

COOPERATIVE HABITAT PROTECTION PARTNERSHIPS AND A PILOT EFFORT IN MOBILE BAY, ALABAMA

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The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (NEP) is working through a new local, state, and federal partnership to update its habitat protection and restoration priorities for coastal Alabama. The project brings together the knowledge and expertise of more than sixty state and local representatives concerned with habitat protection in coastal Alabama, along with the geospatial, ecoregional, and technical expertise of several national organizations: The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, and the NOAA Coastal Services Center. The partnership is a pilot effort of NOAA Fisheries' Office of Habitat Conservation's Cooperative Habitat Protection Partnerships (CHPPs), an initiative developed to engage stakeholders and equip local communities with the tools and information needed to protect coastal and marine fish habitat.

The Mobile Bay CHPPs project is building upon an existing acquisition and restoration priorities atlas that was developed in 2004-2005 by the Mobile Bay NEP and TNC, in cooperation with a number of stakeholders. In light of changing conditions, the project's report and static maps are being revised to incorporate new and additional habitat and land use data, information on habitat stressors (such as long-term temporal stressors of climate change and sea level rise), and a range of potential implementation strategies. Using the interactive functionality of a geographic information system (GIS) and NOAA Coastal Services Center's Habitat Priority Planner tool, the effort will result in an interactive, GIS-based map used to strategically identify and prioritize habitat protection actions at local and regional scales.

Habitat conservation, protection, and restoration are important community concerns in coastal Alabama. This presentation will illustrate the challenges and accomplishments of collaborative partnerships that work across sectors and leverage tools, resources, and expertise. Such partnerships – motivated by local needs and grounded in holistic assessments of the ecological value of protected lands – serve as an important step in ecosystem-based approaches to coastal resource management. These partnerships aid communities in their efforts to make better use of existing capabilities, resources, and funding for achieving habitat goals.

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