

A COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIP TO PRIORITIZE AND PROTECT HABITAT IN MOBILE BAY, ALABAMA

*Roberta Arena Swann, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Carl Ferraro, Alabama Department of Coastal and Natural Resources
Kara Meckley, NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation
Mary Austill Lott, The Nature Conservancy
Jay Udelhoven, The Nature Conservancy
Lauren Long, NOAA Coastal Services Center*

Keywords: conservation, coastal, conservation priorities, habitat protection, restoration, cooperative conservation, community-based

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 and restoration 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 Office of Habitat Conservation, and the NOAA Coastal Services Center. The partnership is designed to engage stakeholders and equip local communities with the tools and information needed to protect coastal and marine habitat.

The Mobile Bay collaborative conservation 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 many of the same stakeholders involved in the current effort. 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 and throughout the coastal watershed.

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.

*Proceedings of Coastal Zone 09
Boston, Massachusetts
July 19 to 23, 2009*

Roberta Arena Swann
Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
4172 Commanders Drive
Mobile, AL 36615
rswann@mobilebaynep.com
(251) 431-6409