-owned submerged lands

- Continued to provide information about the SLD regulations to efficiently manage uses of public submerged lands
- Received, reviewed, and/or approved 202 permit applications for activities impacting nearshore public trust submerged lands such as dredging, implementing living shorelines, and constructing structures over state-owned submerged water bottoms
- Received an additional Shellfish Aquaculture Easement application for off-bottom oyster farms as part of Alabama's Shellfish Aquaculture Program, which promotes

the cultivation and harvesting of hatchery-spawned oysters for commercial purposes. There are currently 67 acres of permitted off-bottom Shellfish Aquaculture Easements in coastal Alabama.

5 RIVERS DELTA RESOURCE CENTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Hosted approximately 10,102 visitors at more than 203 events, receptions, meetings, guided boat tours, field trips, and educational classes
- Hosted the Annual Delta Woods and Waters Expo in conjunction with the City of Spanish Fort. This three-day conservation event attracted more than 2,080 participants
- Conducted or assisted with more than 23 educational programs serving over 920 participants of all ages
- Hosted the Annual Alabama Coastal BirdFest Expo, which attracted 674 participants for three days of guided birding tours, lectures, and workshops
- Hosted 8 public meetings conducted by local conservation organizations
- Hosted 46 receptions and business meetings for nearly 1,600 participants
- Hosted University of South Alabama Marine Sciences tag and release fishing tournament
- Maintained two public boat launches on Mobile Bay
- Removed more than 96 barrels of trash and more than a dozen illegally dumped tires
- Hosted multiple Mobile Bay Kayak Fishing Association tournaments attracting more than 70 anglers
- Hosted Alabama Author's Day in partnership with Historical Blakeley State Park attracting over 100 participants throughout the day
- Assisted Alabama Naturalists and various other conservation groups with education specimens
- Provided meeting space for state or federal agencies associated with conservation efforts
- Hosted federal, state, and municipal law enforcement training sessions, including drone training
- Assisted several facilities with educational programming, including Weeks Bay Reserve, Meaher State Park, and WFF District IV
- Continued chemical and mechanical efforts to control exotic plant species, including cogongrass and Chinese tallow tree throughout property
- Initiated a lease with the Alabama Wildlife Federation establishing a public-private partnership as to operation of the facility for the upcoming fiscal year

WEEKS BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Provided field experiences that introduced 1,552 students, ranging from preschool to college students to local environmental and coastal related topics
- Conducted a two-day Teacher on the Estuaries workshop for 13 high school teachers, one middle school teacher, and one pre-service teacher. This workshop was designed to increase attendee knowledge and appreciation of local environments as well as teach the necessary skills to act as stewards of coastal resources.
- Provided 27 educational tours of the Weeks Bay Estuary for 566 participants from civic groups, educational institutions, and regional agencies
- Conducted eight workshops for 76 coastal leaders that provided 904 training hours related to resource management along the Gulf Coast
- Hosted 569 guest nights in the research dormitory. Guests included researchers, GulfCorps volunteers, workshop participants, visiting educators, and state personnel.
- Collaborated on four new research projects within the Weeks Bay Watershed. Topics included tools to guide restoration of coastal wetland habitats, modeling primary production as a tool for management within nearshore coastal environments, variation in groundwater nutrients along various shoreline conditions, and development of an underwater remotely operated vehicle for removal of plastics.
- Used high resolution digital leveling equipment to measure vertical elevation changes to Sediment Elevation Tables as part of Weeks Bay Reserve's Wetlands and Water Levels Plan
- Treated invasive plant species on 720 acres across four land tracts
- Continued work on capital improvement projects including the bog boardwalk and parking lot, visitor boardwalk, and resource center
- Received a \$619,714 award through NOAA's Habitat Protection and Restoration Bipartisan Infrastructure Law competition for wetland restoration to enhance coastal resilience within the Reserve
- Partnered with the University of South Alabama Stokes School of Marine and Environmental Sciences to host interns in support of education and land management programs at the Reserve
- Facilitated citizen science monitoring through three Reserve led programs: Alabama Water Watch; Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network; and Weeks Bay Phenology Trail
- Served as an Alabama Coastal Cleanup zone for 76 volunteers who removed 675 pounds of litter from Weeks Bay, Fish River, Magnolia River, and the surrounding land and roadways

- Collected continuous water quality and weather data from five sites in Weeks Bay as part of NOAA's system-wide monitoring program. These data are also utilized by local sport fishermen and commercial crab fishermen to determine optimal fishing conditions as well as by the local postal service when seeking water level and tidal data associated with delivering mail via the Fish and Magnolia rivers.
- Constructed resilient platforms at three water quality stations within Weeks Bay as part of the Department of Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering Capstone. The monitoring platforms, developed by U.S. Naval Academy engineering students, are designed to withstand forces from storm winds, waves, debris, and local boat traffic.
- Constructed storm-resilient meteorological monitoring station and installed updated weather monitoring equipment
- Served the needs of coastal resource managers by providing technical training on the following topics: water quality monitoring and training through Alabama Water Watch, wetland identification and delineation, living shorelines for contractors, and invasive exotic plant species identification, prevention, and control
- Conducted quarterly meetings of Weeks Bay Reserve Advisory Committee
- Provided state leadership for three Gulf of America Alliance Priority Issue Teams: Education and Engagement, Marine Debris, and Habitat Resources

WEHLE LAND CONSERVATION CENTER AND ELHEW FIELD STATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Hosted 95 visitors who attended meetings and retreats held by local businesses and church groups
- Attracted 2,731 visitors, a 17% increase over the previous fiscal year, to the WLCC facilities for outdoor recreational and educational activities managed in coordination with the Forever Wild program
- Hosted 710 visitors during 19 Open Trails and Fishing weekends
- Hosted a Wagon Train camping and trail riding event with 63 participants
- Hosted 102 youth (ages 15 and under) and 298 mentoring adults for the Bullock County Youth Fishing Derby cosponsored by WFF and the Children and Mentors Outdoors (CAMO) group. Each youth participant received a free fishing rod and tackle box.
- Hosted 71 seniors (ages 60 and older) and 29 volunteers for the annual Bullock County Senior Citizen Fishing Derby cosponsored by WFF, CAMO, and the Bullock County Sheriff's Office

- Continued to provide year-round public access for hiking, nature photography, and bird watching through the Forever Wild Wehle Tract hiking trailhead
- Hosted WLCC's first-ever summer day camp with 12 sixth through eighth grade students. Organized by the Auburn University Museum of Natural History (AUMNH), the three-day camp provided hands-on outdoor learning opportunities and nature-based experiences.
- Continued our collaboration with AUMNH by providing educational programs for local fifth through eighth grade students, with 444 youth attending 11 days of programs
- Hosted 286 fourth grade students, teachers, and instructors during the annual Bullock County Forestry and Wildlife for Youth and Water Festival events, organized by the Bullock County Cooperative Extension Office
- Provided learning opportunities for 92 college students as part of class-related trips focused on field-based learning. Participating institutions included the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Auburn University, Huntingdon College, and Dickinson College (Carlisle, Pennsylvania).
- Hosted the Alabama Extension Office "Securing Legacy and Generating Income on Family Land" workshop with 39 participants
- Hosted multiple CCP hunting workshops coordinated by WFF for 73 college students and faculty from Tuskegee University, Alabama A&M University, University of Montevallo, and Auburn University
- Provided meeting venues for the Alabama Partners in Amphibians and Reptiles annual meeting and the Alabama Plant Council annual meeting
- Hosted 109 participants for ADCNR-related programs and staff training including wildlife trapping workshops, State Wildlife Action Plan planning, WFF-Enforcement District Four training, and participated in Alabama State Parks' Fins, Feathers, and Flowers event
- Hosted 15 participants for a week-long Wilderness First Aid class led by Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities (SOLO) in partnership with the Alabama Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- Hosted 32 participants for a prescribed fire training class led by TNC
- Hosted a three-day Chainsaw Training Class for 8 participants led by TNC
- Continued operation of a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) bird banding station, now in its 20th year of operation
- Performed periodic Gopher Tortoise surveys, documenting new burrow locations to support long-term evaluation of translocation success and site fidelity
- Continued work on a floristic inventory, cataloging the vascular flora of the Wehle Forever Wild Tract, with over 900 species recorded to date
- Added new fire ring grills to all campsites and new outdoor barbecue grills to dining hall and picnic pavilions
- Replaced electrical hookups at three campsites
- Replaced weathered siding on horse barns
- Replaced weathered siding on and repainted the Carriage House
- Treated a quarter acre of newly discovered cogongrass with spot herbicide application. Previously treated areas were regularly monitored for any signs of regrowth and were retreated when necessary.
- Continued treatment of water shield with herbicide on ponds managed for public fishing
- Trapped and removed 49 feral pigs
- Conducted a prescribed burn on 680 acres

STATE LANDS 2025 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Section Name	* Budget	† Expenditures
Land Management & Stewardship Activities	\$5,900,561	\$4,983,494
Administrative Transfer to Department	\$744,441	\$703,141
Coastal Zone Management Program	\$2,517,301	\$1,841,013
Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve	\$5,147,047	\$1,433,798
Total per State Lands Fund	\$14,309,350	\$8,961,446
Forever Wild Land Trust Fund	\$16,150,918	\$8,762,238
Forever Wild Stewardship Fund	\$3,000,000	\$2,507,776



BLANKENSHIP EVENT CENTER SPOTLIGHTING CONSERVATION, RECREATION, AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE BLACK BELT

Located near the City of Greensboro in Hale County, the M. Barnett Lawley Forever Wild Field Trial Area (FWFTA) reflects the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) State Lands Division's commitment to furthering conservation, outdoor recreation, and economic growth opportunities through strategic land management. Formerly the site of a state correctional facility known as the State Cattle Ranch, this property has been transformed into a nationally recognized venue for sporting dog events while continuing to support a broad range of recreational uses and habitat enhancements that showcase Alabama's Black Belt region.



The FWFTA encompasses approximately 4,300 acres, including 3,342 acres owned by the Forever Wild Land Trust (Forever Wild) and 998 acres owned by the State Lands Division. The combined acreage and associated facilities are managed by State Lands Division staff consistent with the multiple-use philosophy utilized across other Forever Wild tracts.

BENEFITS FOR THE BLACK BELT AND ALABAMA

The FWFTA welcomes nearly 4,000 visitors each year, with thousands of sporting dogs competing in more than 30 events annually. These events attract participants from across the U.S. and other countries, elevating Alabama's profile in the sporting dog community and generating meaningful tourism activity for the surrounding local communities.

Under the management of the State Lands Division, the property hosted several prestigious national competitions in FY 2024-2025, including the Vizsla Club of America National Gun Dog Championship and the AKC National Gun Dog Championship. This fiscal year alone the property hosted more than 2,700 dogs for various trial and hunt test events with an additional 275 dogs taking advantage of day-use training areas. This success comes as a result of annually preparing 2,500 acres to create specific ground conditions necessary to meet the individual competition and training requirements associated with each of the various sporting dog events.

While perhaps best known for sporting dog events and training opportunities, the FWFTA acreage also supports several hunting programs coordinated by State Lands Division. In addition to scheduled physically disabled deer hunts, the FWFTA annually offers multiple youth deer, duck, and dove hunt events. Staff continues work to increase public fishing opportunities by restructuring old catfish ponds on the site and continuing efforts to eradicate Southern naiad (an aquatic plant) growth in those ponds. The State Lands Division also continues to coordinate with ADCNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division to ensure that field-based learning opportunities are provided to college students through ADCNR's Campus Conservation Program. Participating institutions this year included Alabama A&M, Auburn University, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Huntington College, Montevallo University, and Tuskegee University.

Land management at the FWFTA also focuses on habitat conservation efforts. One example can be seen through activities associated with native warm season grass restoration. Ongoing prescribed fire planning and implementation is used as a management tool furthering this mission. Prescribed fire rotation also supports upland bird population growth and white-tailed deer abundance, while further aiding efforts associated with site preparation for sporting dog events. These efforts have contributed to the vibrant birding opportunities ranging from annual Black Belt Birding Festival events to smaller field trips organized by Alabama Audubon.

Visitors attending these various events at the FWFTA support local restaurants, regional lodging, and small businesses throughout Hale County and surrounding Black Belt communities, reinforcing the connection between responsible land management and rural economic development.

THE BLANKENSHIP EVENT CENTER

The completion of the new Blankenship Event Center served as a significant milestone enhancing the State Lands Division's ability to host large-scale competitions, various meetings, and community events at the FWFTA. The State Lands Division was honored to dedicate this new facility in honor of ADCNR Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship and his wife, Allyson, in recognition of the family's steadfast commitment to Forever Wild, the State Lands Division, and the broader mission of ADCNR.

The multi-use center is specifically designed to support competitions, outdoor recreational activities, educational programming, and community gatherings. The 5,000-square-foot indoor facility and adjacent 4,000-square-foot outdoor pavilion feature Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible restrooms, meeting space, and a limited kitchen. This new infrastructure significantly expands the property's versatility and capacity to attract large events and strengthens its role as a regional hub for outdoor recreation.

Several other FWFTA improvements have been completed and additional enhancements are ongoing. Recent work at the barn area expanded available stables so that 48 horses now can be accommodated. Barn area lighting and plumbing have been replaced and a bathroom added as well. Surrounding the barn area, five new campsites with electrical hookups were added, and work on additional sites is underway. More than 2.5 miles of new fencing has been added to better protect dogs from adjacent public roadways. Internal roads leading to the Blankenship Event Center were paved following construction activities and internal roads throughout the FWFTA were enhanced and repaired with additional gravel. New directional signage was also installed, both along internal roads as well as state and county roadways leading to the FWFTA.

A LASTING LEGACY

Managed by the ADCNR State Lands Division in partnership with the Forever Wild Land Trust, the M. Barnett Lawley Forever Wild Field Trial Area and its Blankenship Event Center stand as a lasting legacy of thoughtful land stewardship. This site demonstrates how careful planning and active management can simultaneously meet the conservation, recreation, education, and economic impact goals inherent to a multiple-use land management philosophy. Through expanded facilities, diverse programming, and a growing national reputation, the property continues to preserve Alabama's natural heritage, strengthen the Black Belt's economy, and ensure that Alabama's outdoor traditions remain accessible for generations to come. ■



BILLY POPE



ALABAMA STATE PARKS

The **State Parks Division** administers 21 state parks in Alabama, encompassing 48,850 acres of stunning landscapes. Whether guests seek a peaceful day of hiking or a luxurious resort experience of conventions, lodging, restaurants, and golf courses, Alabama State Parks have something for everyone. From Gulf Coast beaches to the Appalachian Mountains, the Parks Division offers a diverse range of activities and amenities for individuals, groups, and families.

The mission of the Alabama State Parks Division is to acquire and preserve natural areas; develop, furnish, operate, and maintain recreational facilities; and extend the public's knowledge of the state's natural environment.

Goals of the Division include:

- Providing exceptional facilities and services tailored to create memorable experiences for guests
- Managing the parks efficiently, ensuring financial sustainability
- Creating opportunities for personal growth through outdoor experiences
- Encouraging the use of Alabama State Parks to showcase the state's natural beauty
- Preserving parks for future generations to stay, play, and explore
- Promoting goodwill and upholding Alabama's reputation through the Division's dedicated team members

In FY 2024-2025, the Division continued to complete several major renovation projects in alignment with Division goals. Staff served with excellence through every step of the improvement projects and provided access to outdoor recreation for park visitors throughout the state.

FY 2024-2025 Division highlights include:

- Welcoming more than 5,233,000 guests throughout the park system
- Implementing numerous systemwide design and renovation projects
- Partnering with the Alabama State Parks Foundation for educational programming using Alabama State Parks as outdoor classrooms, welcoming more than 13,600 guests
- Celebrating the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail being honored as the top recreational trail in the country for the third consecutive year in the USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice Awards
- Engaging 1,024 First Day Hike participants covering 1,408 miles in January 2025



JOE MILLER

FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL

Of the 21 State Parks, 18 are maintained by the Alabama State Parks Division staff. Staffing is determined by each location's size, development, and operation. The total number of employees for all parks varies from approximately 700 during the peak season to an estimated 500 during the off-season. Three parks are staffed and operated through management agreements with local governments. The State Parks Division Central Office in Montgomery includes eight sections: Operations, Marketing and Promotions, Natural Resources, Education and Interpretation, Recreational Trails, Planning and Visitor Services, Law Enforcement, and Management Analysis.

OPERATIONS SECTION

The Operations Section is divided into North and South regions. The North Region includes the Northeast, Northwest, and Central Districts, and the South Region includes the Southeast and Southwest Districts. Each District is managed by District Superintendents with the regional Operations Supervisor overseeing the team's work, ranging from daily park operations to maintenance and more. The section manages insurance and property inventory along with the needs of hundreds of hardworking division team members.

**Operational highlights for
FY 2024-2025 include the following:**

SOUTHERN REGION:

Gulf State Park

- Welcomed 2,685,103 visitors to the park
- Began construction of the new executive campground with 105 expanded campsites
- Earned recognition as a top five finalist for Best RV Park at the Beach, Best Public Park, and Best Camping and Glamping in the Best of Baldwin 2025
- Earned the title of Best Recreational Trail in the country in the USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice Awards for the third straight year for the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail
- Awarded the 2025 Sweet Home Alabama Attraction of the Year for the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail
- Renovated the Gulf State Park campground office and camp store
- Installed new education building flooring and audio/visual equipment
- Resurfaced the tennis courts and installed lines for six pickleball courts
- Resealed and striped the education pier parking lot

- Hosted annual special events, including Shark Week with 1,500 participants, Turtle Fest with 600 participants, Grinch-mas with 2,000 participants, Trek or Treat with 450 participants, and Golden Extravaganza with 178 families
- Hosted four marathons that passed through the park with 2,571 runners
- Welcomed 41,594 visitors to the Nature Center
- Provided 68 Angler Academy Classes to 510 participants
- Participated in the Gulf Shores Gives Back second annual community-wide service day
- Planted 4,900 dune plants and Christmas trees as part of a dune restoration project through the Planting for Protection program, involving 364 students from Gulf Shores and Orange Beach in dune restoration efforts
- Hosted a zone for the annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup in which 258 participants collected 274.5 pounds of trash and debris along our beaches
- Assisted the Panhandle Terrapin Project and University of West Florida graduate students with diamondback terrapin trap deployment and monitoring
- Provided 664 interpretive and educational programs and hikes for 20,623 participants through the Gulf State Park Nature Center
- Provided 51 private programs and field trips for 2,506 participants
- Provided interpretive booths at Gulf Shores City Schools Earth Day, Alabama Nature Center Career Day Expo, Nest Fest, Fort Morgan Bird Banding, Alabama Association of Rescue Squads, and Neighborhood Adventure Safety Day
- Awarded a Gopher Tortoise Council Heinrich Environmental Education Grant

Meaher State Park

- Welcomed 56,240 park guests
- Completed construction of 45 luxury RV sites, four waterfront cabins, a park headquarters office with a nature center feature and retail center, an elevated bathhouse, and a new entrance gate
- Refinished existing waterfront cabins, bathhouses, and pavilion exteriors to match new construction
- Installed new park directional signage
- Hosted the 2025 Great Alabama 650 Paddle Race as a rest stop sponsor
- Held the annual Spanish Fort Fire Department 5K
- Coordinated a zone for the annual Alabama Coastal Cleanup and Crab Trap Clean Up events, where 700 pounds of debris was collected
- Hosted the annual Salty Kids Fishing Rodeo with 50 youth participants

- Hosted 62 interpretive and educational programs and walks for 872 participants
- Hosted a Master Naturalist Kayaking field day in partnership with Auburn University
- Installed a pollinator garden
- Hosted a First Day Hike with 110 participants

Roland Cooper State Park

- Welcomed 12,497 park guests
- Installed a new accessible playground
- Remodeled riverside cabin interiors
- Rebuilt the fish and game cleaning station
- Installed new cabin and campsite signage
- Hosted six fishing tournaments, including the Pride of the South Solo Series
- Coordinated multiple family reunions, events, and weddings
- Hosted several interpretive programs with support from district staff

Lakepoint State Park

- Welcomed 147,567 park guests
- Renovated 51 Lodge rooms with modern furniture, luxury fixtures, and appliances, 10 of which are fully Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible
- Partnered with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to upgrade 110 RV sites to 50-amp service
- Began renovations to improve drinking water and wastewater upgrades through an Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) grant
- Hosted Kayak Eufaula through a partnership with the City of Eufaula Parks and Recreation Department and a grant from Innovate Alabama
- Held the annual Fins, Feathers, and Flowers Weekend
- Launched the inaugural Alligator Awareness Weekend
- Hosted more than 1,000 events, conferences, and programs for civic, business, and regional groups
- Hosted 40 fishing tournaments, including local, high school, and regional events
- Held the annual Fourth of July event in partnership with the City of Eufaula
- Installed new air conditioning units in 10 cottages
- Provided programs, outreach, and field trips for 1,035 guests and participants, including 243 programs for 651 park guests, outreach to 4-H and Boys and Girls Club groups for 213 participants, and a two-day Blue Cross Blue Shield field trip for 160 children and 11 teachers from Eufaula City Schools



PATRICIA LYDAY

Blue Springs State Park

- Welcomed 30,000 park guests
- Hosted the annual Polar Plunge with more than 30 participants
- Hosted the Kids Fishing Rodeo with more than 150 participants
- Sponsored the Friends of Blue Springs Easter Egg Hunt with more than 50 participants
- Hosted several interpretive programs with support from the district staff

Frank Jackson State Park

- Welcomed 17,529 park guests
- Hosted annual Scarecrows in the Park with 1,000 visitors, showcasing local community partnerships
- Worked with the Trail Masters to renovate the trails and trailheads
- Hosted the annual Fourth of July Fireworks event sponsored by the City of Opp
- Hosted several programs including Girl Scouts Love State Parks and Gross Out Camp programs focused on environmental and wildlife education with support from district staff

Chewacla State Park

- Welcomed 106,000 park guests
- Began construction of the new Chewacla Event Center, scheduled for completion in January 2026

- Began renovations to improve drinking water and wastewater systems through a grant with ADEM
- Represented the park at nine off-site outreach events for 331 participants, including at Montgomery Public Library, Auburn Public Library, and Transformation Montgomery
- Completed two invasive plant workdays with the Chewacla Invasive Plant Work Group, targeting privet and elaeagnus species
- Hosted Merit Badge University for 150 Boy Scouts
- Hosted the Chewacla Classic Camper event that included 46 guests and 22 RV sites
- Launched the Chewacla Cubs Nature School, a weekday homeschool program series offering 15 programs for 290 guests
- Provided 148 interpretive programs and nine field trips funded by The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield, a 214% increase over the previous fiscal year

NORTHERN REGION:

Oak Mountain State Park

- Welcomed 516,508 park guests
- Sold 48,400 rounds of golf
- Hosted approximately 1,300 guests for horse trail rides
- Added approximately 1,000 feet of drainage around the golf course
- Renovated the driving range ball house, bathroom, and starter building
- Renovated the fairway of number eight to improve drainage
- Installed recycled rubber mulch in the day use playground
- Renovated the event center and meeting space in the park office
- Repaved the back entrance and Fishing Center parking lot
- Renovated cabin exteriors with new lighting and doors
- Completed and opened the Rodeo Clown, Fish Whistle, and Roman Road multi-use trails funded through a grant from Innovate Alabama
- Nominated for Shelby County Best of the Best's Best Field Trip Location 2025
- Hosted the annual Campween event in the campground
- Expanded programming for visitors with campground movie nights
- Hosted 36 field trips for 3,656 participants and seven outreach programs reaching 508 participants
- Delivered 186 interpretive programs for 3,442 participants and hosted several major park events, including the Harvest Festival and Spring Market with more than 6,000 attendees
- Provided Master Naturalist field days in partnership with Alabama Cooperative Extension System

- Partnered with Fresh Air Family to present Gross Out Camps, environmental education day camps for elementary and middle school students
- Launched new interpretive programs exploring local lore, Appalachian history, and arts in nature

Cheaha State Park

- Welcomed 221,540 guests
- Began construction of the new lodge
- Welcomed 7,892 visitors to the interpretive center
- Welcomed 10,477 visitors to the Civilian Conservation Corps Museum
- Welcomed 1,547 visitors to the Walt Farr Native American Relic Museum
- Hosted special events in the park with 17,920 participants
- Hosted the annual Hop into Spring Festival with 250 participants and the Cheaha Fall Festival with 400 participants
- Participated in community programs engaging approximately 6,000 people
- Renovated the descent on the Rock Garden Trail for easier access
- Received certification for two staff members as National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) instructors
- Partnered with local beekeepers to maintain seasonal hives on the property and sell the honey collected at the park's mountain store
- Installed a Motus Wildlife Tracking System station within the park to help gather bird migration data
- Advanced the drinking water improvement project by cleaning, sealing, and painting treated water holding tanks, continuing improvements to the well and spring water pump stations
- Improved safety by repainting the emergency landing zone at the Pinhoti Trailhead, restriped all parking areas, installed reflectors on roadways
- Received Alabama Law Enforcement Agency helicopter rescue safety training for four staff members
- Renovated the lower campground restrooms
- Hosted Alabama Cooperative Extension System Master Naturalist field days and research visits for local colleges and universities
- Hosted 333 programs for 3,033 guests
- Received a Blue Cross Blue Shield Caring Foundation grant that funded 16 field trips for 735 participants
- Conducted 11 field trips for 388 participants
- Conducted prescribed burns on the western side of the park in partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission and continued an ongoing photo documentation project describing the benefits of prescribed fire

Wind Creek State Park

- Welcomed 311,423 park guests
- Constructed five three-bedroom, three-bath lakeside cottages overlooking Lake Martin
- Completed campground renovation projects for sections B and C, renovating 72 campsites with 10 of them being ADA accessible
- Served as host site for the Vulcan Orienteering Club and Southern Trails Equine Competition endurance race
- Partnered with the Alabama Forestry Commission for prescribed burns supporting a healthy ecosystem
- Continued partnership with Lake Martin Resource Association and Renew Our Rivers for cleanup efforts on Lake Martin and the surrounding roadways
- Hosted 40 fishing tournaments, serving high school and college teams as well as professional anglers
- Hosted the annual Alabama Cooperative Extension System Water Festival Event, where more than 400 Tallapoosa County third and fourth graders learned about water stewardship and local ecosystems
- Supported the park naturalist in acquiring merchant mariner credentials, captain's license, and NASP basic archery instructor certification
- Hosted Fresh Air Family summer environmental education camps for children
- Received a Resource Conservation and Development grant to install a pollinator garden and interpretive storybook trail

Lake Guntersville State Park

- Welcomed 250,039 park guests
- Hosted 733 group events with 52,043 guests attending weddings, family reunions, church retreats, social groups, government meetings, conferences, and corporate outings
- Hosted the Alabama Bass Trail and Big Bass Classic fishing tournaments
- Hosted Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve, Mother's Day, and Easter holiday dinner celebrations
- Hosted the Lake Guntersville Halloween weekend for campers and registered guests
- Reopened the Eagle's Nest Golf Course with new concrete cart paths
- Added a new ball dispenser and renovated the tee pavilion at the driving range
- Added two deluxe Bennington pontoons to the park's boat rental fleet
- Represented the park at six outreach events including Boaz Middle School, Girl Scouts of North Central Alabama Leadership Summit, and Guntersville Public Library

- Hosted the annual Eagle Awareness Weekends with nearly 450 attendees
- Hosted the Environmental Education Association of Alabama annual conference for more than 200 teachers and educators
- Partnered with Alabama Scenic River Trail to provide a new kayak launch for visiting and lodging guests
- Partnered with Girl Scouts of the USA to lead the statewide interpretive team for Girl Scouts Love State Parks, a nationwide initiative that reached more than 1,042 scouts through 34 programs at 15 Alabama State Parks
- Developed and hosted the first History on Horseback program, a new interpretive offering
- Hosted 93 interpretive and educational programs and hikes for 796 park guests

Buck's Pocket State Park

- Welcomed 10,801 guests
- Hosted the annual Super Bowl group and other large groups that booked the entire campground
- Hosted weekly homeschool groups
- Constructed additional parking areas for primitive campers

and pavilion visitors

- Developed two new primitive campsites along Sauty Creek
- Installed lighting along the gravel walkway from the park office to the camp host site to enhance guest safety
- Partnered with certified arborists to remove hazardous trees
- Provided several interpretive and educational programs with support from the district staff

DeSoto State Park

- Welcomed 301,238 guests
- Hosted several annual events, including Wildflower Saturday, Spookapalooza, Creative Spirit Art Market, Moonlight Meandering Guided Paddles, and Fourth of July events
- Hosted the Lost Falls Trail Run with more than 50 participants
- Constructed a new accessible pool house that opened in May 2025
- Provided 168 interpretive and educational programs for 2,414 park guests
- Partnered with Blue Cross and Blue Shield for kindergarten through twelfth grade field trips with 20 participants



- Hosted Alabama's Ecology in Action teacher workshops funded through a grant from The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield
- Partnered with Legacy Partners in Environmental Education and The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield to implement the Mountains to Gulf Expedition teacher workshop

Joe Wheeler State Park

- Welcomed 264,280 guests
- Hosted 131 banquets, including 15 weddings
- Replaced all windows, doors, and railings at the lodge
- Began renovations to improve drinking water and wastewater systems through a grant from ADEM, including renovations to the water tower
- Hosted Feather Fest with 150 guests in partnership with Oakville Indian Mounds, Cook Museum of Natural Science, North Alabama Young Birders, Bankhead National Forest, Wild Alabama, and other community partners
- Partnered with Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful to remove nearly 3,000 pounds of trash from park waterways
- Supported the park naturalist in acquiring merchant mariner credentials, captain's license, and NASP basic archery instructor certification
- Provided a Master Naturalist field day in partnership with Alabama Cooperative Extension System and hosted teacher workshops for 41 educators in partnership with Legacy Environmental Education Partners and Alabama State Parks
- Hosted 163 interpretive programs for 2,552 guests, supported by a Blue Cross Blue Shield Caring Foundation grant that enabled 501 participants to visit the park and supported two accessible field trips with more than 30 participants
- Represented the park at nine statewide outreach events, with the park naturalist engaging nearly 1,000 participants and assisting 56 people in catching their first fish

Monte Sano State Park

- Welcomed 149,374 guests
- Hosted 108 lodge events including car shows, mountain bike events, the Monte Sano Arts Festival, North Alabama Japanese Garden celebrations, and more
- Renovated the Civilian Conservation Corps Museum exterior
- Modernized the park's 14 cabins, including kitchen and bathroom renovations
- Upgraded exteriors and landscaping at cabins 6 and 7
- Removed invasive species throughout the park and cleared vegetation at the park's iconic park bluff views
- Constructed a new pergola at the lodge for weddings and other events



- Reduced understory vegetation and cleared storm damage in the day use area
- Renovated the lodge exterior lighting, doors, and roof
- Replaced the camp store's HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) unit
- Represented the park at 18 outreach events with staff and volunteers and delivered 121 on-site and off-site presentations, engaging 5,634 participants
- Partnered with the Madison Huntsville Library System for outreach reptile presentations and with Huntsville Botanical Garden, reaching more than 1,000 participants and students
- Hosted the first park cleanup through the Alabama Cooperative Extension System Master Naturalist Program
- Provided three kindergarten through twelfth grade field trips for 236 teachers and students funded by The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield
- Provided a Master Naturalist field day in partnership with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System
- Partnered with the University of Alabama in Huntsville to present the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute series on naturalists of Alabama
- Hosted a summer intern through Legacy Environmental, who delivered 16 programs for 715 participants and educated visitors about the park
- Partnered with Legacy Partners in Environmental Education to host a teacher workshop on art and wellness in nature for 25 educators statewide

- Hosted 98 interpretive and educational programs and hikes for 1,854 park guests, a 63% increase over the previous fiscal year

Cathedral Caverns State Park

- Welcomed 96,450 guests
- Installed a roof over the gem mine area
- Established a new trailhead and parking area
- Made improvements to the wastewater treatment facility
- Assisted the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) with rover research inside the caverns
- Presented Osher Lifelong Learning Institute programs at the University of Alabama in Huntsville
- Partnered with scientists statewide to host a Bat Blitz ecology study at the caverns
- Represented Alabama cave parks at a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) educator event and a career day, engaging 183 people
- Provided more than 100 unique programs through the park naturalist, interacting with 1,918 visitors during cave tours, field trips, and interpretive programs
- Removed more than 100 pine trees infected with pine beetles
- Hosted 64 programs for 795 guests and 14,277 students, parents, and teachers for kindergarten through twelfth grade field trips and cave tours, including one field trip funded by The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield for 53 students, 6 teachers, and 41 parents
- Launched a homeschool program series serving hundreds of students in the greater Huntsville area
- Provided a Master Naturalist field day in partnership with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System for 13 statewide participants

Rickwood Caverns State Park

- Welcomed 56,401 guests
- Hosted several cave weddings
- Installed a new accessible playground with support from the Alabama State Parks Foundation and the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham
- Hosted the annual Wonderland Under Warrior holiday lighting event
- Renovated the picnic tables in the day use areas
- Began construction on a new entrance road from Highway 31 through a partnership with Blount County
- Presented Osher Lifelong Learning Institute programs at the University of Alabama in Huntsville

- Installed trail markers along all park trails and completed a new Karst Trailhead kiosk
- Represented Alabama cave parks at several off-site outreach events, engaging 183 people
- Provided more than 100 unique programs through the park naturalist, interacting with 1,017 visitors through cave tours, field trips, and interpretive programs
- Provided 58 programs attended by 517 guests and hosted 86 groups with more than 3,990 students, parents, and staff touring the cave
- Launched a homeschool program series serving hundreds of students in the Warrior area
- Provided a Master Naturalist field day in partnership with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System for several statewide participants

Lake Lurleen State Park

- Welcomed 355 guests and recorded 902 campsite rentals during two months of open operations prior to closing for a complete renovation to the park. The park is expected to reopen in 2026 after renovations are complete.

MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS SECTION

The Marketing and Promotions Section manages statewide messaging, media relations, and public engagement for all 21 Alabama State Parks. It supports branding, digital platforms, public communications, and outreach efforts, ensuring consistent and timely information while promoting park programs, services, and staff achievements across various channels. This section includes a Parks Marketing and Promotion Manager, Public Relations and Communications Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, Marketing Field Liaison, and Marketing Intern.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Implemented the Alabama State Parks Ambassador Program
- Earned media coverage demonstrated strong statewide and regional interest in Alabama State Parks, with more than 1,500 featured stories across a wide range of media outlets
- Continued the Alabama State Parks license plate sales campaign that generated additional revenue for park improvements
- Achieved a 64% engagement rate through management of Alapark.com, exceeding industry benchmarks for government and tourism websites
- Supported programs, events, and reservation growth statewide through the Stay, Play, Explore - It's Natural campaign

- Led the International Women's Day campaign, recognizing and elevating women across Alabama State Parks
- Created content for and distributed the Alabama State Parks e-newsletter
- Promoted major statewide initiatives, including First Day Hikes; Eagle Awareness Weekends; Alligator Awareness Weekend; Fins, Feathers and Flowers; the Outdoor Mobility Device Program; construction milestones, and more
- Marketed more than 2,400 educational programs and professional development offerings supporting the Education and Interpretation Section
- Provided communications support for nine prescribed burns supporting the Natural Resources Section

Digital Engagement and Audience Reach:

- **Division E-Newsletter:** Expanded and managed the Division's e-newsletter program, reaching between 316,000 and 440,000 subscribers with an average open rate of 36.8% , a figure that exceeds national benchmarks for government and tourism email programs. The Division's email performance demonstrated strong audience engagement, content sharing, and subscriber retention.
- **Social Media Marketing:** The section managed 46 social media profiles across Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Social media continues to have steady growth and consistent engagement with millions of followers and interactions across all platforms.
- **Alabama State Parks Ambassador Program:** Launched in March 2025, the inaugural Alabama State Parks Ambassador Program was created to expand brand awareness and spark conversation about Alabama State Parks. The program received nearly 800 applications for 75 ambassador positions. Ambassadors documented their authentic park experiences through photos, videos, and digital content that was amplified across official Alabama State Parks channels. With consistent brand oversight ensuring quality and cohesion, the program significantly expanded reach and content volume.

FUTURE EFFORTS

- Redesign business and conference marketing materials
- Continue modernizing Alapark.com for accuracy and improved user experience
- Launch Pics in the Parks: An Alabama State Parks Photo Journey campaign
- Expand diversity, accessibility, and inclusion efforts across communications and marketing
- Enhance internal technology platforms supporting programs, reservations, and public information
- Finalize the Alabama State Parks Passport campaign

NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION

The Natural Resources Section plays a vital role in preserving the natural integrity of Alabama State Parks by conserving ecosystems, managing wildlife, and protecting water resources while balancing recreational use. Its core responsibilities include habitat restoration, invasive species control, prescribed burning, and wildlife monitoring, all focused on maintaining biodiversity and ecological health. The section monitors research initiatives, oversees real property matters, and secures funding through grants and partnerships. The section is staffed by a Natural Resource Supervisor based in Montgomery and a Natural Resource Planner based in Pelham. Together, they spearhead efforts to protect and manage the parks' diverse natural resources.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Natural Resources Section made significant strides in conservation and resource management across Alabama State Parks, focusing on prescribed fire, habitat restoration, invasive species management, community engagement, and educational initiatives.

Prescribed fire:

Prescribed fire is a tool used by the Natural Resources staff to manage forests, grasslands, and other ecosystems. Its purpose is to restore fire-adapted habitats, reduce wildfire risks, and promote native plant growth. The following are the prescribed fire accomplishments:

- **Gulf State Park: 443 acres**
- **Lakepoint State Park: 55 acres**
- **Wind Creek State Park: 100 acres**
- **Frank Jackson State Park: 190 acres**
- **Oak Mountain State Park: 230 acres**
- **Lake Guntersville State Park: 183 acres**
- **DeSoto State Park: 42 acres**
- **Cheaha State Park: 150 acres**
- **Paul Grist State Park: 220 acres**

Habitat Restoration and Wildlife Management:

Habitat Restoration is the process of repairing and bringing back natural areas such as forests, wetlands, or grasslands to their original healthy condition and for the benefit of wildlife populations. Wildlife Management is conserving, protecting, and managing wildlife populations. In FY 2024-25, the section continued to blend and perform these services through various projects, including managing the 188-acre longleaf pine restoration at Frank Jackson State Park to restore critical habitat for the gopher tortoise and managing archery hunts at Oak Mountain State Park and Frank Jackson State Park.

Invasive Species Management:

- Monitored the Integrated Pest Management Plan to control Argentine ants and other invasive species across southern parks
- Partnered with volunteers at Chewacla State Park to combat invasive plants and restore native habitats through the Hearts of STIHL grant
- Applied herbicides to manage invasive vegetation at several parks

Lake Management:

- Fertilized Lunker Lake at Oak Mountain State Park to enhance recreational fishing
- Managed catfish stocking at Oak Mountain State Park and Frank Jackson State Park

Educational and Community Engagement:

- Hosted Learn to Burn workshops at Wind Creek State Park, providing hands-on training for private and public landowners
- Hosted Fins, Feathers, and Flowers Weekend at Lakepoint State Park
- Hosted Girl Scouts Love State Parks Campfire Program at Wind Creek State Park

Research, Planning, Collaboration, and Land Acquisition:

- Advanced the Fort Morgan Parkway Bike Trail Extension project under the RESTORE Act
- Enhanced data collection using ArcGIS to map invasive species and prescribed fire objectives
- Partnered with academia to facilitate research permits
- Collaborated with local stakeholders to resolve land disputes and boundary issues, and facilitated land use permits with private parties

Public Contributions and Outreach:

The Natural Resources Section reinforced the Alabama State Parks Division's commitment to ecological stewardship, guest education, and long-term sustainability by facilitating training and participating in national and state conferences.

FUTURE EFFORTS

The section continues to focus on funding opportunities for ecosystem restoration projects within Alabama State Parks. Efforts will include prescribed fire, innovative ideas for wildlife habitat improvements, the addition of fish habitat structures, and the control of invasive species.

EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

The Education and Interpretation Section inspires public appreciation and understanding of Alabama's natural heritage through dynamic educational programs. Centered on place-based learning, this section emphasizes natural resource interpretation, outdoor recreation, wellness in nature, accessibility, safety awareness, and opportunities for meaningful connections with the outdoors. The team is composed of a Chief of Education and Interpretation, five District Naturalists, and nine Park Naturalists, including a newly designated Caverns Educator serving both Rickwood and Cathedral Caverns state parks.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Program Growth and Reach:

- Presented 2,400 educational programs to more than 50,000 guests and visitors
- Provided field trips for 8,800 students and 450 teachers, a 120% increase from the previous year
- Provided teacher workshops and educational classes for 300 teachers

Partnerships:

- Collaborated with the Girl Scouts of the USA as staff led Alabama's participation in the Girl Scouts Love State Parks initiative, offering 34 programs at 15 State Parks and reaching more than 1,040 scouts during this fifth annual event
- Participated in the First Day Hikes program and guided 1,024 participants on a combined 1,408 miles of hikes across 12 Alabama State Parks during this eighth annual event

AWARDS

- Awarded the Best Environmental Education Program in the State of Alabama from the Environmental Education Association of Alabama
- Received the Natural Resources Extension Education award from the Alabama Chapter of the Association of Natural Resources Extension Professionals
- Received an Outstanding Service to National Forests in Alabama award from the United States Department of Agriculture

Educational Program Funding Secured: Secured grants from The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, Big Cedar Education Foundation, Bronco Wild Fund, and Legacy Partners in Environmental Education Darryl Gates Memorial Scholarship, which funded the following:

- Free Alabama Course of Study curriculum-based K-12 field trips for 8,800 Alabama students

- Wild Wonders park passes for 1,500 Title I field trip students and their families; 570 passes were redeemed for 3,013 visitors
- Alabama, Math, Science, and Technology accredited teacher workshops and professional development for 300 Alabama teachers
- Summer internships for college students at Monte Sano, Chewacla, and Gulf state parks
- Environmental literacy and education programs for students and communities in the Black Belt Region through programs at Chewacla, Lakepoint, Frank Jackson, and Blue Springs state parks

Statewide Themed Programs: The Education and Interpretation Section developed and delivered themed programs aligned with national and statewide initiatives, creating meaningful opportunities for visitors to connect with Alabama’s natural resources while promoting outdoor recreation, environmental awareness, wellness, and accessibility. Programs included First Day Hikes, Girl Scouts Love State Parks, Leave No Trace activities, B.A.R.K. Ranger hikes, and specialized offerings such as accessible Windows to Nature workshops, nature photography, story trails, Shinrin Yoku nature wellness experiences, and prescribed fire education. Collectively, these programs supported physical activity, mindfulness, and inclusive engagement for visitors of all ages and abilities while fostering appreciation for Alabama’s State Parks.

FUTURE EFFORTS

- Continue expanding place-based environmental education across Alabama State Parks
- Build strong partnerships with schools to grow an intern and volunteer base
- Establish a structured high school internship program to develop future environmental educators and encourage careers in conservation
- Launch the Junior Ranger Program to connect youth with natural resources and conservation education in January 2026
- Enhance accessibility for all programs and activities
- Secure grants and corporate funding to sustain statewide programs
- Maintain K–12 grade field trips, community outreach, and professional development

RECREATIONAL TRAILS SECTION

The Recreational Trails Section consists of a Trails Coordinator, two Crew Members, and one Equipment Operator. The section works with park staff, partner groups, and local communities to expand trail access, support mountain biking, and improve outdoor recreation statewide. These efforts enable more park guests to experience safe and enjoyable trail experiences.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Oak Mountain State Park:

- Added an advanced backwoods trail
- Performed trail update work through grants from Innovate Alabama and strong partnerships with Shelby County, Birmingham Urban Mountain Pedalers, and Forever Wild
- Continued to work toward International Mountain Bicycling Association Silver Ride Center status

Lake Guntersville State Park:

- Rerouted the Taylor Mountain Trail to improve trail sustainability and rider experience
- Helped prepare several acres of land for planting small-leaf pines, supporting long-term environmental health

Additional Park and Regional Supports:

- Assisted Chewacla and Monte Sano state parks with storm cleanup to keep trails clear and safe for visitors
- Logged hundreds of hours supporting systemwide trail upkeep, assisting with fallen trees, trimming vegetation, repairing washed-out areas, and removing trash
- Participated in the Alabama Tourism Department's Year of Alabama Trails launch to celebrate outdoor recreation trails across the state with a kickoff celebration at Birmingham's Vulcan Park

Training, Outreach, and Accessibility

- Provided two Trail Crew members with S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior and S-130 Firefighter training to support prescribed fire efforts, improve forest health, and improve trail corridors
- Expanded the Outdoor Mobility Device Program
- Provided Action Trackchairs to Lakepoint State Park
- Added a Paragolfer all-terrain mobility chair at Oak Mountain State Park
- Supported accessibility needs in accessing parks and trails
- Planned additional mobility devices for future deployment

FUTURE EFFORTS

- Continue building, improving, and maintaining safe, enjoyable, and environmentally responsible trails
- Support continued growth of mountain biking opportunities
- Expand accessibility through additional mobility devices and adaptive trail initiatives
- Enhance forest health to support long-term trail sustainability
- Strengthen partnerships with volunteers, local communities, and statewide outdoor recreation organizations

PLANNING AND VISITOR SERVICES SECTION

The Planning and Visitor Services Section oversees the Alabama State Parks reservation system, which includes campground, lodge, convention center, cabin and chalet reservations, golf tee times, food and beverage operations, cave tours, education programming, and gift cards. This section is led by a Planning and Visitor Service Manager, an Administrative Analyst, and a GIS Field Analyst.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Located and tracked all park infrastructure assets within ArcGIS to support park maintenance effectiveness and to prepare for the implementation of a work order system
- Upgraded equipment in park restaurants to enable faster and more accurate service
- Introduced new software features to support special offers and promotional pricing
- Developed new inventory and maps for the Meaher State Park campground expansion and the Wind Creek State Park campground renovation within the reservation system to allow guests to book new campgrounds, cabins, and cottages online
- Established an all-inclusive event package at lodge parks in collaboration with park teams, allowing guests to book bundled lodging, meals, and park signature events
- Leveraged guest reservation and feedback data to improve services
- Began plans to roll out interactive data dashboards for park staff to help anticipate guest needs, address service gaps, and plan future promotions

FUTURE EFFORTS

Planning and Visitor Services is actively planning the implementation of new mobile devices for restaurant and gate staff to improve the guest experience while optimizing rates.

- Prepare for the grand opening of the fully renovated Lake Lurleen State Park to ensure a seamless online booking process
- Prepare for the launch of the new executive campground at Gulf State Park with a focus on managing high guest demand
- Prepare to roll out interactive data dashboards for park staff by the end of FY 2025-2026
- Continue refining the reservation system to support programs, promotions, and guest experience improvements across all parks
- Utilize ArcGIS data in the development of a statewide work order system

LAW ENFORCEMENT SECTION

The Alabama State Parks Law Enforcement Team provided safety and security across all State Parks while supporting visitors, park operations, and resource protection. In addition to routine patrols, rangers responded to emergencies, assisted visitors, and supported educational and outreach efforts, all while enforcing park regulations and protecting the natural environment.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Conducted search and rescue missions and provided emergency medical assistance throughout Alabama’s State Parks System
- Supported educational programs while enforcing park regulations and protecting natural resources
- Led the 988 You Matter campaign to develop a proactive approach to mental health
- Increased accessibility options with KultureCity Sensory Bags and strengthened real time guest connections with park giveaways and promotional items in all patrol vehicles for guest engagement

FUTURE EFFORTS

Effective law enforcement efforts in Alabama State Parks for the coming year will focus on balancing visitor safety and resource protection with positive guest education. Priorities will include improving technology, strengthening partnerships with our local and federal agencies, and increasing ranger staffing.

MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS SECTION

The Management Analysis Section provides general administrative direction and coordination for management control, administrative cost analysis, performance reporting, data processing, budgeting, payables, receivables, and purchasing.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Received, processed, and analyzed 2,244 performance reports for all Alabama State Parks
- Prepared Parks System Performance Reports as required by the Budget Management Act
- Received, processed, and analyzed operations plans, budget reports, and related reports
- Prepared Parks System Operation Plans and fiscal year budgets
- Processed \$73,047,535 in revenue and \$69,263,542 in expenditures
- Processed 23,489 payment documents
- Disbursed 12,578 checks to vendors
- Worked with the Department of Treasury to consolidate State Parks bank accounts
- Monitored data processing output and distributed it to statewide park cost centers
- Monitored managerial audits

FUTURE EFFORTS

Management Analysis will continue to work with the State’s Accounting and Resource System to develop detailed monthly financial statements of the State Parks System and specific operations. Management Analysis will also continue to revise resale inventory procedures to promote better accountability.

STATE PARKS 2024-2025 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Section Name	* Budgeted	† Expenditures
Park Revolving Operations	\$53,452,347	\$ 52,648,458
Parks Revolving Capital Outlay	\$171,009	\$170,231
Administrative Transfer	\$ 4,261,300	\$ 4,394,164
Parks Fund Repairs and Maintenance	\$23,784,985	\$13,011,003
Parks Fund Capital Outlay	\$6,710,000	\$1,819,846
Total	\$88,379,641	\$72,043,702



MATTHEW CROWELL

STATE PARKS BOND SUPPORT IN ACTION



Chewacla Event Center



Meaher Campground



Chewacla Playground

STAFF PHOTOS

On May 24, 2022, Alabamians voted in favor of the State Parks Bond Amendment, allocating \$80 million to enhance our Alabama State Parks. In November of 2022, the bonds were sold, allowing ADCNR to move forward on many improvement projects throughout our Parks System, with our Parks team diligently initiating the projects. Alabama State Parks has also collaborated with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) to secure approximately \$35 million in grant funding to upgrade the State Parks System's drinking and wastewater facilities.

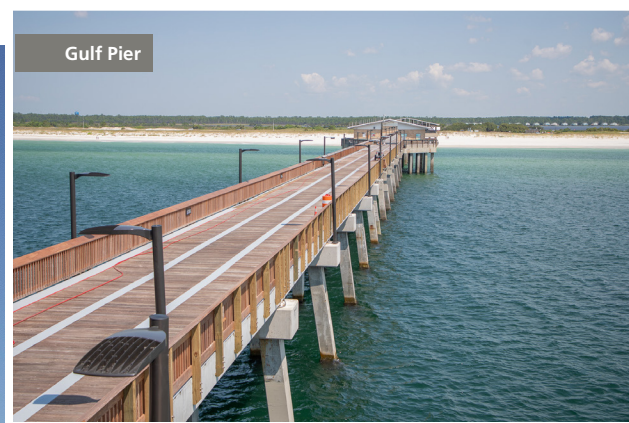
To meet the goal of completing 85% of bond-funded projects within three years of the bonds being sold, Alabama State Parks contracted with multiple design professionals and a program management firm to help oversee construction projects statewide. By fiscal year 2024-2025, the State Parks Division had completed the majority of bond projects, with several larger and more complex projects still underway. ■

Below, you will find status updates for many of our construction projects, which we're excited to share with Alabama residents and guests:

- Campground Renovations at Oak Mountain State Park – Completed
- New Cabins at Wind Creek State Park – Completed
- Cabin Renovations at Monte Sano State Park – Completed
- Campground Expansion at Meaher State Park – Completed
- Lodge Renovations at Joe Wheeler State Park – Completed
- Lodge Room Renovations at Lakepoint State Park – Completed
- Cabin Renovations at Lakepoint State Park – Completed
- Cabin Renovations at Gulf State Park – Completed
- Beach Renourishment Project at Gulf State Park – Completed
- Romar Beach Improvement at Gulf State Park – Completed
- Gulf State Park Fishing Pier – Completed
- Beach Pavilion Renovations at Gulf State Park – Completed
- Campground Improvements at Wind Creek State Park – Completed
- Campground Renovations at Monte Sano State Park – Completed
- Joe Wheeler State Park road resurfacing with support from ADEM and the recycled tire program – Completed
- Beach Pavilion at Joe Wheeler State Park – Completed
- Pool House Renovations at DeSoto State Park – Completed
- Campground Store at Meaher State Park – Completed
- Golf Course Cart Path Improvements at Lake Guntersville State Park – Completed
- Wi-Fi Projects at various locations – Ongoing
- Renovations to improve drinking water and wastewater upgrades at various locations, made possible with grants from ADEM – Ongoing
- Construction of Event Center at Chewacla State Park – Ongoing and scheduled to be completed in early 2026
- Construction of Campground at Lake Lurleen State Park – Ongoing and scheduled to be completed by Spring 2026
- Construction of New Executive Campground at Gulf State Park – Ongoing and scheduled to be completed by Summer 2026
- Construction of New 32-room Lodge at Cheaha State Park – Ongoing and scheduled to be completed by Summer 2026



Gulf Executive Campground



Gulf Pier

STATE PARKS EXPAND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS FOR ALABAMA STUDENTS

Alabama State Parks continued to strengthen its commitment to accessible outdoor learning this year thanks to a grant to provide Outdoor Alabama Adventures (OAA) from The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama (BCBS–TCF). This generous grant enabled thousands of students and teachers to experience Alabama’s State Parks as living classrooms where academic content, wellness, and wonder intersect for the benefit of Alabama’s next generation.



STAFF PHOTOS

What began as a vision to remove barriers to outdoor learning has become one of the fastest growing education initiatives in Alabama State Parks’ history. The 2024-2025 school year marked the first full year of BCBS-TCF supported K-12 field trips and Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) approved PowerSchool teacher workshops. These offerings coincided with a period of unprecedented expansion throughout the State Parks

System. Participation in these programs increased by 120% over the previous year, with 8,800 students and 450 teachers in attendance.

“Each time we welcome a student or teacher into a State Park we are planting seeds for Alabama’s future,” said Renee Raney, Chief Parks Naturalist. “These experiences nurture confidence, joy, and a lifelong connection to Alabama’s natural world.”

Teachers who participated in the Alabama State Parks series of OAA Ecology in Action workshops expressed their eagerness for this type of outdoor classroom experience. Many educators who attended the workshops described a sense of renewal, as they stepped into forests, lakeshores, and nature centers after long months in traditional classrooms. One teacher shared, “Just, wow! Everything in this workshop has blown my mind. I can’t wait to bring my students back to this State Park.”

State Parks Director Matthew Capps, a father of young children himself, emphasized the deeper significance of the program’s growth.

“These programs are about more than numbers,” Director Capps said. “They’re about opening doors for Alabama students. All children deserve the chance to learn in places that inspire them. Our parks give them that spark, and The Caring Foundation is helping us reach children who may otherwise never have the chance to experience a State Park or connect with natural resources firsthand.”

In addition to expanding access, Alabama State Parks revised its evaluation system to better understand how outdoor learning affects academic growth and well-being. The results were remarkable. Students participating in OAA showed a 90% average increase in understanding of program topics, with pre- and post-test scores rising 200% in 2025, up from 167% the year before. Approximately 10% of students were assessed, providing a meaningful snapshot of learning gains. Teachers experienced dramatic benefits as well. Workshop participants reported an 85% increase in applied curriculum knowledge and a 300% improvement in wellness indicators, including satisfaction, mood, perceived safety, and student engagement.

These findings affirm what educators experience firsthand: hands-on, place-based learning helps students see, feel, and internalize concepts that are difficult to grasp indoors. “I didn’t realize I could merge science and wellness into my math curriculum,” one teacher said. “These workshops have changed how I teach.”

Director Capps praised the program’s alignment with statewide health and wellness goals.

“The Caring Foundation’s support is helping us reduce disparities in educational access,” he said. “Outdoor learning strengthens physical and emotional health while connecting kids to our natural resources. This is an investment in Alabama’s future.”

With measurable academic gains, expanded teacher training, and strong wellness outcomes, the BCBS-TCF program is shaping a healthier, better prepared generation of young Alabamians. The program is expected to reach 10,000 students and more than 200 teachers next year, as it nears participation capacity and deepens its statewide impact.

“Outdoor learning plants seeds,” Capps said. “When a child discovers a fossil, feels the quiet of a forest, or learns that parks belong to them something changes. They carry that with them. Our job is to keep opening those doors.”

Thanks to strong partnerships, clear momentum, and a shared commitment to Alabama’s children, Alabama State Parks is poised to continue leading the nation in innovative, place-based outdoor education, ensuring that every new generation has both the knowledge and the joy needed to care for Alabama’s natural treasures. ■



STAFF PHOTOS

WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES



The **Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division**, charged by law with protection, management, and enhancement of the state's freshwater fish and wildlife resources, is composed of the Administrative, Enforcement, Fisheries, and Wildlife sections. The Division meets its responsibilities by carrying out coordinated, scientifically sound enforcement, management, research, development, and educational programs designed to ensure protection and enhancement of freshwater fish and wildlife populations and habitats for the sustainable benefit of the people of Alabama.

WILDLIFE SECTION

RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNCTION

The mission of the Wildlife Section is to manage and enhance the wildlife resources of Alabama for the sustainable benefit of the resources and the people of Alabama.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs): Staff managed more than 790,000 acres within the WMA and Special Opportunity Area (SOA) system. During FY 2024-2025, staff held 7,288 managed hunt days on the 35 WMAs and 11 SOAs. WMAs also provided opportunities for trapping, fishing, hiking, picnicking, camping, research, and nature study. To support public recreation opportunities on the WMA/SOA system, staff maintained 147 office and operation support buildings, maintained equipment, painted and placed signs on 160 miles of property boundaries, maintained boat ramps, applied aggregate (crushed rock) to refurbish 1,380 miles of WMA public access roads, and maintained 97 access, parking, and campground areas.

Additionally, staff conducted prescribed burns on 31,367 acres of wildlife habitat, maintained 284 miles of fire lanes associated with prescribed fire activities, maintained 3,121 acres of wildlife openings and early successional habitat, and performed invasive species control for both plants and animals to enhance habitat for wildlife populations and public enjoyment.

Physically Disabled Hunting Areas: The Hunting Trail for People with Physical Disabilities continued to be a well-utilized program. The trail has 19 hunting areas located in 17 counties.

This innovative program provides opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities to participate in hunting in an environment developed to meet their needs.

Youth Hunting Programs: Staff conducted 20 youth dove hunts across the state in 13 counties. The hunts are a cooperative effort between ADCNR, Auburn University, local vendors, and private landowners. The 2025 youth dove hunts had 490 youth participants with 12% of those participants being first-time hunters. Additionally, 24 WMAs hosted youth deer hunts and 27 WMAs hosted youth turkey hunts on the weekends prior to the opening of regular gun seasons.

Land Acquisitions for FY 2024-2025:

- Acquired 486 acres in Barbour County as an addition to Barbour WMA
- Acquired 40 acres in Monroe County as an addition to Red Hills WMA
- Acquired 77 acres in Monroe County in conjunction with Forever Wild as an addition to the Red Hills WMA
- Acquired 79 acres in Shelby County for the Shelby County Shooting Range

Forest Management Activities: WMA biologists and foresters worked to promote forest health and enhance habitats within the WMA system to benefit wildlife year-round.



WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES - FY 2024-2025

Section	Budgeted Amount*	Expenditures
Admin	\$6,193,904	\$2,261,873
Law Enforcement	\$21,422,698	\$20,081,557
Fisheries	\$11,862,674	\$9,167,636
Wildlife	\$20,697,924	\$17,710,777
Wildlife Diversity	\$1,156,500	\$1,220,840
Transferred to Department Administrative Expenses	\$4,700,975	\$4,460,360
TOTAL	\$66,034,675	\$54,903,043

* The budget figures on this report reflect the approved spending authority for Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division. They are not a representation of the available cash.

Funding includes Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration monies apportioned to Alabama based on the state's geographical size and hunting and fishing license sales.

Seventy-seven percent of the variance between the total budget and expenditures is unspent capital outlay monies that have been retained and carried forward to the subsequent fiscal year.

WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES DIVISION STAFFING

	FILLED	VACANT**
FULL-TIME POSITIONS	287	68
PART-TIME POSITIONS	28	0

** Vacancy count is based on the 2024 operations plan.

Revenue generated from timber sales on Wildlife Section-owned lands was used for general management efforts such as tract reforestation and/or utilized to fund additional land acquisitions.

Forestry actions for FY 2024-2025 included the following:

- Autauga WMA:** 576 acres of first and second pine thinning were sold, and the timber harvest is 26% complete. Conducted prescribed burns on 43 acres for a longleaf pine restoration and 190 acres were reforested with longleaf pine. Additionally, 194 acres were aerially sprayed with herbicide and will be reforested with longleaf pine in the fall and winter of FY 2025-2026.
- Barbour WMA:** 192 acres of pine thinning, 311 acres of natural pine/hardwood thinning, and 246 acres of final harvest were sold. Additionally, 57 acres was burned and reforested with longleaf pine.
- Geneva State Forest WMA:** The timber sale encompassing 706 acres of microchipped pine plantation is 70% complete. Additionally, 125 acres was burned and reforested with longleaf pine.
- Lauderdale WMA:** 50 acres were reforested with shortleaf pine. Additionally, 32 acres were aerially sprayed and will be burned and reforested with shortleaf pine in the fall and winter of FY 2025-2026.

- **Skyline WMA:** The timber sale encompassing 220 acres of pine/hardwood thinning and final harvest was completed. Additionally, 83 acres were prepared with prescribed burns for shortleaf pine planting; 172 acres were reforested with shortleaf pine; and 149 acres were aerially sprayed with herbicide (81 of these acres are being used as early successional habitat and will not be reforested). In the fall and winter of FY 2025-2026, 68 acres will be burned and reforested with shortleaf pine.
- **Red Hills WMA:** 83 acres were aerially sprayed and will be burned and reforested with longleaf pine in the fall and winter of FY 2025-2026.
- **Shelby County SOA:** 127 acres were aerially sprayed with herbicide and will be burned and reforested with loblolly pine in the fall and winter of FY 2025-2026.

Timber stands on the WMA system will continue to be evaluated and monitored for emerging forest health issues. Scattered, light mortality has been noted in early- and mid-rotation pine stands at Lauderdale and Autauga WMAs. These areas will be monitored to ensure the stands remain viable in the future. Silvicultural prescriptions will be planned and implemented as needed to ensure forest resources remain healthy and supply ample wildlife habitat to meet the section's needs. Future thinning sales are being planned for specific tracts located on Skyline, Freedom Hills, Lauderdale, and Lowndes WMAs along with Shelby County SOA. Additionally, a timber sale on Madison County Fishing Lake under the Fisheries Section supervision is being planned and coordinated by the Wildlife Section Forester.

Invasive species such as tallow tree, Japanese climbing fern, and bicolor lespedeza were scouted and treated throughout the WMA system. Additionally, the aggressive nature of Cogongrass has made section staff more vigilant in spotting and treating infestations statewide. Scattered areas of the grass have been undergoing treatment on the Fred T. Stimpson, Upper State, Cedar Creek, and Portland Landing SOAs, as well as on the Upper Delta, Geneva State Forest, and Barbour WMAs for several seasons. The infested areas have been significantly reduced, but monitoring and chemical control will continue.

GAME SPECIES PROGRAMS

White-tailed Deer Management: Information was collected on various WMAs and other sites to determine deer hunter participation and success, the physical condition of deer, and the status of deer populations. A hunting activity telephone survey was also conducted that supplied valuable data. During the 2024-2025 hunting season, 235,865 deer hunters harvested an estimated 330,413 deer. The data were used in determining recommendations for hunting seasons and bag limits and evaluating the success of each hunting season.

Hunters reported 205,913 deer harvested through Game Check, Alabama's mandatory deer and turkey harvest reporting system, during the 2024-2025 hunting season.

Samples from 3,375 deer were collected and tested for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) as part of WFF's statewide CWD surveillance efforts. Two additional CWD-positive deer were detected in Lauderdale County as part of these surveillance efforts.

Wild Turkey Management: Wild turkey observation, harvest, and reproduction information was collected statewide through the Avid Turkey Hunter Survey (ATHS) and wild turkey brood survey. Avid turkey hunter survey participants, 149, reported data on gobbling activity (number of gobblers and gobblers heard), turkeys seen, and gobblers harvested for each day hunted during the spring season. ATHS data was used to monitor trends in gobbling activity, population, sex and age structure, harvest timing, and harvest rates. Section staff and volunteers collected observational wild turkey brood data in July and August 2025. They reported 429 observations of turkeys (hens, poults, and gobblers), and each observation during any day was recorded separately. The data were separated by five WFF districts, by six ecoregions (Piedmont, Southeastern Plains, Ridge and Valley, Southwestern Appalachians, Interior Plateau, and Southern Coastal Plain), and by public or private lands. Brood survey data was used to monitor trends in reproduction and the associated survival of poults being recruited into the population. The results of the ATHS and brood survey will be published in the annual Full Fans & Sharp Spurs wild turkey report. The ATHS and brood survey data was also used in combination with results from the Game Check harvest reporting system and Responsive Management post-season harvest survey to structure recommendations for hunting seasons and bag limits.

Hunters reported 17,070 harvested male turkeys through the Game Check system for the 2024-2025 hunting season. The Responsive Management post-season harvest survey estimated 41,869 male turkeys were harvested in the 2024-2025 hunting season.

In addition, section staff continued to conduct game camera brood surveys. These surveys were conducted on Autauga, Barbour, Black Warrior, Blue Spring, Cahaba, Choccolocco, Coosa, David K. Nelson, Freedom Hills, Geneva, Hollins, Lauderdale, Little River, Lowndes, Mulberry Fork, Oakmulgee, Perdido River, Red Hills, Skyline, and Yates Lake WMAs. Staff also conducted surveys on Fred T. Stimpson, Portland Landing, and Uchee Creek SOAs.

The game camera survey results will be compared to incidental observation results. These projects will continue in following years.

Mourning Dove Management: The annual mourning dove study, as part of a nationwide project, consisted of trapping, banding, and releasing mourning doves. For this project, 980 mourning doves were banded and released, and the data was submitted to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Bird Banding Laboratory. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will analyze data from reported band returns to provide parameters needed for dove population modeling such as band return rates, migration, harvest rates, and estimates for mortality and survival.

Waterfowl Management: Annual biological surveys and research continued throughout the state to obtain information on waterfowl and their habitats to better inform management decisions. Aerial waterfowl censuses were continued on the Tennessee River, Mobile Bay, and Delta in the fall and winter. The winter count is conducted in conjunction with other states and USFWS as part of the annual mid-winter waterfowl survey to assess wintering waterfowl populations. Hunter bag checks were continued in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and the Tennessee River Valley during fall and winter. As part of the nationwide project, 765 wood ducks were banded and released in Alabama, and data was submitted to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory. USFWS will analyze data from band returns to provide parameters needed for wood duck population monitoring such as band return rates, migration, kill rates, and estimates for mortality and survival.

American Alligator Populations: American alligator population and harvest surveys are conducted annually throughout the most populated portions of its range in Alabama. Data from these surveys are used to manage our alligator resources and make harvest recommendations for each of the state's five Alligator Management Areas (AMAs). Population surveys are used to evaluate overall trends in alligator abundance. Hunter harvest data is also collected annually from all alligators harvested within each AMA to evaluate the health of the population. Harvest information such as body weight, length, sex, and harvest location is collected. This information provides insights regarding trends in health as well as sex and age structure of our alligator populations. Long-term trends from harvest and population surveys continued to indicate that Alabama's alligator population is stable, and a conservative harvest is sustainable. Interest in the hunts remains stable. Changes to the program included increased primary permit numbers and an option for a bonus permit. The bonus permit was not available in the Eufaula AMA due to a harvest size restriction. Section staff received nearly 17,000 applications from over 5,500 applicants and provided 380 primary harvest permits and an additional 350 permits available under bonus permit status for a total 730 permits for the harvest program. This represents an increase of 181% in permit opportunity over that from the 2024 sea-

son. Hunter success rates increased 0.3% over 2024 rates, with a 66.8% success rate throughout the five hunt AMAs. Success rates within each AMA hunt were Southwest, 85% with 128 harvested; Coastal, 73% with 55 harvested; West Central, 77% with 58 harvested; Southeast, 44% with 22 harvested; and Lake Eufaula, 50% with 15 harvested. Additional harvests of 180 alligators were taken through the bonus permits. To further understand and manage alligator resources in Alabama, WFF initiated a collaborative research project with other state agencies and universities to obtain information regarding hunter harvest management, public satisfaction, and baseline population health within the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

PRIVATE LANDS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Technical Assistance: The Wildlife Section employs six biologists dedicated to providing technical assistance to private landowners, corporations, hunting clubs, and government agencies. Throughout the year, biologists made contacts and provided onsite inspections, reviewed and drafted management plans, and conducted various other management outreach activities to enhance management of Alabama's wildlife resources. One of the most popular avenues for dispensing wildlife management advice is through the agency's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). DMAP included 146 landowners and hunting clubs with 414,465 acres enrolled last year.

Providing landowners and land managers technical assistance in implementing strategies to improve wildlife habitat on their lands continued to grow in importance. As a result, a mutually beneficial 10-year partnership continued with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This partnership helps private landowners with obtaining farm bill program assistance while delivering better wildlife management advice. Under a cooperative agreement, technical assistance staff worked with NRCS personnel to deliver the programs. Seven section biologists worked in this partnership in FY 2024-2025. Biologists met with landowners to develop conservation plans and contracts and to monitor wetland easements. Biologists also participated in numerous workshops, tours, presentations, working groups, and training sessions that reached hundreds of landowners and dozens of natural resource agency personnel. This partnership with NRCS will continue in FY 2025-2026.

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Meetings: Staff continued meetings and site visits with personnel from Alabama Power Company (APC) associated with the Coosa Wildlife Management Plan, Harris Dam APC hydroelectric relicensing project, and Martin Dam APC hydroelectric relicensing proj-

ect. Staff reviewed documents regarding the development of wildlife, shoreline, threatened and endangered species, and recreation management plans for the hydroelectric projects at Martin, Jordan, Mitchell, and Weiss lakes. Plans are required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Staff will continue active involvement in the development of wildlife, shoreline, threatened and endangered species, and recreation management plans for all projects associated with hydroelectric power generation.

Nuisance Wildlife: Nuisance wildlife information was disseminated to the public through a variety of media outlets, educational workshops, technical literature, and personal correspondence. Due to their destructive nature and negative impact on wildlife habitat, feral hogs are of serious concern in Alabama. Partnerships continued across the state with personnel from ADCNR, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services to provide informative workshops regarding feral hog biology, impacts of feral hogs on wildlife habitat, disease implications, current control methods and techniques, and the need to eliminate relocation of this species. Control of other nuisance and predator species, such as beavers, coyotes, and raccoons, also generates many requests for assistance from landowners and land managers due to their potential impacts on game species, including white-tailed deer and wild turkeys. Personnel conducted and assisted with numerous workshops and seminars around the state to provide landowners, hunting clubs, forestry owners, and the public with information to be proactive in their nuisance wildlife management activities. Additionally, articles about dealing with these species were made available to the public online through ADCNR's website, www.outdooralabama.com. Personnel utilized the ADCNR nuisance manual to provide the public with current information on nuisance wildlife species and ongoing nuisance issues across the state.

Trapper Educational Workshops: Staff conducted 10 furbearer trapping education workshops in FY 2024-2025. Workshops were held in Butler, Bullock, Bibb, Jackson, Jefferson, Baldwin, Covington, Barbour, and Pike counties. The two-day program begins on a Saturday morning with classroom presentations on trapping history, furbearer management, responsible trapping and conservation, and trapping regulations. Presentations continue with additional discussion on trap and snare types, trapping equipment and lures and baits, and hands-on trap-setting familiarization. Saturday afternoons are devoted to trap line scouting and making sets with mentors. On Sunday mornings, the students meet at predawn to check traps and pull their trap line. The remainder of the day is devoted to demonstrating fur-handling methods and techniques. Student participation in the FY

2024-2025 workshops included 111 youth and 154 adults. Most of the youth participants were accompanied by a parent or guardian.

FUTURE EFFORTS

Public Hunting: The loss of leased land in the WMA system is a continued concern. Land acquisitions supported with federal grant programs are pursued each year to help offset losses in our private land leases. During FY 2024-2025, Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) Federal Grant Assistance funds were used to purchase 583 acres for additions to existing WMAs. More leased land is likely to be lost in the future as private and corporate landowners withdraw from their contractual agreements. WFF will attempt to contractually lease or purchase other lands and provide additional incentives to encourage landowners to include lands in the program. WFF will also continue to work with the Forever Wild Land Trust (FWLT) to acquire land for public hunting.

Nuisance Wildlife: The occurrence of nuisance wildlife problems and conflicts continues to rise, especially as we deal with an increasingly urbanized society. This portion of the public is inexperienced in dealing with wildlife issues. Also, the urban/suburban setting limits common solutions to deal with many of these problems. At the district level, a considerable amount of time is spent providing assistance on nuisance wildlife calls. As the Division becomes more active in dealing with these non-traditional wildlife issues, time management and funding will become more challenging. The Division's Wildlife Section has issued approximately 87 nuisance wildlife control operator permits across the state. These permits allow private companies/individuals to deal with nuisance wildlife issues.

State Funding: Federal funding associated with the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act has begun to level out from previous years, though it has continued to be in higher amounts during the past 10 years. The matching state dollars required to fully utilize all the federal dollars (25%/75%) have been limited and could lead to reversions of federal dollars if matching opportunities are not available. WFF staff has collaborated with the FWLT Board of Trustees and worked cooperatively to utilize Forever Wild funding as a state matching source. This assists in capturing the federal apportionment that is beyond the amount our traditional state dollars can match, thereby providing aid for land acquisitions into the WMA system. We are exploring other options to fully utilize our federal dollars through partnerships with outside entities and third-party, in-kind matching funds.



BILLY POPE

FISHERIES SECTION

RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNCTION

The mission of the Fisheries Section is to manage, protect, conserve, and enhance the freshwater sport fish resources of Alabama.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Technical Assistance: Fisheries biologists conducted 121 biological checks of private ponds and offered written solutions for identified issues. Staff provided technical assistance to government and non-government agencies 145 times. District biologists investigated six reported fish kills and pollution cases and sent formal reports to the appropriate agencies.

Public Fishing Lakes (PFLs): During FY 2024-2025, a total of 96,253 angler trips were made to Alabama PFLs, and 64,549 fish were harvested weighing a total of 61,298 pounds from 19 of the 23 lakes. The number of anglers fishing at Alabama's PFLs increased by 9.5% over the previous fiscal year. The increase of angler PFL usage is due to the reopening of multiple lakes that had been closed for renovation.

Fisheries biologists and support staff made 173 visits to PFLs to evaluate the condition of fish populations and to conduct various operational and maintenance activities. The Carbon Hill, Eastaboga, and Marion fish hatcheries stocked 3,006,134 fish into Alabama's PFLs. Species stocked included bluegill sunfish, redear sunfish and channel catfish. Additionally, 3,000 pounds of rainbow trout were stocked into Madison County PFL and 1,000 pounds of rainbow trout in Walker County PFL for a winter fishery.

PFL Operational Changes in FY 2024-2025:

- Barbour County PFL: Closed after underdrain failure. Repairs will be completed in FY 2025-2026.
- Chambers County PFL: Reopened after renovations in spring 2025
- Coffee County PFL: Reopened under a new lease agreement with the City of Elba and Coffee County in summer 2025
- Washington County PFL: Reopened in May 2025 after temporary closure to control an invasive plant – giant salvinia

Access Areas: Throughout the year, staff conducted routine maintenance inspections of 115 access areas, which included 144 boat ramps with 190 launch lanes, 121 courtesy piers, and 4,001 parking spaces. Fisheries personnel also serviced, repaired, and maintained equipment, as well as ordered materials for ongoing maintenance tasks. Additionally, staff completed general construction, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades, and other maintenance projects at 84 access areas statewide. Maintaining these access areas accounts for a significant portion of the annual boating access budget.

In total, 132 repairs or improvements were completed at access areas statewide, including tree and debris removal, resurfacing and striping of parking lots/entrance roads, erosion damage repairs, signage replacement, storm damage clean-up, and repairs, replacements, and expansions to launching slabs, piers, and parking lots.

The following new construction projects were completed:

- Mount Vernon (Mobile County) – Major facility expansion

- McIntosh Bluff (Washington County) – Parking lot paved
- Chocolatta Bay (Baldwin County) – New piers and parking lot repaved
- McCarty's Ferry (Choctaw County) – Major facility expansion and 1.5 mile entrance road paved
- Claiborne (Monroe County) – Major facility expansion
- Riverview (Tuscaloosa County) – Ramp replacement and parking lot paved
- Brown's Creek (Marshall County) – New launching slab and new access pier
- Cotaco Creek (Morgan County) – New access pier
- Triana (Madison County) – Access pier extension
- McFarland Park (Lauderdale County) – Launching slab replacement and new access pier
- Foster's Ferry (Tuscaloosa County) – Major parking lot renovations for drainage and parking lot repaved
- Highway 77 Bridge (Etowah County) – Parking lot paved and new access pier

Construction has begun, is about to begin, or has been permitted at the following access areas:

- Moundville (Tuscaloosa County) – New launching slab
- Kowaliga (Elmore County) – Major facility renovation and expansion
- Waterfront (Marshall County) – Major facility renovation and expansion
- Ponder's Camp (Tallapoosa County) – New facility and access road
- Bonner's Point (Elmore County) – New access pier
- Camp Rotary (Elmore County) – New access pier
- Thomas Mill Creek (Henry County) – New access pier

Plans have been generated and are being permitted at the following access areas:

- Elk River 72 (Lauderdale County) – Expanded parking lots and new fishing pier
- Mud Creek North (Jackson County) – New boating access facility
- Crow Creek (Jackson County) – New access pier
- Panther Creek (Lauderdale County) – New access pier

Fish Hatcheries: Fish production goals for FY 2024-2025 were met or exceeded for several species. Section staff stocked a total of 3,993,992 fish into public waters statewide, including PFLs (Table 1). The continued need for hatchery infrastructure improvements is ongoing, primarily due to aging facilities.

Routine upgrades are made at all three state fish hatcheries. Carbon Hill Fish Hatchery has installed temporary electrical lines for adding aerators. Staff also removed a damaged pond liner and resloped pond banks along with installing access ramps into ponds. Marion Fish Hatchery has completed the installation of new electrical supply lines and control panels that will allow for more efficient use of the new paddlewheel aerators. Additionally, a new water pump for filling ponds and new regenerative blowers and compressors for oxygen supply to header tanks and the spawning lab were installed at the Marion facility.

Public Water Fish Stockings by Permit Holders: Four permits for stocking fish in public waters were issued to individuals representing agencies and organizations. A list of the fish species and sites stocked by permit holders is provided in Table 2.

Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS): The introduction of species outside their native ranges can negatively impact native species in Alabama's aquatic environments. The spread of silver carp into the Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers via the Mississippi and Ohio rivers is currently the most immediate threat to Alabama's waters. ANS staff are actively conducting field sampling and collaborating with state fisheries agencies in Tennessee, Mississippi and Kentucky, as well as with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to monitor the expansion of silver carp populations in these rivers.

Fisheries staff spent 126 field days or event-days sampling for invasive carp on the Tennessee River. Primary sampling methods included lake and tailwater electrofishing and dozer trawls. Additionally, staff performed ecological indicator sampling (i.e., carp effects on resources, populations) of gizzard shad and threadfin shad from dozer trawl samples at Wheeler, Wilson, and Pickwick reservoirs.

Staff assisted other agencies, universities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for 77 events, providing comments, technical documents, reports and document reviews, or raw data during multi-agency meetings that support decisions on multiple projects, including carp deterrents at proposed locks-dams on the Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers, telemetry grids, multi-agency sample planning, budgets and support, educational documents, and more.

Staff carried out tasks funded by a USFWS grant that supports Alabama's ANS Management Plan, including monitoring of zebra mussel veligers (the larval stage of aquatic gastropods) in five lakes on the Tennessee and Black Warrior rivers, planning for crayfish signage placement near select waterways, and other assistance to various agencies and universities. Staff also assisted with the 2025 update of Alabama's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

TABLE 1:**FISH STOCKED DURING FY 2024-2025 INTO ALABAMA PUBLIC WATERS THROUGH THE FISHERIES SECTION'S PROGRAMS**

Species	Inch Groups	Number
Striped Bass - Gulf Race	1 inch	766,010
Hybrid Striped Bass	1-2 inches	72,178
White Bass	1 inch	100,000
Channel Catfish	8-15 inches	58,145
Bluegill Sunfish	1-5 inches	2,739,554
Redear Sunfish	1-2 inches	217,110
Southern Walleye	5-7 inches	7
Largemouth Bass - Cahaba	1-10 inches	8,280
Rainbow Trout	8-14 inches	28,394
Redeye Bass - Cahaba	1 inch	1850
Redeye Bass - Black Warrior	2-3 inches	2464
TOTAL		3,993,992

TABLE 2:**FISH STOCKED BY PERMIT HOLDERS INTO ALABAMA PUBLIC WATERS DURING FY 2024-2025**

Species	Location	Date	Number or Weight
Rainbow Trout	Black Creek (Gadsden)	June 1, 2025	1,000 pounds
Rainbow Trout	Mill and Mud Creeks at Tannehill State Park	April 25, 2025	600 pounds
Channel Catfish & Blue Catfish	Lake Guntersville	May 16, 2025	300
Largemouth Bass	Logan Martin Lake	June 27, 2025	10,000

TABLE 3:
FRESHWATER MOLLUSK STOCKING ACTIVITIES BY AABC STAFF IN FY 2024-2025

Species	Locality	Date of Release	Number Stocked
<i>Medionidus parvulus</i> Coosa Moccasinshell – E	Big Canoe Creek, below Goodwin’s Mill, St. Clair Co., AL	July 3, 2025	333
<i>Medionidus parvulus</i> Coosa Moccasinshell – E	Little Cahaba River, TNC / USFWS tract, Bibb Co., AL	July 14, 2025	333
<i>Medionidus parvulus</i> Coosa Moccasinshell – E	Yellowleaf Creek, Westervelt Mitigation Tract, Shelby Co., AL	July 17, 2025	333
<i>Epioblasma capsaeformis</i> Oystermussel – E	Paint Rock River, 3 localities along Jones Property, Jackson Co., AL	July 25, 2025	761
<i>Toxolasma cylindrellus</i> Pale Lilliput – E	Paint Rock River, 3 localities along Jones Property, Jackson Co., AL	July 25, 2025	1,000
<i>Venustaconcha trabalis</i> Tennessee Bean - E	Paint Rock River, 3 localities along Jones Property, Jackson Co., AL	July 25, 2025	1,000
<i>Medionidus conradicus</i> Cumberland Moccasinshell - PE	Bear Creek, above Rock Creek confluence, Colbert Co., AL	Aug. 7, 2025	735
<i>Leptoxis plicata</i> Plicate Rocksnail – E	Locust Fork, near Warrior-Kimberly Bridge, Jefferson Co., AL	Aug. 14, 2025	7,812
<i>Elimia hydeii</i> Gladiator Elimia – P3	Locust Fork, near Warrior-Kimberly Bridge, Jefferson Co., AL	Aug. 14, 2025	11,625
<i>Epioblasma penita</i> Southern Combshell – E	Cahaba River, below AL 25 Bridge, Bibb Co., AL	Aug. 24, 2025	800
<i>Toxolasma cylindrellus</i> Pale Lilliput – E	Paint Rock River, 3 localities below Hollytree, Jackson Co., AL	Aug. 28, 2025	5,194
<i>Venustaconcha trabalis</i> Tennessee Bean - E	Paint Rock River, 3 localities below Hollytree, Jackson Co., AL	Aug. 28, 2025	1,990
<i>Epioblasma penita</i> Southern Combshell – E	Sipsey River, downstream of Lewiston Road – CR 181 Bridge, Greene Co., AL	Aug. 28, 2025	300
<i>Epioblasma penita</i> Southern Combshell – E	Cahaba River, above US 82 Bridge, Bibb Co., AL	Sept. 2, 2025	800
<i>Epioblasma penita</i> Southern Combshell – E	Cahaba River, below CR 26 Bridge, Pratts Ferry, Bibb Co., AL	Sept. 3, 2025	352
Total mollusks stocked by the AABC in FY 2025			33,368

Various invasive aquatic plants, fish, and invertebrates were also documented throughout FY 2024-2025.

Publications: Fisheries Section staff presented research findings and prepared several scientific journal articles for publication. Staff also provided their knowledge to outdoor writers upon request for information pertinent to Alabama's vast aquatic resources.

Fisheries Research: Through the Investigation and Management Techniques for Public Waters Project (formerly Sport Fish Restoration F-40), one study was completed with investigators from the Auburn University School of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Aquatic Sciences (AU-SFAAS): "Evaluation of the Statewide 229-mm Minimum Length Limit for Crappies in Alabama." Two studies continued with investigators from the AU-SFAAS: "Recruitment and Growth Dynamics of Riverine Sport, Food, and Forage Fishes Related to Flow Operations and Temperature Conditions of the Lower Tallapoosa River" and "Population Density, Demographics, and Food Consumption of Largemouth Bass in Small Impoundments Managed Under Three Different Strategies." One new study was initiated with investigators from the AU-SFAAS: "Mobile Delta Striped Bass Telemetry." One study continued with investigators from the Mississippi State University Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture (MSU-DWFA): "Southern Walleye Genotyping."

Reservoir Management: Staff sampled largemouth bass, spotted bass, smallmouth bass, Alabama bass, black crappie, white crappie, bluegill sunfish, redear sunfish, threadfin shad, skipjack herring, walleye, and striped bass populations by several methods, including electrofishing, trap netting, gill netting, seining, and hook and line in the following locations: Pickwick, Wilson, Guntersville, Cedar Creek, Smith, Lay, Weiss, Neely Henry, Yates, Thurlow, Tuscaloosa, Duck River, Eufaula, Point A, and Millers Ferry reservoirs, as well as the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, Bankhead Dam tailrace, Guntersville Dam tailrace, Blackwater Creek, and the Little Cahaba River. Black bass spawn checks were completed at Eufaula and Point A reservoirs. Specimens were collected, measured, and weighed. Many were also aged to determine growth rate and sexed to determine sexual maturity and ratios. Thermal and oxygen profiles were collected from most of the previously mentioned reservoirs. Reconnaissance surveys were also completed at Guntersville Reservoir and its tailrace.

General Surveys: General reconnaissance surveys were completed at Mitchell and Eufaula reservoirs, Lake Yahou, and ponds at Jacksonville and Ft. McClellan. Redeye bass were sampled from multiple streams statewide. Aquatic vegetation surveys were completed at Guntersville and Neely Henry reservoirs, as well as the Tallapoosa River near Heflin.

Stream black bass were surveyed at Fivemile, Buck, and Blue creeks. Minnow traps were set for loaches in Logan Martin tributaries. Fishing activity was documented at the Neely Henry tailrace, Logan Martin Reservoir, and Lake Yahou. Fish communities were sampled on Fowl and Dog rivers.

Rivers and Streams Fisheries Program: Staff conducted 108 biological sampling trips during the fiscal year. Staff reviewed applications for 340 general and 164 state-protected scientific collection aquatic permits, 258 permit collection notifications, 241 permit collection reports, and penned seven permit amendment letters.

Staff continued implanting acoustic transmitters in Gulf sturgeon collected from the Choctawhatchee River near Geneva and implanted nine-year transmitters in 34 fish to examine movements and migrations of fall-spawning fish versus spring-spawning fish; to ascertain the movement, habitat use and spawning in the Pea River above the breached Elba dam; and to determine the habitat use related to low water in the summer and fall.

One Alabama shad was collected by staff in the Choctawhatchee River. This specimen was implanted with an internal acoustic transmitter and released alive. Movement and habitat use will be examined by a 33-receiver acoustic array deployed in the Choctawhatchee River watershed. Staff will continue to annually sample the Choctawhatchee to estimate the size of the annual spawning population.

Sampling continued for Alabama sturgeon and Gulf sturgeon in the Mobile River Basin. No specimens were collected.

Staff sampled 58 streams and river sites throughout the state to determine and assess the index-of-biotic integrity, which is an indicator of the health of a stream based on fish species and abundance. Staff also assessed the distribution and abundance of river chubs (*Macrhybopsis* spp.) during stream sampling. Staff had two manuscripts published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

FUTURE EFFORTS

Fishing License Sales: Fishing license sales, essential for funding conservation efforts, have declined, creating challenges for ADCNR's fisheries programs. This revenue has not kept pace with inflation, threatening the continuation of significant programs. To address this, the agency has focused on creating fishing opportunities and enhancing marketing efforts to attract new buyers and to encourage existing anglers to renew lapsed licenses.

Employees: The agency is facing significant challenges in hiring and retaining new fisheries biologists, which could lead to staffing shortages and hinder our ability to perform critical tasks in the future.

Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS): Invasive species remain a significant biological and economic threat to Alabama. Staff will continue statewide monitoring, emphasize public education for prevention, and implement regulations or recommend control methods when appropriate.

Public Fishing Lakes (PFLs): Staff continue to explore alternative management options for lesser-used lakes. Recruiting qualified lake managers in rural areas remains difficult, but efforts are ongoing to find sustainable solutions that keep these lakes open and accessible to the public.

Fish Hatcheries: Alabama's state fish hatchery system faces significant maintenance and renovation challenges due to aging infrastructure. Critical components such as production ponds, drain kettles, water supply lines, drainage systems, buildings, and electrical supplies require repair or replacement. Renovation of critical hatchery infrastructure is progressing incrementally as funding permits.

LAW ENFORCEMENT SECTION

RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNCTION

The Law Enforcement Section of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division provides assistance in the protection and management of Alabama's wildlife resources and the safety of the public through a fair and balanced enforcement program.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In FY 2024-2025, WFF's Law Enforcement Section was awarded full law enforcement accreditation from the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (NAWLEA). Receiving accreditation from NAWLEA was the culmination of three years of focused preparation and intensive policy development as well as a rigorous assessment of the section throughout 2025. The assessment included interviews with officers, observations of agency issued equipment, and an extensive review of agency operations, policies, and procedures. The section was recognized for the accomplishment at the 79th Annual Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies awards banquet in Biloxi, Mississippi, on October 28, 2025. After Florida, Alabama's Conservation Department is the second state agency in the U.S. to receive accreditation from the NAWLEA. (For more information, see the WFF feature article in this section.)

Serving the public through the enforcement of Alabama's game and fish laws continues to be a priority. Throughout FY 2024-2025, WFF's Law Enforcement Section responded to 7,222 calls for service, performed 47,940 hunter checks, performed 69,395 angler checks, checked 21,371 boats of anglers for fishing law and license compliance, made 4,488 arrests, and issued 3,963 warnings for game and fish violations.

Section officers attended a 72-hour Use of Force Instructor Course taught by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center during FY 2024-2025. The course focused on the constitutional liberties and historical case law related to the use of force in law enforcement. During the course, officers engaged in role-play scenarios, attended lectures, and observed demonstrations that allowed them to develop the problem-solving skills necessary to create ADCNR's Use of Force training program. As a result, officers learned to apply de-escalation tactics when feasible, clearly articulate their decision-making processes, and decrease the risk of harm to officers, the public, and potential suspects. This forward-thinking program provided essential training to ADCNR officers based on U.S. case law and better prepared them for real-world law enforcement situations.

Each year, National Shooting Sports Month takes place in August. The event celebrates America's love of shooting sports and the role they play in conservation efforts throughout the country. During FY 2024-2025, the section's Shooting Sports Unit held its first annual firearms competition at ADCNR shooting ranges located throughout the state. Named in honor of John H. Wallace, Jr., who served as Alabama's first Conservation Commissioner from 1907 until 1920, the new pistol challenge was designed to introduce participants to the fundamentals of handgun competition using commonly owned pistols. The event promotes firearm safety, outdoor recreation, and family-friendly competition without requiring specialized equipment. John Slay of north Alabama won the inaugural John H. Wallace Firearms Challenge. The competition caught the attention of other wildlife agencies across the country, and several of those are planning similar events in their states.

In recent years, the number of paddling fatalities has gone up nationally as the popularity of canoeing and kayaking has increased. To help meet the demand for paddle sports training for the public, seven section CEOs (and two State Parks rangers) participated in the American Canoe Association Instructor Certification Workshop at Lake Gunter in the summer of 2025. The workshop covered level one kayak curriculum for lakes and sheltered water, level two curriculum for class one rivers, kayak fishing, and rescue training on class one and class two rivers. The completion of the course allows trained ADCNR officers to teach paddling techniques and safety to other Department personnel and the public.

In October of 2020, WFF's Hunter Education Unit transitioned from the supervision of the Wildlife Section, where it had resided since its inception in 1973, to the Law Enforcement Section. This transition paved the way for a more robust program to purchase and develop shooting ranges. The Law Enforcement Section has a long history of teaching firearms courses within the agency. As of FY 2024-2025, the number of FBI-certified firearms instructors on staff with WFF's Law Enforcement Section has increased to 30. These instructors provide firearms training to the public through a

variety of classes offered at ADCNR shooting ranges throughout the state.

AWARDS

Several Law Enforcement Section CEOs were honored with awards in FY 2024-2025. CEO Senior Thomas Bobo was selected as the Mississippi Flyway Council Officer of the Year. CEO Senior Chas Moore was selected as the Alabama Wildlife Federation Officer of the Year. C.E.O. Senior Nick Cochran was selected as Alabama's Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) Officer of the Year. CEO Senior Adam Fuller received the Shikar Safari Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award. C.E.O. Senior Kevin Kirby was selected as the National Wild Turkey Federation Officer of the Year.

FUTURE ISSUES

With approximately 75% of all Pittman-Robertson Act funds generated by target shooters, the development of state-owned shooting ranges remains a priority. A robust public shooting range system is one way ADCNR can meet the high demand for public target shooting opportunities and increase license sales, maximizing the return on Alabama's contributions to the Pittman-Robertson Act. ADCNR will continue its efforts to meet the demand for firearms instruction from new gun owners.

In recent years, cost of living adjustments have been enacted for all state employees by the State Legislature. This is hoped to have a positive effect on officer recruitment. However, courting qualified officer applicants continues to be a challenge.

NONGAME RESOURCES AND WILDLIFE HEALTH SECTION

RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNCTION

The mission of the Nongame Resources and Wildlife Health Section is to manage and enhance the nongame wildlife resources and health of all wildlife in Alabama for the sustainable benefit of the resources and the people of Alabama.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP): The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a comprehensive plan for conservation of our state's most vulnerable species and the habitats they depend on to help prevent listing under the Endangered Species Act. The SWAP is mandated by U.S. Congress for states to receive federal funding through the State Wildlife Grants program. The SWAP addresses numerous required elements

that focus on identifying state-specific wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), examining the health of wildlife species and their habitats, identifying threats and factors that adversely affect wildlife species and habitats, and outlining conservation management and monitoring actions for the state-ranked SGCN species and associated habitats. The SWAP is developed in collaboration with other state and federal agencies, leading scientists, conservationists, private landowners, and other members of the public. The SWAP is required to be updated every 10 years.

SWAP Revision: A major revision of the Alabama SWAP began in FY 2023-2024. The 2025-2035 SWAP revision was completed in September 2025 and submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for review and approval. Meetings with experts from mussel, snail, crayfish, fish, mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, and plant taxa groups were conducted to review and rank all Alabama species under these taxa groups to identify SGCN. An evaluation of habitats, threats, and conservation actions for those species was completed in FY 2024-2025 as well as a public outreach and comment period. The results are posted at www.outdooralabama.com/2025-swap-update.

SWAP Implementation for FY 2024-2025 included the following:

Reintroduction of the Eastern Indigo Snake: Thirty-four snakes were released in May 2025, bringing the total release number to 329. After being released, the Eastern indigo snakes and other fauna are monitored throughout the year.

Statewide Stream and River Assessment Program for

Aquatic Species of Conservation Concern: This project collects statewide information on the distribution, abundance, species composition, and habitat requirements of at-risk aquatic species in Alabama.

Black Bear Research: Trapping and tagging of black bears is conducted in the Mobile River basin. Once trapped, the bears receive a general physical exam and yellow tags in each ear, and they are injected with a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag. Female bears are fitted with GPS-enabled radio-telemetry collars to track their movements. Staff visit bear dens during winter months to document location, characteristics, and the number of cubs. Cubs receive an expandable collar to track their movements.

Habitat and Population Restoration of Gopher Frogs: The gopher frog is ranked as a Highest Conservation Concern species and is currently petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Gopher frogs are state listed as imperiled due to low populations and are at a high risk of extinction. They were historically known to exist in multiple

locations across the eastern portion of Alabama but now are only found at two wetlands within the Conecuh National Forest. Research and monitoring activities have been completed at these locations and a final report is currently being compiled to analyze project results.

Flattened Musk Turtle Assessment: The flattened musk turtle is a small, aquatic, freshwater turtle endemic to the Upper Black Warrior River drainage of northwestern Alabama. Since it received a federal listing status of threatened in 1987, studies indicated a continued decline throughout the range in spite of federal protection. Study objectives have been to perform a habitat suitability model, identify areas with threat and areas with potential for population reintroduction, conduct field visits to assess sites, and collect tissue samples from across the range to analyze genetic variability across the range and within populations. A final report is being compiled to analyze project results.

Black Belt Prairie Assessment: Black Belt prairies have been devastated by land use alterations. Fewer than 1% remain, and these are small and highly fragmented. This study will acquire baseline data on rare species and perform an ecological assessment to assist managers with making conservation decisions.

Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center (AABC): The AABC was established in 2004 to promote clean water and to restore rare freshwater species. This is accomplished through the propagation and reintroduction of rare aquatic species. The reintroductions and recovery efforts provide leverage to other partners in pursuit of habitat recovery projects in critical watersheds statewide.

AABC Staff contributed a wide range of research, recovery, and monitoring activities. AABC personnel collaborated on research projects with the USFWS, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Auburn University, University of Alabama, University of Michigan, and the Smithsonian Institution.

A total of 33,368 mollusks of eight different species were stocked into various rivers (see Table # 3), and staff conducted 76 biological trips statewide in support of monitoring, research, and recovery efforts. AABC staff also provided 2,700 cultured live mollusks to four research institutions in support of basic research. AABC staff provided technical assistance on 137 occasions to state and federal agencies as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Staff participated in 69 technical meetings and 23 outreach activities with government agencies, academic institutions, and NGOs. AABC's educational efforts engaged 291 college students. Additionally, staff contributed three published scientific articles, two scientific articles currently in-press, and five technical reports.

Endangered Species: WFF received \$515,238 in federal funds for projects on fish and wildlife species eligible for funding under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act. Approximately half of the total funds were for projects administered by the Wildlife Section. Population and status surveys for the gopher tortoise, flattened musk turtle, and Black Warrior waterdog, along with red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) translocation and habitat restoration on state lands, are examples of projects made possible by those funds.

NONGAME MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

Bald Eagle Population Monitoring: Since the bald eagle was removed from the Threatened and Endangered Species List in 2007, Alabama bald eagle nests have been randomly monitored for productivity and survivorship. Biologists continued to record newly discovered or reported eagle nests and monitored the number of bald eagles overwintering in Alabama as part of the nationwide Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey. The number of bald eagles wintering in Alabama remains stable.

Golden Eagle Migration Project: Biologists continued to track golden eagles with active transmitters. Data gathered from the tracked birds will help to assess wintering golden eagle habitat in Alabama as well as provide information about their migration pathways and breeding habitat.

Christmas Bird Count: Conducted annually during December and January for more than a century, the Christmas Bird Count serves to gather winter population data on all bird species in the U.S., Canada, and many countries in the Western Hemisphere. Program biologists assist by conducting one Christmas Bird Count in south Alabama on Dauphin Island. Nongame Wildlife Program biologists also lead the Montgomery County Christmas Bird Count.

Banding Stations: From May 16 to August 6, 2025, WFF biologists operated a banding station at Autauga WMA that consisted of nine mist nets used to gather migration and breeding bird data for the area. During the survey, a total of 48 species were detected with 185 individuals representing 29 species that were captured in mist nets. WFF biologists also operated the last four banding sessions of the Wehle MAPS station in Bullock County between July 3 and August 1, 2025, to complete the station's 20th season of operation. During those sessions, 23 individuals representing 14 species were captured. Additionally, 47 species were detected during station operation. WFF biologists assisted in the Dauphin Island Banding Station during fall migration, from October 7-12, 2024. Sixteen nets were deployed during this time, and the most common species captured included

gray catbird, white-eyed vireo, Swainson's thrush, Northern cardinal, and wood thrush. WFF biologists also assisted with a migration bird banding station on Fort Morgan peninsula during spring migration in 2025. Sixteen nets and one hummingbird trap were distributed. The largest daily catch was 496 birds with the highest number of species caught in one day being 32 species. The most common bird captured was the wood thrush.

Southeastern American Kestrel Nest Box Program: WFF biologists continued to monitor Southeastern American kestrel nest boxes placed at three WMAs, one SOA, the M. Barnett Lawley Forever Wild Field Trial Area (FWFTA) and in the Conecuh National Forest. A total of 35 boxes were monitored. Unfortunately, no boxes were utilized by kestrels. Other species did use boxes including Eastern screech owl and great-crested flycatcher.

Wood Thrush Range-wide Tagging Project: The wood thrush is considered a SGCN under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act and a priority species for conservation in 25 states in the U.S. and Canada. In response to the continued decline of wood thrush, a large collaborative network of conservation partners, led by the USFWS, began an extensive effort to study movement ecology of wood thrush across their range from spring 2024 through 2025. As part of that project, WFF biologists worked with the Paint Rock Forest Research Center on the Sharp-Bingham Mountain Preserve in Paint Rock, Alabama, to deploy 15 Motus radio tags on wood thrush near the Paint Rock Forest Research Center's Motus Station from May to July 2025.

Wading Bird Rookery Surveys: Wading bird rookery surveys were conducted along the Tennessee River to monitor known breeding locations and to survey for additional sites. A total of two rookeries were surveyed by boat with both being active. During the surveys, three wading bird species were detected. Double-crested cormorants were also observed nesting at these survey sites in large numbers. Surveys will continue to better assess trends of breeding wading birds in Alabama.

Coastal Shorebird Surveys: The most important sites for nesting shorebirds in Alabama are located within Mobile County. These sites include Gaillard Island, Cat Island, Marsh Island, and Isle aux Herbes. North of Isle aux Herbes on the mainland coast is the Lightning Point Shoreline Restoration area at Bayou La Batre. Completed in 2021, this habitat creation project hoped to attract nesting shorebirds. During the 2025 breeding season, no surveys were conducted on these coastal areas due to personnel changes.

Bat Population Monitoring: WFF continued efforts to search for northern long-eared bats in the coastal plain. Along with

multiple partner agencies, WFF set up mist nets to catch long-eared bats at Perdido WMA in April 2025. Unfortunately, no bats were captured during the surveys.

The Alabama Bat Working Group's (ABWG) Bat Blitz was conducted May 12-14, 2025, in Jackson and Marshall counties. Each year the event targets a different location in the state to inventory the bat species present. Nongame personnel were heavily involved with the selection of areas, planning, preparations, and participation for the event. This area was selected as the location of the event for a second year in a row to capture more eastern small-footed bats after the first individual of that species was captured there in 2024. During the event, which spanned three nights, 282 bats were captured. One ABWG team, mist-netting at Cathedral Caverns State Park, captured one eastern small-footed bat – the second documentation in Alabama by live-capture. Other species captured included Eastern red bat, big brown bat, silver-haired bat, evening bat, gray bat, and Seminole bat.

Freshwater Mollusks: Staff conducted 76 biological field trips to sample streams statewide, focusing on mussels and snails. These efforts documented species distribution and population health, identified broodstock for the AABC, and provided specimens for genetics studies.

Staff assisted and consulted with multiple organizations on mollusk-related issues, including the USFWS, Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), USGS, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Smithsonian Institution, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, University of North Alabama, Appalachian State University, McClung Museum (University of Tennessee), North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Tennessee Technological University, and Mississippi Museum of Natural Science. Additionally, staff worked with 10 consultants and private individuals.

Eastern Spotted Skunk Research: Program biologists conducted camera surveys for Eastern spotted skunks (ESS) in north Alabama from mid-December to mid-May. Areas surveyed by nongame staff included Bankhead National Forest, Natchez Trace Parkway, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, and a private hunting club in Walker County. Cameras were placed at 33 distinct locations across these areas. ESS were only detected at the hunting club in Walker County. While no ESS were found on the camera surveys at Bankhead National Forest, there were reports submitted to WFF, including one report in the Sipsey Wilderness area within Bankhead National Forest from a hunter's camera. Additionally, WFF staff found a dead ESS specimen in Randolph County. Biologists continue to occasionally receive reports of ESS from the public that are generated through a WFF outreach flyer about ESS and information on ADCNR's website. Since

the start of the ESS campaign in 2016, WFF has received 49 verified observations.

Long-tailed Weasel Research: Although camera traps were put out by nongame staff to capture ESS, long-tailed weasels were also captured on camera at two of the trap sites. One was imaged near Capsey Creek within the Bankhead National Forest, and a second was recorded at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. Program biologists continue to receive reports of long-tailed weasels from the public after launching a citizen science campaign in 2021. Since the launch of that campaign, WFF has received 45 verified reports. A statewide distribution and frequency of the reports suggest long-tailed weasels may not be as rare as previously believed. Continued outreach is needed to obtain additional reports in the future.

Falconry Permits: The Nongame Wildlife Program administers falconry permits for the state and provides technical assistance to permit holders. Staff administers falconry written examinations, conducts required falconry facility and equipment inspections, issues permits and inputs data to the federal falconry database. As of September 30, 2025, Alabama had 70 individuals permitted to practice falconry in the state. Of those 70 falconries permit holders, six are apprentice class, 34 are general class, and 30 are master class.

NONGAME TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Environmental Reviews and Consultations: Staff reviewed, investigated, and provided feedback on eight projects from various government agencies across the state for environmental review and consultation related to nongame wildlife. In addition, WFF received 243 new project proposals for review from engineering and consulting firms and non-government agencies. Reviews were provided with guidance for how to avoid, minimize or offset potential environmental damage from various projects including telecommunication towers and solar, bridge and road improvement projects.

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Meetings: Staff reviewed and provided feedback on natural gas pipeline projects from the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company. Staff also reviewed documents related to a proposed Tennessee Valley Authority pumped storage hydropower facility and provided comments related to aquatic and terrestrial species. Staff will continue active involvement in the development of wildlife, shoreline, threatened and endangered species, and recreation management plans for all projects associated with hydroelectric power generation and natural gas projects.

Joint Ventures: Section personnel continue to participate in three Joint Ventures that cover the state: East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture, Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture, and the Gulf Coast Joint Venture. Joint ventures are partner-

ships of state, federal, private, and academic organizations that lead regional habitat conservation movements founded on a science-based, landscape-scale strategy. These partnerships can more effectively secure a sustainable future for birds and habitats. WFF staff participated in annual board meetings with the three joint ventures to hear updates on regional initiatives and habitat projects. Staff also participated in the Bird Nesting Island Working Group Planning Committee of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture and the Technical Committee of the Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture to provide guidance on future regionwide projects.

WILDLIFE HEALTH MONITORING FOR FY 2024-2025 INCLUDED:

Bats: During winter 2025, staff assisted researchers from the University of Montana and the University of Exeter to visit four caves in Alabama to swab for *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd) fungus – the causative agent of White-Nose Syndrome (WNS), take ultraviolet pictures of wing damage, collect morphological data, and perform environmental swabs in bat hibernacula. This research was performed in Conecuh, Clarke, Jefferson, and Lauderdale counties. The research was conducted as part of a U.S. National Science Foundation funded project evaluating how changing environments impact disease ecology and the way genomics can be used to predict disease dynamics in North American bats.

Results from the research conducted with the University of Montana and University of Exeter are currently being processed, and preliminary results are pending confirmation at the University of Montana research laboratory. The probability of detection results from winter 2025 will be utilized to help guide our sampling site collection for winter 2026. Additionally, coordination continues for the installation of bat friendly gating at Honeycomb Mine with cooperating agency TVA. Environmental compliance has been completed with TVA, and planning and logistics have been initiated for the site, with installation planned for winter to spring 2026.

Bald Eagles: Unexplained mortalities and morbidities were investigated where possible. Nine individuals were submitted for diagnostic testing, and four of these were positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

Coastal Shorebirds: Morbidities and mortalities were investigated where available for testing, including a spotted sandpiper, black skimmer, and brown pelican. None of these individuals had HPAI. However, they had a variety of other bacterial infections that caused their death.

Waterfowl: More than 100 samples were collected from dabbling and diving ducks during the performance period to

assist the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Wildlife Services in the surveillance of HPAI. Numerous morbidities and mortalities were reported to WFF. However, in most instances, the animals were too degraded or scavenged for a sample to be collected. Samples from one Canada goose were collected in February 2025. Those samples were positive for HPAI.

White-tailed Deer: Samples from 3,170 deer were collected and tested for CWD as part of WFF's statewide CWD surveillance efforts. As part of these surveillance efforts, six additional CWD-positive deer were detected in Lauderdale County and one in Colbert County.

At least 13 of 67 counties reported evidence of hemorrhagic disease (HD) including chronic or acute symptomatic deer in summer 2024. In summer 2025, 11 of 67 counties were reported to have evidence of HD with confirmatory testing being done in two counties, Madison and Winston.

Wild Turkey: Reported morbidities and mortalities were submitted for diagnostic testing to the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) at the University of Georgia's College of Veterinary Medicine. There were five mortalities that were reported and sent to SCWDS for diagnostic testing. Results for three individuals have been returned which revealed negative infection with HPAI and one individual had lymphoproliferative disease.

AWARDS

The **AABC's Paul Johnson, Michael Buntin, Jesse Holifield, and Thomas Tarpley** received the USFWS Southeast Regional Director's Honor Award in Recognition of Outstanding Performance for their leadership in freshwater mollusk conservation. "AABC has become an indispensable partner to the USFWS and a national model for aquatic conservation." - Michael Oetker, USFWS Regional Director

Amy Silvano, WFF Nongame Resources and Wildlife Health Section Chief, and Matthew Warriner, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Assistant Chief, received the USFWS Southeast Regional Director's Conservation Partner Award in recognition of outstanding performance for their leadership roles on the national Federal Aid Coordinators Working Group (FACWG) that has significantly advanced grant and policy work within the USFWS. "Matthew and Amy have fostered trust and strengthened partnerships with state agencies. Their work has shaped national grant policy, streamlined administrative procedures, and reinforced the Service's mission through sound financial stewardship. Together, they exemplify how collaborative leadership and strategic partnerships can drive meaningful progress in conservation funding and policy—ensuring lasting results for wildlife, habitat, and the public." - Michael Oetker, USFWS Regional Director

FUTURE EFFORTS

Federal funding associated with State Wildlife Grants and Section 6 Grants, a significant funding source for nongame wildlife in Alabama, continues with a high level of uncertainty for future federal budget allocations. WFF is exploring additional options through competitive grant programs, partnerships with outside entities, and third party corporations for funding opportunities to continue supporting implementation of our Alabama SWAP.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND REACTIVATION (R3) SECTION

Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3): With state wildlife agencies' funding model relying on the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) of license buyers and participation in hunting, fishing, shooting sports, and trapping is of utmost importance to the future of conservation. For that reason, a full-time R3 Coordinator focuses on R3 efforts across the WFF Division. Staff training and outreach engagement opportunities continue to be a priority for R3. In FY 2024–2025, staff participated in quarterly trainings covering R3 principles, hunting, trapping, shooting sports, conservation history, customer service, and community engagement. Each training and outreach activity reinforces the Agency's mission to manage, protect, conserve, and enhance Alabama's wildlife and aquatic resources for the sustainable benefit of its people. This mission can only be achieved through collaboration, innovation, and a continued commitment to the future of conservation.

Campus Conservation Program (CCP): The CCP was developed to increase engagement and involvement from Alabama's colleges to include community colleges, public and private universities and colleges, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and culinary institutes. The top 20 largest colleges in Alabama have a combined student population of almost 250,000. These students will be future community leaders, workforce professionals, and decision makers. The CCP aims to increase their involvement, awareness, and participation in hunting, fishing, targeting shooting, trapping, and other outdoor recreation activities so they prioritize conservation throughout their careers and lives. In addition to recruiting, retaining, and reactivating participants, this program serves as an important recruitment tool for future agency personnel. During FY 2024–2025, 94 hunter development events were held to engage with 6,604 students from 19 different colleges and universities. Of those, 40% were persons of color and 40% were

female. Program events included lectures, mentored hunts, and workshop opportunities created through the CCP. Participating campuses included Alabama A&M University, Auburn University, Tuskegee University, Alabama State University, Jacksonville State University, Montevallo University, University of West Alabama, University of Alabama Huntsville, Calhoun Community College, University of Alabama, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Samford University, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, University of South Alabama, University of Mobile, Coastal Alabama Community College, Auburn University Montgomery Campus, Stillman College, and Troy University. Events were held in various locations throughout the state of Alabama. Many students were not only first-time license buyers but many of them also experienced numerous outdoor recreation activities for the first time in their lives and several are now pursuing careers in conservation.

Adult Mentored Hunting (AMH) Program: The AMH Program is designed to provide participants with little or limited hunting experience an opportunity to learn basic skills and receive one-on-one guidance from experienced mentors. New skills include firearm safety and handling, woodsman-ship, tracking, scouting, identifying where to hunt, and game cooking, cleaning, and preparation. The learning process starts at one of the Hunting 101 Workshops, which are hosted around the state at Wildlife Management Areas. Afterwards, participants are randomly selected to participate in one-day or three-day mentored hunting opportunities. In FY 2024-2025, WFF hosted 17 Hunting 101 workshops, four one-day mentored hunts, and three multi-day hunts with a total of 144 participants. Of those participants, 22% were female and 14% were minorities. These events were hosted throughout the state and conducted in partnership with the Alabama Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), the Alabama Chapter of the Safari Club International, Grand Slam Club Ovis, the Council to Advance Hunting and Shooting Sports, and Delta Waterfowl.

Aquatic Education Program: The Aquatic Education Program serves to provide education and outreach to the public about fishing and the vast aquatic resources of Alabama. Staff, with assistance from other WFF sections and cooperating organizations, conducted a total of 221 aquatic education events for 14,775 participants. These included 28 community fishing events offered to 2,706 participants. Staff also conducted 29 fishing classes for various audiences serving a total of 509 participants and taught casting classes for 2,125 participants during 29 events. Staff presented 82 talks about Alabama's aquatic resources to a total audience

of 3,151 participants. Staff reached 5,742 people through display booths at events held throughout the state, and held two fishing instructor trainings for 22 participants. Twenty-one additional educational presentations benefited 520 participants. Information on fisheries careers was presented to 4,327 attendees at 123 events.

SkillBridge Program: The Department of Defense (DOD) SkillBridge Program helps service members transition from military to civilian careers by offering hands-on training, apprenticeships, and internships during their final 180 days of service. With approval from their unit commander, participants may take up to 180 days of permissive duty to gain full-time experience with approved industry partners in high-demand fields. These real-world opportunities allow service members to apply their skills while exploring future career paths.

As of FY2024-2025, WFF became a SkillBridge partner, providing service members with valuable experience in conservation, wildlife management, and public outreach. Through this collaboration, WFF supports transitioning service members in developing new professional skills while contributing to the stewardship of Alabama's natural resources.

Conservation Outreach: WFF's Conservation Outreach Program provides public communication, outreach, and education services to proactively increase awareness of the Division's wildlife management programs, accomplishments, policies, and related topics. The program is also designed to encourage interaction between the public and the Division.

The Conservation Outreach Coordinator directly aids the public via phone, mail, online, and in person regarding hunting, freshwater fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing, species' natural history, and all associated laws and regulations by responding to questions and offering information to those who would like to know more about Alabama's wildlife and freshwater fishery resources. Additionally, the coordinator accepts feedback from the public and shares policy recommendations with Administration as appropriate.

Throughout the year, the program coordinator monitors the Division's printed and personal interactions with the public and makes recommendations based on public needs and requests from the Division to continually streamline and simplify communications between the Division and the public. The program coordinator also provides guidance and support to other ADCNR staff who are interacting with the public at a variety of outreach events to foster positive relationships and encourage sustainable use of Alabama's abundant natural resources.

CONSERVATION OUTREACH EFFORTS DURING FY 2024-2025 INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:

- Appeared on various television and radio broadcasts throughout the state to discuss WFF-related topics in response to public inquiries over current trends or noteworthy events
- Provided interviews to print, television, and online media throughout the state on a regular schedule to encourage public awareness of WFF initiatives
- Interacted with the public through WFF's social media to promote public engagement with the Division
- Coordinated WFF staff representation at various trade shows, expos, and professional meetings and managed placement and distribution of WFF marketing materials at events
- Responded to landowner and media questions regarding wildlife identification and other WFF-related topics
- Assisted hunters with details regarding usage of WMAs throughout the state
- Assisted non-resident hunters and anglers with planning their trips to Alabama
- Helped promote Outdoor Alabama programs (Firearms 101, Hunting Workshops, Adult Mentored Hunts, Campus Conservation Program, and Go Fish, Alabama!)

- Assisted with R3 programs and provided mentorship and support to new hunters
- Determined gaps in communication by evaluating frequently asked questions and then revised printed materials to provide needed clarity
- Attended regulatory meetings and recommended regulation updates based on feedback from the public that aligned with the Division's goals
- Highlighted photographs and narratives provided by the public on social media to foster positive relationships between the Division and its constituents
- Participated on an advisory board for a county school system to foster natural resource management-related education in the classroom and increase student awareness of natural resource career paths

Hunter Education Program: Hunter education teaches essential skills in firearm safety, wildlife conservation, and responsible hunting practices, significantly reducing accidents and promoting safe, ethical behavior in the field. Volunteers and agency personnel are vital in providing these educational opportunities statewide, helping ensure hunting remains a safe and enjoyable tradition for all participants. In FY 2024-2025, 14,501 students completed their Hunter Education certification. Of those who completed their certification, 10,777 did so through online courses and 3,724 through in-person instruction. The addition of 48 new certified Hunter Education instructors brings the total number of active instructors for the fiscal year to 376.





WFF LAW ENFORCEMENT SECTION RECEIVES NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

A Division highlight for FY 2024-2025 was the accreditation of WFF's Law Enforcement Section by the North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (NAWLEA). Receiving this honor was the culmination of three years of focused preparation by section personnel. The process included interviews with officers, observations of agency issued equipment, and an extensive review of agency operations, policies, and procedures. This article provides a brief overview of the section's efforts to achieve this accomplishment

In early 2022, WFF's Law Enforcement command staff made the decision to seek law enforcement accreditation through the recently formed NAWLEA – a national accreditation program with standards

that focus on best practices in conservation law enforcement. The program adopts all mandatory U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) standards and many of the optional DOJ standards.



To begin the accreditation process, personnel first had to consider the section's mission, legally mandated responsibilities, and the demands of its service community when determining which law enforcement standards are applicable and how to comply with those standards. The NAWLEA's program standards address life, health, and safety issues; legal matters; and essential law enforcement best practices.

In October 2022, the section started the process of achieving accredited status through the NAWLEA program. It began preparing for the accreditation process by first revamping and overhauling its policy manual and beginning construction on six permanent evidence storage facilities located statewide. Attaining accredited status would make the section the first state law enforcement agency in Alabama to be nationally accredited.

During the initial phase of policy revision, the section recognized it fell short of compliance expectations when comparing its policies to the law enforcement standards of the NAWLEA program and the DOJ. It quickly began developing policies that addressed and reduced liability for the agency as well as increased the effectiveness of the delivery of its services.

The section's approval and review process for new and updated policies is very thorough. Draft documents are reviewed by field supervisors, command staff, subject matter experts, policy review committees, and ADCNR's legal staff. Once a final draft is compiled, legal staff gives the document a final review before approving any new policies. Upon final approval, the WFF Division Director signs the final document making it official.

During the initial review phase, WFF's Law Enforcement Section recognized that, in addition to policies, several other standards needed improvement to meet compliance expectations. For example, each evidence facility needed improved security measures including solid doors, ceiling barriers, and new locks to protect seized evidence from unauthorized access. Also, items such as locking freezers, gun safes, and filing cabinets were purchased as an additional level of protection and placed inside each evidence facility. Lastly, all evidence handling procedures were examined such as evidence ledgers and tags, chain of custody documentation, facility entry and exit, and proper evidence packaging and receiving. Meeting the standards of the NAWLEA program would ensure the section was taking the necessary preventative measures to eliminate evidence mishandling and protect evidence integrity.

A new policy manual was issued to all Law Enforcement Section personnel for review in June 2024. After reviewing the new

manual, personnel digitally signed the document via the newly acquired document management system called PowerDMS. This system ensures new and amended policies are reviewed by all personnel within an allotted time and offers instant accessibility to all policy and procedure documents anywhere in the field.

In May 2025, the section completed its first mock assessment with NAWLEA. The purpose of the mock assessment was to identify any policy and procedure deficiencies and make those corrections in preparation for the formal assessment. After a thorough review of policies and proofs that the new standards were being met, section personnel conducted a static display of agency equipment for the NAWLEA assessment team. During that display, section personnel exhibited various items of issued equipment and answered questions concerning agency policies and procedures. Upon conclusion of the mock assessment, the NAWLEA team made recommendations for how the section could continue preparing for the formal assessment.

The section's formal assessment took place September 29 through October 1, 2025. Much like the mock assessment, personnel were tested on their knowledge of the new policies and procedures adopted by the section. The section also successfully passed inspections of various section facilities. To conclude the formal assessment, the NAWLEA assessment team conducted an exit interview with WFF Law Enforcement command staff at section headquarters in Montgomery. During the meeting, the assessment team announced that WFF's Law Enforcement Section would be recommended to receive accredited status through the NAWLEA Program.

Soon after the formal review, NAWLEA board members voted unanimously to grant the WFF Law Enforcement Section accredited status through the NAWLEA Program. The section formally was recognized for the accomplishment at the 79th Annual Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies awards banquet in Biloxi, Mississippi, on October 28, 2025. After Florida, ADCNR was the second state agency in the U.S. to receive accreditation from NAWLEA.

By meeting the program's professional standards, WFF's Law Enforcement Section has demonstrated its commitment to excellence in wildlife conservation and public safety. The accreditation serves as a testament to the section's dedication to transparency, professionalism and the highest standards of service to the communities and natural resources ADCNR is honored to serve. ■



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