

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2020

EEAA News

The latest news, events and announcements from the
Environmental Education Association of Alabama

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**SEEA and NAAEE
conference updates**

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Bioblitz update**

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\$100,000 EPA grant**

Environmental Education Association of Alabama

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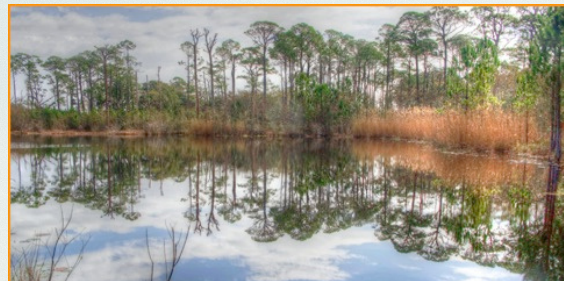
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FACEBOOK: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION OF ALABAMA

EEAA: 2020

THE MOBILE-TENSAW DELTA: A MYSTERIOUS WILDERNESS

By Claire Datnow



A writer's words vibrate to the changing tides of time, like leaves whispering in a gentle breeze, or whistling in gale, or roaring in a hurricane. The mounting death toll of Covid-19 plays on our emotions, evoking rage, horror, misery, and dread. Now more than ever, writers seek words to bring calm, delight, joy, and encouragement. For us, looking at pictures of our travels to fascinating places nearby and faraway, recalls happy memories and good feelings. So, I'm dedicating this blog about our trip to the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, to you! (see Blog Eco Mysteries and Earth Day). And we're dreaming about taking another trip to the delta when the pandemic, finally abates. Perhaps, you will join us.

The world-renowned biologist and prize-winning author, Edward O. Wilson, who grew up in Alabama, describes the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta as a "stream-laced wilderness, an impenetrable jungle, and a great forest magical to the imagination." He called this place, where the rivers meet the sea, the American Amazon because of its rich biodiversity. It's a place where intrepid explorers may yet discover new species, flourishing in its hidden depths. The delta floodplain, forests, and swamps, including the Red Hills to the north rank as the second largest river system in the lower United States. Its northernmost point begins where the Tombigbee and the Alabama rivers meet, and its southern most point ends in Mobile Bay, which empties into the Gulf of Mexico. The rivers flood in the spring, turning the salty bay into a 20-mile-long estuary where fishes and mollusks of every variety come to spawn. The mighty plume of muddy river water, sweeping into Mobile Bay and Gulf of Mexico, is visible from outer space.

At the last count, the Mobile-Tensaw Delta is home to more than 800 species of non-vertebrates, 337 species of fish (36 at risk), 126 amphibians & reptiles (30 at risk), 355 Birds (38 at risk), 49 mammals (7 at risk). The biggest number of turtle species in the world, one on the endangered list, live in the central Gulf Coast and the Delta. In the spring, thousands of migrating songbirds from Yucatan make their first landfall on nearby Dauphin Island. Alabama alone, ranks number one in the US for freshwater fish, mussels, turtles, snails, and crayfish species.

When the ridges and deep ravines of the Red Hills, on the northern boundary, are added to the delta the biodiversity climbs even higher. It's the only place on earth where the endangered and rare giant Red Hills salamander lives. And deep inside this place, old-growth "ice-age forests" and plant species—left behind when the last continental glacier retreated—flourish.

At least 24 oak species grow there—possibly a world record. On the western edge of the delta, the longleaf prairies are home to an hundreds of species of wild flowers and plants, dotting the grass with splashes of pink, purple, red, yellow and blue. And this place is home to the world's greatest concentration of pitcher plant species. In the Splinter Hill Bog, thousands of carnivorous, vermilion and white pitcher plants bloom in the wild grass, wending between stands of tall longleaf pine.

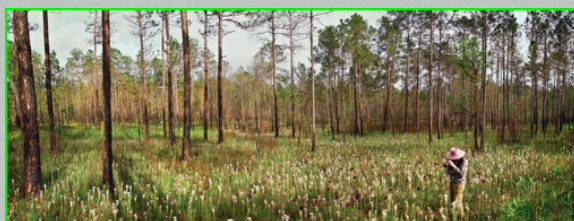
The place has played an important role in our nation's history, too. Hidden deep within the interior, explorers may stumble across the unexcavated mound village of the Mississippian Indian culture, AD 1250–1550. Across the War.

Despite the delta's treasure trove of species, pollution continues to damage this unique ecosystem. For decades, chemical plants, military weapons plants, steel mills, paper mills, municipal sewer systems, farms, and power plants have rapidly increased the pollution. In addition, dams upstream have blocked the free flow of the rivers, killing off fish, freshwater mussels, plants, and forests that depend on clean water. There are also concerns that increasing commercial development for recreation will diminish the scenic beauty of the lower delta.

More recently, the blowout of an oil rig resulted in a massive oil spill, which greatly escalated the pollution. From dolphins to manatees, sea turtles to oysters, fishes to birds, corals to plankton scientists are finding on-going environmental destruction from one of the worst oil spills in our nation's history. As a result, many species have gone extinct, and creatures that inhabit the delta, floodplains, forests, swamps, hills and valleys are on the brink of never coming back. Yet, the Tensaw-Mobile River Delta remains a mysterious wilderness to be explored with care. Few roads penetrate the interior. And not all of the bountiful diversity of life has been discovered. Perhaps you will be the scientist-adventurer who will name a new species.

Perhaps you will be the citizen-scientist who takes action to help heal the harm to North America's Amazon.

<https://mediamint.net/page7/files/The%20Mobile-Tensaw%20Delta:%20A%20Mysterious%20Wilderness%20.html#.XtgDBC81ihA>



Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

@WeeksBayNERR · Wildlife Sanctuary

The Weeks Bay Education Staff has put together virtual lessons to follow along with all summer long! Mondays at 10AM we have Story Time, where we share our favorite nature-based stories and some fun activities you can do at home. We also have Squeaky Sneakers lessons that combine science and art to educate youth audiences about estuaries, habitats, and coastal flora and fauna. Lastly, enjoy a cool beverage of your choice for our afternoon Tea Time Talks with a Scientist, brief discussions with researchers and natural resource managers about all things related to coastal zone management and the habitats of southern Alabama.

Videos can be found:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRrm0qtwCPJrx3>

YCG4sMAaA

WEEKS BAY



The Nature of Americans

The relationship of Americans and nature is changing. Adults and children alike spend evermore time indoors, participation in activities like hunting and fishing is stagnant or declining, and shifts in social expectations treat engagement with nature as a mere amenity. These trends pose a nationwide problem, since overwhelming evidence shows the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of humans depends on contact with nature. To monitor these trends and to reveal how to restore this relationship, social scientists conducted an unprecedented study of 11, 817 adults, children, and parents across the United States in 2015–16. This study is a cornerstone of The Nature of Americans, a national initiative to understand and connect Americans and nature.

[https://natureofamericans.org/sites/default/files/reports/Nature-of-Americans National Report 1.3 4-26-17.pdf](https://natureofamericans.org/sites/default/files/reports/Nature-of-Americans%20National%20Report%201.3%204-26-17.pdf)



Alabama State Parks Virtual Naturalist Series

For those who are unable to visit one of Alabama's beautiful state parks due to the COVID-19 precautionary measures, our State Parks Naturalists are bringing the parks to you through Facebook live events and videos like those in this playlist.

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEz6lPQUeUn1wKerOoAkID5Mgy6tA8_CH&fbclid=IwAR0X2XZBje5MAPNz20eoZcDCkS581sOvSyl0Yrhypgo9Jz2sMbZaWX3DDV4)

[list=PLEz6lPQUeUn1wKerOoAkID5Mgy6tA8_CH&fbclid=IwAR0X2XZBje5MAPNz20eoZcDCkS581sOvSyl0Yrhypgo9Jz2sMbZaWX3DDV4](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEz6lPQUeUn1wKerOoAkID5Mgy6tA8_CH&fbclid=IwAR0X2XZBje5MAPNz20eoZcDCkS581sOvSyl0Yrhypgo9Jz2sMbZaWX3DDV4)

Nature-Based Early Learning Virtual Conference

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 29-31 Nature-Based Early Learning Conference
Virtual

Sept 24-25 SEEA Conference
Virtual

Oct. 14-17 NAAEE Conference
Virtual

EEAA Conference 2021 Details Coming Soon!

The largest national gathering of nature-based early education professionals is moving online this year with more content than ever before!

Register for the Nature-Based Early Learning Virtual Conference, hosted by the Natural Start Alliance, and access more than 50 interactive live sessions over three days (July 29-31) and 24-hour on-demand access to more than 40 sessions.

You also get 365-day access to session recordings so you can revisit your favorite presentations, gain continuing education credits throughout the year, and get the most out of your conference experience. There is even a pay-what-you-can option, making the conference more accessible to everyone, all across the world!

<https://naaee.org/eepro/blog/nature-based-early-learning-virtual>

RUFFNER

MOUNTAIN | EST. 1977

Hiking Responsibly in the Time of COVID-19

Stay home if you're sick.

If you or anyone in your household is experiencing flu-like symptoms, do not go to public places, even trails and conservation lands. You can still enjoy plenty of nature in your own yard or from your front stoop.

Stay local.

Keep close to home, and choose quieter spots or quieter times of day for your outings. Try one of these trails less traveled put together by Freshwater Land Trust.

Keep your distance.

Only hike with members of your own household and stay at least six feet from other hikers at all times, even at trailheads and vistas. If a parking lot is crowded when you arrive, visit another local greenspace.

Keep your dogs on leash.

We always expect dogs to be leashed while on Ruffner Mountain trails, but it's especially important now, when increased trail activity means a higher probability of encounters with other dogs and other hikers. Keeping dogs on leash is for the dog's safety as well, especially with an increase in snake/wildlife activity.

Don't take risks.

Search and rescue efforts put first responders at risk of exposure, and can divert medical attention away from those who need it most. Use an abundance of caution with regard to weather, terrain, and trip planning. And always remember to bring plenty of water.



COVID-19

What I Miss Most About Teaching Outside

Nearly two months into COVID-19 school closures, eePRO group moderator Natalie Crowley reflects on what she misses most about taking her students out into nature.

<https://naaee.org/eeepro/blog/what-i-miss-most-about-teaching-outside>

Environmental Education and the New Normal

How do we make the facilities we teach at as flexible as our teaching? It is no surprise that things won't be the same in the wake of current events.

<https://naaee.org/eeepro/blog/environmental-education-new-normal>

**‘Nature Deficit Disorder’ Is Really a Thing
Children’s behavior may suffer from lack
of access to outdoor space, a problem
heightened by the pandemic.**

[https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/parenting/nature-health-benefits-coronavirus-outdoors.html?](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/parenting/nature-health-benefits-coronavirus-outdoors.html?fbclid=IwAR2myvHJZzMX61ngaP9rX7u9YGxpWcXBBaKDnXI4kUH06cbKvYk6IjFlnjo)

[fbclid=IwAR2myvHJZzMX61ngaP9rX7u9YGxpWcXBBaKDnXI4kUH06cbKvYk6IjFlnjo](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/parenting/nature-health-benefits-coronavirus-outdoors.html?fbclid=IwAR2myvHJZzMX61ngaP9rX7u9YGxpWcXBBaKDnXI4kUH06cbKvYk6IjFlnjo)

Will COVID-19 Spell the End of Outdoor and Environmental Education? The pandemic has been devastating to the field, according to a recent survey

[https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/will-covid-19-spell-end-outdoor-and-environmental-education-180975295/?fbclid=IwAR0AwlFS40LYiDV-](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/will-covid-19-spell-end-outdoor-and-environmental-education-180975295/?fbclid=IwAR0AwlFS40LYiDV-YPebljltK8XnRLPfgoGK6GjOnmDsW56H16reachZZNE#.Xw3fsvMWj4s.facebook)

[YPebljltK8XnRLPfgoGK6GjOnmDsW56H16reachZZNE#.Xw3fsvMWj4s.facebook](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/will-covid-19-spell-end-outdoor-and-environmental-education-180975295/?fbclid=IwAR0AwlFS40LYiDV-YPebljltK8XnRLPfgoGK6GjOnmDsW56H16reachZZNE#.Xw3fsvMWj4s.facebook)



naaee Affiliate Network

SEEA Landscape Analysis Kickoff Call July 20 - State Coordinators have been chosen and will be providing updates. We are looking forward to learning more about the landscape analysis of EE across the southeast!

What will this project accomplish?

SEEA will be conducting a landscape analysis of environmental education efforts in the southeast. This analysis will take a comprehensive look at what environmental education is already happening on the ground. It will identify gaps and barriers to access that prevent successful implementation in some areas, and provide recommendations and next steps for increasing environmental literacy efforts in the southeast based on an inventory of model programs and initiatives happening nationwide.

This analysis and the tailored state recommendations provided will equip the organizations conducting environmental and conservation-related work in the southeast with the materials they need to address gaps, allocate resources more effectively, and ultimately meet the goal of increasing environmental literacy levels and stewardship behaviors. This analysis will help to guide future strategic planning efforts in individual states as well as the regional SEEA collaborative going forward. It will be a tool we can use to ensure we are focusing our limited time and resources in areas where we will have the biggest impact. Data collection and analysis will be led by the Project Analyst, but it will be directed and advised by a leadership team comprised of one State Coordinator from each partner state and a few other key leaders.

Dear Friends of NAAEE:

NAAEE stands in solidarity with every person in our country who is outraged by what we've witnessed as a nation—the recent and brutal murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and David McAtee, and too many more. And with every person who is equally upset by the almost daily examples of racially motivated behaviors nationwide, including the individual who used her white privilege to call the police on a black man who was birding in New York City's Central Park. We know that what we've seen and heard is only the tip of the iceberg, since so many egregious injustices are not captured on video and shared. As Superintendent Robert W. Runcie, a social justice leader in Broward County, Florida, said, "These incidents, as well as the many thousands of others, committed on people of color that have been captured on video or personally witnessed, rekindle feelings of anger, anxiety, and fear due to historical and generational racism and oppression."

We also know that words can't sufficiently capture the pain and loss that so many are feeling. Systemic racism has been a blight on our nation for centuries. And although we've made progress, those of us with power and privilege who have benefitted from the current system have not done enough to stop the oppression of those victimized simply because of the color of their skin or their perceived background. Nor have we fought hard enough to reform the systems that are so unfair and life-threatening to people of color everywhere. Just look at how many more brown and black people are dying from COVID-19 or how many more have been arrested at peaceful demonstrations.

At NAAEE, we are committed to redoubling our efforts to work with our members, partners, and others to create a more just and sustainable future. This is another step in our journey to center equity in everything we do. Our path hasn't always been easy or as fast as we'd like. And although we've made considerable progress, thanks to support from so many, we know that we have much more to do to ensure that civil rights apply to every person—regardless of color, country of origin, sexual orientation, or any other label.

NAAEE's tagline, "Education We Need for the World We Want," will guide us now more than ever. The education we need helps people think critically so they understand that we can't have a healthy environment unless we have healthy people and communities. And we can't have healthy people and communities if everyone doesn't have equitable access to clean water, clean air, health care, jobs, high-quality education, and nature. The education we need helps learners weigh pros and cons, question things we've taken for granted, look at how the past has influenced the present, understand the needs of our communities, and learn how we can work together to help dismantle injustice, protect the environment, and increase access to nature.

The education we need is also about creating a nation of individuals who are civically engaged. There has never been a more critical time to ensure our leaders are with us in fighting racism, fighting to protect the environment, fighting to address poverty, and overall, fighting for the better world we want to see.

I know that so many of you care deeply about creating a better "new normal." We will continue to work with you to raise up voices of people of color—from our EE 30 Under 30 program that recognizes outstanding contributions by young leaders around the world, to building community leadership through our Community EE Fellowship programs, to partnering with the Center for Diversity and the Environment and others to help ensure that our field is trained to be effective allies in centering equity in all that we do. And we look to you, with humility, to do more, collaborate more, trust more, and listen more to create a new normal. We can't do that unless we all realize in our gut that we can't return to business as usual.

We know that progress isn't painless. In discussions with colleagues and friends, we have heard the sadness, grief, and anger that so many are feeling. But we also heard that education is one of the most important strategies we have to fight for justice. Creating systemic change starts with each of us wanting to be part of that better world, by listening to our colleagues who live with oppression every day, and taking actions that demonstrate that black lives matter, unequivocally.

Thanks to all of you for your thoughts and comments, and we look forward to working with you on this path toward "the world we want."

Sincerely,
Judy Braus
Executive Director

Change is never easy, but it is surely possible.

—Superintendent Robert W. Runcie

Growing Roots for Families at Camp McDowell

Come join the fun and learning as we celebrate the return of Growing Roots!

Connect to Nature and reconnect with your family.

Bring your children or grandchildren to explore the woods, streams, canyons and working farm of McDowell with professional teacher naturalists from the McDowell Environmental Center and Farm School.

Register Now!

<https://campmcdowell.org/upcoming-events/family-educator-workshop-growing-roots>



2020 Connection Series from Camp McDowell

These videos are from the Connection Series. Each day we will bring either a prerecorded or live video from Camp McDowell. During a time when we need to be separated we want to still bring you educational and fun moments from all the areas of McDowell.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?reload=9&list=PLYfOp40Sz-K0kTfcL3sM3kEQHGQEjLpW3>

