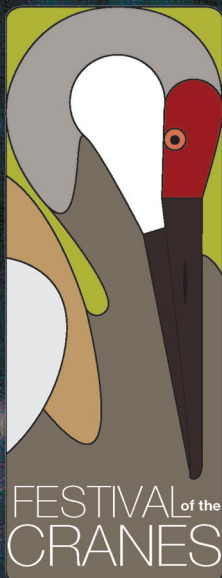


Complimentary Issue

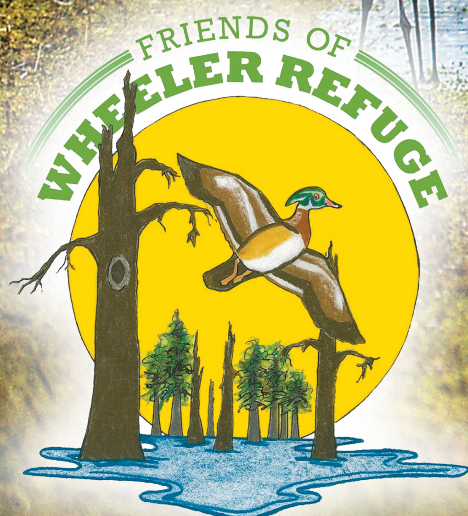


Festival of the Cranes 2024

January 12 - 14, 2024
Wheeler National
Wildlife Refuge
Decatur, AL

Sponsored by

Alabama State Tourism • 3M • Decatur/Morgan County Tourism
City of Priceville • Redstone Federal Credit Union



Published by

The Decatur Daily

EMERGENCY VETERINARY SERVICES



THERE WHEN YOU
NEED US MOST

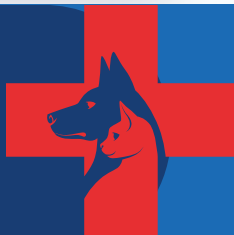


SURGERY INTENSIVE CARE
IMAGING PATHOLOGY
EXCEPTIONAL STAFF



MON - THUR 8AM-5PM
SAT 8AM - SUN 8PM

 (256) 350-7001



2117 VETERANS DR SE
DECATUR, ALABAMA

Meet the Presenters



The Prescriptions
Festival Opener



Steve Trash
Environmental Educator



Vicki Beckham Smith
Environmental Educator -
"The Bat Lady"



Christopher Joe
Conservationist



Dr. James B. McClintock
Polar and Marine Biologist



John Stokes & Dale Kernahan
Wings to Soar - Raptor Show



Robert Smith
Photographer



Bobby Harrison
Photographer



Joe Wiegand
The Teddy Roosevelt Show



Jimmy Stiles
Herpetologist



Heather Montgomery
Children's Author



Stephanie Schmidt
ICF Outreach Coordinator

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Event Presenters **3**

Return of the Whooping Crane **4-5**

Wintering at Wheeler **6-7**

History of Sandhill Cranes **8-9**

Schedule of Events **10-14**

Map of Wheeler National
Wildlife Refuge **16-17**

Wheeler NWR Satellite Refuges **18-19**

Wheeler Refuge Renovations **20-22**

I'm Going Outdoors **24**

History of the Festival of
the Cranes **28-29**

FRIENDSOFWHEELERNWR.ORG

CHECK US OUT!

Check out our website and come say hello on social media.

friendsofwheelernwr.org

Follow us on
Facebook



EVENT SPONSORS

**Sweet Home
Alabama**

DECATUR^{AL}
DECATUR MORGAN COUNTY TOURISM
Create Your Adventure

3M

REDSTONE
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

CITY OF PRICEVILLE

RETURN OF THE WHOOPING CRANE TO ALABAMA



Three stately white birds with red crowns and black primary feathers flap silently as they head south from their summer home in Wisconsin, headed for the Gulf Coast of Florida where they will spend the winter. They had taken a similar path two years before, following an ultralight airplane piloted by what seemed to them a member of their own species. With the ultralight no longer accompanying them, they are looking for a place to alight for the night when they see a small wetland surrounded by harvested corn just north of the Tennessee River and Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. They set their wings and land.

Sometime over the next few days, they note a small party of humans approaching and they move slowly away. Little did they know or care, the humans were participating on the 2004 Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count on December 18. It was an historic event...they were Whooping Cranes and members of their species had not been seen in Alabama since 1899.

Whooping Cranes, unlike many other waterbird species, were probably never numerous with peak estimated populations of around 10,000. They nested over much of the northern United States and Canada and migrated

through much of the U.S. to their wintering grounds in the southern U.S. By the 1940's their numbers had declined precipitously to only 15-20 birds when conservation measures aimed at increasing their populations were initiated. Thankfully, these measures resulted in an increase in numbers and by the 1990's, 500-600 birds were migrating from their nesting grounds in and near Wood Buffalo National Park in northwest Canada to winter along the Gulf Coast of Texas.

Realizing that Whooping Cranes once occurred in eastern North America the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership (WCEP), a group of non-profit organizations

and government and state agencies, was formed in 1999. Its purpose is to facilitate the restoration of that migratory population as an integral part of the overall recovery of the species. Member organizations conduct a number of research, educational and management actions throughout eastern North America.

Alabama has benefitted directly from WCEP programs. Since the appearance of the three cranes in 2004, Alabama has become a haven for migrating and wintering Whooping Cranes. Many now spend all or a portion of their winters here. North Alabama appears particularly attractive to them. They have been seen in Lauderdale-

dale, Lawrence, Limestone, Morgan, Madison and Cherokee counties.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, with its 35,000 acres of wetlands, forests and cropland, has provided a sanctuary for migrating and wintering Whooping Cranes since at least 2004. The number of Whooping Cranes using the Refuge annually varies from 10-20 birds with a high of

26. From their primary roost sites in the Refuge's shallow waters surrounding Flint Creek Island and Garth Slough, they spend much of the day foraging and loafing in Garth Slough, Limestone Bay, in the Tennessee River backwaters off White Springs Dike and often around the Refuge Visitor Center and Wildlife Observation Building. In late afternoon, prior to making their way to their roost site,

upwards of 10,000 Sandhill Cranes gather around the Wildlife Observation Building. It's an awesome challenge sorting through all those Sandhills for Whooping Cranes.

Accept that challenge and join us for the next Crane Festival scheduled for January 12-14, 2024!



WHEELER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE... AT THE CENTER OF WINTERING WHOOPING CRANES IN EASTERN NORTH AMERICA



When the first captive-reared young Whooping Cranes followed Operation Migration ultralight pilots from Wisconsin to Florida in 2001, no one knew for sure what the future held for the attempt to re-establish a migratory population in eastern North America. The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, a coalition of conservation organizations and state and federal agencies, had chosen two re-introduction techniques to establish the Eastern Migratory Population. One technique trained cranes to follow costumed pilots flying ultralight aircraft from Wisconsin to Florida. The other, Direct Autumn Release, initially released young birds directly into wild Sandhill Crane populations nesting in Wisconsin hoping

they would “learn” how to migrate and return.

The first Whooping Cranes recorded near Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge were three found just north of the Refuge on the 2004 Christmas Bird Count. Unfortunately, one of the three was found dead shortly thereafter and the remaining two quickly made their way to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida.

Not knowing if Whoopers would be seen in subsequent years, we were pleasantly surprised when two showed up on the Refuge’s Garth Slough in December of 2007. To our great joy, those same two birds, 13-02 and 18-02 from the 2002 cohort of birds led by ultralight aircraft to Florida,

would become regular wintering birds for the next several years. How did we know they were the same birds? All birds released were fitted with a metal leg band and plastic color bands in unique combinations allowing individual identification if those band combinations could be recorded. In addition, most were also fitted with telemetry transmitters with different frequencies on their legs so they could be monitored, at least as long as the transmitter batteries lasted.

The birds that wintered in 2007 heralded increasing numbers of cranes using the Refuge and that usage continues today. It is not unusual for 10-20 Whoopers to use the Refuge while 26 is the highest number

recorded. Not all Whoopers recorded on the refuge winter here. Some stop during their autumnal migration to Florida and others stop on their return to their nesting grounds. However, 10-15 usually spend their winter here.

To add spice to the saga, consider this. The first ten years of effort to establish an eastern migratory flock proceeded almost without a hitch. Operation Migration led young cranes from Wisconsin to Florida each year. However, as we all know, even the best laid plans can go awry. After flying over 700 miles with several multi-day stops, the ultralight-led cranes made it to their planned rest site in Franklin County, Alabama on December 11, 2011.

A few days rest and it's on to the next site. It was not to be. The cranes and ultralight pilots were grounded because of a potential Federal Aviation Administration rule violation. Ultralight aircraft are licensed as light sport aircraft which prevents them being flown for compensation under rules that took effect in 2008. Eventually, the FAA provided a temporary waiver allowing them to continue their trip.

Now, the cranes could head toward Florida. They could but they didn't! They refused to follow the ultralights. After considering all options, the decision was made transport the young cranes by truck to Wheeler NWR. They made the 70-mile trip on February 4,

2012 and they were eventually released to mingle with thousands of Sandhill Cranes and seven Whooping Cranes wintering on the Refuge. They remained on the Refuge until April 12 when they took wing, soared high, and headed north. They spent the next night in Kentucky and eventually made it back to Wisconsin.

Several of them returned to winter on the Refuge over the years, joining other Whooping Cranes that form a core group that continues to return to Wheeler NWR every year.

OUR FAMILY IS WITH YOURS
Every Step
OF THE WAY

Honoring Life
Traditional Funerals
Memorial Services
Veteran Services
Pre-planning

Shelton
Funeral Home

2105 Beltline Road SW, Decatur | 256.353.1620

**DECATUR
CONTAINER**

**SELF-STORAGE FACILITY
IN MORGAN COUNTY, ALABAMA**

888-751-3802

*Providing Quality, Low-Cost Storage
Solutions Since 1995*

5375 Marsha Avenue
Decatur, AL 35603

ARMOR'S
**UTILITY
CONTRACTORS**

Armor's Contracting provides
water and gas line repair and
trenchless sewer rehabilitation
services to the Decatur, AL area.

**Decatur, AL
(256) 355-2686**



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SANDHILL CRANES

ON WHEELER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Sandhill Cranes are a conspicuous winter bird on Wheeler NWR. However, that has not always been the case. The reason...historically, Sandhill Cranes in the eastern population migrated well east of Wheeler, moving from northern Canada and the Great Lakes area through Indiana, eastern Kentucky and Tennessee to spend their winter in southern Georgia and northern Florida.

The earliest known reference to them occurring in Alabama can be found in A.H. Howell's *Birds of Alabama* (1928). He noted that "A few pairs are resident and breed in the pine flats

of Baldwin County. D.R. Peete reports a small bunch living within two miles of Foley, and a few are known to occur about the shores of Perdido Bay, having been frequently heard calling in January, 1912, by the residents of Orange Beach. A pair was reported in the same vicinity in August 1911, and during the same summer an adult and a young bird were captured near the mouth of Perdido Bay, on the Alabama side."

In the early 1990's, for reasons unknown, small groups began to linger and spent the winter in east Tennessee near Hiwassee.

The number of birds wintering there increased dramatically and about the same time small numbers found their way to Wheeler. Three wintered on the Refuge in 1995; 11 in 1997; 50 in 2000; 500 in 2005; 1200 in 2007; 10,000 in 2015... doubling and tripling in number some years.

Fast forward to now. Walk outside the Refuge Visitor Center on any winter day and you will probably see hundreds, if not thousands, of Sandhill Cranes. At their seasonal peak we now expect to see up to 10,000 in the fields surrounding the Visitor Center and Wildlife

Observation Building while 15,000 to 20,000 use the Refuge in most years and, in good years, upwards of 25,000 have been recorded. They proclaim their presence in flight and on the ground by raucous call....some might even call it a noisy din.

If we travel back to the winter after July 7, 1938 when Franklin D. Roosevelt established Wheeler NWR by Presidential Proclamation, we wouldn't hear a Sandhill Crane whimper. As a matter of fact, we would have to wait 25 years, when on November 28, 1963, the first Sandhill was reported on the Ref-

uge and we wouldn't see it because only Ernest Jemison of the Refuge staff saw the bird! Fast forward 17 years to 1980 and we might have gotten to see the next Sandhill because it hung around for most of December.

Sandhill Crane sightings in late fall and early winter increased through the late 1980's but the first wintering birds were in 1992 when three birds remained through January 1993. Small numbers wintered each year through 1997 when numbers started to increase dramatically.

Wintering numbers seemed to double each year from 2000 through 2008, establishing the Refuge as an important Sandhill Crane wintering site.

To witness this spectacle, join us January 12-14, 2024 for the Festival of Cranes. Hope to see you there!



CATHEDRAL CAVERNS STATE PARK

"Make it a weekend of fun!"

OPEN YEAR ROUND

**Call 256-728-8193 for tour times
or visit www.alapark.com**

637 Cave Road, Woodville, AL 35776



573008-1

WNWR Visitor Center

Registration is required for all visitor center events



3121 Visitor Center Road, Decatur, AL
friendsofwheelernwr.org

SATURDAY

January 13, 2024

7:00 am - 8:30 am
**Early Morning Birding
with Dwight Cooley**

8:00 am - 9:30 am
**Early Morning Birding
with Christopher Joe**

9:00 am - 10:30 am
**Photography Workshop
with Robert Smith**

1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
**Afternoon Birding
with Christopher Joe**

3:00 pm - 4:30 pm
**Photography Workshop
with Robert Smith**

SUNDAY

January 14, 2024

8:00 am - 9:30 am
**Early Morning Birding
with Teddy Roosevelt**

10:00 am - 11:30 am
**Photography Workshop
with Bobby Harrison**

11:00 am - 12:30 pm
Birding with Christopher Joe

1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
**Photography Workshop
with Bobby Harrison**

ALL TIMES CENTRAL STANDARD TIME

PRINCESS THEATRE *Center for the Performing Arts*

112 2nd Avenue NE, Decatur, AL
princesstheatre.org

Princess Theatre

Tickets available for purchase through the Princess Theatre website

SATURDAY

January 13, 2024

9:00 am - 10:00 am
**Wings to Soar -
Live Raptor Show**

11:00 am - 12:00 pm
**Teddy Roosevelt Show
with Joe Wiegand**

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm
**Steve Trash -
Rockin' Eco Hero!**

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
**Film Premiere -
Wings Over Water**

SUNDAY

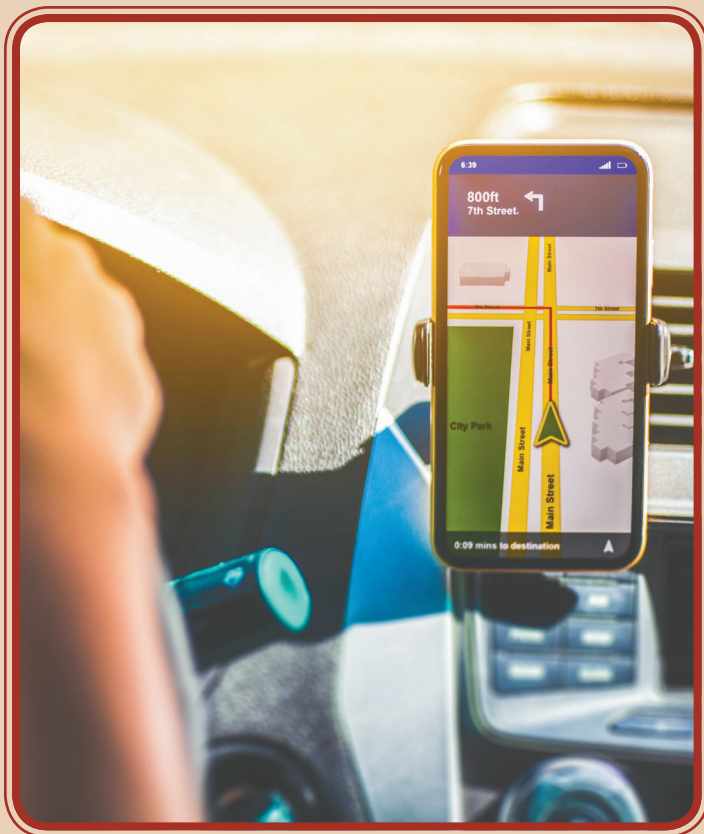
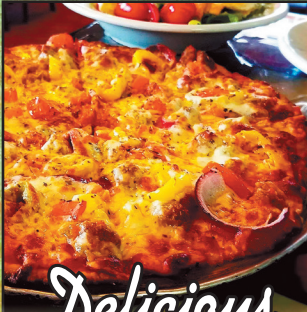
January 14, 2024

11:00 am - 12:00 pm
**Wings to Soar -
Live Raptor Show**

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
**Teddy Roosevelt Show
with Joe Wiegand**

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm
**Wings to Soar -
Live Raptor Show**

ALL TIMES CENTRAL STANDARD TIME

**Delicious
ITALIAN
FOOD**

"You'll love our **FAMILY**
recipes made from
FRESH ingredients!"

Alfonso's
PIZZA AND ITALIAN RESTAURANT

725 Beltline Road, Suite E,
Decatur, AL 35603
256-350-0211
www.thealfonsospizza.com

574913-1



**FLAVORFUL
TASTY FOOD**

Come try!

WING

**1123 Somerville Road, SE
Decatur**

Mon. & Tues. & Thurs.
10:30 am - 8:00 pm
Wed. 10:30 am - 2pm
FRIDAY & SATURDAY
10:30 am - 9 pm



575295-1

Around TOWN

**Priceville
FOODLAND**
Super Market

*always
DELICIOUS!*



470 Alabama 67, Priceville
256.355.5412
pricevillefoodland.com

573183-1



Sandra Ball
CRS, GRI
256-642-9903
sandraballrealtor.com
sandra@
coldwellbankerdecat.com

*"I have been a Realtor for over
30 years, I live in Somerville,
and I am very familiar with
the Somerville and Priceville
areas. Let me help you find
the home of your dreams!"*

**COLDWELL
BANKER**
MCMILLAN &
ASSOCIATES

573156-1

*Cricket by
the Creek*

FINE WOMEN'S APPAREL



Personalizing
your
shopping
experience

Flattering
styles
for all sizes



1519 6th Avenue, SE, Decatur
256-350-9963

574909-1

**HOLAWAY'S
FOODLAND**

**We are your
MEAT MARKET
store!**

The Decatur Daily
**BEST
OF THE BEST**
2023
READER'S CHOICE POLL
WINNER

Voted Best Meats

**Holaway's
FOODLAND**

Since 1957

21652 Beltline Road SW
Decatur • 256-351-4264



573533-1



ALABAMA CENTER FOR THE
ARTS

133 2nd Avenue NE, Decatur, AL
alabamacenterforthearts.org

Alabama Center for the Arts

Performing Arts Building (Recital Hall)

SATURDAY January 13, 2024

Visual Arts Building
(Room 113)

10:00 am - 11:00 am
**Children's Activity
with ACA staff**

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
**Junior Duck Stamp Workshop
with Tammy Clark**

Performing Arts
Building (Recital Hall)

9:00 am - 10:00 am
**Vicky Smith -
Batty about Bats!**

11:00 am - 12:00 pm
**Dr. James B. McClintock -
Lost Antarctica**

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm
**Stephanie Schmidt -
International Crane
Foundation**

SUNDAY January 14, 2024

10:00 am - 11:00 am
**Vicky Smith -
Batty about Bats!**

11:30 am - 12:30 pm
**Jimmy Stiles -
Live Reptiles**

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm
**Dr. James B. McClintock -
Lost Antarctica**

3:00 pm - 4:00 pm
**Jimmy Stiles -
Live Reptiles**

ALL TIMES CENTRAL STANDARD TIME



207 Church Street, Northeast
Decatur, Alabama

carnegiearts.org   256-341-0562



FESTIVAL OF THE CRANES

See the exhibit, "Tread Softly," by Timothy Joe on display at the Carnegie Visual Arts Center, January 9th-February 17th. This exhibit is a collection of various subject matter with stories collected from Timothy's hometown of Greensboro, Alabama to Florence, Italy. Please lend them your ear as they tell you their story "Tread Softly."

Festival of the Cranes Special Gallery Hours:

Thursday & Friday, 10:00 am-5:00 pm
Saturday, 10:00 am-3:00 pm
Sunday, 11:00 am-3:00 pm



Intro to Gouache Workshop with Timothy Joe, Saturday, Jan 14th, 10:00-12:00 am. Pre-registration required due to limited space. Sign up at carnegiearts.org/events Cost: \$100.



cook museum
of NATURAL SCIENCE

133 4th Avenue, Decatur, AL
cookmuseum.org

Cook Museum

SATURDAY
January 13, 2024
0:00 am - 0:00 am
event name

SUNDAY
January 14, 2024
0:00 am - 0:00 am
event name

No Events on Website

ALL TIMES CENTRAL STANDARD TIME



CARNEGIE
VISUAL ARTS CENTER

207 Church Street NE, Decatur, AL
carnegiearts.org

Carnegie Visual Arts Center

SATURDAY
January 13, 2024
10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Exhibit "Tread Softly" by
Timothy Joe on display from
January 9th - February 17th

SUNDAY
January 14, 2024
10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Introduction to Gouache
Workshop by Timothy Joe
Pre-registration required.
Cost: \$100

11:00 am - 3:00 pm
Exhibit "Tread Softly" by
Timothy Joe on display from
January 9th - February 17th

ALL TIMES CENTRAL STANDARD TIME



Decatur Public Library

Decatur Public Library will host free children's activities during the festival

504 Cherry Street NE, Decatur, AL
mydpl.org/cranes

FRIDAY

January 12, 2024

3:30 pm

**Story Time with Hope,
the International Crane
Mascot at Delano Park**

SATURDAY

January 13, 2024

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Kid's Activities

*Assorted crafts/activities,
photo opportunity, scavenger
hunt, and goodie bags for kids 12
and under (while supplies last)!*

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

**Build a Crane Puppet!
with Tsering Choedron from
Green Feather Foundation**

11:00 am - 11:45 am

**Free Meet & Greet with Hope -
Photo opportunity with the mas-
cot for the International Crane
Foundation**

12:00 pm - Community Room

Decatur Artist Terry Conner
*His wildlife artwork in display
cases Jan. 2 - Jan. 30*

2:00 pm - Community Room

**Wild Discoveries!
with Heather Montgomery,
children's book author -
Touch bones, pelts, and body
parts to jumpstart your curiosity
for nature exploration**

SUNDAY

January 14, 2024

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Kid's Activities

*Assorted crafts/activities,
photo opportunity, scavenger
hunt, and goodie bags for kids 12
and under (while supplies last)!*

10:00 am - 1:30 pm

**Build a Crane Puppet!
with Tsering Choedron from
Green Feather Foundation**

11:00 am - 11:45 am

**Free Meet & Greet with Hope -
Photo opportunity with the mas-
cot for the International Crane
Foundation**

12:00 pm - Community Room

**Wild Discoveries!
with Heather Montgomery,
children's book author -
Touch bones, pelts, and body
parts to jumpstart your curiosity
for nature exploration**

2:00 pm - Community Room

**Stephanie Schmidt -
International Crane
Foundation**
*Whooping Cranes in the
Eastern Population*

ALL TIMES CENTRAL STANDARD TIME



FULL BOARD STALLS AVAILABLE!



Cotton Meadows Farm



We are an upscale, full-service boarding facility which boasts a large indoor arena with mirrors and large ceiling fans, a large outdoor stadium ring, a lighted outdoor dressage arena, horse-friendly stalls with

rubber mats & fans, large derby field with jumps up to novice height, and much more!

Our facility is geared towards eventing and dressage with regular clinics with local trainers, ample turn out over 75 acres with multiple turn out options and quality hay and grain provided.

We are in north Alabama, convenient to Huntsville, Madison, and Athens and owned and operated by Debi and Kevin Crowley. Debi is a lifelong equestrian having competed in eventing through the Advanced level and having earned her USDF gold medal in dressage. The staff at CMF are also experienced equestrians as well as courteous and helpful.



Please visit us on Facebook.

For more info or a tour please text or call Debi at 256-679-3348



Cotton Meadows Farm

26846 Lambert Road, Elkmont, AL
cottonmeadowsfarm@gmail.com

574746-1

González Painting LLC

INTERIOR • EXTERIOR

256.257.2071

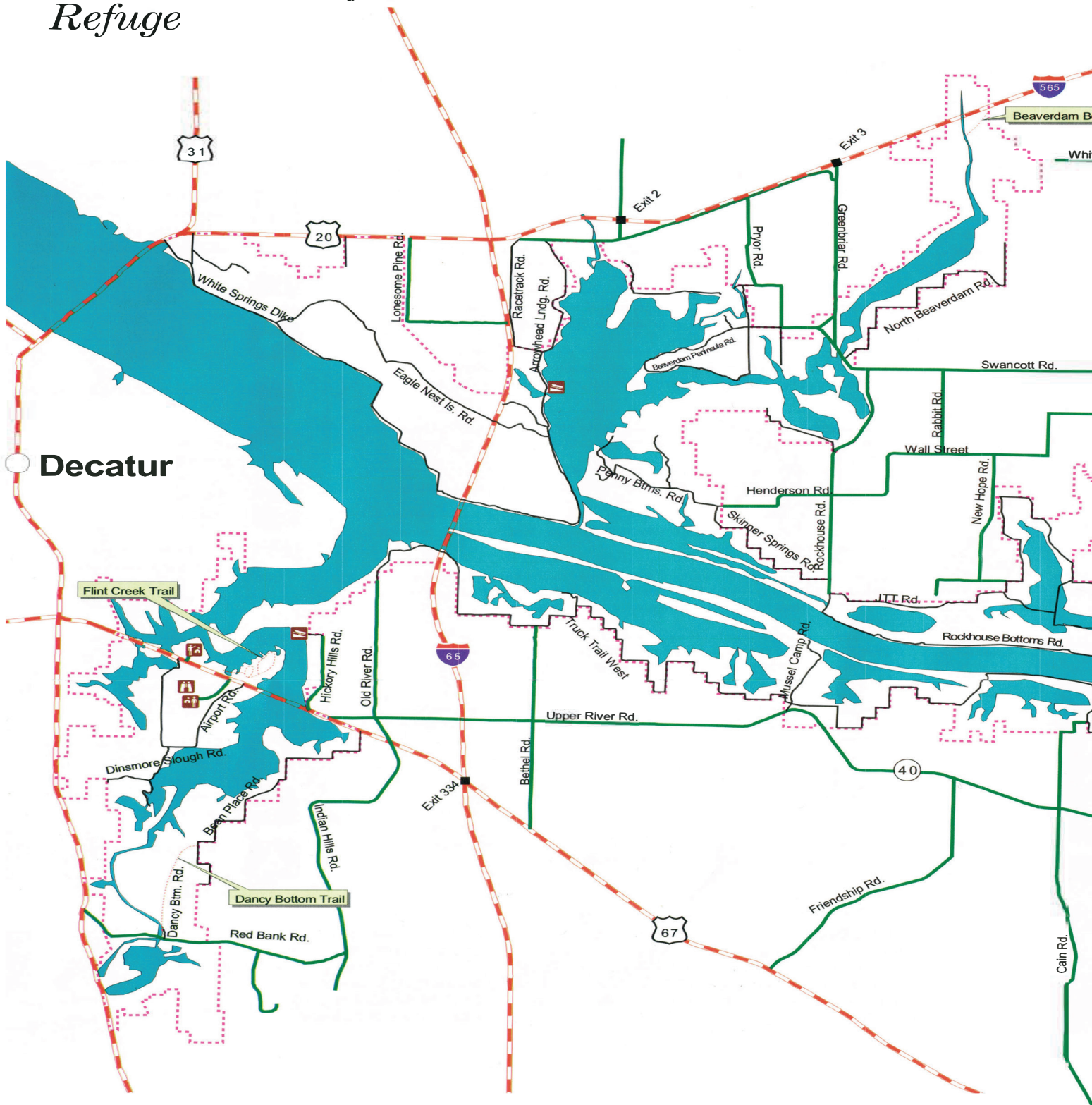


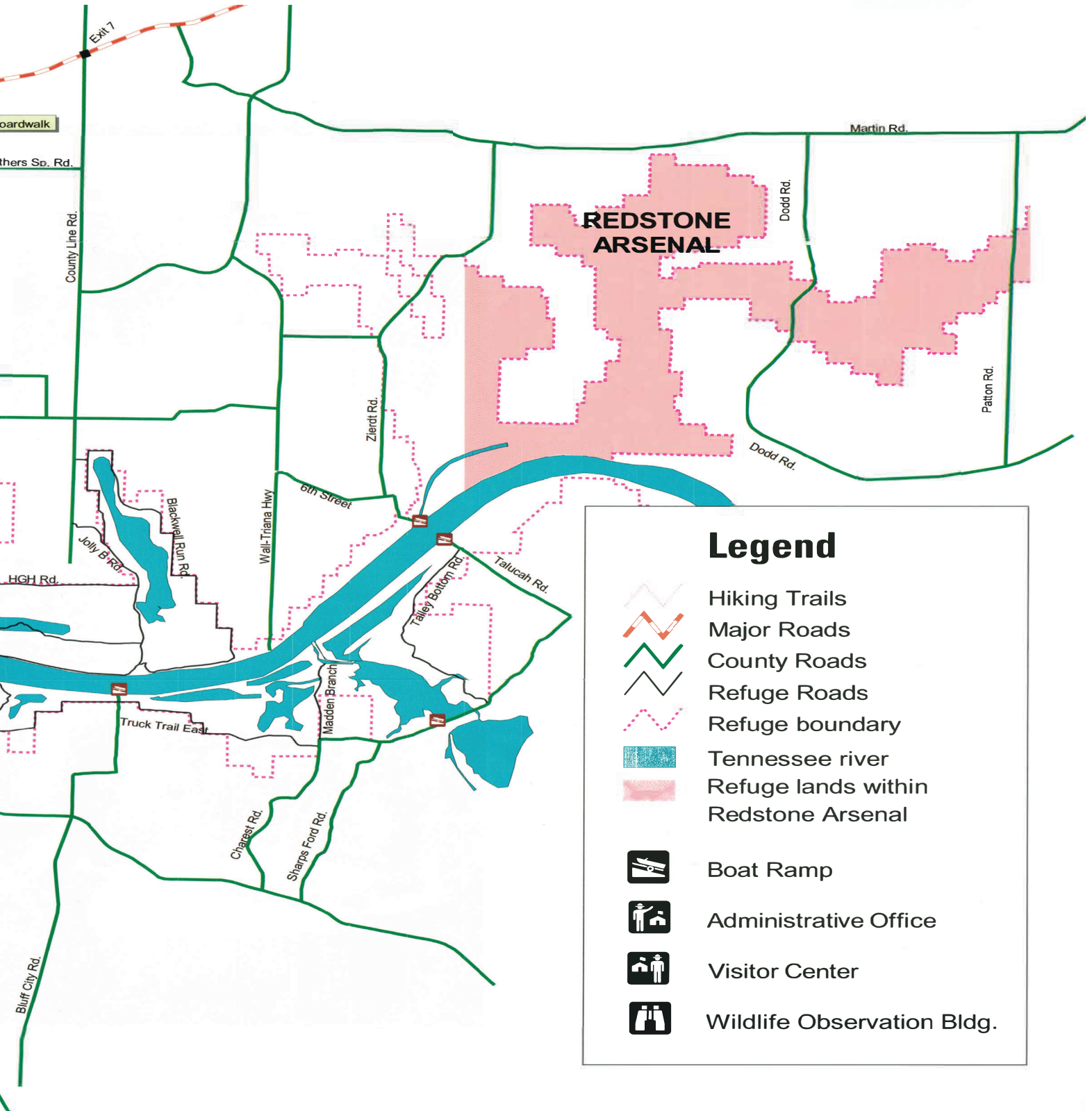
LICENSED & INSURED
FREE ESTIMATES

573010-1

Wheeler

National Wildlife Refuge





WHEELER NWR SATELLITE REFUGES

We are justifiably proud of “our” refuge, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge is Alabama’s biggest national wildlife refuge at 35,000 acres, it has the largest concentration of winter waterfowl in the state and it’s the best place in Alabama to spot endangered whooping cranes, but the Wheeler NWR staff also manages six other refuges that have plenty to boast about too.

Here’s a quick look at the other national wildlife refuges managed by Wheeler NWR. When you get a chance give them a visit.

Key Cave NWR. Located near Florence, Key Cave NWR was established to protect critical habitat for two species of blind crayfish and the endangered Alabama cavefish, a small, blind fish found nowhere else in the world. It is also an important brooding site for up to 40,000 endangered gray bats. The cave is closed to the public to safeguard

the rare inhabitants but the fields in the refuge’s 1060 acres are ideal for spotting a variety of birds, including northern harriers, grasshopper sparrows, dickcissels, short-eared owls, loggerhead shrikes and northern bobwhites. The Refuge has 2.5 miles of roads/trails for hiking and biking and deer and small game hunting are permitted.

Fern Cave NWR. This 199 acre refuge near Gurley, in Jackson County, protects federally endangered gray and Indiana bats. Fern Cave contains the largest wintering colony of gray bats in the United States, more than one million bats hibernate there. Cave fish, cave crayfish, and cave salamanders live in the vast subterranean maze that lies under the surface of the refuge. The forested surface acreage hosts the endangered American hart’s-tongue fern, from which the cave gets its name. The cave is closed to the public and the property’s

remote location makes it difficult to access.

Sauta Cave NWR. Sauta Cave and its surrounding 264 acres, located in Jackson County, protect the habitat of endangered gray and Indiana bats. Sauta Cave has an interesting history; it was used at various times as a saltpeter mine during the Civil War, a nightclub during prohibition in the 1920s, and a fallout shelter during the 1960s. During the months of June, July, and August, one of nature’s most spectacular events occurs here every evening. At dusk, 200,000-400,000 bats leave the cave to begin their nightly foraging. The cave is gated and closed to the public to ensure the health of the bats but you can view the bat emergence from a wildlife viewing platform in front of the cave.

Mountain Longleaf NWR. This 9000-acre refuge near Anniston was established in 2003 on the grounds of

the former Fort McClellan Army base after the military installation was closed. The refuge preserves old-growth longleaf pine forests, which normally are found only in the Coastal Plain. The limited access to the Army base and frequent fires from artillery have allowed a remnant of the original longleaf pine forest to thrive on the slopes of the refuge’s Choccolocco Mountain, one of the highest ridges in Alabama at 2,063 feet. The refuge has eighteen miles of hiking trails and hunting is permitted.

Watercress Darter NWR. Alabama’s smallest NWR, at 24 acres, is located near Bessemer in Jefferson County and was established to protect the endangered watercress darter, a small, colorful fish that measures about two inches in length. Thomas Spring, a quarter-acre pond, is one of only a handful of springs in central Alabama where the fish was known to exist. The fed-

eral government constructed a second pond on the site in 1983 to provide additional habitat. In 1988, 100 watercress darters were relocated from Thomas Spring into this newly constructed pond, resulting in the establishment of a second successful population.

Cahaba River NWR. This refuge, located near West Blocton, Bibb County, hosts the largest known stand of the rare and showy Cahaba lily. This beautiful plant blooms in May and the annual Cahaba Lily Festival in late May draws thousands of visitors to view the spec-

tacle. Established in 2002 to protect a unique section of the Cahaba River and the land adjacent to it, the refuge currently encompasses more than 3600 acres and 3.5 miles of river. The refuge is also home to stands of native longleaf pine, Alabama's official state tree.

The two-mile long Piper Trail follows an old railroad bed along the river and is an easy hike.



WHEELER IMPROVEMENTS AND UPGRADES

The past two years have been exciting times at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge! In 2018 the refuge received 5.4 million dollars of federal appropriations for improvements and upgrades. Since that time there has been a flurry of activity on the refuge in improving existing infrastructure and adding new features.

This almost three year effort culminated in the completion of the last facet of the project—the opening of our upgraded Visitor Center in December 2023. The Visitor Center was totally updated with new static displays, interactive visitor interface points, state-of-the-art visual capabilities in an updated

auditorium, digital display monitors, an enlarged observation area, a larger gift shop and upgraded staff offices and facilities.

In the Visitor Center complex area the existing Observation Building had much needed structural and mechanical work done, including improved drainage and some new windows. A new outdoor classroom that will provide additional educational space for visiting groups was constructed just across the parking lot south of the Visitor Center and a new photo blind was built on the edge of the open field a short walk from the Visitor Center.

In the Dancy Bottoms area of the refuge, a new kayak launch ramp and expanded parking lot were added and a 1400-foot long boardwalk was constructed across a portion of Dancy Bottoms, opening up the trail that was often impassable due to frequent flooding.

A new 5.5 mile hiking and biking trail was added near the Visitor Center entrance road that meanders through a mixed hardwood forest to Dinsmore Slough. A new road and parking lot were constructed to provide access to the trail.

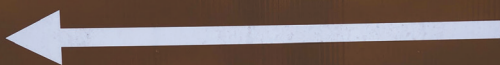
The existing boardwalk across an arm of Flint Creek in the Flint Creek Day Use

Area was renovated as was the boardwalk at Beaver-dam swamp.

These improvements significantly enhance visitor amenities at the refuge. Come on out and experience the new recreation opportunities!

Improvement and upgrade photos continued on page 22.

HIKING & BICYCLING TRAIL



- Open daylight hours only
- Pedestrians and bicycles only
- Dogs must be on leash
- No horses permitted
- No motorized vehicles (authorized e-bikes allowed)







Morgan Price

CANDY COMPANY

1735 Sixth Ave SE • 256-350-2992
Monday-Friday 10-5, Saturday 10-2
OPEN SATURDAY



Today, Morgan Price Candy ships candy to all parts of the country as well as provides a fun place to visit and shop when visiting North Alabama. Our customers look to us for our famous English toffee, pralines, fine chocolates and other sweet treats. We look forward to serving you our specialty candies with the same old fashioned service as was begun over 26 years ago!



575497-1

AMANDA G. SCOTT, CPA

Revenue Commissioner - Morgan County, Alabama



The Revenue Commissioner is elected by the people of Morgan County for a six year term and is responsible for the mapping, appraising, assessing, and collecting of ad valorem taxes as levied by the government. The office collects approximately 62 million dollars annually.

Since my election in 1996, I have made every effort to serve you and simplify the process of ad valorem property tax for the citizens of Morgan County. To accomplish this goal, our website offers online property tax data, tax maps, and online payment services to the public. We have satellite offices in Hartselle and Lacey's Spring for your convenience.

I appreciate the support and trust you have placed in me as Revenue Commissioner of Morgan County. It is my goal and privilege to continue to serve you, and I look forward to every opportunity to make a difference for you and Morgan County.

Thank you,

HOW TO CONTACT US

Appraisal Division
Assessment Division
Collection Division

256-351-4694
256-351-4690
256-351-4691

Mapping Division
Business Personal Property
Board of Equalization

256-351-4698
256-351-4862
256-351-4674

Phone: 256-351-4690 Fax: 256-351-4699 • ascott@co.morgan.al.us
Monday - Friday 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.

Mailing Address
Amanda G. Scott, CPA
Revenue Commissioner
P.O. Box 696
Decatur, AL 35602

Morgan County Courthouse
302 Lee Street, NE
Second Floor
Decatur, AL 35601

Hartselle Satellite Office
241 Highway 31, SW
Crestwood Shopping Center
Suite 10
Hartselle, AL 35640

Lacey's Spring Satellite Office
423 Union Hill Road
Somerville, AL 35670
Mon.-Thurs. 6:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

AGE 65 OR OLDER

If you are 65 years of age or disabled, you may qualify for an exemption which will result in a decrease of your property tax. Please call our office for further information.

www.morgancountyrevenue.com



I'M GOING OUTDOORS RESOLUTION FOR THE ENTIRE YEAR

By: Mary Ratliff - President
of Wheeler Wildlife Refuge
Association

How neat would it be if our federal government issued EcoGold tokens that anyone could purchase to help fund the environmental programs of your choice. While we are waiting for that development, how about we all try taking advantage of what our state and local government agencies offer our citizens through programs held in our parks, forests, and refuge system. Usually, the admission fee is just showing up! Start off your new year by attending our FOC, then mosey over to Eagle Awareness, and continue to uphold your "I'm going

outdoors" resolution for the entire year. I guarantee you will reap endless benefits – especially staying mentally and physically fit. Join them for the 38th Annual Eagle Awareness Weekends at Lake Guntersville State Park from January 19th - 21st. This weekend will be filled with lots of chances to see bald eagles in the wild. <https://www.alapark.com/EagleAwarenessWeekends>

For that reason alone, we are always delighted to team up with various environmental partners who are diligently working toward the same goal. Preserving, protecting, and now IMPROVING our sparse public lands for everyone's use

and benefit. Hardest part is we are all trying to fund these programs with limited donations and grants. By closely communicating with each other we are fine tuning our ability to share resources when we can. For instance, we asked one of our main presenters for FOC 2025, Lauren McGough (who learned to hunt with eagles in Mongolia and now rehabs injured raptors to hunt their own prey) to spend the week in Alabama and then present her programs at Eagle Awareness. How wonderful would it be to then have her appear at schools, civic groups, etc., while here. Bringing environmental awareness to the public is an ongoing educational pro-

cess, and we've found the best way to accomplish this goal is through family-oriented programs presented in an entertaining manner.

This year the City of Priceville has donated the use of their new Event Center to house some of our partners booths which are all directly related to providing an enhanced outdoor experience. Please be sure to check out our vendors here, don't miss our display of curated high school art, and if you're wanting to sit awhile, view short documentaries developed by Southern Exposure Films. Can't wait to see you all at this year's FOC!

Oil, Lube, and Filter Service

featuring Havoline motor oil
(other major brands available)
NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY



Oil change includes a 16-point **STAR SERVICE CHECKLIST**

Havoline
xpress lube

1202 Highway 31 NW, Hartselle, AL 35640
(256) 751-1050

117 2nd Avenue SW
Cullman, AL 35055
(256) 739-5888

573424-1



Follow us on Facebook



SHARPLEY
FUNERAL HOME

"Where Service is an Everlasting Memory"

410 Railroad Street NW, Decatur
sharpleyfuneralhome.com



Review Us



Michell Sharpley-McCarver

574905-1

**Advanced
cancer care.**

Close to home.



CCI CLEARVIEW
CANCER INSTITUTE

clearviewcancer.com
256-705-4224



Saint Ann Catholic School

*Cultivating students' knowledge of what is true,
good, and beautiful, Saint Ann Catholic School
provides high-quality academics and
faith formation through classical liberal arts.*

What's Great about Saint Ann

- Staff is full of highly qualified professionals trained in classical education instruction.
- Teachers implement a Christian-based mission
- Nationally recognized through state accreditation
- Class sizes average 9 students to every teacher from preK3-8th grade.
- We have competitive tuition rates compared to other local private schools.
- We encourage members of all faiths to join our school.

*Now Accepting Applications
for grades PreK-8*



Preview our school at www.saintanndecatur.org • Call 256-353-6543 today to schedule a tour.

575248-1



PRICEVILLE

Crossroads of North Alabama

We define Southern hospitality with a community that's incredibly close - to friends and visitors alike.



LIVE VISIT WORK



Find out more at cityofpriceville.com





HISTORY OF THE FESTIVAL OF THE CRANES

The Festival of the Cranes has come a long way in a short period of time, mostly due to those fabulous whooping cranes deciding they really like the fields around the Visitor Center! No where else in the country can you walk 200 yards to a heated building with seats and spotting scopes and view the tallest bird and one of the most endangered birds in North America.

The first whooping cranes appeared on the refuge in 2005 and generally stayed in remote refuge locations. In 2010 the whooping cranes started showing up in front of the Observation Building, presenting the refuge with an opportunity to showcase these special

birds. The refuge had initiated a program called “Crane Watch” in December 2009 to showcase the thousands of Sandhill cranes visible from the Visitor Center and Observation Building. With the ever-increasing number of both Sandhill and Whooping cranes, we decided to expand the program and initiated the first Festival of the Cranes.

With an initial donation from Toray, Inc we kicked off the first festival in January, 2013. The festival was an immediate success and attracted almost 1000 attendees. Our program lineup included storyteller Brian “Fox” Ellis as John James Audubon, Raptor Trek! live birds of prey presented by

the Alabama 4-H Center and the Operation Migration film “Hope Takes Wing”.

Buoyed by the success of the inaugural festival we expanded our program offerings and the next year on January 11, 2014 we had 2,500 visitors to our one-day event. 6,920 total visitors in January. Featured programs were Auburn University’s Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey and an International Crane Foundation presentation with Joan Garland.

Our third festival in 2015 attracted 2,500 visitors from ten different states and three foreign countries. Brian “Fox” Ellis as John James Audubon, Auburn University’s

Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey and the Operation Migration film “Hope Takes Wing” were return presenters. This was also the first year for the Festival of the Cranes Art Exhibit.

In 2016 we expanded the event to two days, Saturday and Sunday, January 9 & 10, 2016 and had 3,000 visitors. Presenters included: Joe Wiegand as Theodore Roosevelt, Auburn University’s Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey, ICF Co-Founder George Archibald, Film Premiere of “The Power of One Voice: A 50-year Perspective on the Life of Rachel Carson”, a Nature Photography Workshop, Art Exhibit and Children’s Activities.

Attendance substantially increased in 2017 as awareness of the event spread and we had January 4,200 visitors. There were visitors from 22 states and five foreign countries. Brian “Fox” Ellis made his third festival appearance as John James Audubon & Meriwether Lewis, Auburn University’s Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey returned and we added a concert and workshops with Erica Wheeler. The International Crane Foundation presented a program and we offered birding nature walks, an art exhibit and children’s activities.

Weather affected our attendance in the following year as a cold and drizzly weekend reduced attendance to 3000. We added the Princess Theatre as an additional venue to accommodate the number of visitors and provided shuttles between downtown and the refuge. Popular storyteller Brian “Fox” Ellis was back again as John James Audubon & Meriwether Lewis, along with Auburn University’s Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey. A photography workshop with David Akoubian, Musician/Composer Michael Graham Allen, and a George Lee video premier were added to our recurring birding nature walks, art exhibit and children’s activities.

Our seventh festival 2019 recorded 5,721 visitors for the expanded 4-day event. Part of the expanded event included a Friday night concert with John Paul White at

the Princess Theatre, Journey of the Whooping Crane film premier with producer Rhett Turner at the Alabama Center for the Arts, IBEX Puppetry “Celebration of Flight”, Auburn University’s Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey, a photography workshop with David Akoubian, Musician/Composer Michael Graham Allen, Joe Wiegand as Theodore Roosevelt, Auburn University’s Southeastern Raptor Center live birds of prey and the Discovering Alabama Whooping Crane Video with Doug Phillips.

The 2020 festival was interrupted due to severe thunderstorms and tornado warnings for the area on Saturday. Power was lost to the Visitor Center at noon on Saturday and as a consequence visitor numbers dropped to 2500. Our Friday concert featured Kathy Mattea at the Princess Theatre. Presenters included the IBEX Puppetry show, Paul Bannick, yet another appearance by then popular Brian “Fox” Ellis, a Dr. John Dindo presentation Coastal Birds and Dr. Doug Phillips with Discovering Alabama.

Our 2021 festival was a very limited one day event due to the COVID outbreak. The Visitor Center and Observation Building were closed to the public but the refuge grounds were open. Hundreds of people were able to view the cranes from around the Visitor Center as well as from two newly constructed blinds overlooking the adjacent fields. All

the presentations took place at the Princess Theatre on Saturday. Strict protocols were followed including social distancing, cleaning between presentations and masks requirements. Two of the scheduled presenters, Lauren McGough and Paul Bannick, provided video presentations. The AU Southeastern Raptor program was a live presentation. Musician Gareth also presented live. Total numbers for the one day event were 500.

For our tenth annual festival on January 14-16, 2022 a stellar list of presenters welcomed COVID weary visitors. John Paul White returned for the Friday night concert at the Princess Theatre. President Theodore Roosevelt, Joe Wiegand returned for his third FOC. The Auburn University-SE Raptor Center also returned for their ninth FOC appearance. A special Saturday night film premiered at the Princess Theatre. “OVERLAND” featured three falconers from different parts of the world. The director/producers were on hand for a question and answer session. Lauren McGough, one of the featured falconers and Dr. Richard Beilfuss, President and CEO of the International Crane Foundation presented both days. Author/Photographer Paul Bannick prerecorded presentations were shown at the Princess. New additions to the presenter lineup included birder Christopher Joe and artist brother Timothy Joe. Our other partner venues - Alabama Center for the Arts, Carnegie Center,

Cook Museum, Decatur Public Library and the Old State Bank, offered additional events for the whole family. Total attendance for the three day event was 3550.

The 2023 annual festival on January 13-15 was our biggest one yet! We kicked off the festival with a Friday night concert by the popular group Three on a String at the Princess Theater. Christopher Joe and brother Timothy Joe returned. Richard Beilfuss returned, along with George Archibald from the International Crane Foundation. New presenters included herpetologist Jimmy Stiles, photographer Andrew Orr who presented programs about condors and Antarctica, Joe Duff who pioneered ultralight aircraft led migration of whooping cranes with Operation Migration and Steve Trash’s Totally Rockin’ Science Show. Wings to Soar joined us for their live raptor show. The Alabama Center for the Arts, Carnegie Center, Cook Museum, Decatur Public Library and the Old State Bank joined us in offering additional events for the whole family. The 2023 festival was the largest ever with over 6500 visitors enjoying the weekend.

We are excited to see you at our eleventh annual Festival of the Cranes on January 12-14!



WE'RE HIRING!

Visit the Athens State University
ONLINE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM
to search and apply for open positions!



JOBS.ATHENS.EDU

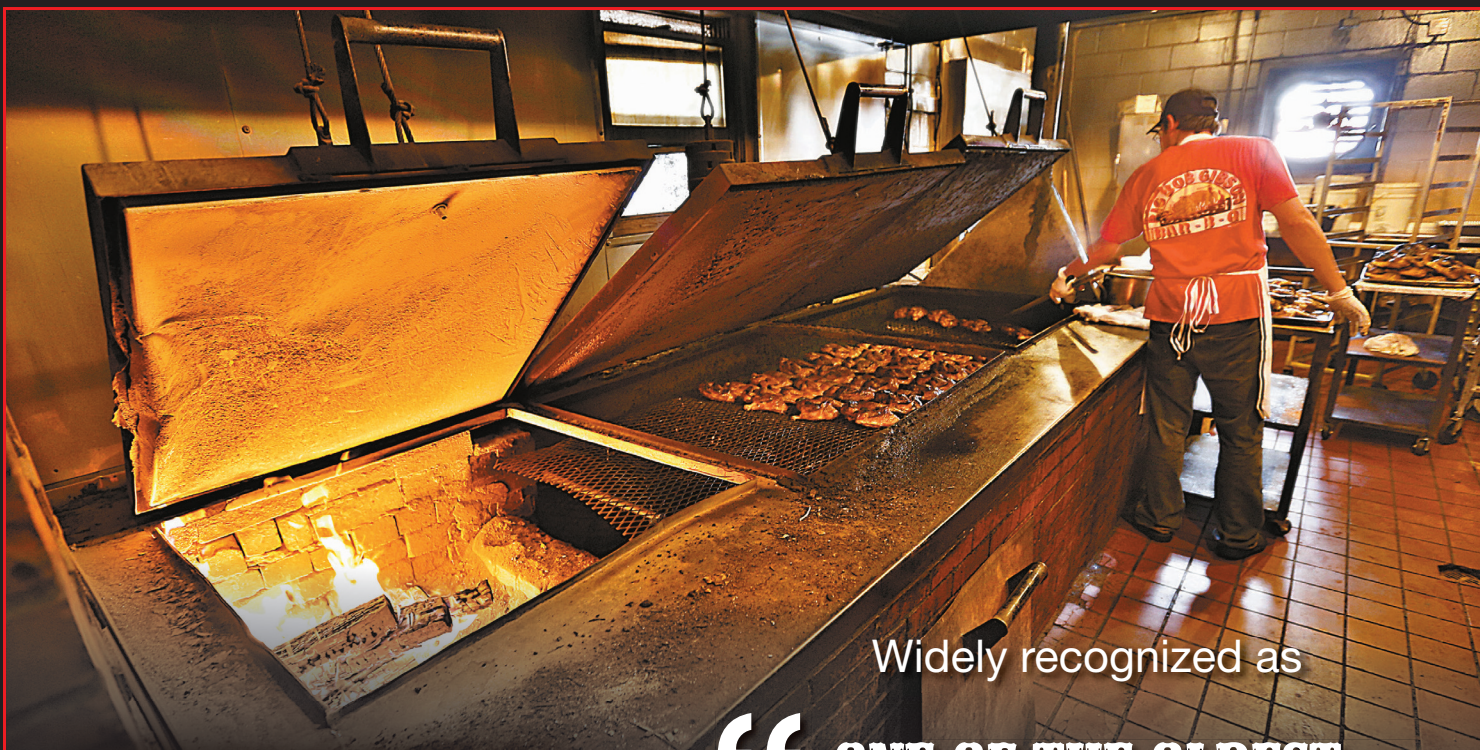


*Please scan with your
smartphone camera:*



ATHENS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Office of Human Resources • (256) 216-3333 • employment@athens.edu



Widely recognized as

“ ONE OF THE OLDEST
AND MOST PRESTIGIOUS
BARBECUE RESTAURANTS
IN THE WORLD ”



Big Bob Gibson Bar-B-Q was
founded in Decatur, AL in 1925.



Decatur Locations

OPEN ON SUNDAYS

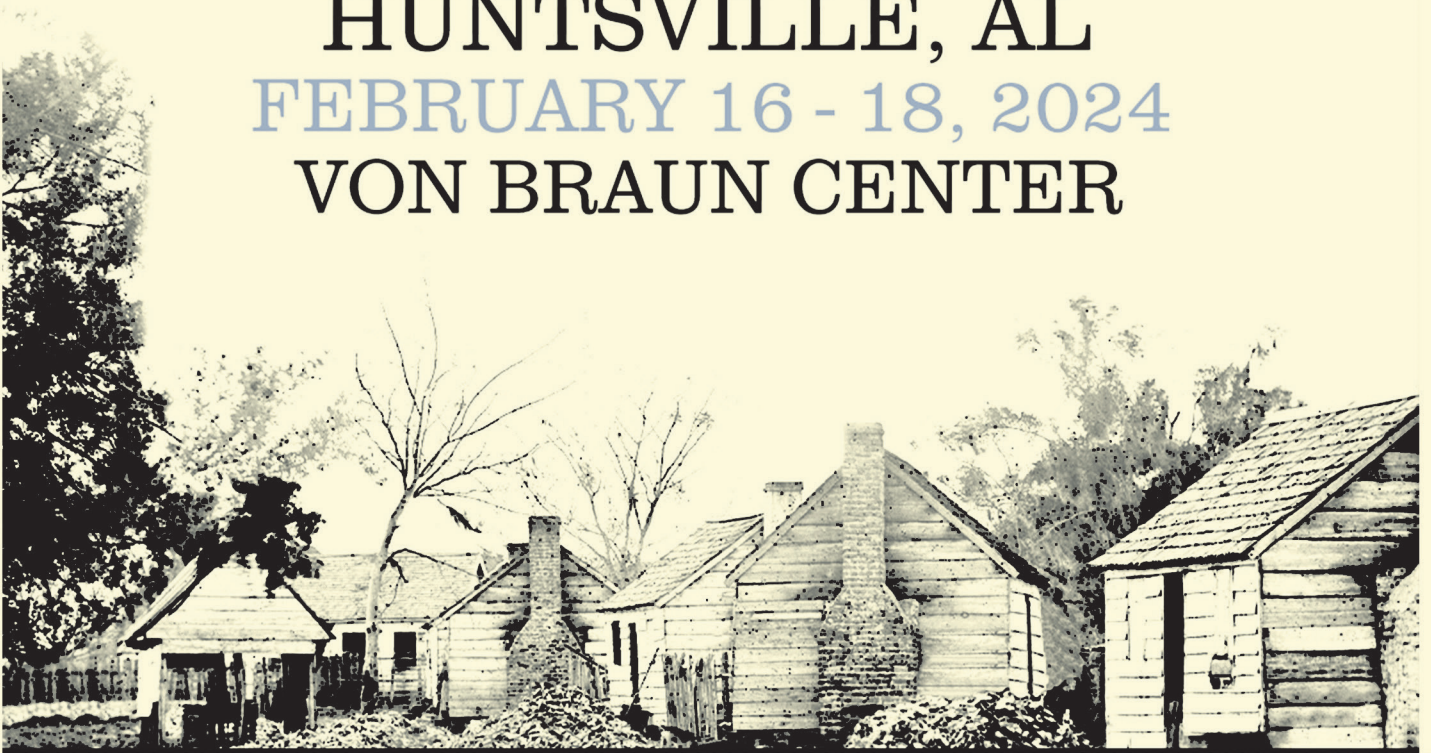
1715 6th Avenue SE (US Hwy 31)
256-350-6969
7-days 9:30 am - 8:15 pm
Drive-thru 9:30 am - 8:30 pm

2520 Danville Road, SW
256-350-0404
Mon-Sat 9:30 am - 8:15 pm
Drive-thru 9:30 am - 8:30 pm



ALL RISE.

HUNTSVILLE, AL
FEBRUARY 16 - 18, 2024
VON BRAUN CENTER



RICHARD THOMAS is ATTICUS FINCH in

HARPER LEE'S

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

A new play by AARON SORKIN Directed by BARTLETT SHER

BROADWAYTHEATRELEAGUE.ORG

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

SMITH THORNTON
ADVISORS



Alabama
Colon &
Gastro, P.C.

mix96.9

