

Field Notes

News from the Alabama Ecological Services Field Office



Strategic Habitat Units: Working Together for Clean Water

Written by Jeff Powell

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Geological Survey of Alabama have selected watersheds and river segments in the five HUC-4 subregions in Alabama to focus conservation activities for managing, protecting, restoring, and recovering populations of rare fishes, mussels, snails, and crayfishes. These Strategic Habitat Units (SHUs) and Strategic River Reach Units (SRRUs) include a substantial part of Alabama's remaining high-quality rivers and streams and reflect the variety of small stream to large river habitats occupied by these species historically and/or currently.

The SHUs were selected based on best available information about the essential habitat components required by these aquatic species including: (1) geomorphically stable stream and river channels; (2) stream flow regimes

that support normal behavior, growth, and survival of the animals; (3) acceptable water-quality conditions necessary for normal behavior, growth, and viability of all life stages of the animals; (4) a diversity of channel substrate types, with minimal amounts of fine sediment and filamentous algae; (5) for mussels, the presence of fish hosts with adequate living, foraging, and spawning areas; and (6) few or no competitive or predaceous nonnative species. The SRRUs were selected based on the historical and/or current presence of rare species and include river reaches where species restoration and recovery actions are planned for the future or are already underway.

The purpose of designating SHUs and SRRUs is to facilitate and coordinate watershed management and restoration efforts as well as to focus funding to address habitat and water quality issues.

Program Promotes Diversity in the Service

The Alabama Field Office (AFO) participated in a pilot program to help attract diverse candidates to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Summer Fellows Program invites faculty members from minority colleges to spend time with the Service. Dr. Ray Shange spent six weeks at the AFO as a part of this program. Dr. Shange is a first year Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Environmental Science (with a specialization in Microbial Ecology) at Tuskegee University. During the fellowship, he became familiar with the day-to-day operations of the Service. Some days were spent out in the field, taking surveys or collecting data. Other days were spent in the manager's chair, learning how to carry out the conservation mission of the Service. Through the program, Dr. Shange was able to get an understanding



photo: USFWS, The AFO is teaming up with its partners to focus on clean water

All of the SHUs currently support one or multiple federally listed species and/or critical habitat designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

For more information on how you can help keep our water clean, log onto <http://www.cleanwaterpartnership.org/>



Dr. Ray Shange spent six weeks with the AFO

IT Makes It Happen

Alabama Field Office employees are often called to duty for incidents across the country. From oil spills to hurricanes, you can often find Service employees getting their hands dirty. But our office biologists aren't the only ones in high demand. This year, our Information Technology Specialist Tracy Bush participated in an on-the-job detail in Portland, Oregon. A series of summer fires were sweeping the area. So Tracy joined the Northwest Coordination Center in an effort to get the fires under control. The Center included a team of several agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, Department of Interior; Forest Service, National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Each team member needed technical assistance to function... including computer set-up, blackberry activation, printers, and networking.

Tracy became the primary IT Specialist during her two week detail. Her skills allowed folks on the ground to upload reports, get email, attend webinars, view Geographic Information Systems layers, and track fires and planes, as well as resources. Her skills were so impressive, she was recently selected to an elite disaster response team. In other words, she is now qualified to be a first responder during an incident. Congratulations on all of your achievements, Tracy!



photo: Tracy Bush is the Information Technology Specialist of the AFO

Partners Unite for Endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker

This month, 40 Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) artificial cavity inserts were installed by state, federal, and local conservationists on the private quail plantations known as Enon and Sehoy. These artificial cavities will improve the nesting and roosting habitat for a small but increasing population of RCWs. Just a few short years ago, this population was wavering on the brink of extinction with only a small hand full of birds scattered across the landscape. Today, there are over 20 active clusters. This aggregate population has recently formed where two sub-populations were once separated by more than seven miles. Active, aggressive habitat management (in particular, artificial cavities) is largely responsible for this success. We could not accomplish this without our partners, including the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division (Landowner Incentive Program Funding), State Lands Division, U.S. Forestry Service, Conservation Southeast, and most importantly, the landowner.

This effort and success would not be possible without the support of multiple partners, including the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries (Landowner Incentive Program funding), State Lands Division, Conservation Southeast and most importantly, the private landowner.



photo Eric Spadgenske

From Left to Right: Mark Garner, Conecuh National Forest; Scott Jordan, Conecuh National Forest; Art Henderson, Talladega District, Talladega National Forest; Wendell Hallman, Oakmulgee District, Talladega National Forest; Chance Fillmer, Conecuh National Forest; Leigh Agan, Talladega District, Talladega National Forest; Lee Pentecost, Shoal Creek District, Talladega National Forest; Scott Magargee, Talladega District, Talladega National Forest; Chuck Curvin, Shoal Creek District, Talladega National Forest; Eric Spadgenske, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alabama Ecological Services Field Office; Mark Bailey, Conservation Southeast, Inc.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces a Revised Permitting Process for Folks Planning to Build in Alabama Beach Mouse Habitat

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) wants to make the permitting process more efficient for folks planning to build homes in Alabama beach mouse habitat.

The Alabama Beach Mouse General Conservation Plan was just signed into law, and is now being implemented in parts of Fort Morgan and Gulf Shores. The plan will streamline the permitting process for those who want to build single-family or duplex homes in Alabama beach mouse (ABM) habitat. The coverage area begins at Little Lagoon Pass on State Hwy 182 in Gulf Shores, and extends westward to the tip of the Fort Morgan State Historic site at the western part of Fort Morgan Peninsula.

The ABM is federally protected under the Endangered Species Act. In the past, folks who wanted to build homes in ABM

habitat underwent a permitting process that would often take years. Under the new plan, the process would only take about three months.

“We realized the permitting process was taking too long,” explained Alabama Field Supervisor Bill Pearson. “We are pleased to come up with a plan that would streamline the process. We feel the General Conservation Plan will protect this unique mouse with little interruption to the taxpayers’ lives.”

Under the General Conservation Plan, the applicant must meet certain requirements, such as reducing their total impacts to just 0.10 of an acre or 4,350 sq.ft. If an applicant doesn’t meet those requirements, he/she can still apply for an incidental take permit.

An integral part of the plan is an in-lieu-fee of \$2.30 per square foot. The funds collected from the in-lieu-fee will be used to further ABM conservation across its range through monitoring, habitat



photo: Jackie Isaacs, The Alabama Beach Mouse U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces Plan a revised Permitting Process for Folks Planning to Build in Alabama Beach Mouse Habitat

restoration, land purchase, and research. The Alabama Coastal Heritage Trust will administer those funds.

For more information on the Alabama General Conservation Plan, and the Alabama Beach Mouse, log on to your website at <http://www.fws.gov/daphne/>.



Hutton Scholar Katie Dankovic participates in mussel surveys with AFO biologists

Hutton Scholar Spends Six Weeks with AFO

This summer, Spanish Fort High School senior Katie Dankovic spent eight weeks with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alabama Field Office as a scholar in the 2012 Hutton Junior Fisheries Biology Program. The Hutton Program was created by the American Fisheries Society in an effort to get females, minorities and members of underrepresented communities interested in fisheries science careers. Fifteen students were chosen out of 79

applicants, and biologists from the Alabama Field Office were selected at Katie’s mentors. Biologists Andy Ford and Jennifer Pritchett took Katie under their wings, and helped her gain hands-on experience in science. In addition, Katie received a \$3,000.00 scholarship. Katie participated in a variety of activities, including mussel surveys, necropsies, and the removal of invasive island apple snails. This fall, Katie entered the University of South Alabama as a freshman, where she is majoring in marine biology.

Sand Dunes Enhance Habitat, Protect Homes

When you drive along the beach in Fort Morgan, you can't help but notice the mounds of white sand, covered in sea oats, morning glory, and beach elder. These are sand dunes, and they add more than just beauty to the beach. They also act as habitat for wildlife, and protection for coastal homes.

Sand dunes can form naturally through wind-blown sand and vegetation. They can also be built by humans through beach renourishment. In Alabama, sand dunes are habitat for species, like the migratory birds and the Alabama beach mouse. In addition, they also add a strong line of protection for property on the beach.

“As hurricane frequency and intensity continue to grow, there is increasing evidence that natural beach dunes protect manmade structures such as homes, condominiums, and boardwalks,” explains U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist Bill Lynn. “Large sand dunes provide protection for homeowners because it takes more time for them to be eroded by storms.”

But even large sand dunes can wear down after awhile. That's why it's important for landowners to take steps to protect their property and assist in the dune recovery process. Lynn says a great way to stabilize dunes is by planting vegetation.

“Dune vegetation traps the windblown sand, causing formation of sand dunes and stabilizing soils,” says Lynn. “The stems



photo: USFWS, A Service Biologist holds a sand dune workshop in Fort Morgan

of dune plants slow wind velocity and sand movement. Dune plants also give an aesthetic benefit for the homeowner.”

Establishing your sand dunes is only the first step. The next step is maintaining them. In addition to native dune plants, Lynn suggests homeowners install sand fence or rope fence as well. Fertilization has also proven very effective in dune enhancement. However you decide to protect your dunes, make sure your neighbors know not to trample on them. “Dunes are usually not significantly

affected by a few people walking through them. However, dunes are easily damaged by repeated trampling,” explains Lynn. “A dune walkover gives folks access to the beach while allowing for dune growth and protection.

If you have any questions about sand dune maintenance, you can contact our public affairs officer Denise Rowell at denise_rowell@fws.gov. For a complete list of dune plants, [click here](#). For a list of dune suppliers, [click here](#).



Shelby Rider of Fairhope High School snapped the winning photo

Photo Contest Focuses on Nature in Mobile, Baldwin Counties

This year, the Alabama Field Office held its first ever EyeOnNaturePhoto Contest. We invited students from Mobile and Baldwin Counties to enter their best nature photographs. The grand prize award went to Shelby Rider of Fairhope High School. She won an Amazon gift card, and her framed photograph. Congratulations, Shelby!

Meet the Biologist: Jeff Gleason

Jeff Gleason is the Alabama Field Office's newest Endangered Species Biologist. Jeff is filling a newly-created position that will link him with other science networks to help strategically conserve our natural resources. A native of west-central Iowa, Jeff grew-up in an agricultural setting where he developed a strong interest in the outdoors through time spent hunting and fishing with his father. During his undergraduate degree, Jeff worked for several graduate students, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (MT, SD), and U.S. Forest Service (AZ). He received his Bachelor's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from South Dakota State University in Brookings, SD. After a summer with the USGS-Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Jamestown, ND, Jeff completed a Master's at South Dakota State University in Wildlife



Management where he studied survival of resident giant Canada geese. After working a summer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (SD) he obtained a PhD in Zoology from the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada, where he studied reproductive performance and behavior of breeding Canada geese in the presence and

absence of lesser snow geese in Southern James Bay (Akimiski Island, Nunavut). His first permanent position was with the Minerals Management Service, Environmental Studies Section in the Alaska Regional Office, Anchorage, AK. He has since worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management in Portland, OR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuges in Kulm, ND, and most recently with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Gulf of Mexico Regional Office in New Orleans, LA. Though most of his formal education is related to waterfowl ecology and management, he has published on a diversity of mammalian (e.g., white-tailed deer, beaver, bowhead whales, and polar bears) and avian species. He remains actively involved in avian ecology and research, including 2 recently completed research projects on potential effects of wind-development on prairie-nesting dabbling ducks in southern ND/northern SD.



A bucket of mussels used in the reintroduction



photo: Dr. John Wiggington, Southeast Regional Manager of Westervelt Ecological Service, assists in the reintroduction of the orange-nacre muskellunge

Our Featured Partners: Westervelt Ecological Services

Westervelt Ecological Services (WES) is headquartered in Tuscaloosa with regional offices in Auburn and Sacramento, California. A division of The Westervelt Company, a land-resource organization, WES creates mitigation banks and provides environmental mitigation and habitat planning services to landowners, businesses, government agencies, and land trusts, and offers mitigation bank appraisal services on a nationwide scale.

As a long term leader in the field of timber and land management in Alabama, the Westervelt Company continues to be a great partner to the Fish and Wildlife Service. They have, and continue, to work closely with us on identifying recovery opportunities on their properties as well as seeking to improve overall water quality in our streams and rivers. In 2012, Westervelt partnered with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Service to reintroduce the first endangered mussel species on private lands. Thanks, Westervelt!

Divers Play Critical Role in Service Mission

Though not widely known, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has a small group of individuals that actually get to dive as part of their jobs. In the Southeast Region, there is a team of 14 authorized divers, including federal law enforcement agents, pilots, and biologists. This team uses SCUBA and HOOKA diving as a means of conducting search and rescue missions, aquatic surveys, and other scientific research.

The Alabama Field Office has three biologists on that team: Jennifer Pritchett, Patric Harper, and Jeff Powell. The dive team is a critical part of many missions in the Service. In 2010, Powell participated in a law enforcement investigation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Service, and the Miami-Dade County Dive Team. The group teamed up in the Florida Keys where lobsters were being illegally harvested in the Gulf of Mexico. This year, Harper joined other Service divers in Louisiana to investigate a fish kill at Pearl River.

Our divers also use their skills to conduct surveys for imperiled mussels and snails in the rivers across Alabama and more recently, conducting surveys for invasive species in the Gulf of Mexico. One of



Alabama divers participate in an illegal lobster harvesting investigation



In October, the Alabama Field Office Divers joined the rest of the SE Region Dive Team and other Lionfish experts to begin develop procedures and methods for monitoring, tracking, and managing the species. Stay tuned for updates on this potentially nasty species. For more information please visit <http://www.reef.org/lionfish>.



those species, the Lionfish (*Pterois miles*), is an exotic species that has been documented sporadically along the East Coast for the last ten years, but over the last couple of years the population has exploded in the Gulf of Mexico. Although a relatively small species (maximum sizes up to 19 inches), the Lionfish is a ferrous predator that can live up to 20-30 years. This species has the potential to seriously impact our native marine fauna including game/sport fishes and crustaceans (shrimp).

Alabama Sea Turtle Update, 2012

Written by Dianne Ingram

For some people, expecting to find white, sandy beaches in Alabama, let alone a nesting sea turtle, is a surprise. Yet our beaches and the wildlife that live here are a well-known and much-valued resource for Alabamians. The loggerhead sea turtle does nest here, and in recent years, so has the Kemp's ridley sea turtle and, recorded for the first time this year, the green sea turtle. The three species mentioned forage in the Gulf and nest on Alabama beaches and other Gulf beaches; the Hawksbill and Leatherback sea turtles also forage in the Gulf, but nest elsewhere in the Gulf, not in Alabama. All five sea turtle species that use the Gulf of Mexico for some or all of their life cycle are federally protected under the Endangered Species Act.

2012 has proven to be a landmark year for sea turtle nesting in Alabama. Share the Beach has reported some preliminary benchmarks: the earliest nest ever recorded in Alabama (May 1), the first green sea turtle nest ever recorded in Alabama, the latest laid nest ever recorded in Alabama (September 3), highest number of Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests (3), the most number of nests recorded on Dauphin Island (11), and the big news is the most nests laid in one season ever recorded in Alabama, 149.



photo: Sherry Parks, A sea turtle hatchling makes its way to the Gulf



The threatened gopher tortoise thrives in longleaf pine habitat

Mobile County Takes Step in Conserving Threatened Gopher Tortoise

The Mobile County Commission recently received a Coastal Impact Assistance Program grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase and conserve longleaf pine habitat in Mobile County. The County used the grant to purchase +/- 650 acres in north Mobile County. The County plans to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to aid in the recovery of the threatened gopher tortoise in Mobile County. This property, along with three other publicly owned conservation areas in the county, will go a long way in the species recovery.

Employee's Retirement Will Leave Void in AFO

In March, the Alabama Field Office (AFO) will say goodbye to a very important member of our family. Administrative Officer Jill Carlton will retire after 29 years of federal service; twenty as a civilian employee for the Coast Guard and nine years with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Jill has the difficult job of balancing our office budget, and her success in this task has allowed the office's biologists to do their conservation work. Bill Pearson, Field Supervisor for the AFO says that an effective Administrative Officer will make or break a field office. "After I was selected as the supervisor, my first phone call was to the Acting Field Supervisor who was also the AFO Deputy Field Supervisor; my second call was to Jill", says Pearson. "I told her that she had the most important job in the office....and after more than six years as the AFO supervisor, I still believe that." The implementation of FBMS, the new budget system, has made it tough on all of the administrative officers, but "Jill has hung in there and figured that system out and made our life better here in the field office", says Pearson. In addition to the nearly full time job keeping up with FBMS, Jill also serves as our



Jill Carlton is the administrative officer of the AFO. She will retire in March

office timekeeper, and is responsible for verifying the timesheets of all twenty-one employees. Other responsibilities include travel authorizations, grant agreements, accounts payable, personnel actions, purchasing, payroll, and the office uniform coordinator. Jill looks forward to spending more time with her family and dedicated time on the farm, tending her garden, chickens, and sheep. We will miss you, Jill, job well done!!!!

Alabama Field Office Staff

Bill Pearson, Field Supervisor,
251/441 5181, bill_pearson@fws.gov

Dan Everson, Deputy Field Supervisor,
251/441 5837, dan_everson@fws.gov

Jeff Gleason, Fish and Wildlife Biologist,
Landscape level research, Strategic
Habitat Conservation, 251/441 5859,
Jeffrey_gleason@fws.gov

Bill Lynn, Fish and Wildlife Biologist,
Alabama Beach Mouse, ESA Permitting
and Consultation, 251/441 5869,
William_lynn@fws.gov

Jeff Powell, Fish and Wildlife Biologist,
FERC licensing, Aquatic Species
Recovery, 251/441 5858,
jeff_powell@fws.gov

Shannon Holbrook, Fish and Wildlife
Biologist, Alabama Beach Mouse, Grants,
Forest Service, ESA Consultations,
251/441 5871, Shannon_holbrook@fws.gov

Patric Harper, Northern Gulf Coastal
Program Director, 251/441 5857,
patric_harper@fws.gov

Bruce Porter, Fish and Wildlife Biologist,
Linear Projects, Gopher Tortoise, Sea
Turtles, 251/441 5864,
bruce_porter@fws.gov

Dianne Ingram, Fish and Wildlife
Biologist, ESA Consultation, Sea Turtles,
Manatees, Migratory Birds,
251/441 5839, Dianne_ingram@fws.gov

Josh Rowell, Fish and Wildlife Biologist,
ESA Consultations, Mitigation Banking,
Federal Projects, 251/441 5836,
josh_rowell@fws.gov

Jennifer Pritchett, Fish and Wildlife
Biologist, Aquatic Species Recovery,
251/441 6633, Jennifer_pritchett@fws.gov

Andy Ford, Fisheries Biologist,
Consultations, Aquatic Recovery,
Contaminants Issues,
251/441 5838, Anthony_ford@fws.gov



Tracy Bush, IT Specialist,
251/441 5869, tracy_bush@fws.gov

Drew Rollman, Cartographer, GIS
Mapping, 251/441 5866,
drew_rollman@fws.gov

Denise Rowell, Public Outreach and
Media Relations, 251/441 6630,
denise_rowell@fws.gov

Jill Carlton, Administrative Officer,
251/441 5865, jill_carlton@fws.gov

Sonya Johnson, Administrative Assistant,
251/441 5184, sonya_johnson@fws.gov

Eric Spadgenske, Fish and Wildlife
Biologist, Partners for Fish and Wildlife
State Coordinator, 205/731 0874,
eric_spadgenske@fws.gov

Karen Marlowe, Fish and Wildlife
Biologist, ESA Consultations, NRDAR,
205/726 2667, Karen_marlowe@fws.gov