

CURRENTS

Newsletter of Flint River Conservation Association

<http://www.flintriverconservation.org>

February 2008

First FRCA Meeting of 2008: Tuesday, February 19th

Our meetings have changed to meet the needs of our community and are now held on the third Tuesday of each month. This change includes our board meetings which are open to our members and the public at large.

Our February meeting will be held in downtown Huntsville's City Engineering Building 320 Fountain Circle SE at **6:30pm on Tuesday, February 19th**. Tentatively scheduled to speak is Mr. Jim Grassiano, a chief of the Municipal Section of ADEM's Water Division. From the Montgomery office, Mr. Grassiano will be able to provide insight on water quality and sewage discharge regulations. Currently there are several sewage outlets proposed for construction on our Flint River that have been brought to our member's attention. We look forward to his insights and suggestions, and hope that you will come out for a great evening. This is a potluck event, so please bring a dish (with utensil) to share with the group.

Currents needs a new editor

Do you like writing, editing, and helping your favorite organization, FRCA? We are looking for a new editor and coordinator for the Currents newsletter. This talented individual will work with the FRCA board in developing article ideas and organizing the distribution of the newsletter 6 times per year. The time commitment is very small, but the rewards are great! If you or someone you know would be interested in this position, please contact Allison Bohlman, Abnailed@hotmail.com or 256-656-3334 for more information.

Slackwater Darter activities set for March 15th

Jennifer Schade, our Slackwater Darter intern, recently finished the habitat probability maps of breeding and non-breeding sites in the Flint River watershed. The finished progress report was submitted to the World Wildlife Fund on January 1, 2008. You can find a copy of the report on our website, flintriverconservation.org. Mark your calendars now! The Slackwater darter project is going to the field and we want you to join us on Saturday, March 15th! There will be a free short workshop about the Slackwater darter's habitat and then we will head out to the field to evaluate the potential habitat sites. This will be a great hands-on experience for members to participate in this WWF grant. We plan to have more workshops this spring, so keep a watch out for additional bulletins.

Calling all Flint River photographers!

Do you have pictures of the Flint River or FRCA activities? If you do, please send them to our new web coordinator so she can post them on the FRCA web page. We want to make sure everyone knows what a beautiful river the Flint is, and also how much fun we have on our river cleanups, AWW workshops, and other events. If you have some photos you'd like to share, please email them to Jennifer Pinkley at jpinkley@mchsi.com. Don't worry about sending big files, she has a cable modem!

River Guardian Awards

At our Christmas annual meeting, FRCA awarded 3 members of the development community River Guardian Awards for their efforts to do Best Management Practices (BMP's) to control erosion. Our River Guardians have seen very little of good BMP's anywhere in Huntsville. These honorees put up sturdy silt fences to prevent mud from oozing off construction sites. Most developers use the fences, but they are often installed incorrectly and not maintained for the duration of construction activity, and sediment is the numero uno pollutant of our streams. FRCA hopes that those that get the awards will brag about it to the rest of the development community, so there will be the opportunity for dozens of awards at this December's meeting. The Board of FRCA hopes that all those that have been trained to look for both good and bad BMP's. We may be giving out some "most improved" awards to those developers that come around from their current practices of allowing tons of mud from moving from their home sites into nearby creeks and rivers.

Jeff Benton Homes, Kenneth McCrary of Smith Engineering, and Cove Storage Center owner Brad White received the Flint River Conservation Association's first-ever River Guardian awards for helping to protect wetlands and endangered species habitat. Jeff Benton Homes, one of the area's biggest subdivision developers, was honored for their work in the Liberty Park neighborhood off Taylor Road. Silt fences kept mud out of the adjacent 400 acre Goldsmith-Schiffman Wildlife Sanctuary, the company also gave the city about 10 acres of wetlands to add to the Sanctuary. They could have filled them in, and gone to a Wetland Mitigation Bank to buy credits to do it, but Jeff Benton chose not to.

McCrary, a licensed surveyor with Smith Engineering, was honored for keeping sediment runoff from the Grand Lakes subdivision out of Muddy Cave, one of the last remaining habitats for the endangered Alabama Cave Shrimp. McCrary is in charge of inspecting the silt fences at Grand Lakes, being built off Green Cove Road in south Huntsville. The rare shrimp are very small and restricted to small pools inside the few caves that constitute their habitat. Runoff loaded with sediment would smother the population in Muddy Cave. Dick Holloway and Gene Sapp, the actual developers of this property, will receive awards for eliminating several home sites to help protect the cave.

During construction of his storage business on Taylor Lane and US 431, Brad White planted grass to keep loose soil from washing into a nearby wetland area. He later installed sod to further limit runoff. One hardly ever sees developers, whether commercial like Brad White or in subdivisions, as in Benton, Sapp, and Holloway, plant grass seed or use hydroseeding, but it is the best thing to do to stabilize the soil, aside from leaving areas green until they need to be developed.

Muddier waters ahead

January's rainfall for Huntsville, AL was barely over 3.5 inches total, 2 inches short of our average monthly rainfall of 5.52 inches. While every drop is welcome during the month of February, we should remember that this 100 year drought is not simply solved by a few rainstorms. Intense rain events produce a significant volume of water, but not all of it is restored to our depleted water table. Short heavy rains do not soak into the land very well, instead the water flows over the land and into the nearby culvert or local stream. Rain falling on impervious surfaces (e.g. concrete, asphalt, roofs) is channeled and often diverted away from low lying areas and wetlands. Our stream levels may look temporarily higher after a heavy rainfall, but after a week, the stream will recede to its low levels once again.

Adding to our water woes is that the milky chocolate color that our streams become! There is too much sediment set loose into our streams! The level of turbidity in our streams after heavy storms costs us money for our municipal water to be filtered. Oftentimes, the municipal drawing stations will

simply shut down as a result of too much sediment in the water. The aquatic life in our local streams are choking on the sediments flowing in our streams for days at a time. We do a great disservice to our natural treasures by passively overlooking our muddy waters. Take the proper action! Have discussions with your neighbors to educate them on the importance of clean water. Plant grasses, native shrubs, and trees alongside your creeks! Report those silt fences flapping in the wind in that construction zone to ADEM. Conserve water in your own home as well, practice what you preach, dear friends. We may not be able to predict the future, but this drought will surely not end quickly or neatly.

The ADEM Decatur field office phone number is: (256) 353-1713.

“Friends of the Preserve and Sanctuary”—a new nonprofit

The kick off meeting for this new nonprofit, dedicated to preservation of the Hays Nature Preserve and Goldsmith-Schiffman Wildlife Sanctuary, was Tuesday January 29th between two heavy duty thunder storms. That probably kept many away, but we had about 150 people to hear Dr. Doug Phillips of Discovering Alabama speak about the need to protect areas along the Flint River, and a million other places in Alabama. The Friends Association is not actively fundraising to build the first of three buildings on these 1000 acres of bottomlands, a building which will serve as the Wetland and Watershed Education Center for north Alabama, and will have a meeting room for FRCA and other conservation organizations.

We will have our next event on April 5th, when Soos will lead a tour of both the Preserve and Sanctuary. If you are interested in this free event to introduce folks to these nature preserves, call Soos Weber at 427-5116 before March 31st.

Green Resource Center to open in Birmingham

Green Resource Center for Alabama will have an open house on Saturday, March 15th from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Homewood. The mission of the Green Resource Center for Alabama is to enlighten and educate the public, industry professionals and policymakers about design, construction and maintenance practices for environmentally sustainable living--inspiring them to action.

Established in Homewood, Alabama in 2007, the Green Resource Center for Alabama will be a place to explore and experience the many sensible solutions to lessen our impact on energy and the environment through the ways we live and work.

The goal of the center is to be a convener to bring together parties from business, non-profit, government, and the general public who are interested in adopting green practices into their operations, policies, and daily lives. The GRCA seeks to spark dialogue that will bring about positive change in helping to conserve our natural resources and improve Alabama's environment. The GRCA seeks to offer resources to the people of Alabama so that they may find sensible solutions for healthy and productive lives.

If you would like to carpool with Soos Weber that morning, please call her at 427-5116 Friday at COB. For more information on the Center, please visit their website at www.greenalabama.org.

PLEASE JOIN US!

The Flint River Conservation Association is a non-profit organization. Only by your memberships and donations can we do the many projects we do 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 Joe Imhoff, FRCA Membership Coordinator, at enviroman88@earthlink.net. 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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