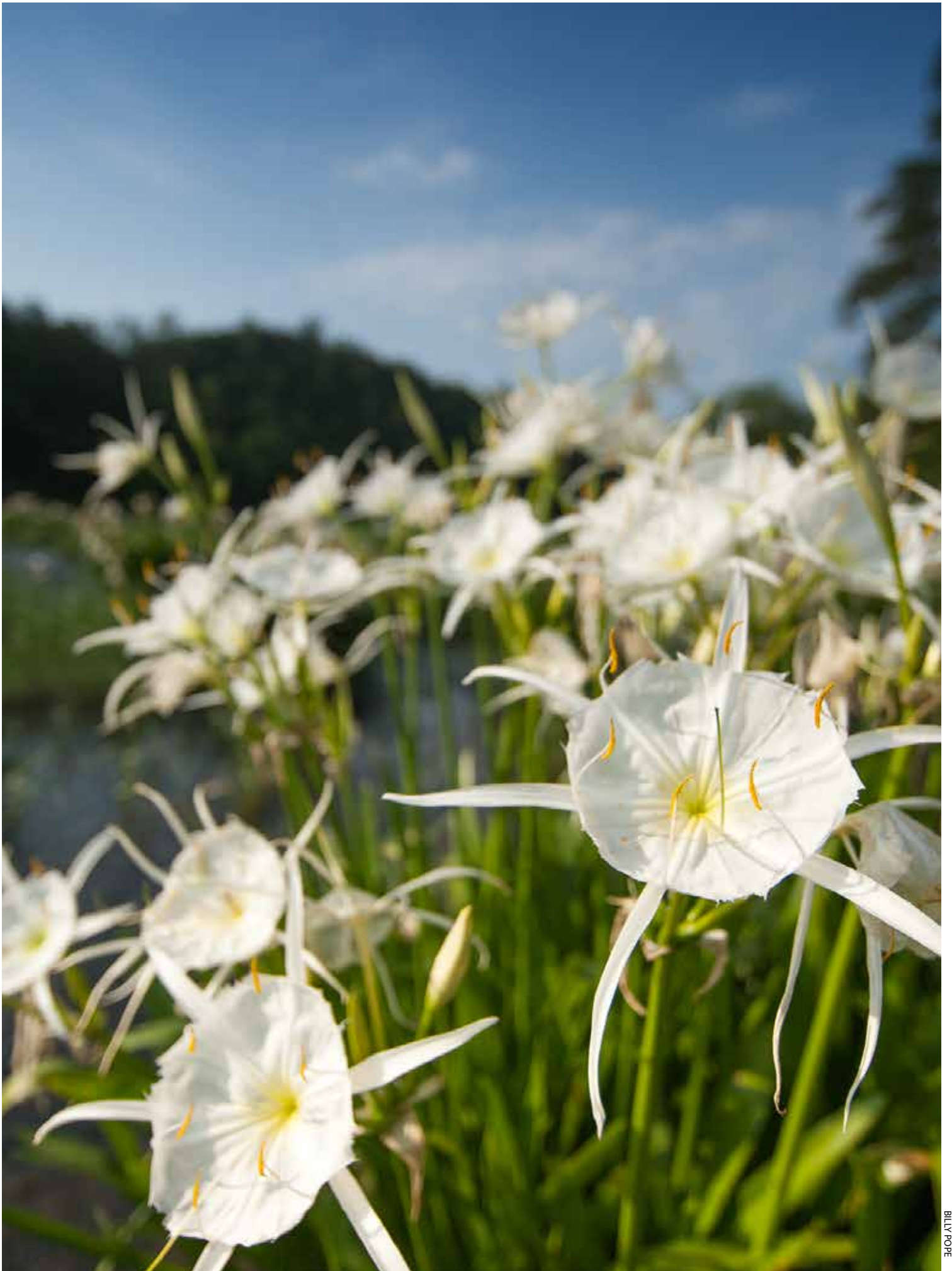




**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF  
CONSERVATION AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES**  
2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT







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

**Dear Governor Ivey:**

I am pleased to submit the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015-16. As you will see, the Department was involved in many diverse projects during the fiscal year.

We continue to find more efficient ways to communicate and conduct business with our constituents. License purchases, special hunt registrations and park lodge and camping reservations are available through our websites, [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com) and [www.alapark.com](http://www.alapark.com). In addition, we are communicating to more than half a million people through email newsletters and notices.

Visitors to Alabama State Parks operated by our agency totaled more than 5 million, an increase of 4.9 percent over the previous year. We strive to manage and operate the State Parks system in an economically sound and efficient manner.

Alabama is home to the most diverse artificial reef system in the United States, which is managed by the Marine Resources Division. Reef enhancements continued during the fiscal year with 342 public artificial reefs either created or enhanced, and 542 private artificial reefs permitted for deployment offshore.

The State Lands Division continued to coordinate administrative and technical aspects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment pursuant to the Oil Pollution Act. Activities included solicitation of public input regarding potential restoration ideas, assisting with development of draft restoration plans and implementation of early restoration projects.

The Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division became the first agency in the United States to reach 100 percent certification of all law enforcement personnel in the Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events training program. This training focused on stopping active shooters in rural environments and preventing further casualties. With heavy emphasis on emergency first aid and evacuation, this training will prove invaluable when responding to an active shooter event, natural disaster or serious accident.

These are just a few of the accomplishments 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 written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Christopher M. Blankenship  
Acting Commissioner**

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# DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The 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 his cabinet, advises the Governor and Legislature on management of freshwater fish, wildlife, marine resources, waterway safety, state lands, state parks, and other natural resources.

## SCOPE OF OPERATIONS

The Department's scope of operations includes the administration, management and maintenance of 19 state parks, 23 public fishing lakes, three freshwater fish hatcheries, more than 141 public boat ramps, 33 wildlife management areas, 11 shooting ranges, a saltwater mariculture center, and 645,000 acres of trust lands managed for the benefit of several state agencies, the General Fund and Alabama Trust Fund. Other departmental functions include maintenance of a State Land Resource Information Center and administration of the Forever Wild land acquisition program.

## ORGANIZATION

During Fiscal Year 2016, 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, Information and Education, Information Technology, Legal, Personnel and Payroll and Property Inventory. The commissioner was advised by a 10-member Conservation Advisory Board appointed by the governor.

Division directors managed the Department's programs under their jurisdiction through authority delegated by the Legislature and the commissioner. Concerted efforts were made to balance needs and requirements against resources and available funding to satisfy present and future public and resource requirements. 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

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources receives no general fund support. 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 Program received interest income from the Alabama Trust Fund. Specific revenue sources for the five 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 enough as of date to enhance operations.

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

***State Parks:*** User-generated funds in the form of entrance, rental, lodging, golf and other recreational fees. 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; 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 decrease 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 two times during FY 2016:*

- February 20, 2016, at the Capitol Auditorium in Montgomery, Ala.
- March 26, 2016, at the Pelham Civic Complex in Pelham, Ala.



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## CONSERVATION ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS AS OF SEPT. 30, 2016

Members	Home Town	Term Expires
Dr. Warren Strickland, Chairman	Huntsville	September 30, 2017
Austin Ainsworth	Guntersville	September 30, 2017
T.J. Bunn	Tuscaloosa	March 28, 2021
Patrick Cagle	Montgomery	March 28, 2021
Joseph Dobbs, Jr.	Bessemer	March 28, 2021
Grady Hartzog	Eufaula	March 28, 2021
Raymond Jones, Jr.	Huntsville	May 9, 2019
Jeff Martin	Pell City	May 9, 2019
Ben C. Stimpson, Jr.	Mobile	September 30, 2017
Gary Wolfe	Fairhope	March 28, 2021

### EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Robert Bentley, Governor, State of Alabama

Gary Lemme, Director, Auburn University Cooperative Extension System

John McMillan, Commissioner, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries

### EX-OFFICIO SECRETARY OF THE BOARD

N. Gunter Guy Jr., Commissioner, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

# DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES

	DCNR Total ACTUAL 2016	DCNR Total BUDGETED 2017	DCNR Total REQUESTED 2018
<b>NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES</b>	<b>1,012</b>	<b>1,160</b>	<b>1,155</b>
<b>UNENCUMBERED CASH BALANCE FORWARD</b>	<b>30,464,323</b>	<b>25,999,401</b>	<b>21,105,411</b>
Marine Resources - Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission	601,522	697,000	697,000
Marine Resources - Commerce	722,941	1,364,000	858,000
Marine Resources - Interior	705,188	1,600,000	1,600,000
Game & Fish - Interior	25,261,038	17,020,000	17,100,660
Game & Fish - Misc	52,204	125,000	125,000
Lands - CIAP	16,182,162		
Lands - Commerce	2,154,756	5,950,000	12,098,511
Lands - Interior		1,000,000	1,000,000
<b>Total Federal Funding</b>	<b>45,679,811</b>	<b>27,756,000</b>	<b>33,479,171</b>
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	5,663,419	750,000	5,100,000
Licenses and Permits	18,594,317	20,432,850	20,130,200
Land Management Fees	2,479,501	4,007,796	3,500,000
User Fees	35,625,249	36,101,474	36,064,662
Timber Sales	404,334	400,000	400,000
Fines	738,679	735,000	735,000
Trust Fund Interest (MR and WFF)	729,185	745,000	645,000
Other	2,105,370	12,693,200	6,903,000
<b>Total Departmental Related Receipts</b>	<b>66,340,054</b>	<b>75,865,320</b>	<b>73,477,862</b>
Cigarette Tax	2,537,133	3,000,000	3,000,000
Gasoline Tax	2,578,417	2,700,000	2,700,000
Use Tax Discount Cap	1,032,087	1,062,056	1,038,000
Sales Tax Discount Cap	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
GOMESA		75,000	33,600,000
Forever Wild Land Management	600,000	600,000	750,000
BP Oil Spill/NRDA Reimbursements	13,743,156	10,000,000	15,000,000
<b>Total Other Receipts</b>	<b>25,490,793</b>	<b>22,437,056</b>	<b>61,088,000</b>
<b>Administrative Transfer</b>	<b>7,275,549</b>	<b>9,500,000</b>	<b>9,500,000</b>
<b>Actual All Receipts</b>	<b>144,786,207</b>	<b>135,558,376</b>	<b>177,545,033</b>
<b>BFY 2016-2018 Expenditures or Budgeted</b>	<b>149,251,129</b>	<b>140,452,366</b>	<b>188,975,785</b>
<b>Revenues versus Expenditures--Over(Under)</b>	<b>(4,464,922)</b>	<b>(4,893,990)</b>	<b>(11,430,752)</b>
<b>UNENCUMBERED CASH BALANCE</b>	<b>25,999,401</b>	<b>21,105,411</b>	<b>9,674,659</b>
<b>BFY 2016-2018 Expenditures/Budgeted</b>	<b>149,251,129</b>	<b>140,452,366</b>	<b>188,975,785</b>
<b>BFY 2016-2018 Federal Funding</b>	<b>45,679,811</b>	<b>27,756,000</b>	<b>33,479,171</b>
<b>BFY 2016-2018 State Funding</b>	<b>103,571,318</b>	<b>112,696,366</b>	<b>155,496,614</b>

# 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, staff 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. Over 15,000 transactions are processed on an annual basis.

Accounts Receivable reviews and approves all cash receipts and investment transactions for the department. Over 12,000 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 FY2016 were approximately \$149.2 million.

Procurement provides purchasing assistance to each administrative section and to all divisions. This office is the liaison between DCNR 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 CAFR entries, closing entries, reports on grants, calculates federal draws and maintains grant budgets for the Department.

## INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

The Information and Education Section provides a variety of creative services for the Department. These include news releases, publication design, graphic design, web and special video productions, photography and a weekly outdoors column sent to media and published on the Department's website. Personnel included eight full-time positions.

In addition, I&E provided marketing and publishing consultation as well as editorial, proofreading, and copywriting service for departmental staff; responded to information requests from the public, media and other agencies, and coordinated special projects.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- A traveling exhibit of the Outdoor Alabama Photo Contest winning photos appeared at Five Rivers Delta Resource Center as well as several state parks.
- Eighty-four press releases were written in support of Department programs.
- Oversaw an email communications network of approximately 500,000 people. Emails distributed included e-newsletters, hunting and fishing license expiration reminders, program notifications and more.
- Designed new license plate for Alabama State Parks that will be sold in probate offices in 2017.
- Designed promotional materials including brochures, flyers, banners and other printed material for State Parks promotions, Game Check, Forever Wild and other Department programs.
- Operated the department's official social media platforms on Facebook, Twitter YouTube and Instagram.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Information Technology Section provides computer hardware, software and networking services for the Department. Hardware services include setup and installation of desktop and notebook computers, management of departmental 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.

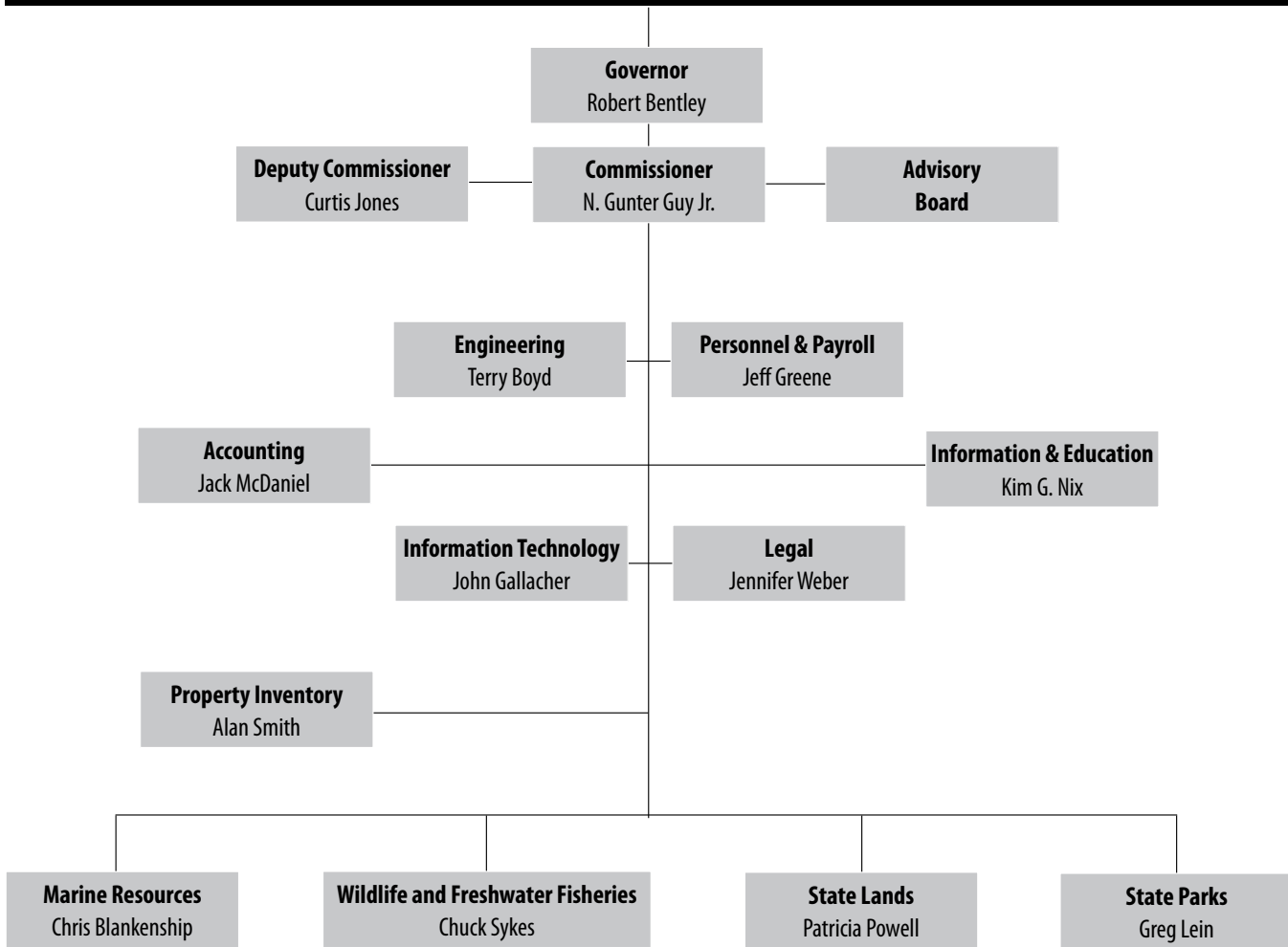
Networking services include support for all wired and wireless technologies used throughout the department. IT support is also provided for email through the Alabama Consolidated Email system.

The staff of 11 includes an IT Manager, Programmer Analysts, Systems Specialists and Technicians and two contractor-filled positions. There are seven vacant positions in IT.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Provided consultation, analysis and design, project management, database management and technical service and support for many Department projects.

# CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES



## FY 2016 BUDGETS AND EXPENDITURES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

Section	Budgeted Amount	Actual Expenditures	Over/(Under)
Accounting	2,025,512	1,672,344	(353,168)
Commissioner	686,303	770,046	83,743
Engineering	1,589,571	1,030,206	(559,365)
Information & Education	1,206,807	745,285	(461,522)
Information Technology	2,028,118	1,561,973	(466,145)
Legal	581,807	733,789	151,982
License	340,795	211,657	(129,138)
Payroll & Personnel	887,263	833,400	(53,863)
Property Inventory	213,226	123,071	(90,155)
Contingency	720,384		(720,384)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,279,786</b>	<b>7,681,771</b>	<b>(2,598,015)</b>



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- Developed Game Check phone app that recorded over 84,000 deer harvested in the first season.
- Developed a new accounting system including a distribution of payment processing and automation of payment distributions that replaces an antiquated system of manual payment processing
- Commercial and recreational license management streamlined public hunt online registration by developing an all-encompassing system for the public to register; it also provides administrative selection and reporting by department personnel.
- Hunter Education class registration and reporting. Developed a Gamebreeder application that manages deer.
- Department website management.

### **PROBLEMS AND UNMET NEEDS**

Staffing issues due to budget constraints, a backlog in new development, and inability to secure adequate network bandwidth for department initiatives.

### **LEGAL SECTION**

The Legal Section provides advice and counsel directly to the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, and as a staff function, provides legal services to the division directors and other ADCNR staff.

The drafting of contracts, interagency agreements, deeds, leases, patents, permits and attorney general opinions are also responsibilities of the Legal Section. Litigation against the ADCNR and employees as well as litigation initiated by the Department is also handled by the legal staff.

The Legal Section drafts, reviews and monitors legislation affecting the department, regulations for management and enforcement efforts of divisions are drafted and approved for execution and followed through the adoption process.

The section is responsible for real estate transactions involving land owned or managed by the Department and for the legal work associated with the state's oil and gas leasing activity and other natural resource management activities.

### **PERSONNEL AND PAYROLL**

The Personnel and Payroll Section provides personnel-related support services to the Commissioner's office, Division Directors, and Section Chiefs. The section serves as liaison to the State Personnel Department for DCNR's personnel actions and activities.

The section is responsible for processing all payrolls, as well as maintaining all employee files and payroll records, for the Department's hourly and bi-weekly personnel.

### **ENGINEERING SECTION**

The Engineering Section provides professional planning and

programming, engineering, architectural, landscape architectural, surveying, cartographic and related administrative services to the divisions of the department. The section's professional staff of engineers, architect, and landscape architect and land surveyors ensures that solutions to conservation planning and programming, design and construction problems and the development of departmental projects are integrated with ecologically functional and aesthetic aspects within the confines of economic feasibility.

### **FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL**

The Engineering Section had 13 employees during FY 2015-2016: one Chief of Engineering Services, one Architect II, two Design Technician Supervisors, one Graduate Engineer, one Legal Research Assistant, one Clerk Stenographer III, one Conservation Construction Inspector I, one Conservation Inspector II, one Design Technician, one Design Assistant, one Plant Maintenance Supervisor III and one Retired State Employee. The section's facilities are in Montgomery.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The Engineering Section continued to provide on-site professional and technical support in the rebuilding of property and structures damaged or destroyed by storms. The Engineering Section continues to coordinate with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and work with local communities, federal, state and local agencies. The section continued to assist with documentation of December 2015 severe storms and associated flooding in multiple Alabama counties. Additionally, we are working with the Alabama Emergency Management Agency to recover approximately \$941,180 associated with the damages sustained from the April and May 2011 tornadoes and other severe weather events. The Engineering Section administered approximately \$10

million in contracts both initiated and coordinated in fiscal years 2015-2016.

Engineering Section programs consist of providing professional expertise required to reach Department goals. These programs include capital and improvement, using both outsourcing and in-house design and in-house construction, master planning and site planning for Department facilities. General technical assistance is also performed including construction document preparation, project status reports, annual reports, replies to correspondence, feasibility studies, advisement on proper repair and operation manuals, providing file information, technical field assistance, emergency project involvement, dam inspections, specification writing for material and equipment purchases, field maintenance and training assistance.

Engineering was also involved with surveying assistance and technical advice on construction projects, boundaries and property corners for State Parks, delineation and location of oyster reefs, public access areas, wildlife management areas, public lakes and other state managed property. Approximately 30 percent of Engineering Section time was spent on technical assistance of a general nature involving various Department activities requiring engineering input.

The Engineering Section continues to assist the Commissioner's Office and the State Parks Division in the advertising for, and selection of private architectural/engineering firms to prepare documents for the State Parks Restoration Program and State Lands Capital Improvement Program. The section remains as a coordinating liaison between the Department of Conservation and these private firms to communicate the needs of the Department and to ensure their inclusion into the completed plans.



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# MARINE RESOURCES



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 resources and the citizens of Alabama. The Division consists of an enforcement section, a fisheries section and an administrative section. The Enforcement Section is responsible for enforcing state laws and regulations pertaining to Alabama's marine resources and to work cooperatively with other state agencies and federal fisheries enforcement agencies to protect federal fisheries resources in federal waters adjacent to Alabama. The section also works cooperatively with the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency to accomplish their missions.

The Fisheries Section works with other Gulf of Mexico state and federal agencies, as well as the public to collect data through various projects to describe Alabama's marine resources and supply information and recommendations for managing these resources at state, regional and national levels. It also has a mariculture program located at the Claude Petet Mariculture Center. Both sections participate in outreach programs throughout the year.

The administrative section handles accounting, billing, payroll, license sales and public inquiries. The Division is housed at two facilities, one on Dauphin Island and the other in Gulf Shores. The two division facilities supported an average of 54 full-time employees, two part-time employees, and 10 temporary positions during the 2015 fiscal year. There were 66 full-time employees budgeted and 12 positions unfilled during the year.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

AMRD deployed approximately 21,554 cubic yards of cultch material on 319 acres of water bottoms in 2016 on reefs located in Mississippi Sound and Mobile Bay. Annual SCUBA quadrat dives conducted in July and August 2016 show higher oyster spat settlement rates on cultch material deployed in recent years compared to annual dives conducted in 2014 and 2015.

The requirement of captains of recreational vessels with red snapper to report harvested red snapper prior to landing fish in Alabama continued in 2016 for the third year. During the red snapper season, just over 5,800 vessel reports were submitted through Snapper Check. Approximately 1.57 million pounds of red snapper were estimated to have been harvested, which represents 55 percent of the federal estimate. AMRD staff has submitted information from Snapper Check to the federal fisheries statistics staff as part of a certification process in order to include this data in federal management.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) projects are proceeding with a few exceptions due to vessel issues and volunteer concerns with fishery-dependent projects. Sampling for vertical

line (88), bottom long-line (20) and trawl (40) target stations were completed for the year. This work complements current SEAMAP surveys. Approximately 100 wild caught red drum were acoustically tagged for the project task of acoustic monitoring of red drum movements. Additionally, 42 hatchery-reared fish raised at the CPMC were tagged with acoustic tags and released throughout the Mobile Bay system to assist in refining estimates of emigration. Hydrophones are located throughout the estuarine system to assist in tracking acoustically tagged fish and will help document movements and habitat use.

Offshore and estuarine areas targeted within the NFWF project for side-scan imagery acquisition were completed. Offshore side-scanning activities included mapping bottoms adjacent to the vertical, bottom long-line and trawl sampling stations. Estuarine side-scanning sonar activities focused on determining the extent and condition of artificial fishing reefs, natural structures and oyster reef habitats. Sonar images were used in pre-reef construction to assist staff with identifying areas to receive reef material and in post-construction to verify targeted areas were satisfactorily enhanced.

Hard parts (otoliths) are currently being processed and aged from the vertical and bottom-long line surveys. Gut samples exceeded the target of 1,000 samples (1,425) to identify trophic linkages through species identification and stable isotope analysis of contents. Ovary samples from 130 fish were collected and submitted to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Laboratory for processing.

AMRD has continued the operation and maintenance of five continuous water quality monitoring stations throughout Mobile Bay. General results indicate significant periods of anoxic conditions at depth.

AMRD biologists conducted 11 observer trips on five commercial blue crab harvesting vessels working in upper Mobile Bay, Portersville Bay, Perdido Bay and Wolf Bay systems. Traps were sampled for the number of legal and sub-legal crabs and bycatch species. External parasites and any abnormalities, if observed, were noted. Twenty crabs were randomly selected during each trip and were frozen for further measurement and analysis. Owners of the crab vessels were compensated for access to their vessels and traps during sampling trips.

The Biological Sampling Program, funded by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, was funded during the entire reporting period. A total of 1,735 otoliths were collected by AMRD staff. Some targets for primary species such as gray triggerfish

and greater amberjack were not be met due to fishery closures occurring before project start. AMRD has processed the majority of otoliths in FY2016. Data will be entered into the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's database FIN.

During the reporting period, a total of 2,258 APAIS interviews were collected in all modes. Additionally, economic expenditure questions were added to the creel survey. Throughout this time, samplers received fish identification training and testing, ongoing survey training and malfunctioning/missing field equipment was replaced.

During the project period, an agreement was entered between Auburn University's Southeast Fish Disease Laboratory and AMRD whereby AMRD staff collected and shipped quarterly samples of wild fish to Auburn University for diagnostic checks related to commonly known disease and pathogen identification. The sampled fish will be added to a fish disease sample database whereby results of diagnostic tests conducted in subsequent years will be stored in order to better understand the incidence of infection and pathogens in wild fish populations throughout the year. Results indicated low levels of fish disease among the fish species sampled.

The second gas rig jacket deployed under a formal Rigs-to-Reefs plan was reefed during the summer. The jacket of MP 255 was cut approximately 95 feet below the water surface and the top portion of the jacket was placed next to the fixed portion of the jacket in 330 feet of water. The reef provides approximately 243 feet of vertical relief and is approximately 54 nautical miles offshore of Dauphin Island. AMRD received a \$248,178 donation from Fieldwood Energy for accepting the structure into the State of Alabama Rigs-to-Reefs program.

During the report period, AMRD continued artificial reefing activities to enhance habitats and increase recreational fishing opportunities for coastal saltwater anglers. A total of 342 public artificial reefs were either created or enhanced; 542 private artificial reefs were permitted for deployment in the offshore artificial reef permit zones; and two inshore reefs were enhanced with 7,000 tons of limestone aggregate.

Alabama continued a seafood promotional campaign under the direction of the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission. The Alabama Seafood Marketing Program consists of public relations, television commercials, print ads and articles, radio ads, billboards, speaking appearances, distribution of marketing materials, sponsorships of events and participation at community festivals and chef events. The website [eatalabamaseafood.com](http://eatalabamaseafood.com) was developed and has received rave reviews from the public.

## **ENFORCEMENT SECTION**

From January 1, 2016, to September 1, 2016, AMRD enforcement officers conducted 3,001 commercial fishermen intercepts, 21,914 recreational fishermen intercepts, 15,002 patrol hours, and 7,563 vessel boardings.

AMRD officers continue to participate in joint investigations with NOAA/OLE regarding Gulf Reef fish. Additionally, they are conducting joint patrols with the uniformed NOAA Enforcement Officer.

AMRD Enforcement entered into the 15th Joint Enforcement Agreement with NOAA/OLE. The JEA provides equipment and funding for officers to enforce federal laws and regulations. One of the unique aspects of this contract is creation of a canine program. Two Eco-dogs were purchased and trained to assist officers in locating fish and fish filets that have been hidden on vessels. From January 1, 2016 to September 1, 2016, AMRD enforcement officers conducted 1,066 commercial fishermen intercepts, 5,968 recreational fishermen intercepts, 3,993 patrol hours, and 2,356 vessel boardings while working under the current JEA program.

The Enforcement section is actively involved in the Southern District of Alabama Environmental Crimes Task Force. This partnership has allowed multiple agencies to provide a wide range of skill sets and manpower to enforce state and federal laws. The section also participates in the South Alabama Regional Search and Rescue group (SARSAR) to provide regional search and rescue. During FY 2016, officers worked closely with other state law enforcement agencies in a variety of activities including the apprehension and prosecution of persons in multiple federal fisheries cases covering several states.

## **FUTURE ISSUES**

The management of red snapper and other reef fish continues to be a highly volatile issue. Currently, red snapper are managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service since most red snapper are harvested from artificial reefs, oil and gas platforms and other structures in federal waters. The federal season for this economically important species was reduced to a seven-day season in 2016. Although the fish are primarily harvested in federal waters, the shortened seasons have taken an economic toll on the charter and recreational fishermen and related businesses in Coastal Alabama.

There are many initiatives to improve the management of red snapper to allow for increased harvest and an increased season length on this recovering species. One of the initiatives is for the federal government to cede management of red snapper to the individual states or regions made up of a combination of states. Other initiatives call for increased data collection and a reexamination of the red snapper stock through an improved stock assessment process using the additional data. The Marine Resources Division represents Alabama on the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council where these and many other issues are discussed.

MRD will continue to work with other state and federal agencies in the assessment, monitoring, and rehabilitation efforts needed in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The Fisheries Section will work closely with the NRDA process to implement fisheries assessment and monitoring plans.

MRD will continue to produce public service announcements regarding the National Angler Registry and assist anglers with questions and registration related to the Registry.

## **MARINE RESOURCES 2016 BUDGET**

<b>BUDGETED ITEM</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>EXPENDITURES</b>
PERSONNEL COSTS	3,332,552	2,557,123
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	1,384,844	1,107,964
TRAVEL- IN-STATE	19,000	15,398
TRAVEL -OUT- OF-STATE	21,000	12,959
REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE	150,000	66,828
RENTALS AND LEASES	85,000	21,663
UTILITIES AND COMMUNICATION	300,000	209,396
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	3,009,897	2,937,174
SUPPLIES,MATERIALS & OPERATING EXPENSE	582,560	410,859
TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT OPERATIONS	649,025	383,554
GRANTS AND BENEFITS	50,500	29,541
CAPITAL OUTLAY	7,246,689	3,588,926
TRANSPORTATION EQUIPMENT PURCHASES	300,000	194,581
OTHER EQUIPMENT PURCHASES	323,000	101,689
ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSFER	557,442	557,442
	<b>18,011,509</b>	<b>12,195,096</b>

## **MARINE RESOURCES PROJECT SUMMARY**

Artificial Reefs Deployed	884 reefs
Marine Tide Calendars	75,000 distributed
Snapper Check Reports	5,804 landing reports submitted
Fisheries Assessment and Monitoring	410 samples taken and analyzed
Adult Finfish Sampling Program	232 net sets taken and analyzed
Cooperative Statistics	217 samples collected
Commercial Trip Ticket	11,572 commercial fishing trips entered
Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment	108 offshore sites sampled
Marine Recreational Information Program	2,258 anglers interviewed
Otolith Sampling program	1,735 fish sampled
Oyster Planting Program	21,554 cubic yards of cultch material planted



BILLY POPE

# STATE LANDS



The 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, timber harvesting, farming, coal mining, hunting leases and commercial uses. SLD continues its efforts to identify additional alternative means of revenue generation through management of these trust lands.

The Forever Wild Land Trust program is administered by the 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, the SLD also manages many of Forever Wild's 251,000 acres, as well as complimentary tracts owned by the SLD.

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

The SLD maintains the state Land Resource Information Center (LRIC), which is a database of all lands owned by the State of Alabama and its departments, agencies and institutions. The SLD implemented public search capabilities of this database in January 2013. This provides the public the ability to access and search information maintained in the LRIC database. The database can be found by following the state property and then state lands links on the [www.Open.alabama.gov](http://www.Open.alabama.gov) website.

Alabama's Natural Heritage Database is maintained by the SLD. Animal and plant species and areas of biological significance that make up the rich natural diversity of our state are identified and inventoried. This effort provides important biological information to conservation organizations, developers, governmental agencies and the public. It also complements the 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.

The 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 (NERR), located in Fairhope on Weeks Bay (an estuary of national significance), conducts education and outreach, research, coastal training programs and stewardship related to the estuary and its watershed. The Wehle Land Conservation Center is located in Midway (Bullock County) and consists of the Robert G. Wehle Nature Center and the Elhew Field Station, which is funded in part through the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust. Located in Alabama's Black Belt region, the M. Barnett Lawley Forever Wild Field Trial Area is south of Greensboro in Hale County.

The SLD conducts coastal resource management and planning through the Alabama Coastal Area Management Program (ACAMP). The ACAMP 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 such valuable resources for the benefit of present and future generations. This program works in cooperation with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and receives federal funds from the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the Department of Commerce. The ACAMP, as well as research activities and educational programs at the Weeks Bay NEER, complement the division's responsibilities for managing submerged lands, which include 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.

The 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 jurisdiction 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.

The SLD administers the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) for the State of Alabama. The CIAP is a federally funded program managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designed to mitigate impacts from Outer Continental Shelf activities. Specifically, the SLD implements projects selected by the State of Alabama, and coordinates grant administration activities with the two coastal counties, Baldwin and Mobile.

The SLD continued to coordinate administrative and technical

## STATE LANDS DIVISION FY16

Sources of Revenue	Total
Coal Bed Methane Royalties	\$276,784.17
Coal Mining Royalties	\$1,776,350.56
State Land Sales & Leasing Act (SLSLA)	\$10,399.55
Land Leases, farming, hunting, etc.	\$830,647.86
Miscellaneous easements, fees and permits	\$322,185.12
Non-Governmental Contributions to Forever Wild	\$127,613.50
Non-Governmental Operating Contributions	\$146,516.50
OCS - 8(g) Oil and Gas Payments	\$1,229,250.07
Oil and Gas Bonuses/Rentals	\$183,943.24
Oil and Gas Royalties	\$43,345,645.69
Timber Sales	\$285,897.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$48,535,234.00</b>

## DISTRIBUTION OF STATE LANDS RECEIPTS

Sources of Receipts	Total
Marine Resources Division	\$203.38
State Lands Division	\$2,366,088.80
State Parks Division	\$3,093.75
Alabama Department of Corrections	\$1,145,289.80
Alabama Department of Education - Institutional Land	\$10,702.98
Alabama Department of Education - Trust Land	\$1,633,459.83
Alabama Department of Mental Health	\$75,048.37
Alabama Forestry Commission	\$67.35
Alabama Historical Commission	\$151,206.15
Alabama Department of Transportation	\$59,564.54
Alabama Department of Revenue	\$2,025.00
Alabama Trust Fund	\$42,728,459.33
Auburn University	\$1,316.91
Forever Wild Land Trust	\$13,883.70
Forever Wild Land Trust Stewardship Account	\$126,303.50
General Fund	\$218,520.61
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$48,535,234.00</b>

aspects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) pursuant to the Oil Pollution Act. Specific activities included participating in NRDA Trustee Council meetings, participation in Trustee Implementation Groups (TIG's), conducting public meetings related to NRDA activities, solicitation of 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 natural resource trustees and the governor's office.

The SLD assists the commissioner related to his service as the governor's designee to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council 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 percent of Clean Water Act civil penalties resulting from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill for restoration projects within the five Gulf states. The SLD also provides administrative support to the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council, which was established by the federal RESTORE Act to oversee certain funds allocated directly to the State of Alabama.

In addition, SLD 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. 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.

These critical efforts to restore the state's valuable natural resources impacted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and to enhance recovery from associated economic impacts, which are both time and staff intensive, have presented the SLD with the challenge of maintaining other routine activities and services at current staffing levels.

The SLD manages its responsibilities through several sections: Land Management/Administrative (including Land Stewardship/Enforcement, Asset Management, Recreational Programs, and Natural Heritage Program); CIAP and Coastal. At the end of FY16, SLD employed 78 employees in support of its programs.

Several examples of the accomplishments by the various programs and facilities operated by the SLD for this past year follow.

### ASSET MANAGEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Generated over \$48.4 million in revenue for distribution to a number of state agency beneficiaries including, but not limited to, the Alabama Trust Fund, the General Fund, the Department of Corrections and the School Land Trust.
- Examples of Asset Management activities include:
  - Supported statewide educational activities through sales of timber on school trust lands managed by the Division.
  - Tidal Submerged Lands Management/Regulatory Program
  - Processed permit applications for projects impacting Forest management activities (i.e. timber sales) on 60 acres.
  - Completion of reforestation on 2,152 acres.

- Initiation of reforestation activities (i.e. site prep) providing potential future revenue streams on 3,214 acres.
- Administration of revenue generating activities on state-owned land including issuance of timber sale contracts, 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 a coal lease.

### **DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL RESTORATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Resolved non-economic damages claims against responsible parties resulting in \$1.38 billion benefitting restoration in Alabama.
- Initiated planning for Alabama NRDA Trustee Implementation Group (ALTIG) Restoration Plan 1 focused on restoring lost recreational use.
- Continued planning, implementation and monitoring associated with approximately \$117.7 million in NRDA Early Restoration Projects benefiting Alabama.
  - Marsh Island Restoration Project - \$11,280,000
  - Dune Restoration Project in Gulf Shores and Orange Beach - \$1,480,000
  - Habitat Improvement Project for Nesting Sea Turtles - \$345,000
  - Avian Habitat Enhancement Project - \$279,000
  - Gulf State Park Enhancement Project - \$85,500,000 (\$58m for Lodge component)
  - Oyster Reef Restoration in Mobile County - \$3,400,000
  - Swift Tract Living Shoreline Project - \$5,000,080
  - Shell Belt and Coden Belt Road Living Shoreline Project - \$8,050,000
  - Point aux Pines Living Shoreline Project - \$2,300,000
  - Osprey Restoration in Coastal Alabama Project - \$45,000
- Secured award of and/or implemented approximately \$113 million in NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Projects benefiting Alabama.
  - Restoration and Enhancement of Oyster Reefs - \$3,750,000
  - D'Olive Watershed Restoration - \$12,500,000
  - Fowl River Watershed Restoration - \$2,900,000
  - Alabama Barrier Island Restoration Assessment - \$4,200,000
  - Alabama Marine Mammal Conservation and Recovery Program - \$1,300,000
  - Coastal Habitat Restoration Planning Initiative - \$2,840,000

- Enhanced Fisheries Monitoring in Alabama's Marine Waters (Phase I) - \$1,800,000
- Multifaceted Fisheries and Ecosystem Monitoring in Alabama's Marine Waters (Phase II) - \$2,100,000
- Grand Bay Land Acquisition - \$4,000,000
- Mobile Bay Shore Habitat Conservation and Acquisition Initiative (Phase I) - \$300,000
- Mobile County Conservation Land Acquisition - \$4,200,000
- Alabama Artificial Reef and Habitat Enhancement - \$12,000,000
- Alabama Coastal Bird Stewardship Program - \$1,460,000
- Lightning Point Acquisition and Restoration - \$5,900,000
- Dauphin Island Conservation and Acquisition - \$3,500,000
- Multifaceted Fisheries and Ecosystem Monitoring in Alabama's Marine Waters (Phase III) - \$4,400,000
- Fowl River Watershed Restoration: Coastal Spits and Wetlands Project (Phase I) - \$1,100,000
- Bon Secour-Oyster Bay Wetlands Acquisition Project - \$8,700,000
- Gulf Highlands Conservation Acquisition - \$36,000,000
- Worked with other state and federal members of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council to secure and prioritize over \$26,000,000 in funding commitments for RESTORE Act Council-Selected Restoration Component projects in Alabama.
  - Coastal Alabama Comprehensive Watershed Planning - \$4,342,500
  - Alabama Living Shorelines Program (Planning/Design/Implementation) - \$6,250,000
  - Comprehensive Shoreline Monitoring - \$4,000,000
  - Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Monitoring and Enhancement - \$875,000
  - Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Three Mile and Twelve Mile Creek Restoration - \$2,100,000
  - Marsh Restoration in Fish River, Weeks Bay, Oyster Bay and Meadows Tract - \$3,158,043
  - Upper Mobile Bay Beneficial Use Wetland Creation (Planning/Design) - \$2,500,000
  - Enhancing Opportunities for Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediments - \$3,000,000

## **FOREVER WILD LAND TRUST PROGRAM**

### **ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES**

- Administered the acquisition of 11 tracts totaling 2,216.8 acres:
  - Desoto State Park – Steward Gap Addition (253 acres in DeKalb County)
  - Autauga WMA – Oak Grove Addition (359 acres in Autauga County)
  - Weeks Bay Reserve Swift #2 – Meyer Addition (29 acres in Baldwin County)
  - Autauga WMA – Old Kingston Addition (351.6 acres in Autauga County)
  - Walls of Jericho – Estilfork Addition (72 acres in Jackson County)
  - Dallas County WMA Phase I (497.2 acres in Dallas county)
  - Henshaw Cove Addition (40 acres in Jackson County)
  - Hinds Road Outcrop (80 acres in Etowah County)
  - Post Oak Flat Shiflett Addition (160 acres in Jackson County)
  - Autauga WMA – Joffre Addition (335 acres in Autauga County)
  - Yates Lake Tapley Addition (40 acres in Elmore County)
  - Martin Timber Swap (425 acres in Lauderdale County)
- Provided administrative support for the Public Education Initiative to improve the awareness and understanding of the Forever Wild Land Trust program and the opportunities it provides to Alabama’s citizens.
- Processed 22 general information inquiries and 11 Forever Wild Land Trust tract nominations originating from the Alabamaforeverwild.com website forms.
- Determined landowner “willing seller” status, mapped and evaluated 11 Forever Wild nominations.

### **RECREATIONAL PROGRAM AND LAND STEWARDSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Managed the public physically disabled and youth hunting programs hosting 17 days of hunting; hosted the Fifth Annual Beyond Becoming an Outdoors-Woman deer hunt; and hosted 18 sporting dog field trial/hunt tests (including the Hunting Retriever Club Grande Event and the U.S. Open Championship for pointing dogs) at the M. Barnett Lawley Forever Wild Field Trial Area in Hale County. These events brought over 3,000 visitors to the tract and surrounding areas.
- Hosted over 2,000 visitors at the Wehle Land Conservation Center facilities for outdoor recreational and educational activities in Bullock County.

- Began improvements to 8 miles of public access roads associated with Coastal Impact Assistance Program grant award supporting the Perdido River Canoe Trail Project near Bay Minette in Baldwin County.
- Expanded public access opportunities by offering 40 open woods days at the Forever Wild Land Trust Sipsey River Recreation Area (Tuscaloosa County) and open gate weekends during the hunting season at the Red Hills (Monroe County), Old Cahawba (Dallas County), Splinter Hill Bog (Baldwin County) and Lillian Swamp (Baldwin County) Forever Wild tracts.
- Constructed two changing rooms, two bike-washing stations, and three kiosks at the Dothan Trail Park Tract; assisted with the construction of 2 miles of trail.
- Installed a new parking area for the new hiking trail at Yates Lake WMA (Elmore County).
- Constructed footbridge along the Alabama Pinhoti Trail at the Weogufka State Forest Addition Tract (Coosa WMA).
- Continued construction of mountain biking trail at the Coldwater Mountain tract near Anniston in Calhoun County as part of an ongoing effort bringing trail to a total of approximately 35 miles.
- Maintained existing horseback riding, hiking, biking, and multi-use trails and boardwalks at the Shoal Creek Nature Preserve (Lauderdale County), Walls of Jericho (Jackson County), Wehle (Bullock County), Splinter Hill Bog (Baldwin County), Old Cahawba Prairie (Dallas County), Jacinto Port (Mobile County), Coldwater Mountain (Calhoun County), Dothan Park Trails (Houston County), Grand Bay Savanna (Mobile County) and Coon Creek (Elmore County) Forever Wild tracts.
- Continued construction of a hiking trail along the Perdido River located on the Forever Wild Perdido River WMA tracts near Bay Minette in Baldwin County.
- Performed prescribed fire on over 3,000 acres as part of maintaining or enhancing the natural plant communities occurring on various Forever Wild tracts.

### **NATURAL HERITAGE SECTION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Reforested 895 acres of longleaf pine on Perdido River WMA.
- Reforested 668 acres of shortleaf pine on Freedom Hills and Riverton WMA.
- Reforested 386 acres of longleaf pine on Coosa WMA.
- Performed biodiversity survey work, conducted habitat assessments, participated in trail planning and continued collecting detailed GPS/GIS data of existing Forever Wild tracts to aid with the management and research of these tracts.

- Maintained GIS Server software allowing greater transparency of Forever Wild holdings and ADCNR facilities to the public by providing an interactive map online (<http://conservationgis.alabama.gov/fwlt/>). This same software is being used to improve geographic information transmission within the division and the department.
- Maintained the Natural Heritage Section (NHS) database, partially funded by a State Wildlife Grant, as a database accessible via a secure Internet website for over 500 approved users, currently containing more than 2.2 million records.
- Conducted winter whitenose syndrome surveys in priority bats caves on Forever Wild property.
- Continued to enhance the Alabama Natural Heritage Section Herbarium with a current total of 3,350 specimens, all of which have been digitized, imaged and databased.
- Published five peer-reviewed journal articles about significant biodiversity finds on Forever Wild lands.
- Insect collections were conducted throughout the state and several notable finds were made.

### **COASTAL IMPACT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CIAP) ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Continued implementation of 28 awarded grants funded through the USFWS totaling approximately \$33 million.
- Examples of activities include the following:
  - Funded road improvements on 13.5 miles along the Perdido River Corridor, adding over 9,000 tons of stone to help stabilize the public access to the Perdido River canoe trail. Several low water crossings and bridges were also installed or repaired to facilitate access to the newly constructed canoe/kayak launches.
  - Funded the addition of an Americans with Disabilities Act-accessible canoe/kayak launch and wharf at the Five Rivers' Bartram Landing.
  - Funded the installation of nine kiosks at several locations along the Bartram and Perdido Canoe trails in Baldwin and Mobile County.
  - Provided funding for the construction of four pile-supported camping shelters along the Bartram Canoe Trail in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Construction also included a boardwalk and ADA-accessible canoe/kayak launch at two of the shelters.
  - Completed mechanical mulching and herbicide treatment at the Weeks Bay Reserve in Baldwin County.
  - Funded the removal of understory, enhancement of gopher tortoise habitat, and longleaf reforestation at the Gulf State Park.

- Funded the addition of a 4,000-square-foot pole barn for staging and harvesting of fish species at the Claude Peteet Mariculture Center in Gulf Shores. Drainage repairs were also completed at the hatchery ponds at Claude Peteet Mariculture Center.
- Funded the installation of over 181,000 linear feet of sanitary sewer lines in south Mobile County. These funds also included lift stations and sewer connections for approximately 650 homes and businesses as well as the de-commissioning of nearly 540 septic tanks. Two maintenance vehicles were also purchased for City of Bayou La Batre to help maintain the sewer lines.
- Provided funding for the largest shoreline stabilization project on Dauphin Island. Over 300,000 cubic yards of sand was added to nearly 1 mile of beach along the east end of the barrier island.
- Funded the construction of the Weeks Bay Reserve re-research dormitory in Baldwin County. The 3,000-square-foot dorm features six bunkrooms, one ADA-accessible bedroom, five bathrooms, solar power, and a wetland wastewater treatment system for low maintenance wastewater treatment.
- Provided funding for site improvements at the Delta Port Marina near Portersville Bay in Mobile County. Site improvements included a new wharf, boat launch, fishing pier, pole barn, and an ADA accessible kayak/canoe launch.
- Funded prescribed burns at seven State Lands' coastal Alabama tracts. In total, prescribed fires were accomplished on over 6,300 acres.
- Funded approximately 600 linear feet of stream restoration along the Tiawasee Creek in Daphne.
- Provided funds to complete an updated Submerged Aquatic Vegetation survey for coastal Alabama.
- Funded artificial reef improvements to the inshore and offshore artificial reef areas in coastal Alabama. Inshore and offshore reef deployments included concrete material, pipe, rock, pyramid reefs and oyster shell.
- Funded the removal of 23 derelict vessels in Bayou La Batre (Mobile County) and Soldiers Creek (Baldwin County).
- Funded the installation of educational exhibits, an ADA-accessible sidewalk, tables, facility signage and a motorized gate at the Five Rivers Delta Resource Center.

### **COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT SECTION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- The Alabama Coastal Area Management Program provided funding and oversight to 14 sub-awards to local governments in Mobile and Baldwin County, the Dauphin

Island Sea Lab (DISL) and the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP). These sub-awards totaling over \$428,500 in federal funds provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration supported the following:

- Development of low-cost public access improvements to coastal areas including the cities of Gulf Shores and Foley.
- Assisted in the development of the comprehensive plan for the City of Creola to be utilized by local decision-makers relating to land use and infrastructure issues.
- Assisted in the development of a Stormwater Management Plan for the Town of Perdido Beach to reduce hazards, improve resilience and protect the health of local waterways.
- Assisted the City of Fairhope in the development of a beach management plan for future management of their beaches through monitoring changes in beach profiles and transport as they relate to the targeted beach templates determined by the plan.
- Sponsored and organized the 29th Annual Coastal Cleanup resulting in 4,250 volunteers removing 36,700 pounds of marine debris.

## **SUBMERGED LANDS REGULATORY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Received, reviewed and/or approved over 100 permit applications for activities impacting near-shore public trust submerged lands through the Notice of Intent to Impact State Owned Submerged Lands (NOI) permit application process.
- Conducted 43 onsite inspections.
- Continued to coordinate with local governments, homeowner associations and individual riparian property owners to provide information about SLD regulations as a means to efficiently manage uses of public submerged lands.
- Received six permit applications for Shellfish Aquaculture Easements and issued six preliminary easement approval letters.

## **5 RIVERS DELTA RESOURCE CENTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Hosted over 62,750 visitors from 42 states and 12 foreign countries.
- Hosted over 675 events, receptions, meetings, guided tours, field trips and educational classes and summer day camp programming.
- Delta Safaris, a concessioner, continued to offer a variety of tours into the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta and served over 14,150 guests via pontoon boat tours and canoe/kayak rentals and guided tours.
- 5 Rivers staff conducted more than 190 guided educational programs serving over 7,600 students of all ages.

- Utilizing grant funding from the Coastal Impact Assistance Program, the facility made several physical improvements in 2016, including: Expansion of the docking and picnic facilities at Bartram Landing, highlighted by the installation of a new wheelchair-accessible canoe and kayak launch; Installation of a concrete perimeter trail sidewalk on the north end of the property, connecting Bartram Landing, the Nature Center, Battery Point Pavilions, and the Blakeley Hall Conference Center; and Installation of new signage, including a front entrance sign, directional signage and kiosks throughout the property.
- The Cypress Gift Shop at 5 Rivers had over \$83,800 in sales.
- Education staff represented 5 Rivers and ADCNR at 12 community events including the Greater Mobile Boat Show, Dauphin Island Discovery Days, Bay Area Earth Day, Bellingrath Gardens Discovery Day, GulfQuest Museum Summer Camp, Stockton Sawmill Days, Alabama Coastal BirdFest Conservation Expo and Baldwin County Fair.
- In addition to static displays, the Apalachee Exhibit Hall hosted five discrete exhibits throughout the year including 2016 Marine Resources Division's Children's Art Calendar Contest; the 2016 Outdoor Alabama Photo Contest; the 2016 Weeks Bay Photo Contest; the Nature Photography of Spence Harrison; and the Complete Alabama Waterfowl Stamp Collection. Two new permanent exhibits were added to the space this year, using CIAP funds including: a diorama on the Mississippian Indian mounds found in the Delta's Bottle Creek; and the Maubila Villa camp shelter and aquatic wildlife exhibit, which features 6 fresh and brackish water aquaria with fish, shellfish, turtles, and an alligator.
- The Nature Center's educational classroom space, Lil' Bateau Learning Center, also received new exhibits via a CIAP grant, which added a panoramic mural of Lil' Bateau Bay, high definition microscopes, live bird enclosures, an animal scat/tracks/pelts display and an alligator nest exhibit.
- 5 Rivers and the City of Spanish Fort hosted the Eighth Annual Delta Woods and Waters Expo, a three-day conservation event that served over 3,000 participants, including 650 students.
- The facility served as host site of several annual community fundraising events, including the Kiwanis Taste of the Towns (in its ninth year at 5 Rivers), Bay Bash, Cocktails for the Coast, Spanish Fort Educational Foundation Fiesta, as well as 5K run/walk events. The facility also hosted public information meetings and press conferences on a variety of topics.
- Served as host site for the Thirteenth Annual Alabama Coastal Birdfest, which drew over 390 participants from 20 states for three days of guided birding tours. Staff also coordinated the Conservation Department's presence at the Birding and Conservation Expo, which drew approximately 3,000 attendees.

## **WEEKS BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- The Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (Reserve) hosted an estimated 8,000 visitors at the Weeks Bay Visitor Center from more than 48 states and 12 foreign countries and was involved in a number of administrative activities including:
  - Securing a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Acquisition grant award for acquisition of 244 acres of wetland habitat adjacent to the Meadows Tract in the Weeks Bay Coastal Area.
  - Receiving final NOAA approval on the 2017-2022 Weeks Bay NERR Management Plan.
- The Weeks Bay Education and Coastal Training programs provided quality K-12 and adult educational programming relating to coastal area resources. Activities included:
  - Conducting education programs for approximately 955 K-12 students and 2200 adults.
  - Conducting nine workshops for 279 coastal decision-makers providing 1,732 training hours.
  - 70 Baldwin County Grasses in Classes Program students planting approximately 150 native beach plants in a restoration site at Boggy Point, Orange Beach, and an additional 250 native salt marsh plants in a living shoreline project near the mouth of Weeks Bay.
  - Completing two exercises in support of the Weeks Bay Reserve Disaster Response Plan
  - Leading the Gulf Regional Training Program by conducting science communication and behavior change workshops in locations along the Gulf of Mexico.
- The Weeks Bay Reserve Research and Stewardship programs participated in several ongoing programs and activities including:
  - Coordinating research from universities and agencies on nine research projects.
  - Collecting water quality and weather data from five sites in Weeks Bay as part of the Reserve System-Wide Monitoring Program and staff served on the data management committee associated with this program.
  - Collecting approximately 500 digital elevation points, installation of near surface groundwater wells, and collection of sediment surface and water level data as elements of the ongoing SWMP Sentinel Site Application Module 1 project.
  - Continuing to serve as a member of the Northern Gulf of Mexico Cooperative (Cooperative) Sentinel Site program sponsored by NOAA to focus research and monitoring efforts on tools and products to aid coastal resource use and management as well as coastal resiliency planning.

<http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/sentinelsites/pdf/sentinel-site-gomex.pdf>

- Installed a permanent Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) as part of a global navigation satellite system on Reserve property in cooperation with the Cooperative Sentinel Site Program and other partners.
  - Hosted the Weeks Bay NERR Research Symposium featuring past and current projects within the Weeks Bay watershed.
  - Conducting 32 vessel tours of Weeks Bay and its tributaries for 721 students and Reserve visitors.
  - Assisting State Lands and contract personnel with prescribed fires on the Foley, Damson and Meadows Tracts.
- The Weeks Bay Reserve Volunteer program continued to be a critical source of operational and financial assistance providing more than 3,199 volunteer hours. Supporting activities included the annual native plant sale, maintaining the Reserve herbarium, and providing funding and logistical support for more than 27 Reserve-supported events including research and summer education programs.

## **WEHLE LAND CONSERVATION CENTER/ ELHEW FIELD STATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Hosted 1,718 visitors accommodating the public, professionals, students of all ages from elementary to college and researchers.
- Hosted Auburn University, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences undergraduate Wildlife Practicum and Trapping Workshop at the WLCC with 47 students participating.
- Hosted Tuskegee University's Youth Smart Camp to expose young adults to various aspects of the environment and natural resources representative of the Southeast, with a total of 69 participants.
- Hosted private landowner workshop in partnership with the Alabama Forestry Foundation educating 44 citizens and professionals about recognizing and working with gopher tortoises on active timberlands outside of its federally protected range.
- In partnership with the Auburn University Museum of Natural History, hosted conservation and environmental outreach programs for 609 fourth through sixth grade students from Barbour, Bullock, and Macon county schools for three weeks in spring and four weeks in fall.
- Continued to serve on the Bullock County Natural Resource Council (BCNRC), participating with outreach opportunities for the public and elementary students through numerous educational programs, including hosting the annual Water Festival and Forestry and Wildlife for Youth events. Both these programs benefited 192 area youth.

- Opened WLCC facilities (campground, horse stables and paddocks) and adjacent Forever Wild grounds to public on 16 weekends for free outdoor recreational use, with 434 visitors enjoying the grounds and accommodations.
- Implemented a standardized Wehle facilities rental model for the public enabling user groups to host meetings and workshops.
- Opened a free, day-use hiking trail within the north end of the Wehle Forever Wild tract enabling the public day-use access of the property without making visit arrangements.
- Performed late August prescribed burn over 281 acres of the Wehle Forever Wild tract as part of ongoing management to maintain the ecological integrity of the property.
- Administered and participated in USGS Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in Alabama.
- Continued management of a migratory bird night-flight call recording program to monitor bird migration patterns.
- Continued operation of a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) Banding Station on the Wehle Forever Wild tract for the eleventh year, providing important demographic and survival data for representative breeding bird species. This summer-long event is open to the public.
- Continued gopher tortoise population monitoring on the Wehle Forever Wild tract to evaluate establishment/site retention and habitat use of translocated individuals.
- Initiated two-year floristic survey of the Wehle Forever Wild tract to identify the representative plant communities and species diversity of the property.
- Monitored and oversaw management actions for red-cockaded woodpecker populations on the Forever Wild Coosa WMA through an awarded ESA Section 6 Grant.
- Instructed a bird identification workshop at Bankhead National Forest and performed 44 breeding bird point counts at Tuskegee National Forest under an executed challenge cost share agreement with the USFS.
- Developed and implemented a standardized painted bunting survey of the Black Belt region of the state to determine the distribution and breeding status of the species to supplement records in the NHS biological database and address priority objectives listed in the Alabama State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).
- Continued Eastern bluebird monitoring and management on the Wehle Forever Wild tract.
- Continued herpetofaunal monitoring using established drift fence trap arrays for passive long-term inventory of the Wehle Forever Wild tract.
- Continued fall northern bobwhite quail covey count surveys as part of a long-term monitoring effort.
- Hosted two guest graduate students performing research on the Wehle grounds throughout portions of the year.

## STATE LANDS 2016 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Section Name	Budget	Expenditures
Land Management/Administrative	\$16,062,635	\$5,197,828
Administrative Transfer to Department	\$757,065	\$757,065
CIAP (100% Federal)	\$5,485,045	\$17,069,214
CIAP Capital Outlay (100% Federal)	\$390,554	\$1,285,803
Coastal Zone Program (50% Federal)	\$3,050,715	\$1,096,636
Weeks Bay NERR (70% Federal)	\$2,366,906	\$570,579
<b>Total per Lands Fund</b>	<b>\$28,112,920</b>	<b>\$25,977,125</b>
<b>Forever Wild Land Trust Fund</b>	<b>\$20,906,050</b>	<b>\$6,499,387</b>
<b>Forever Wild Stewardship Fund</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$628,475</b>

# STATE PARKS



The State Parks Division operates and maintains 19 state parks encompassing approximately 45,300 acres of land and water in Alabama. The parks range from Gulf Coast beaches to Appalachian Mountains providing opportunities and facilities from basic day-use activities, to resort convention lodging, restaurant and golfing areas.

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

The Division's goals are to manage and operate the State Parks system in an economically sound and efficient manner on the most self-sustaining basis possible; to provide and maintain high quality facilities and services to meet the needs of visitors; to provide an opportunity for personal growth and development of individuals through outdoor experiences; to promote use of State Parks facilities; to preserve unique natural features and integrity of State Parks for future generations and to promote good will and enhance the public image of Alabama, and the Alabama State Parks through dedicated, courteous employees.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The 19 state parks serve more than 4 million guests annually on a constantly decreasing operational budget. Additional significant accomplishments were made in improving purchasing procedures, computer systems, operation and maintenance policies, financial management analysis, advertising and marketing, natural resource management and the continuous coordination, supervision and implementation of a comprehensive statewide, state parks renovations program.

## **FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL**

Each of the 19 state parks has an internal park staff determined by size, development and operation of each area. Total employees for all parks vary from approximately 800 during peak season to approximately 600 during the off-season.

The Parks Division central office in Montgomery includes six sections: Administrative, Operations and Maintenance, Management Analysis, Natural Resources and Advertising/Marketing, and operates with 13 full-time staff.

## **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

The recent lack of sufficient maintenance funds has limited our options for attending to a backlog of maintenance and renovation needs, as well as attending to the replacement of basic equipment required to manage the parks. The restoration of these maintenance funds derived from the cap on sales tax discounts in FY 2014 has provided much-needed relief in addressing the

problems. As we have approached these challenges, we have undertaken numerous cost sharing initiatives with our local government partners to leverage the impact of these funding opportunities. We have also scrutinized the return on the investment that these projects provide. Special attention has been given to parks and recreational programs which have demonstrated utilization trends that confirm they will yield supporting customer revenue as these improvements are completed. The continued availability of these maintenance funds and the efforts to apply them in the most cost effective manner will be crucial to seeing that the parks and their amenities are cared for and made available for public use. These efforts, coupled with an ongoing review and adjustment of recreational rates and programs will provide the best solutions to address the park's short and long-term management goals.

We have also given special attention to expanding our day use recreational opportunities, especially those associated with families and trail user communities. Great progress has been made by partnering with trail clubs and professional trail organizations as we advance these recreational goals. Lastly, we have achieved new success in providing cost effective recreational venues by partnering with concessionaires who are making financial investments in these facilities at several of our parks. We expect that these forms of innovation and opportunities for improved public services will continue in FY 2015.

## **MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS SECTION**

The responsibilities and functions of the Management Analysis Section are to provide general administrative direction and coordination for management control, administrative cost analysis, performance reporting, data processing, general accounting, budgeting, payables, receivables, and purchasing.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Section personnel received, processed and analyzed 2,184 performance reports for all state parks; prepared Park System Performance Reports as required by the Budget Management Act; received, processed and analyzed operations plans, budget reports and related reports; prepared Park System Operation Plans and fiscal year budgets; processed approximately \$43,500,000 in receipts and 10,799 payment types; and disbursed approximately 10,000 warrants and approximately 15,000 payroll checks through and from the State Accounting System.

Section staff also continuously monitored data processing output, distributed it to statewide park cost centers, and monitored managerial audits as well as personnel actual versus budgeted funds for each park. Management Analysis is continuing to work

# ALABAMA STATE PARKS DIVISION 2016 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Section Name	Budgeted	Expenditures
Park Operations	\$36,523,922.00	\$34,769,967.00
Administrative Transfer	\$3,004,968.00	\$2,894,643.00
Parks Fund Repairs & Maintenance	\$2,800,000.00	\$2,309,461.00
General Fund Transfer	\$3,000,000.00	\$3,000,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$45,328,890.00</b>	<b>\$42,974,071.00</b>

on transitioning to STAARS and developing detailed monthly financial statements. Management Analysis continues to revise resale inventory procedures to promote better accountability.

## OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE SECTION

The natural resources and recreational facilities on each state park have always been protected, managed and maintained primarily by the respective park manager and local staff using available equipment and other resources.

The Natural Resources Section was created in 1982 to help the parks accelerate enhancement of the quality of aesthetic, biological, historic and recreational aspects of their land and water resources and to increase the public's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of those resources. Section staff currently consists of the Chief/Natural Resource Planner and a Natural Resource Manager at Montgomery and four Interpretive Naturalists in field locations at DeSoto, Gulf, Lake Guntersville and Oak Mountain State Parks. These personnel use the latest science and technology to assist the parks with diverse natural resource, recreation and environmental education objectives each year. This section also administers and coordinates grants for natural resource improvement projects.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Over 5 million total park visitors, a 4.9-percent increase over last year.
- The parks continue to supplement their staff through the Volunteers in Parks program. This program has provided an additional workforce of experienced, dedicated and reliable workers to fill many positions left vacant by budget shortfalls.
- More than 630 accident/incident/offense and arrest reports were submitted by the Parks to this section for review and analysis.

- Parks were awarded 11 Trip Advisor's Award of Excellence.
- All Park Officers were certified in Active Shooter Training.
- Established Trails Subsection and promoted Ken Thomas to Trails Coordinator.
- Added real-time online reservations for campgrounds, hotel and cabins.
- Made substantial advances in parks yearend financial goals.
- Established Disaster Relief Strike Teams consisting of four persons per district with each having an alternate.
- Had Leadership/Team Building Seminar to provide training for staff.
- Secured and moving forward with numerous grants for trails.
- Restructured management at Cathedral Caverns and Rickwood Caverns State Parks that resulted in the reopening of Rickwood Caverns.
- Reopened Roland Cooper State Park under a concession agreement with Recreation Resource Management.
- Reopened several parks using partnerships with counties and cities.
- Conducted interviews and hired staff to try to rebuild core staffing that was greatly reduced by retirements and resignations.
- Installed low pressure sewage system at Rickwood Caverns State Park.
- Built bathhouse at Oak Mountain's equestrian campground using partnership with Shelby County.
- Replaced damaged chiller at Guntersville State Park.



# Alabama STATE PARKS



- 1 Bladon Springs State Park  
3921 Bladon Road  
Bladon Springs, AL 36919  
(251) 754-9207
- 2 Blue Springs State Park  
2595 Highway 10  
Clio, AL 36017  
(334) 397-4875
- 3 Bucks Pocket State Park  
393 County Road 174  
Grove Oak, AL 35975  
(256) 659-2000
- 4 Cathedral Caverns  
637 Cave Road  
Woodville, AL 35776  
(256) 728-8193
- 5 Cheaha State Park  
19644 Highway 281  
Delta, AL 36258  
(256) 488-5111
- 6 Chewacla State Park  
124 Shell Toomer Pkwy  
Auburn, AL 36830  
(334) 887-5621
- 7 DeSoto State Park  
13883 County Road 89  
Fort Payne, AL 35967  
(256) 845-0051
- 8 Frank Jackson State Park  
100 Jerry Adams Drive  
Opp, AL 36467  
(334) 493-6988
- 9 Gulf State Park  
20115 State Highway 135  
Gulf Shores, AL 36542  
(251) 948-6353
- 10 Joe Wheeler State Park  
4403 McLean Drive  
Rogersville, AL 35652  
(256) 247-5466
- 11 Lake Guntersville State Park  
1157 Lodge Drive  
Guntersville, AL 35976  
(256) 571-5444
- 12 Lake Lurleen State Park  
13226 Lake Lurleen Road  
Coker, AL 35452  
(205) 339-1558
- 13 Lakepoint State Park  
104 Lakepoint Drive  
Eufaula, AL 36027  
(334) 687-6676
- 14 Meaher State Park  
5200 Battleship Parkway East  
Spanish Fort, AL 36577  
(251) 626-5529
- 15 Monte Sano State Park  
5105 Nolen Avenue  
Huntsville, AL 35801  
(256) 534-6589
- 16 Paul M. Grist State Park  
1546 Grist Road  
Selma, AL 36701  
(334) 872-5846
- 17 Oak Mountain State Park  
200 Terrace Drive  
Pelham, AL 35124  
(205) 620-2527
- 18 Rickwood Caverns State Park  
370 Rickwood Park Road  
Warrior, AL 35180  
(205) 647-9692
- 19 Wind Creek State Park  
4325 AL Hwy. 128  
Alexander City, AL 35010  
(256) 329-0845

- Addressed mold/mildew issues in guest rooms at Guntersville State Park to include sealing building envelope and replacing sheetrock. Mold remediation was done by contract vendor.
- Let contract and began work to replace boiler system at Guntersville State Park.
- Installed fiber at Wind Creek State Park to strengthen internet connectivity.
- Secured grant to build a campground at Cathedral Caverns State Park.
- Replaced campground sewage line at Guntersville campground.
- Had marinas inspected by certified electrical contractor and made repairs.
- Replaced older model TV's with flat screens mounted to wall in cabins at Chewacla State Park. Also replaced door locks and installed double pane windows.
- Installed new WiFi system at Frank Jackson State Park. Added three camper cabins. Partnership of volunteers built handicapped accessible ramp and two pavilions.
- Hosted and filmed Major League Fishing Championship Show at Lakepoint State Park. Installed new 75KW generator at the lodge and new A/C unit at the marina store. Replaced lift stations at the lodge and boat ramp.

### **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

- Internet issues are an ongoing problem for several parks, especially those in remote locations. Customers and staff are unable to obtain adequate Internet connectivity with the current State Parks infrastructure. Work has begun on rebuilding some of the existing networks that are good, while abandoning some and replacing with fiber.
- Work is ongoing to catch up on the deferred maintenance items caused by years of budget shortfalls. In development is a 3- and 5-year plan for infrastructure maintenance and development.
- Working with Shelby County to try to provide better access though the back gate at Oak Mountain. Many areas of the park are very crowded and front gate has disproportionate amount of guest using it. Beach area and greater lake access are being built at the back lakes to encourage the use of back gate and provide improved alternate area from the existing day use areas.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES SECTION**

The Natural Resources Section was created in 1982 to help the parks accelerate enhancement of the quality of aesthetic, biological, historic and recreational aspects of their land and water resources and to increase the public's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of those resources. Section staff currently

consists of the Chief/Natural Resource Section and a Natural Resource Planner at Montgomery and six Interpretive Naturalists in field locations at DeSoto, Gulf, Lake Guntersville, Cheaha, Chewacla and Cathedral Caverns State Parks. The Natural Resources Section currently has one un-filled position. These personnel use the latest science and technology to assist the parks with diverse natural resource, recreation and environmental education objectives each year. This section also administers and coordinates grants for natural resource improvement projects.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Contributions to the quality of natural resource health and vitality above and beyond what the parks would normally be able to accomplish on their own include:

- A three-year Coastal Impact Assistance Program, which is designed to enhance longleaf restoration, forest mulching, invasive species control, fire lane construction, tree planting and prescribed fire at Gulf State Park.
- Restoration efforts at Gulf State Park pertinent to prescribed fire include 240 acres burned within a portion of the marsh burned during the wildfire of 2010. Other benefits of these fires are refreshing of wildlife food and cover sources, control of brush thickets and keeping the forests open for better visibility and air flow for visitors. Marked zones for forestry mulching at Gulf State Park to expand backcountry camping. Forest mulched 102 acres to reduce competition from slash pine and establish native grasses in longleaf restoration zones, and created 3.5 miles of trail/firebreak, treated 8 acres of cattail vegetation, treated approximately 18 acres of cogongrass and planted 12,600 longleaf seedlings.
- Natural Resources Section assisted with the continued use of herbicides for invasive and undesirable vegetation control within parks. This management tool was used at several park sites including Gulf, Frank Jackson, DeSoto and Oak Mountain in 2016.
- Natural Resources Section assisted with bike trail expansion at Lake Guntersville and horse trail expansion at Oak Mountain State Park to facilitate user demand.
- Natural Resources Section assisted with land encroachment, boundary line disputes/discrepancies and conflicts. Accordingly, the section continues to upgrade Alabama State Park deed files to maintain verified boundaries.

Contributions to the public's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural resources above and beyond what the parks would normally be able to accomplish on their own include:

- Park Naturalists entertain and educate many guests and visitors within the parks by in-house recreational activities, interpretive environmental education programs and special events throughout the year. They also provide a variety of public outreach programs and produced articles for publication outside of the parks. Program and publicity topics include: flora and fauna identification, habitat



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needs and management, air and water quality, and other environmental topics.

- Naturalists contribute to new trail construction, maintenance of existing trails and upgrading trail maps. Park Naturalists contributed to a relatively new public relations initiative, coordinating programs and events for inclusion into social media sites within the department/division for public viewing.
- Section personnel assisted in Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division regional fishing day events, deer population reduction management hunts at Oak Mountain State Park, coordinated whitetail deer sampling opportunities for monitoring herd health at Joe Wheeler, Monte Sano and Lake Guntersville State Parks, participated in meetings of the Alabama Birding Trails Advisory Committee and Forever Wild land acquisition evaluations.
- Natural Resource Personnel attended Wildland Fire Academy classes for wildland and urban interface fire control involving parks personnel statewide.
- Staff enhanced plans to manage the existing montane longleaf community at Oak Mountain State Park and dam sites. The removal of invasive plant understory on three dam sites has enabled park personnel to more effectively control growth with prescribed fire and herbicide application.
- Section enhanced MOU's with the Nature Conservancy, the Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama A&M University, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Auburn University to assist with prescribe fire, exotic species control and to provide lab/classroom experience for students in a park, forest environment. Further studies by Samford University this year and those completed for 2016, have yielded important plant survey information at Oak Mountain State Park. The Oak Mountain Interpretive Center Study continues to focus on mammal diversity within the park. The Alabama Wildlife Center located at Oak Mountain State Park continued to educate visitors through in-house and out-reach programs.
- Staff further coordinated trails mapping projects with the Information Technology Section of the Department using GPS/standards for Oak Mountain State Park. This project will facilitate the creation of user-friendly, interactive maps available on the Parks Division web site.
- Facilitated the annual Oak Mountain deer hunt and whitetail survey at Oak Mountain State Park with the addition of surveys at Monte Sano and Joe Wheeler State Parks. Monitored an educational/outreach program at Monte Sano State Park in relation to the Monte Sano homeowners and community representatives pertinent to whitetail deer management.
- Refined a Memorandum of Agreement with the Alabama Forestry Commission allowing commission personnel and forest contractors under Parks' guidance, to assist in timber

management practiced on Parks' lands. Park projects completed under this MOU include timber marking at Joe Wheeler State Park.

- Natural Resource Management personnel continued to participate in the Forever Wild land acquisition program, which resulted in the procurement of acreage for DeSoto and Lake Guntersville State Parks.
- The new archery park at Oak Mountain State Park has generated a heightened interest in the sport of archery and allowed visitors greater recreational opportunities as a family or group.
- Facilitated parks field staff to attend Prescribed Fire Certification Classes and become burn managers.

The negative impacts from past tornados at Lake Guntersville, Wind Creek and Paul M. Grist State Parks continue to provide opportunities to refine additional vistas and restore historic native ecosystems on appropriate sites in 2016. The 2011 wildfire at Gulf State Park created opportunities to restore wetland and longleaf/slash pine/wiregrass savannah habitat. This restoration effort will hopefully continue to attract sandhill, whooping cranes and other migratory birds to the park for visitor enjoyment. Enhancement projects finalized in 2016 will support Forest Management projects planned for the future at Gulf State Park.

#### **PROJECTS FINALIZED AT DESOTO STATE PARK**

- Replanted a 32-acre zone of shortleaf pine to begin restoration of a native species.

#### **PROJECTS FINALIZED AT GULF STATE PARK**

- Invasive species control targeting cogon grass, pampas grass and cattail, forest mulching adjacent to the new primitive campsites and the planting of 15 acres of sea oats within the beach dune system.

#### **PROJECTS FINALIZED AT JOE WHEELER STATE PARK**

- Marked timber based on a long-range plan to thin and remove invasive vegetation.
- Deer sampling.

#### **PROJECTS FINALIZED AT LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK**

- Continue to plant trees and monitor tree development.

#### **PROJECTS FINALIZED AT OAK MOUNTAIN STATE PARK**

- Parks staff continued to monitor deer herd, vegetative impacts from whitetail deer and design educational programs for the parks visitor.

#### **PROJECTS AT WIND CREEK STATE PARK**

- Applied herbicide to control bamboo in quail habitat and firebreak zones
- Stabilized permanent road with forestry best management practices
- Prescribed burned all land islands within the campground zone

- Expanded the park interpretive program to better serve the campground with a seasonal volunteer naturalist.

**PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED AT LAKEPOINT RESORT STATE PARK INCLUDE**

- Planning a site for future archery park and the creation of new birding programs.
- The Natural Resource Section added a Natural Resource Planner to the section this year.
- Accomplishments and projects: assistance to other divisions including the Alabama National Archery in the Schools Program State Tournament, 22 Annual Exceptional Anglers event, Gone Fishin', Not Just Wishing at Oak Mountain and Becoming an Outdoors-Woman teaching geocaching workshop
- Natural Resource Planner Training: ALIPC-Invasive Plant Identification and Control Workshop, ADECA Recreation Trails Program Grant Writing Class, Zika Action Committee, Certified Prescribe Burn Manager Course, Project Learning Tree Workshop, Aldo Leopold Land Ethic Workshop Creek Kids (DCNR-Fisheries), Assisting with the National Archery in the Schools Program – Basic Archery Instructor and participating in the Southeast State Park Program Seminar (SSPPS).
- The Natural Resource Planner assisted the park naturalists with the following events by presenting programs for: Great Outdoors Day (DeSoto), Earth Day at Lake Lurleen, All About Nature (Lake Lurleen), Family Fun Day (Rickwood Caverns), Lake Guntersville Fall Festival, and Bigfoot Biobash at Cheaha State Park.
- The National Resource Planner assisted the Trails Coordinator with GPS existing trails at Lakepoint and Blue Springs and developed a partnership with The Alabama

Birding Trails – Wiregrass and Piedmont Plateau Birding Trails to present programs and field trips at all the Alabama State Parks within this region. This partnership created the First Wiregrass Birding Tour.

- Reestablished the Fins, Feathers and Flowers weekend event at Lakepoint Resort State Park.
- Initial planning has begun with the Cheaha naturalist to develop an action plan to bring Leave No Trace in all the Alabama State Parks. Alabama will be the first state park system to have a Leave No Trace presence in all parks. The Leave No Trace Program teaches and promotes good land and conservation stewardship.
- Section personnel assisted with the development of the iNaturalist State Park project and plans for future development and implementation of this citizen science project.

**PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

The Section continues to deal with the problems of insufficient funding to address lake siltation at numerous parks, the addition of fish habitat structure, expanding the environmental education program, constructing much-needed nature centers and controlling populations of invasive plant species with herbicide.

**STATE PARK PROMOTIONS**

The Alabama State Parks Promotions Section was created in 1983 to coordinate the overall advertising, marketing and promotional efforts of the Alabama State Parks system. The section currently employs two people in the Montgomery office.

Administrative functions include coordination of radio and television public service announcements; preparation and distribution of promotional literature; coordination of print and photographic



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material for magazines, campground directories, and newspaper articles; cooperation and coordination with the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureaus, Tourist Association and special events promoters; evaluation of advertising opportunities; purchasing of advertising space; production of ads and advertising materials, assistance with individual State Parks promotional efforts; special events, various promotional exhibit expos, and continuous updating of photos; presentation of programs for various organizations, and the continued operation of the toll free nationwide phone line; social media marketing, website management and promotion, digital mobile-ready marketing, development of promotional park videos, and continued pursuit of affordable and effective marketing opportunities.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Participated in the Alabama Broadcasters Association's Educational Partnership Program. The program allows us to invest money with a guaranteed return of value at least three times the investment.
  - To promote our parks as destinations for user groups, we continue to create messages and relationships that are better targeted.
  - A new electronic booking engine that allows golfers to review and reserve tee times online was implemented
- Partnerships continued at Tourism and state welcome centers to promote Alabama and our state parks scattered throughout the state.
- The Promotions Section worked to create and provide continued growth of our social media accounts to further enhance the visibility of the Parks, primarily through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.
  - The State Parks e-newsletter continues to go out monthly to over 230K subscribers.
  - The "Partners Pay the Way" campaign that was introduced to raise awareness of the many individuals, user groups, civic partners, and elected officials we depend on to keep our

Alabama State Parks open and operational continues to be a success.

- A new program was implemented for our trail user groups entitled "Dirt Pass Trails Program." Trail users are encouraged to support state parks by buying a trail pass entitling them to use at all the trails within the state parks system by showing the wristband that was purchased. All monies from this promotion go back in the State Parks system to support a stand-alone trails program.
- An assortment of park videos produced and accessed on our website continues to be a way of utilizing video technology to further promote the parks system.
- The Alabama State Parks Pocket Ranger Smart Phone App continues to be an asset for state parks user groups.
- The development, maintenance and management of the state parks website (alapark.com) launched in January 2015 continues to be a valuable asset to our promotional endeavors for our Alabama State Parks.
- We continue to produce various state parks literature; as well as to maintain an inventory of all individual state park brochures. We maintain a working relationship with the Alabama Department of Transportation and the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel for distribution of brochures.
- The entire Promotions and Marketing Section worked diligently to bring awareness to the Constitutional Amendment # 2 on the 2016 ballot. This Amendment overwhelmingly passed by an 80 percent "Yes" vote to keep funding in our Alabama State Parks.

### **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

With limited staff and funding, the Promotional and Marketing Section continues in all endeavors and with the latest in marketing technology to promote our remaining Alabama State Parks through various traditional and contemporary marketing and promotional platforms.

# WILDLIFE & FRESHWATER FISHERIES



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

## ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION

**Wildlife Diversity:** State Wildlife Grants and the Landowner Incentive Program are two federal funding sources intended to focus management on declining wildlife species and avoid their eventual listing under the Endangered Species Act. Federal funding to the State Wildlife Grants program in FY16 was \$741,094. These funds are used to support research and species restoration efforts, including the following projects:

- Reintroduction of the Federally Threatened Eastern Indigo Snake
- Distribution, Abundance, Health Assessment of the Gopher Tortoise
- Support of the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center
- Comprehensive Examination of Black Bear Ecology and Management in Alabama
- Aquatic Snail Survey of Alabama
- Crayfish Survey of Alabama
- Implementation of the State Wildlife Action Plan.

For FY16, the Landowner Incentive program received \$25,000 for habitat restoration on private lands. These federal funds were awarded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. These programs are administered by one biologist, the Habitat and Species Conservation Coordinator, in the Administrative Section who works closely with Wildlife Section and Fisheries Section staff. Both programs interact with and engage a broad range of partners, including federal and state agencies, universities, non-government organizations and private landowners. reopened to the public on June 1, 2016.

## FISHERIES SECTION

### RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNCTIONS

The Fisheries Section's mission is to protect, conserve and increase the freshwater aquatic resources of Alabama.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**Technical Assistance:** District fisheries biologists conducted 311 biological checks of private ponds. Individuals requesting assistance with problems were given appropriate solutions in writing. Staff members participated in meetings and conference calls concerning the licensing and relicensing of hydroelectric projects. District biologists investigated 11 reported fish kills and cases of pollution. Formal reports prepared by the investigators were sent to the appropriate agencies.

**Environmental Affairs:** The Fisheries Section reviewed, investigated, and commented on 360 water-related permits and environmental impact statements with potential adverse impacts to state aquatic resources.

**Public Fishing Lakes:** A total of 116,050 anglers harvested 213,997 fish weighing 141,426 pounds from 21 of the 23 state-operated public fishing lakes. Each angler averaged 1.4 pounds of fish per trip. These figures represent a slight decline from the number and weight of fish harvested in FY15. The number of anglers fishing on Alabama's State Lakes increased approximately 5% from FY15. This increase is due to the reopening of DeKalb and Pike County Lakes in the summer of 2015. Fayette and Lower Clay County Lakes remained closed for renovation.

Fisheries biologists and support personnel made 451 visits to State Lakes to evaluate the condition of fish populations and to conduct various operational and maintenance activities. The Carbon Hill, Eastaboga, and Marion Fish Hatcheries stocked a total of 637,035 fish into Alabama's State Lakes. Species stocked include: bluegill sunfish, channel catfish, and redear sunfish. Additionally, 2,400 lbs. of rainbow trout were stocked into Madison County Lake for a winter fishery.

Two new lake managers were contracted during FY16 at Monroe and Crenshaw County Lakes. The City of Luverne's Parks and Recreation Board was assigned the contract at Crenshaw County Lake. Due to a leak in the underdrain at Lower Clay County Lake, repairs were completed and the lake will be renovated and scheduled to reopen in the spring of 2019. Heavy rainfalls delayed the renovation at Fayette County Lake which is now scheduled to reopen in the spring of 2019. Construction of the multi-use facility at Pike County Lake in cooperation with the City of Troy was completed and the lake reopened to the public on June 1, 2016.

**Access Areas:** Routine maintenance and inspection visits of 113 access areas were made by Fisheries Section personnel. These facilities are comprised of 141 boat ramps with 170 launch lanes, 110 courtesy piers, and parking for 3,457. These numbers have

# WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

SECTION	BUDGETED AMOUNT*	EXPENDITURES
ADMINISTRATIVE	\$1,533,352	\$943,753
LAW ENFORCEMENT	\$13,777,963	\$12,066,928
FISHERIES	\$9,962,984	\$8,022,236
WILDLIFE	\$22,062,406	\$19,354,718
WILDLIFE DIVERSITY	\$1,235,000	\$819,620
TRANSFERRED TO DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES	\$3,143,483	\$3,143,483
TOTAL	\$51,715,188	\$44,350,738

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

## WILDLIFE AND FRESHWATER FISHERIES DIVISION STAFFING

	FILLED	VACANT**
FULL TIME POSITIONS	304	35
PART TIME POSITIONS	18	12

\*\* Vacancy count is based on the 2016 Operations Plan.

changed significantly due to a thorough inventory of all facilities using more clearly defined standards.

Parking lots were restriped at five access areas, and a striping plan was completed for one access area. Wooden courtesy piers were repaired at nine boating access areas. Handrails were repaired on the pier gangway at Mud Creek (Jackson County). Weeds were poisoned or bush-hogged at 12 access areas. Dead trees/ limbs were trimmed or removed at five access areas. Rip-rap or silt fencing was placed to control erosion at two access areas. Signs were replaced or maintained at 107 access areas. Facility inventories were completed at 31 access areas. General inspections were completed at 102 access areas. Flood debris was removed from four access areas.

Six potential sites were inspected for future boating access projects. Boundary surveys were completed at one access area. Project planning and development was initiated or completed for 11 new facilities or renovations.

Construction of a new access area at Bridgeport Ferry (Jackson County) was completed. Construction of two new public boat ramps was initiated at Pollard (Escambia County) and Canoe Creek (St. Clair County). A major renovation and expansion project was initiated at Leesburg Landing (Cherokee County). Completed a wetland remediation at Mount Vernon (Mobile County). Courtesy piers were replaced at Cliff's Landing (Baldwin County), Choccolotta (Baldwin County) and Claysville (Marshall County).

A new facility at Shoal Creek (Lauderdale County) was built by the Alabama Department of Transportation and transferred to ADCNR. It will replace a nearby facility lost to a bridge expansion.

**Fish Hatcheries:** FY 2016 fish production goals were met or exceeded for black bass species, channel catfish, striped bass, bluegill and redear sunfish. There was a production shortfall for hybrid striped bass and black crappie due to poor pond production returns for those species. A pilot effort to develop protocols for rearing advanced-size lake sturgeon fingerlings at the Eastaboga hatchery was continued in 2016. Other fish species were also stocked into public waters statewide (see Table 1).

Public Water Fish Stockings by Permit Holders: Four permits for stocking fish in public waters were issued to agencies and organizations that desired to stock fish to support youth fishing events (see Table 2).

**Presentations:** Fisheries Section biologists attended public meetings and workshops on fisheries resource topics and made 512 presentations on various fisheries topics.

**Publications:** Five peer reviewed scientific journal articles were prepared for publication by Fisheries Section staff.

**Fisheries Research:** Through the Investigation and Management Techniques for Public Waters Project (Sport Fish Restoration F-40), there were four contractual studies with investigators from the Auburn University School of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Aquatic Sciences (AU-SFAAS) and the Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences that were initiated in a prior fiscal year but completed in FY 2016. These studies included: "Evaluat-

ing Components of Largemouth Bass Mortality at Wheeler and Guntersville Reservoirs, Alabama,” “Study of the Culture and Preferences of Alabama Anglers: Specialization, Motivations, Satisfaction and Management Preferences for State Lakes,” “Economic Value of Recreational Fishing on Reservoir and Tailrace Sections of the William “Bill” Dannelly Reservoir (Millers Ferry), Alabama,” and “Experimental Stocking of Sport Fish in the Regulated Tallapoosa River to Determine Critical Periods for Recruitment.”

Three new contractual studies were initiated in FY 2016 with AU-SFAAS and Alabama A&M, College of Agricultural, Life, and Natural Sciences. These included: “Contributions of Genotype and Environment in Hybridization and Performance of Native and Introduced Largemouth Bass Populations in Alabama,” “Potential Striped Bass Recruitment and Distribution of Larvae in Wheeler Reservoir, Alabama,” and “Assessing the Impact of the Introduction of Blueback Herring in Alabama.” These studies will continue through FY 2018.

**Reservoir Management:** Largemouth bass, spotted bass, black crappie, white crappie, striped bass, sauger, white bass, bluegill and redear sunfish populations were sampled by several methods such as electrofishing, trap netting, gill netting, prod pole, seining and/or trawling in the following water bodies: Guntersville, Wheeler, Pickwick, Bear Creek, Neely Henry, Logan Martin, Weiss, Lay, Coosa River, Martin, Yates, Holt, Bankhead, Lake LU (University of West Alabama), Demopolis, Lewis Smith, Duck River, Eufaula, Bartlett’s Ferry, West Point, and Coffeeville. Collected specimens were measured, weighed, and many were aged to determine growth rate. Thermal and oxygen profiles were collected from most of the previously mentioned reservoirs. Reservoir reconnaissance surveys were completed on some reservoirs where standardized sampling was performed. The results of these surveys are incorporated into reservoir management reports. Relative values of angler harvest, effort and pressure were collected by creel surveys on selected reservoirs.

**General Survey:** The rainbow trout fishery, associated habitat, and angler habits were assessed in the Sipsey Fork River below Lewis-Smith Dam. Apple snail populations were monitored in Langan Municipal Lake and Threemile Creek. Blue Sucker surveys were completed below Guntersville, Wheeler, and Wilson Dams. The Tallapoosa River was surveyed for the presence of hydrilla.

**Endangered Species (Section-6) Studies:** Through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act), the following studies were conducted: Tennessee River Mussel and Snail Recovery, Development of a Pleuroceridae Compendium, Alabama and Gulf Sturgeon Survey; Molecular Sequencing of Aquatic Snails, Imperiled Fish eDNA Determination, Pygmy Sculpin Population Monitoring, Restoration Priorities for Slackwater Darter, and eDNA survey for Blue Shiners.

**Aquatic Education Program:** The Fisheries Section, with assistance from other sections of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, conducted 39 fishing events, reaching over 4,568 participants plus their families and volunteers. Fishing classes were conducted for various audiences (mostly youth) during 156

sessions that reached 4,925 participants. One hundred and twenty-four casting classes were taught for 7,139 participants. Two hundred and fourteen talks about Alabama’s aquatic resources were presented to a total audience of 7,650. Additional information was presented to the public through displays for two events, and the Sportfishin’ Simulator was used at one event. Seven presentations were made to 154 instructors of various types about casting, fishing and/or aquatic education.

**Freshwater Mussel Management and Research:** A total of 72 biological field trips including sampling in 157 streams were made for general and specialized surveys of mussel and snail populations and to locate brood stock sources for use at the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center. Assistance and consultation regarding mollusk issues were provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MICRA Habitat Committee, U.S. Geological Survey, Tennessee Valley Authority and the University of North Alabama.

**River and Stream Fish Activities:** A total of 89 biological trips were conducted by staff with the River and Stream Fishes Program. Sampling continued for the most endangered sturgeon species in the world, the Alabama sturgeon. However, none were collected this past fiscal year. For the sixth consecutive summer, tagged gulf sturgeon were detected in the Mobile River Basin. Water samples were collected in the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers to employ eDNA detection as a method to determine the presence or absence of Alabama sturgeon or gulf sturgeon elsewhere within the basin. A total of 1,384 egg-bearing female paddlefish were harvested during the 2016 commercial paddlefish season in the Alabama River. These fish yielded 5,566.85 lbs. of screened eggs with a retail value of \$2.5 million. Paddlefish tagging continued in the Alabama River to determine commercial exploitation during the commercial season and sampling on the Tombigbee River to further develop paddlefish population data for that system. Population monitoring of the threatened pygmy sculpin began with staff conducting standardized visual snorkeling counts in Coldwater Spring. The Stream Fish Assessment Project continued with 7,429 fishes collected from 32 sites in 10 counties by Fisheries Section staff. A total of 242 Alabama scientific collection aquatic permit applications (general and state protected) were reviewed.

**Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center:** Construction of a new fish culture building utilizing several different grant sources was completed at the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center (AABC). At the final inspection, a number of shortcomings to code requirements and design details were identified that are being addressed. The building will be used in support of future nongame and sportfish restoration and recovery efforts. A new backup generator was installed to provide emergency power to water supply pumps and aerators on the facility. The AABC stocked 9,283 individuals of eight different GCN and T&E freshwater mussels and snails into five different drainages in FY 2016 (see Table 3). AABC staff completed a total of 77 biological trips conducted in support of aquatic species research and recovery activities statewide. Staff providing technical assistance to other state, federal, and non-governmental organizations in 124 instances. AABC staff participated in 22 technical meetings across the state. AABC staff

**TABLE 1: FISH STOCKED BY WFF FISHERIES SECTION INTO ALABAMA PUBLIC WATERS DURING FISCAL YEAR 2016**

Species	Inch Group	Number
Largemouth Bass - Florida	1-2	491,475
Largemouth Bass - Northern	1	1,000
Striped Bass - Gulf Race	1	721,414
Hybrid Striped Bass	1	274,310
Channel Catfish	3-14	120,545
Bluegill Sunfish	1-4	845,297
Redear Sunfish	1-2	343,438
Black Crappie	3-8	54,542
Alligator Gar	18	41
Lake Sturgeon	5-12	1,026
Rainbow Trout	6-18	34,683
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,887,771</b>

was involved in 12 outreach activities with respect to interaction with other government agencies, academic institutions, and non-governmental organization. There were two mollusk kill investigations.

**SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS/SOLUTIONS**

**Public Fishing Lakes:** Bass crowding continues to be a problem statewide. Removal of bass by anglers and/or electrofishing gear, along with effective use of marginal treatments and length limits, will be employed to manage overcrowded bass populations. Investigation into reducing bass stocking rates will be conducted. Recruitment of qualified lake managers at rural lakes, low participation at rural lakes and aging facilities (such as Concession Buildings) is a significant problem. Alternative management options will be evaluated at lakes with low angler use.

**Riverine Habitat:** The loss of riverine habitat in Alabama has resulted in the decline or loss of obligate riverine fishes. Efforts continue to document habitat loss and provide suitable riverine habitat where possible. Alabama needs to complete the task of developing a statewide comprehensive water plan that includes instream flow protection as its cornerstone.

**Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS):** ANS pose a significant problem to the State of Alabama. These are species introduced outside of their native ranges that can grow in, or are closely associated with, aquatic environment. They pose a threat to recreational and commercial fishing resources. Little funding is available to address this problem.

**Fish Hatcheries:** Many production ponds, including drain kettles, water supply lines, drainage lines and power supply to the ponds need renovations.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT SECTION**

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**

The alligator hunting season in South Alabama remains highly popular and continues to draw hunters from all areas of the state. Local businesses have embraced these events. The harvest of the world record alligator in 2014 weighing 1,011 pounds has not yet been eclipsed and has fueled the popularity of the hunt.

Feral pig issues continue to be a priority topic. This year we announced the arrest of 16 people for the illegal transport, release or live possession of feral pigs. These arrests culminated an almost two-year investigation by our Special Investigative Unit. The investigators involved in these cases are to be commended for their dedication and great work on a difficult investigation. As we learned in this case, there continues to be live feral pigs caught and transported across the state illegally. We continue to monitor and work on this problem. Legislation passed during 2015 increased the penalty for illegal transport or release of feral pigs to a class B misdemeanor with a corresponding minimum fine of \$2,500. With the increased penalty and news that we have

made arrests for transportation, it is hopeful that this will slow the illegal movement of feral pigs.

For the first time, Alabama had a nighttime season for feral swine running from May 1 to August 30 and it was well received by the hunting public. One problem we found early on and hope to address for next year is the conflict with our existing regulations on what constitutes legal equipment for hunting. Specifically, the restriction on having lights attached to firearms and the use of night vision or thermal devices. Failure to address the regulation conflicts forced hunters to use handheld lights, which are not as effective as weapon-mounted lights or as safe as using night-vision devices. Due to the newness of the season, participation was low; however, we are hopeful that in the coming years this will offer landowners and hunters more opportunities to take feral swine.

The new regulation banning importation of deer carcasses from Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) positive states has already had an impact as officers caught individuals who knowingly violated this ban. One person was arrested after officers received an anonymous tip regarding an Alabama tagged truck with a recently killed buck traveling south from Illinois, a known CWD positive state. Officers were able to locate the individual and deer in Alabama. The deer was killed illegally in Illinois and was confiscated and safely destroyed to prevent the possible spread of CWD. Officers have also issued warnings and confiscated other deer in response to tips from other hunters. This continues to be an informative process as we work to ensure hunters are aware of the import ban. Offices have received several calls on the new regulation and most hunters were familiar with the required steps to debone and remove contagious tissue as several other states have similar requirements.

We continue to deal with an increasing number of black bear sightings in parts of Eastern and Central Alabama. With help from Auburn University, our officers captured and relocated a bear that was causing conflicts in a housing community in Opelika. The bear was safely relocated and was monitored as it moved back north through the state until it was shot and killed on the Talladega National Forest in Clay County. After a thorough investigation by our officers, one person was arrested and charged with killing the bear with a crossbow while deer hunting. In addition to this incident, we had another case in the same area where an individual was charged with shooting at another black bear that was seen near his residence. That bear escaped unharmed. As bear sightings become more common, we must increase our education efforts to ensure that people do not overreact to sightings and take proper steps to ensure that any encounters are safe and rewarding.

Avian influenza is a continuing worry with the commercial poultry farmers of this state. Because hunting activities commonly occur on poultry farms, our officers protect against the possible spread of this virus. The use of disinfectant spray and protective boot covers are recommended and provided by the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries when on or around farms is now policy.

This year the Alabama Wildlife Federation donated several game cameras to the department for use in combating illegal dumping of deer carcass' and illegal hunting. The cameras have generated evidence for several arrests. With the continued successful use of the cameras, we anticipate adding more for officer's use in the future.

The Law Enforcement Section formalized our canine program through establishing procedures and a training policy. The fledgling program (one handler and one tracking beagle) has operated for several years in a low key but successful manner. The initial pilot program utilized a non-barking beagle trained by the Alabama Department of Corrections and donated to our agency due to its silent tracking nature. This type of dog fit our program needs well and to date has been credited with numerous wildlife crime-related arrests as well as recoveries of burglary suspects and lost Alzheimer's patients. We are in the process of expanding the program to other regions and currently have four teams deployed throughout the state.

The Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division became the first agency in the United States to reach 100 percent certification of all law enforcement personnel in the A.L.E.R.R.T-Exterior Response to Active Shooter Events (E.R.A.S.E) training program. This training focused on stopping active shooters in rural environments and preventing further casualties. With heavy emphasis on emergency first aid and evacuation, this training will prove invaluable for responding to an active shooter event, natural disaster or serious accident. Officers have already used their training in emergency first aid to stabilize a gunshot victim involved in a hunting accident.

## **AWARDS**

The Alabama Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation presented their Conservation Officer of the Year award to Jason McHenry of Autauga County. The Shikar Safari International Club awarded Clint Tyus of Chilton County with their Officer of the Year award. Conservation Officer Greg Gilliland of Talladega County was the Alabama Wildlife Federation Officer of the Year. Sergeant Steve James received the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies award for Officer of the Year. These recognitions were based upon superior performance in the field of wildlife law enforcement in their respective regions during the past year.

## **PROBLEMS AND UNMET NEEDS**

The Law Enforcement Section was able to hire 15 new officers during the past year. However, due to retirements, we are still at historically low staffing levels. Budget cuts are likely due to a continued decrease in hunting license sales. It is unknown when we will be able to significantly increase our staffing levels. Additional dedicated funding from license sales or other sources is necessary to safeguard public resources and continue current levels of public service.

Communications remains a major officer safety concern as we continue to rely on a commercial carrier for law enforcement dispatch. As other local agencies have upgraded their own communications, our officers continue to struggle for reliable communications with local agencies when assistance is needed. In addi-

**TABLE 2:  
FISH STOCKED BY PERMIT HOLDERS INTO  
ALABAMA PUBLIC WATERS DURING FY 2016**

Species	Location	Weight
Channel Catfish	R.L. Harris Lake	750 lbs.
Channel Catfish	Neely Henry Lake	1,000 lbs.
Channel Catfish	Guntersville Lake	1,000 lbs
Channel Catfish	Blue Eye Creek	500 lbs

**TABLE 3:  
PROPAGATED MOLLUSKS RELEASED BY AABC DURING FISCAL YEAR 2016**

Species	Release Locality	Date Released	Number Released
<i>Epioblasma penita</i> Southern Pocketbook	Cahaba River, upstream of US 82 Bridge, Bibb Co., AL	October 1, 2015	50
<i>Leptoxis picta</i> Spotted Rocksnail	Cahaba River, downstream of US 82 Bridge, Bibb Co., AL	October 1, 2015	280
<i>Villosa nebulosa</i> Southern Rainbow	Turkey Creek, below Tappawingo Spring, Jefferson Co., AL	October 21, 2015	3,000
<i>Leptoxis compacta</i> Oblong Rocksnail	Lower Little Cahaba River, Wadsworth Property, Bibb Co., AL	October 23, 2015	3,769
<i>Elimia capillaris</i> Spindle Elimia	Coosa River, Weiss Bypass, Downstream of Terrapin Creek Confluence, Cherokee Co., AL	August 17, 2016	1,486
<i>Lampsilis virescens</i> Alabama Lampmussel	Bear Creek, Downstream of Natchez Trace Parkway Rest Area, Colbert Co., AL	August 25, 2016	290
<i>Lampsilis virescens</i> Alabama Lampmussel	Bear Creek, Adjacent to Natchez Trace Parkway, Below Rock Creek Confluence, Colbert Co., AL	August 25, 2016	290
<i>Toxolasma cylindrellus</i> Pale Lilliput	Duck River, Venable Spring	August 30, 2016	98
<b>Total Released</b>			<b>9,283</b>

tion, our own system is often inadequate in emergency situations. We have spent thousands of dollars in equipment in recent years attempting to improve officers' ability to communicate with local agencies. This stop-gap measure is temporary, expensive and not a long-term solution to a statewide need.

Lack of minimum standards, licensing and permitting of hunting enclosures continues to pose a threat to public wildlife resources through the potential for illegal importation of deer. Reports of illegal or questionable activity within enclosures are often received, but difficult to investigate do to access limitations.

As other states restrict or limit the ability to possess dangerous exotic animals, we have received inquiries from individuals that would like to move to the state and bring with them various exotic animals. Tigers, elephants, lions and varied reptiles are often the focus of these inquiries. Though there are limited regulations prohibiting importation of some animals, we do not currently have laws or regulations to prevent the import or possession by private collectors of these dangerous exotic animals. Continuing to be a refuge for these animals may well fuel the illegal

trade in wildlife on a global scale and possibly endanger our citizens should an animal escape. The numbers and locations of dangerous non-native animals being housed in the state are not completely known.

## **WILDLIFE SECTION**

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

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

**Research and Surveys:** Research and biological surveys were conducted throughout the state to obtain information on wildlife and their habitats. Aerial waterfowl censuses and hunter bag checks were continued in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and on the Tennessee River during fall and winter.

As part of a nationwide project, 1,048 mourning doves were banded and released and the data was submitted to the Migra-



BILLY POPE

tory Bird Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Data from reported band returns will be analyzed to provide parameters needed for dove population modeling such as band return rates and estimates for mortality and survival.

Furbearer populations were evaluated by a survey that records the number of road kills and sightings of live animals near roads to develop population indices. For this report period, the project averaged 20 observers per month. These observers averaged driving 32,342 miles per month and 388,104 miles for the project year. Road kill observations averaged 231.1 per month for a yearly total of 2,773 animals. Live sightings totaled 869 animals.

Spring turkey hunter cooperators participated in an avid turkey hunter survey to collect statewide data on gobbling activity (number of gobblers and gobbles heard), turkeys seen, and gobblers harvested for each day hunted during the season. Wildlife personnel and volunteer cooperators collected statewide observational wild turkey brood data in July and August. These observations were collected incidental to normal activities in the field. Field staff and volunteers recorded observations of all turkeys (hens, poults, and gobblers) and each observation during any day was recorded separately. Observations were collected statewide and the data were separated by five Divisions of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Districts, by six ecoregions

(Piedmont, Southeastern Plains, Ridge and Valley, Southwestern Appalachians, Interior Plateau, and Southern Coastal Plain) and by public or private lands. The results of the avid turkey hunter survey and brood survey were published in a wild turkey report entitled *Full Fans & Sharp Spurs*.

In addition, Wildlife personnel began a new game camera brood survey in July and August. These surveys were conducted on WMAs statewide that have a spring turkey season. The game camera survey results will be compared to incidental observation results on WMAs where both methods are employed.

Wildlife biologists participated in annual surveys to monitor the status of breeding birds in Alabama. Participation continues in the continent-wide Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). Thirteen total BBS routes were conducted in the state. BBS routes were conducted across Alabama, which increased the number of completed BBS routes to 153 over a span of nearly 25 years. Seven routes were run in southwest Alabama, four in central Alabama, and two in north Alabama. The BBS program is the most important census program for tracking the population trends of land birds across the landscape. One Christmas bird count was conducted in south Alabama to assess winter bird populations. Additionally, assistance was provided for the International Piping Plover Survey. Wading bird rookery surveys were conducted across the state

to monitor known breeding locations and survey for additional sites. A total of 54 rookeries were surveyed with 11 wading bird species detected. Surveys will continue to better assess trends of breeding wading birds in Alabama.

Surveys were conducted for nesting shorebirds primarily in Mobile County and most importantly on Gaillard Island in Mobile Bay. Gaillard Island is the primary nesting site annually for brown pelican, laughing gull and three species of terns. Approximately 10,000 pairs of gulls and pelicans nested on Gaillard Island. Nearly 5,500 pairs of royal, Caspian, and sandwich terns nested on the island, which was a significant increase from the previous season. Islands located in the Mississippi Sound and the undeveloped west end of Dauphin Island hold the remainder of nesting shorebirds in Mobile County including American oystercatcher, snowy plover and Wilson's plover. Also, nearly 200 pairs of brown pelicans continued to nest on Cat Island and threaten to squeeze out the nesting wading birds if this number increases. Oystercatcher and plover numbers remained stable, yet low. In cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Conservation, Inc., a private shorebird conservation group, protective signage was erected at sensitive nest sites.

Nongame staff and Alabama Bat Working Group partners conducted annual winter cave surveys in 24 caves in 11 counties. Caves were surveyed for the devastating bat affliction White Nose Syndrome (WNS) and documentation of important hibernacula. WNS has been confirmed in five counties in north Alabama: Lawrence, Limestone, Jackson, Marshall, and Morgan. WNS or the fungus causing the disease has been documented in 16 caves. Three previously unknown hibernacula for southeastern bats were discovered and the largest known Alabama population of Brazilian Free-tailed bats was found in an abandoned railroad tunnel near Tunnel Springs.

Summer bat surveys focused on improving understanding of the significance of certain caves of conservation interest and knowledge about the bats using them. Emergence counts were conducted at 10 caves and harp trapping at six caves. This resulted in discovery of a new significant gray bat summer cave and the second known maternity cave for southeastern bats in the state. There was no indication of a significant drop in gray bat population numbers caused by WNS.

The Nongame Biologist for North Alabama serves as the leader of the Alabama Bat Working Group and chairs the Survey and Monitoring Committee of this group. This year the group held the annual Alabama Bat Blitz at Conecuh National Forest. This effort provided valuable species occurrence information resulting from the forest management practices implemented on the forest. No surveys for bats had previously been conducted on the forest.

The Division received \$407,502 in federal funds for projects on fish and wildlife species eligible for funding under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act. Approximately one-half of the total funds were for projects administered by the Wildlife Section. Population and status surveys for the gray bat, red-cockaded woodpecker, gopher tortoise, manatee and red-cockaded wood-

pecker restoration on state lands are examples of projects made possible by those funds. Implementation of a Safe Harbor Plan for red-cockaded woodpeckers continued for the state through Section 6 funding.

Captive breeding and re-introduction of the Eastern indigo snake began in 2007 through a State Wildlife Grant project in cooperation with Auburn University, The Orianne Society, Zoo Atlanta, US Forest Service, Georgia DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These efforts are aimed at restoring the indigo snake as a self-sustaining species on Alabama's landscape. Due to the detection of parasites in juvenile snakes in 2016, the decision was made to retain these snakes in captivity and not risk the potential disease transmission into the wild. A total of 109 juvenile indigos have been released over a six-year period and the project is scheduled to continue captive releases for four more years. Some of the snakes being monitored from the first release have reached reproductive maturity and gravid females have been captured and released, which is the first indication that the project is achieving the objective of the establishment of a wild population. Solid proof of reproduction will be the capture of a wild indigo snake that has not been PIT tagged by researchers. To date, no such capture has taken place.

Since removal of the bald eagle 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 any newly discovered or reported eagle nests and biologists also monitored the number of bald eagles overwintering in Alabama as part of the nationwide 2016 Mid-winter Bald Eagle Survey. The number of bald eagles wintering in Alabama remains stable. Additionally, golden eagle camera surveys were conducted in Alabama on several WMAs with assistance from Wildlife staff to assess the Eastern population of golden eagles. Along with surveys, golden eagles were captured in 2016 and outfitted with cellular trackers to track their migration pathways and movements. Data provided from the tagged birds will help us better determine habitat usage and timing of birds wintering in Alabama.

**Public Hunting:** Wildlife Section staff managed over 739,000 acres within the Wildlife Management Area system. During FY15 Section staff held over 6,600 managed hunt days across the State resulting in approximately 175,000 man-days of hunting on WMAs. Harvest figures reached anticipated levels. These areas also provided opportunities for trapping, fishing, hiking, picnicking, camping, research, and nature study. Supporting these opportunities for public use of the WMA system, staff maintained over 2,500 miles of boundary lines and over 2,100 miles of area roads. Additionally, staff performed habitat management actions on over 114,900 acres through maintaining wildlife openings and food plots, timber management, prescribed fire, and water management.

Annual population surveys are conducted throughout the range of the American Alligator. Data from these surveys are used to make harvest recommendations for each of the state's four hunt zones. Long term trend data from these surveys continue to indicate that the majority of Alabama's alligator population is stable and

the conservative harvest rate for the hunts is sustainable. Hunter harvest data is also collected from all alligators within each zone. Information such as body weight, length, sex and harvest location is collected. This data is also valuable in showing trends of harvested alligators and is used in conjunction with population surveys in managing this resource. Additionally, research has begun with other state agencies and universities addressing issues such as hunter harvest management, public satisfaction, and baseline population health within the Mobile Tensaw Delta.

Participation in the alligator hunts is stable with a total of 3,845 applications received in 2016 for the 260 available tags. Hunter success rates dropped slightly from previous years with a 48 percent success rate. Success rates within each hunt zone are as follows:

Zone	Success Rate	#Harvested
Southwest	59 percent	88
West Central	66 percent	33
Southeast	33 percent	13
Lake Eufaula	35 percent	7

The Hunting Trail for People with Physical Disabilities continues to be well received. The season opened with 20 hunting sites on the trail. This innovative program provides opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities to participate in hunting in an environment developed to meet their needs. To date 286 permits have been issued to Physically Disabled Hunters.

Wildlife Section staff continued efforts supporting youth hunting programs. This year our youth dove hunt program involved hosting 33 hunts. These hunts were offered across the state in 23 counties. The program is a cooperative effort between DCNR, Auburn University, organizations like Ducks Unlimited, local vendors and private landowners. The 2016 youth dove hunts had 761 youth participants. One hundred and eighteen, or 15.5 percent, were first-time hunters. Additionally, 21 WMAs hosted youth deer hunts and 23 WMAs hosted youth turkey hunts the weekend prior to the opening of regular gun seasons.

**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 current status of deer populations. Deer were collected at 35 sites to assess reproductive health and characteristics within those populations. The data collected from a hunting survey was used to determine recommendations for hunting seasons and bag limits and evaluating the success of each hunting season. Hunters reported 15,138 harvested deer through the online deer and turkey harvest reporting system (Game Check) during the 2015-16 hunting season. The system was voluntary for the 2015-16 hunting season, but was made mandatory for all deer hunters starting with the 2016-17 season.

**Technical Assistance:** One thousand one hundred fifty-five man-days were devoted to providing technical assistance to private landowners, corporations, hunting clubs, and government agencies. Biologists, including the eight biologists in the newly created Technical Assistance Unit, made 9,495 contacts and provided on-site inspections, reviewed and drafted management

plans, and conducted other management outreach activities to enhance wildlife 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 64 cooperating landowners and hunting clubs in FY2016.

Providing landowners and land managers technical assistance to assist in implementing strategies to improve wildlife habitat on their lands continued to grow. As a result, a mutually beneficial 10-year partnership continued with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This partnership helps private landowners obtain farm bill program assistance while delivering better wildlife management advice. Under a cooperative agreement, eight WFF wildlife biologists worked out of NRCS offices and worked with NRCS personnel to deliver the programs. Biologists met with landowners to develop conservation plans and contracts. Biologists also participated in numerous workshops, tours, presentations, working groups, and trainings that reached hundreds of landowners and dozens of natural resource agency personnel.

Wildlife staff continued meetings and site visits with personnel from Alabama Power Company (APC) associated with the Coosa Wildlife Management Plan and Martin Dam APC hydroelectric relicensing projects. Staff reviewed documents regarding the development of wildlife, shoreline, threatened and endangered species and recreation management plans for the Martin, Jordan, Mitchell and Weiss hydro-electric projects. Plans are required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Notable accomplishments during this past year were final planning of the Pruitt's Island Waterfowl Area on Weiss Reservoir and the Martin Community Hunting Area on Martin Reservoir. Wildlife staff will continue active involvement in the development of wildlife, shoreline, threatened and endangered species and recreation management plans for all projects associated with hydro-electric power generation.

**Wildlife Section personnel continue to participate in four joint ventures (JV):** East Gulf Coastal Plain JV, Gulf Coast JV, Central Hardwoods JV, and Appalachian JV. A JV serves to lead a regional habitat conservation movement founded upon a science-based, landscape scale strategy. The partnerships can more effectively secure a sustainable future for birds and habitats. The staff also participates in the Gulf Coastal Plain and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC). The LCC will encompass more than one JV and will provide management direction and set priorities for conservation delivery. The LCC will address all taxa.

Nuisance wildlife information was disseminated to the public through a variety of media outlets, educational workshops, technical literature, and by personal correspondence. Due to their destructive nature and negative impact on wildlife habitat, feral hogs are a serious concern in Alabama. Partnerships continued across the state with personnel from DCNR, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, and 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 other game species, including white-tailed deer and wild turkeys. Personnel conducted and assisted with numerous workshops and seminars around the state to educate landowners, hunting clubs, forestry owners, etc. with information to be proactive in their nuisance wildlife management activities. Additionally, informative articles about dealing with these species were made available to the public through the outdooralabama.com website.

**Cooperative Research:** Working in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey's Alabama Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, WFF personnel continued efforts towards development of strategic decision tools to inform science-based adaptive management of white-tailed deer and wild turkey populations for Alabama. The white-tailed deer decision tool will provide a process to simulate deer populations, hunter satisfaction, harvest rates and other facets of a modern deer management program. The wild turkey decision tool will allow WFF project biologists to evaluate impacts of different bag limits and season frameworks to determine harvest regulations that would balance the maintenance of gobbler densities and largest bag limits that can be sustained perpetually.

Agency staff worked with Auburn (AU) and Mississippi State (MSU) University on cooperative research projects related to adult deer mortality rates, deer movement patterns, tick-borne diseases on deer, and deer genetics, as well as wild turkey survival and recruitment rates, and black bear genetics and home range selection. Field work by WFF personnel continued throughout the year assisting AU and MSU with ongoing cooperative white-tailed deer research projects. To assist AU in data collection related to deer movement, survival, and home range size to inform the white-tailed deer decision tool, WFF personnel spent over 40 man-hours monitoring collared deer and retrieving collars from hunter-harvested deer on Barbour and Oakmulgee WMAs. WFF staff collected ticks from 273 deer at 11 WMAs from hunter-harvested deer and during reproductive health checks to aid data collection for AU researchers to evaluate direct effects of ticks and tick-borne diseases on white-tailed deer. In addition, personnel collected 430 tissue samples from hunter-harvested deer as part of an ongoing cooperative research project by MSU to develop and validate a protocol for verifying if deer enclosures in Alabama contain non-local deer stock. WFF staff also assisted AU graduate students capture, band, and radio-mark 210 wild turkeys on Barbour, Oakmulgee, and James D. Skyline WMAs to obtain data on wild turkey vital rates (reproduction, survival, and harvest rates) to better inform the wild turkey decision tool. Additionally, approximately 32 hours were spent assisting AU researchers in determining attributes and distribution of denning sites of female black bears in Alabama, and 88 hours were spent assisting with trapping and collaring black bears to estimate genetic diversity. Information collected on this cooperative research will be analyzed to determine black bear home range selection in relation to habitat use within Alabama.

Efforts continued with utilization of Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) Federal Assistance funds to support purchase of additional acreage to existing WMAs or creating new WMAs in underserved portions of Alabama. Five land acquisition proposals resulting in five grant awards were administered by WFF staff in fiscal year 2016. These projects resulted in the purchase of 6,547 acres for public hunting and recreation. Four of these projects were associated with the addition of 4,360 acres to the existing Charles D. Kelley Autauga County WMA. One project was the completion of phase one in association with creating a new WMA in Dallas County. This project resulted in the purchase of 2,187 acres. Phase two is on scheduled to be completed in fiscal year 2017. Four of these projects continued the partnership of the WFF and Forever Wild Land Trust (FWLT), with the FWLT providing the required 25 percent state match funding. Additionally, WFF utilized state license funds as the 25 percent match supporting one of the projects associated with the Charles D. Kelley Autauga WMA.

**Forest Management Activities:** A major longleaf pine restoration project continued on Barbour WMA. When completed, this multi-year project will have restored longleaf pine habitat on approximately 4,000 acres at Barbour WMA.

A large area on the Lauderdale WMA received a salvage harvest due to tornado damage. Additional areas will be evaluated and marked for thinning during the next fiscal year. Timber sales were marked and set up on Barbour, Lowndes, and Freedom Hills WMAs but were not sold due to a lack of bids. Invasive species, such as cogongrass, tallow tree, Japanese climbing fern, and bicolor lespedeza were scouted and treated on the WMA system. Cogongrass is a highly flammable non-native invasive plant listed on the Federal and Alabama noxious weed lists. Wildlife Section staff have been monitoring cogongrass on the WMAs throughout the state, especially in central and south Alabama. Scattered areas of the grass have been undergoing treatment on the Fred T. Stimpson area, Upper State Sanctuary, and Barbour WMA for several seasons. The infested areas have been significantly reduced. The monitoring and chemical control will continue.

**Education, Outreach and Range Development:** Nine shooting ranges on Wildlife Management Areas, the Etowah Public Shooting Range, the Marengo Public Shooting Range, and the Conecuh National Forest Range continue to receive excellent public use. These ranges are open to the public daily during daylight hours. Maintenance is conducted throughout the year by staff members and volunteers. This provides a total of 12 agency-operated shooting ranges in Alabama.

Twelve community archery parks receive excellent use and public support. All facilities have a youth range, adult range, and an elevated platform for simulating bow hunting conditions from a tree stand. A simulated ground blind is available for bow hunters to practice shooting from a kneeling or seated position. These ranges were constructed through a partnership with the respective city and the Archery Trade Association.

This was the 24th year that completing the Alabama Hunter Education Program was mandatory for first-time license buyers born on or after August 1, 1977. Approximately 8,309 students

participated in the 291 courses offered by certified instructors throughout Alabama. The courses were taught by approximately 508 instructors, mostly volunteers, and totaled 4,064 hours of instruction. The time and expertise contributed by volunteers is essential to the success of the Hunter Education Program. Another 8,259 students took the online hunter education course, for a total of 16,568 receiving certification.

Approximately 4,868 Alabamians participated in 70 youth shooting sports events that were conducted throughout the state to promote safe, responsible firearms handling and improve marksmanship skills. These one-day events are designed to introduce participants to muzzleloaders, shotguns, .22 rifles, pellet guns, and archery. Sport shooting is closely related to hunting activities and it is important for the public to have safe areas to participate in that sport. We will continue our efforts to increase developed shooting range sites.

Alabama's National Archery in the Schools Program continued to show growth and now has approximately 400 schools participating. Teachers from approximately 700 schools have been certified to conduct the two-week target style archery curriculum. The eleventh annual NASP state championship was held on April 7, 2016 and featured 1,251 participants from 158 schools. Approximately 3,945 student archers participated in seven regional qualifying events for the state championship. Teachers and school administrators have made positive statements regarding this program and report that student behavior, attendance, and attitudes have improved since implementing the NASP.

The Wildlife Section conducted eight furbearer trapping workshops. Workshops were held in Baldwin, Butler, Hale, Jackson, Franklin, Mobile, St. Clair and Lowndes County. Additionally, a trapping workshop was conducted in Bullock County for Auburn University Wildlife Society members. Eighteen students attended, seven of which were female. These cooperative trapper education workshops were a collaborative effort of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, the Tennessee Valley Authority, Safari Club International, the Alabama Trapper, and Predator Control Association, the Alabama Forestry Commission and State Lands. One hundred and fourteen students ranging from six to 18 years of age and 144 adults participated in the workshops. Twenty percent of the students were female.

Birding Trails and Falconry Permits: Management and maintenance continued on the North Alabama Birding Trail (NABT). The trail, opened in 2005, has been very successful for tourism and continues to receive better than expected levels of visitation. Nongame personnel also served on several advisory committees and provided technical assistance to the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel (ABTT) with the Alabama Birding Trail Initiative. The Piedmont Birding Trail, the Appalachian Highlands Birding Trail, the West Alabama Birding Trail, Wiregrass Birding Trail, and the Blackbelt Birding Trail have been completed through ABTT's contract with University of Alabama Economic Development.

As of September 30, there were 61 permitted falconers in Alabama at the following classification levels: apprentice (10), general (32), and master (19).

## **PROBLEMS AND UNMET NEEDS**

**Public Hunting:** The loss and threat of losing leased land in Wildlife Management Areas is a significant problem. Over 19,000 acres of leased land were removed from the WMA system at Scotch WMA. Land acquisitions for WMAs were made during the past year. Using Pittman-Robertson Federal Assistance funds, 3,367 acres were purchased and added at Autauga WMA; 1,691 acres were purchased in Dallas County to form a new WMA. Continuing a partnership with Forever Wild, using Forever Wild funds as the State match for Federal Assistance funds, resulted in Forever Wild purchasing 1,411 acres serving a State match at Autauga WMA, and Forever Wild purchasing 497 acres, serving as State match for the new WMA in Dallas County. The Wildlife Section will attempt to lease or purchase other lands and provide additional incentives to encourage landowners to include lands in the program. We will also continue to work with Forever Wild to purchase land for public hunting.

**Nuisance Wildlife:** The occurrence of nuisance wildlife problems and conflicts continue to rise, especially as we deal with an increasingly urbanized society. This portion of the public is not skilled 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 work time is spent dealing with 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 Wildlife Section has issued approximately 107 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 increased significantly during the past five years. The matching state dollars required to fully utilize all of the federal dollars (25:75) have been limited and could lead to reversions of federal dollars if matching opportunities are not available. We are exploring options to fully utilize our federal dollars through partnerships with outside entities and third party in-kind match.



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