

GRCA Green Report 2008



GREEN RESOURCE CENTER
FOR ALABAMA

2564 18th Street South, Homewood, AL 35209



The GRCA Green Report, produced by the nonprofit Green Resource Center for Alabama, highlights some of this year's important developments toward making Alabama a greener place to live, work and play.

Here are some of the key green moments in 2008:

Environmental legislation and policy

- **Stricter cancer standard** – After a yearlong effort, the Alabama Environmental Management Commission, the panel that oversees the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, voted 3-1 to establish tougher standards for more than 50 cancer-causing pollutants. The new standard changes the cancer risk level used to calculate human health impacts from one cancer per 100,000 residents to one cancer per million residents. The stronger rule brings Alabama in line with neighboring states.
- **Landfill fee and recycling initiative** – State lawmakers approved, and Gov. Bob Riley signed into law, a new \$1 per ton fee on waste disposed at Alabama landfills. The fee, which is expected to generate \$7 million to \$8 million annually, will fund the cleanup of illegal dumps, support the state's landfill inspection program and provide grants to help expand recycling across the state.
- **Tougher fines for illegal hunting, fishing** – State lawmakers boosted significantly the fines for violating a host of hunting and fishing rules, including hunting out of season, hunting protected species, unlawful use of nets and violating creel limits. The new fines take effect in 2009.
- **Solar energy liability issue resolved** – Alabama lawmakers eliminated an insurance mandate on solar-generated energy sold to Alabama Power, reducing the cost for individuals who want to generate power from solar systems and sell excess electricity back to the utility.

Habitat and species protection

- **Forever Wild and partners protect nearly 6,000 acres** – The state Forever Wild program, along with partners such as the Alabama Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, the Alabama Forestry Commission and the U.S. Forest Service, have secured through purchase nearly 6,000 acres of important habitat lands across the state. Among the key purchases is more than 1,500 acres adjoining the Skyline Wildlife Management Area in Jackson County, including roughly 3½ miles of frontage along Hurricane Creek and Paint Rock River. Another important purchase is more than 3,300 acres of Blackbelt prairie and pine-hardwood forest in Hale County. Since its inception in 1992, Forever Wild has preserved nearly 140,000 acres of Alabama's wild places for future generations.
- **Nature Conservancy secures prairie near Old Cahawba** – The Nature Conservancy of Alabama secured an option to purchase some 3,000 acres of Blackbelt prairie adjacent to the state-owned archaeological park at Old Cahawba. Securing the tract helps preserve an important but fast-diminishing habitat in Alabama. The Nature Conservancy in Alabama owns or manages more than 4,500 acres throughout the state.
- **Seven Springs, watercress darter habitat** – In a cooperative effort, Birmingham's Faith Apostolic Church, the nonprofit Freshwater Land Trust, the Southern Environmental Center, Samford University and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service celebrated the completion of a meditative garden at Seven Springs in Jefferson County, one of the few places on the planet that is home to the endangered watercress darter. The garden will help protect the tiny fish by filtering pollutants from water runoff. It's been an up-and-down year for the watercress darter. In September, a pond in the Roebuck Springs area of Birmingham with a large watercress darter population was mistakenly drained. That same month, a scientist revealed the darter are thriving in a pond in Pinson; the fish were placed there in 1986 as part of the recovery effort for the species.
- **New azalea species** – Scientists identified a new species of wild azalea (*Rhododendron colemanii*) growing in the Red Hills area of South Alabama. The species, described in one news report as one of the tallest, most fragrant and richly colored of all native azaleas, was given a common name that will forever link it to the diverse habitat of the Alabama region where it was discovered: the Red Hills azalea.

Green cities, green buildings, green awards

- **Huntsville gets green city honors** – Huntsville was named one of "America's 50 Greenest Cities" by Popular Science magazine. Huntsville's No. 18 ranking was the highest of any city in the South. It also put Huntsville ahead of a number of progressive major cities, including New York, Denver and St. Louis. Popular Science used data from the U.S. Census Bureau and National Geographic Society's Green Guide to see how cities compare in terms of renewable energy, public transit, recycling and setting aside land for parks and nature preserves. Huntsville scored high for its efforts in recycling and land preservation.
- **Alabama adds more green buildings** – Although other states can claim more green buildings – structures designed to use less energy, reduce waste and water consumption and protect the surrounding environment – the movement is picking up speed in Alabama. A number of green building projects made the news in 2008, while others received certification as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) structures by the U.S Green Building Council. They include:

- The Jacksonville State University Canyon Center at Little River Canyon. At 23,000 square feet, the LEED-certified structure is the state's largest geothermally heated and cooled building.
 - Lulu's at Homepoint Marina, in Gulf Shores, which installed a 45-foot-tall wind turbine to produce electricity to partially power its "Bama Breeze" bar.
 - The new Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World in Leeds, designed, in consultation with local environmental organizations, to limit its environmental impact and to protect open space
 - Hilltop Montessori School in Shelby County
 - The NASA Child Development Center in Huntsville
 - A new, solar-powered Habitat for Humanity home in Tuscumbia, built by students from the University of North Alabama and volunteers with the Shoals Chapter of Habitat for Humanity. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the Tennessee Valley Authority helped provide financial support.
 - The corporate headquarters for White-Spunner Construction Inc. in Mobile
 - The new Social Security Administration building in downtown Birmingham
 - Hewitt-Trussville High School in Trussville
 - Colonial Center at Brookwood Village in Homewood
- **Media, businesses, festivals go green** – A growing number of media outlets and business groups are recognizing the importance of "going green." In 2008 alone, several Alabama publications, including Thicket magazine, Skirt! magazine, Birmingham magazine, the Birmingham Business Journal (BBJ) and Birmingham Weekly produced special "green" editions or focused on green topics. Several television stations in the state have also begun airing regularly scheduled "green" features. The BBJ this year launched its Going Green awards, honoring individuals and businesses for their green accomplishments. And the Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce initiated a new recognition program for businesses that take steps to become greener. A growing number of public events across the state are also celebrating the importance of going green. Some of the newer events are: the EcoMax Home Expo in Montgomery, the Moss Rock Festival in Hoover, and the Clover Crawl in Birmingham. Also in Birmingham, the annual City Stages music festival has begun to recycle its waste, in partnership with the Alabama Environmental Council.

Alternative energy and biofuels

- **Utilities getting greener** – This year saw two big electricity providers take steps to expand the use of renewable or alternative energy sources. The Tennessee Valley Authority requested proposals for up to 2,000 megawatts of power generation from renewable and clean energy sources by mid 2011. Alabama Power, meanwhile, expanded its biomass-based Renewable Energy Rate to include commercial and industrial customers, along with residential consumers. The company also lowered the price for purchasing blocks of renewable energy.
- **Clean Fuels Corridor** – In October Gov. Bob Riley celebrated the opening of the Interstate 65 "Clean Corridor." A four-state project, motorists can now drive the 886 miles of I-65 and never be more than a ¼ tank away from an E85 or B20 biofuels pump.
- **More municipalities looking to alternative energy** – More cities are looking to alternative fuels for energy sources. The city of Hoover, for example, is a national leader in the use of biofuels for its fleet vehicles. Cities including Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, Auburn, Florence, Gadsden and Daphne are now either using biodiesel or producing biodiesel from grease or used oil to help power their fleets.

Water conservation and quality

- **Statewide water plan resolution** – This spring, the state House and Senate approved a resolution establishing the first-ever joint legislative committee on water policy and management. The panel's primary mission: to formulate a statewide water management plan. Although the plan has yet to be created, the resolution signaled the first tangible step toward creating a comprehensive water policy in Alabama.
- **State of Mobile Bay** – The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program issued its State of the Bay report for 2008. The 46-page document employs 15 key indicators to provide insight into environmental changes that have taken place in coastal Alabama over the past five to 10 years. The report indicated that while population growth, development and other human impacts continue to threaten the watershed, progress is being made to conserve and restore coastal habitat and protect threatened and endangered species.
- **Water conservation kits** – Earlier this year, the Alabama Clean Water Partnership, in a joint initiative with Auburn University, the Alabama Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, began providing free water conservation kits to Alabama residents. The kits include leak-detection tablets, toilet-displacement bags that reduce water usage, and a lawn watering gauge, as well as other items. To order the free kit, log on to www.cleanwaterpartnership.org.
- **Coca-Cola and World Wildlife Fund partnership** – Protecting the Mobile River basin is one of the priorities of a \$20 million partnership between the Coca-Cola Company and the World Wildlife Fund aimed at helping conserve seven key freshwater basins around the world. This year the partnership began working with local environmental groups, such as the Cahaba River Society, to develop and implement specific projects within the Mobile River basin. Among the projects was a major water efficiency and conservation conference in Birmingham, organized by the Green Resource Center for Alabama with support from Coca-Cola Bottling Company United Inc. of Birmingham.

Parks, trails and greenways

- **Three Parks Initiative** – 2008 marked the culmination of the Three Parks Initiative, a joint campaign of the Birmingham Community Foundation and Region 2020 to raise \$15 million toward the creation of two new parks in the Birmingham area – Red Mountain Park and Railroad Park – and fund expansion and improvements at the existing Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve. The initiative has drawn national attention for its success in expanding urban parkland and open space.
- **Alabama Scenic River Trail** – This year marked the official opening of the trail, which runs 631 miles from the Coosa River to Fort Morgan on the Gulf Coast. It is the longest one-state river trail in the nation.
- **Ladiga Trail connects to Silver Comet** – After more than 20 years, bicycle enthusiasts in September celebrated completion of the final sections linking the 61-mile Silver Comet trail in Georgia with the 33-mile Chief Ladiga Trail in east Alabama. Bicyclists can now safely travel from Smyrna, Ga., to Anniston, Ala., on the joined trails.

- **Third state birding trail** – The Black Belt Nature and Heritage Trail, covering 13 counties and 55 sites, joins the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail and the North Alabama Birding Trail as a key attraction for birders in the state.
- **Five Mile Creek Greenway wins Phoenix Award** – Brownfield redevelopment of lands along the Five Mile Creek Greenway in Jefferson County was recognized this year with the prestigious Phoenix Award for Region 4 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It is the first project in Alabama to receive the award. The Phoenix Award honors projects that use innovative and creative techniques to revitalize blighted, contaminated lands for productive, new uses.



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**The GRCA Green Report is produced by the
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Special thanks to:

Pat Byington Wilderness Society and Bama Environmental News
Casi Callaway Mobile Baykeeper
Allison Jenkins Alabama Clean Water Partnership
Cathie Mayne Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama