

CURRENTS

Newsletter of Flint River Conservation Association

<http://flinriverconservation.com>

April 2007

Next FRCA meeting on April 10th

You may have already heard about the proposed port and barge canal that would go through an 800 foot deep swath of Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge south of the Airport. The Huntsville Madison County Port Authority is making a big push again, for about the 3rd or 4th time over 20+ years. Refuge Manager Dwight Cooley is going to be our next guest speaker, on just this subject. Last year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed an *Appropriate Refuge Uses Policy*, which allows the Refuge Manager to do an "appropriateness analysis" to determine whether a new use, such as an easement, is compatible with the mission of the refuge. Dwight is pretty certain he will have that assessment done by our meeting, which he will present in a powerpoint format.

The meeting will, as usual, take place in the conference room in the Engineering Building at 320 Fountain Circle at 6:30 p.m. Bring a potluck to share, and as many friends or concerned citizens as you like.

Bloucher's Ford Mill, a Flint River landmark, destroyed by fire

The last remnant of river mills along the Flint River burned last month. The 170 year old Bloucher's Ford Mill, -also known as Patterson's Mill, just south of Oscar Patterson Road, was burned to the ground in March and arson is the suspected cause (there was no electricity to the building and evidence of tampering with a camp stove/or lantern may have been the accelerant.). FRCA and the Hays Nature Preserve were working over the last two years to get it protected, as well as other individuals and groups similarly involved. Unfortunately, it would have taken an on-site caretaker to protect it, since it was frequented by trespassers who used the property as a party site.

The last mill on the Flint River is gone, and with it, a rich history. I will be putting information about the Mill's history on the Huntsville Preserves web site (www.huntsvillepreserves.com), so that those interested can read more about it. During Huntsville's Bicentennial in 2005, I took about 30 people to various historic sites on the Flint, including this Mill, so some of the best photos taken of it may be from that tour.

It is a sad day when people see no value in our nation's history, and set a torch to it. It is an extremely humbling experience to know that we are not all a caring society. I myself am wounded to the core for this senseless destruction of our local history.

- Soos Weber

"River Guardians" a Success

FRCA had a very successful River Guardian workshop, with 37 people attending the February 24th program, some coming from as far away as Birmingham. FRCA would like to especially thank speakers Allison Bohlman (aquatic ecologist), Sam Sandlin (Flint River Watershed Coordinator) and Steve McKinney (consultant on the Value of Environmental Services). FRCA plans to follow this workshop with others—possibly on turbidity and how the Guardians can quantify the turbidity (due to sediment) after a rain event. We will keep you posted.

What's Happening in (and for) the Watershed

Earth Day at the Hays Preserve on Saturday, April 21st

Earth Day is now in its 37th year of commemorating a day that many historians recognize as the birth of the modern environmental movement. Organized in 1970 by Gaylord Nelson, a Senator from Wisconsin who noticed that serious concern about environmental degradation were obvious everywhere except the halls of power, the first Earth Day drew instant attention from a wide range of citizens across the country. With the help of John Gardner and Denis Hayes, Nelson helped organize a nationwide grassroots celebration on April 22, 1970, that eventually included more than 20 million people. Even after 37 years, Earth Day still remains a watershed event in the environmental movement. Since its inception, interest and participation in Earth Day has only increased and spread around the world, with activities, celebrations, and events growing steadily over time and millions of concerned citizens taking part. It is now recognized as the largest non-religious holiday in the world.

Earth Day is annually celebrated at the J.D. and Annie S. Hays Nature Preserve, an idyllic location on the Flint River. The cool green of trees bursting into leaf, combined with the songs of migratory birds provides a peaceful backdrop for this FREE family event. A mated pair of Barred owls have even entertained us during past years' events by their appearance along the river. This year's Earth Day event will include a birding hike with Bill McAllister, professor at Alabama A&M and a great birder; a program featuring reptiles by Bill Cruger; a live animal presentation by Dr. Bloom of the Lookout Mountain Zoological Park in Mentone; a Mountain Bike Explorathon of some of the preserve's very remote trails with SORBA, a local mountain biking group; and a variety of hands-on activities for young children with teachers from Huntsville City Schools' EarthScope program.

In addition to these programs, there will also be two guided ecotours - one in the Preserve and another more adventurous hike in Goldsmith Schiffman Wildlife Sanctuary, as well as a hike where professional photographer Robert Schuffert will instruct camera bugs in "Shooting great nature photos" while exploring the swamps and bottomlands at the wildlife sanctuary. Exhibitors from various Conservation Organizations, including FRCA, and Earth-Friendly Vendors will be on hand. Come enjoy the natural heritage of our Earth. There are plenty of activities for you to learn about and appreciate the Earth and its resources.

For more details about this Earth Day event, contact Soos Weber at the Hays Preserve, 427-5116 or susan.weber@hsvcity.com, or visit www.huntsvillepreserves.com.

National River Clean Up Week

Millions of tons of trash wind up in our nation's rivers and streams every year, and American Rivers is harnessing the environmental passion and community pride of thousands of people to do something about it. FRCA is one of the many river teams that will be cleaning up our nation's waterways on June 2 (June 9th if the water is too high), with our clean up on the Flint River. FRCA will have to charge each participant \$10 for each seat in a canoe (if you do not have your own) to defray the costs of rentals. The group will meet at 9:00 a.m. on April 2nd (or 9th, if high waters) at the Publix parking lot in Hampton Cove. We do ask that you register in advance to reserve your canoe space. The cutoff for a canoe rental is May 21st, so sign up soon! Learn more about National River Cleanup Week by visiting their web site at www.nationalrivercleanup.org For more information about this FRCA event or to make your reservation for a canoe, call Soos at 427-5116.

Protecting Alabama's Rivers—The Alabama River Agenda

Over the past decade, the Alabama Rivers Alliance has worked to develop, enhance, and connect a strong network of local watershed organizations and citizens across Alabama. Working with this network and the many environmental issues that the network is trying to address across the state has led to the development of the Alabama Water Agenda. The Alabama Water Agenda is a proactive, citizen-driven campaign for improving water policy in Alabama. The Agenda targets the biggest threats to our waters by ensuring lasting protections through improved state policy. FRCA was one of the peer review watershed groups for the Agenda. To find out more, go to www.alabamawateragenda.com.

News from the Watershed Coordinator

This past month was a busy time for planting trees. Two farms in the lower Flint River Watershed completed “new” riparian buffers under our various conservation programs. Combined, over 100.0 acres of crop land or pasture were converted to hardwood trees, pine trees, and permanent grasses along tributaries to the Flint. Both farms are now in long-term conservation agreements.

Now is the time of year to notice all of the vibrant green row crop fields. Winter cover crops can be seen throughout the watershed. Usually winter wheat or rye is used. The winter cover crops protect and hold the soil over the winter and early spring months which typically are the wettest. Through our Brier Fork and Beaver Dam Creek 319 grant, over 3700.0 acres will be treated with this best management practice this year alone. The grant helps the participants pay for the winter cover crop seed, all other costs are absorbed by the landowner or farmer. There are some farmers within the county that do this practice each year anyway, but definitely not all.

Currently, there are still a number of conservation programs available for landowners interested in establishing best management practices. There are still funds available for the third and final year of the Yellow Bank and Goose Creek 319 grants. We are entering the 2nd year for the Brier Fork and Beaver Dam Creek 319 grant. There are plenty of funds available for the Flint River Buffer Initiative program. Last, Continuous CRP and the EQIP program are always available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

For more information about these programs, or any other watershed projects, contact Flint River Watershed Coordinator Sam Sandlin at (256) 532-1677 ext 3.

Alabama Watershed Leadership Conference

The Alabama Rivers Alliance hosted its annual Watershed Leadership Conference last month at Camp McDowell, where Maggie and Mark Johnston were wonderful hosts. About 140 participants attended this year, compared to around 100 people in past years. Wherever this event is held, it is one of the best conferences around, inspiring and very affordable. Five of the attendees of the River Guardian workshop attended at FRCA's recommendation, as well as FRCA members Lance Brecht, Ben Ferrill, Steve Caudill, and Susan Weber.

A few of the great speakers include Jerome Ringo, Chair of the National Wildlife Federation; Don Elder, President of River Network and former leader of the Cahaba River Society; Dr. Doug Phillips, of the Discovering Alabama series from Alabama Public Television; and Andrew Fahlund of American Rivers. In addition, Paul Freeman, aquatic biologist with the Nature Conservancy of Alabama, presented a session about the biodiversity of our state rivers. Mr. Freeman will be visiting US soon, as he will be the guest speaker at the June 12th FRCA meeting.

Institute of Conservation Leadership Workshop

FRCA is considering sponsoring a workshop with the Institute next year, and hosting it in conjunction with other local watershed groups, including south Tennessee. The Institute for Conservation Leadership is an organization that, through training and consulting, seeks to strengthen leaders, organizations, and coalitions or networks that protect and conserve the Earth. If you think you might be interested in attending a Conservation Leadership workshop, contact Soos Weber, 427-5116, so that we can get back in touch with you with more details later.

NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, APRIL 10, at 6:30 pm

Join us for the meeting with our special speaker, Dwight Cooley of Wheeler Wildlife Refuge, and don't forget to bring a potluck dish and a serving utensil. As usual, the meeting will take place at the City Engineering building on the corner of Williams and Fountain. Follow signs from the front door to the meeting room. For more information, call Soos at 427-5116. See you on April 10th!!

PLEASE JOIN US!

The Flint River Conservation Association is a non-profit organization. Only by your memberships and donations can we accomplish the many projects we work on each year. Individual memberships are only \$10, and family memberships are \$20. Please use the Membership Form below to renew your FRCA Dues. If you are unsure about the status of your FRCA Membership, please refer to the expiration date on your mailing label, or contact the FRCA Membership Coordinator. You can also choose to receive your Currents, the FRCA newsletter, by email instead, saving stamps and trees...simply add your email address on the form and mark the "Save Trees" line on the form.

FRCA Membership Form

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____ CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

_____ **SAVE TREES** – Please save trees & stamps by sending my "Currents" newsletter by email instead of postal mail.

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS: (please check your choice below)

_____ **Individual** - \$10 annually

_____ **Family** - \$20 annually

_____ **Life** - \$1,000 one-time payment

Make checks payable to FRCA and mail to FRCA, P.O. Box 275, Brownsboro, AL 35741

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