

How Sustainable Tourism Creates Opportunities for Economic Development

Candace Beers, TMP

Director of Tourism and Community Development
UA Center for Economic Development

Sustainable Tourism
is a framework for
developing
Alabama's endowments
into
economic assets.

Waterfront Endowments

- Alabama has dozens of natural waterfronts, such as the Black Warrior River, Lake Martin, and of course GSOB.
- Travel and tourism is America's largest employer; beaches or waterfronts are the largest attractors of said tourism.
- Not only do waterfronts generate international tourism, but it gets local residents outside and into communities.
- Therefore, waterfront properties or assets function as endowments that a region, like Gulf Shores, must sustain in order to utilize.

Sources: Geology.com, "Alabama Lakes, Rivers, and Water Resources." <https://geology.com/lakes-rivers-water/alabama.shtml>

"Houston, J. (2018). The economic value of America's beaches – a 2018 update." *U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center*, https://asbpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Houston_Spring-2018_86_2_color.pdf

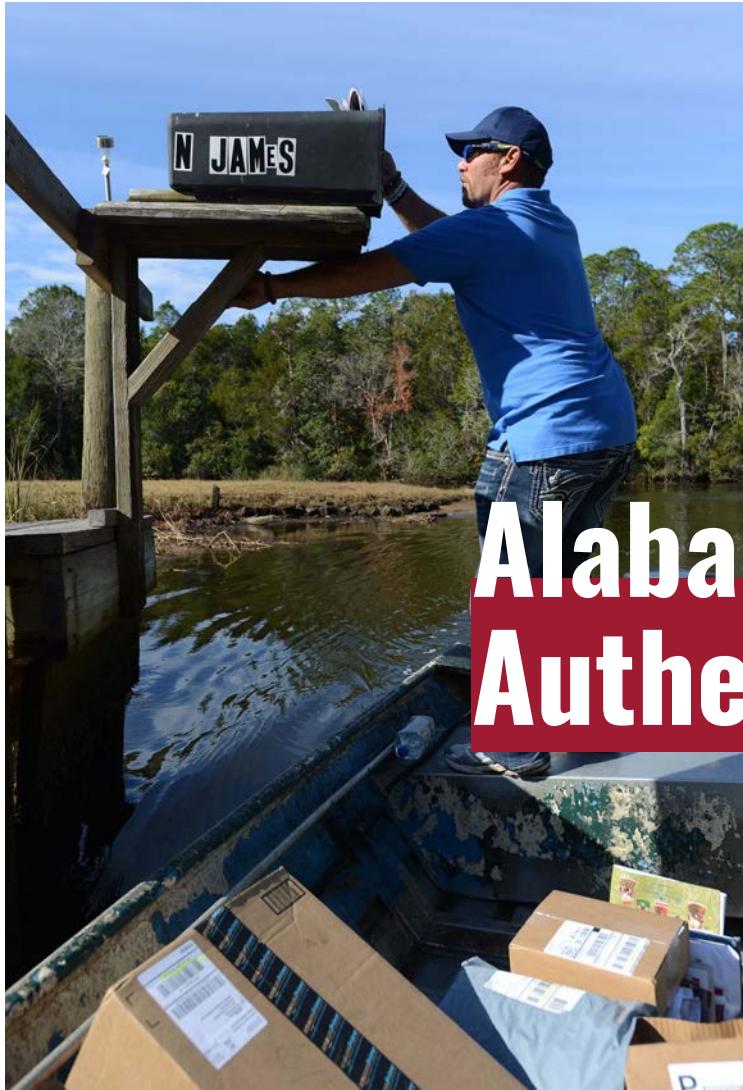
Endowments as Assets

- Developing these waterfront areas can boost economic development on a small and large scale.
- Small scale: tourism to these areas boosts revenue for local hotels, eateries, and tourist attractions.
- Large scale: developing waterfront areas leads to larger economic development in the form of lower unemployment rates for residents, the opportunity to focus on sustainable development, and boosting a city or state's economy.

Sources: Fleisher, C. (2019). "Betting on beach tourism". American Economic Association, <https://www.aeaweb.org/research/mexico-tourism-economic-development-service-manufacturing>

An aerial photograph of a crowded beach. The ocean is on the left, with several small boats. The beach is filled with people and many colorful umbrellas, mostly blue and purple. The text "Alabama has Unique and Beautiful Places." is overlaid on the image in a white font on a red background.

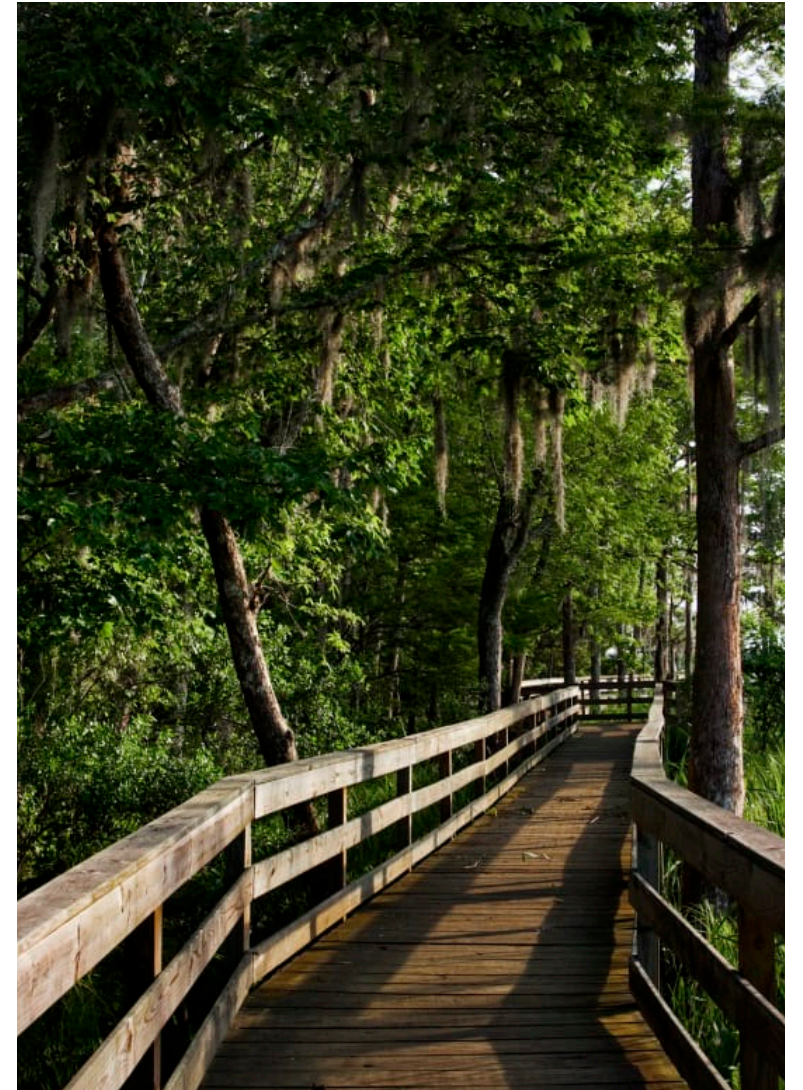
**Alabama has
Unique and Beautiful
Places.**



Magnolia Springs



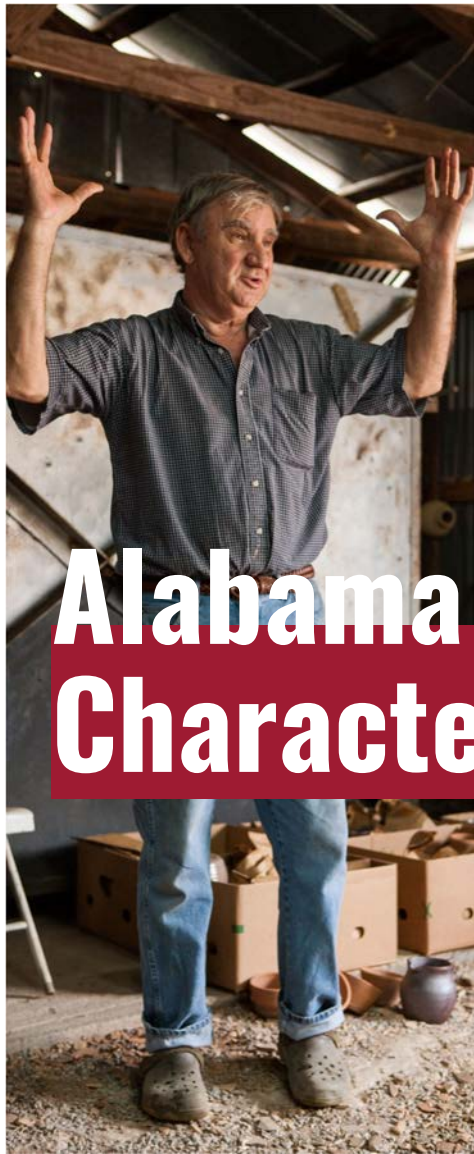
Coastal Arts Center



Blakely Historic Park



Scientists



Artists



Public Servants



Chefs



Leaders

Alabama has Characters.

**How is
Sustainable Tourism
different than other types of
tourism?**

Environment



**Sustainable
Tourism is
environmentally
friendly
operations and
facilities.**

Current Environmental Concerns

- Plastic pollution destroys soil and emits toxic gases when exposed to heat.
- The U.S. throws away the most plastic of any country, generating around 42 million metric tons per year.

Sources: Welden, N. (2020). "Chapter 8 – The environmental impacts of plastic pollution." *Plastic Waste and Recycling*, 195-222.
Millman, O. (2021). "Deluge of plastic waste: US is world's biggest plastic polluter." *The Guardian*,
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/01/deluge-of-plastic-waste-us-is-worlds-biggest-plastic-polluter>

Current Environmental Concerns

- Worldwide, at least 8.8m tons of plastic waste enters the marine environment each year, the equivalent of dumping a garbage truck filled with plastic into the ocean every single minute.
- The amount of plastic trash being dumped into oceans every year is expected to triple by 2040 meaning that the total amount in the ocean will be 600 million metric tons.
- Plastic impacts marine life by suffocating animals or tangling them in waste. It threatens marine diversity.

Sources: Parker, L. (2020). "Plastic trash flowing into the seas will nearly triple by 2040 without drastic action." *National Geographic*, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/plastic-trash-in-seas-will-nearly-triple-by-2040-if-nothing-done>

IUCN Issues Brief (2021). "Marine plastic pollution." <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/marine-plastic-pollution#:~:text=Impacts%20on%20marine%20ecosystems,stomachs%20become%20filled%20with%20plastic.>

Destination Development

- GSOB faces numerous environmental threats, including oil spills and leaks, stormwater and agricultural runoff, and industrial pollution.
- High volumes of tourists put the area at risk of higher marine damage and coastal erosion.
- Residents of GSOB may to see environmental harms firsthand and their health could potentially be impacted.

Sources: NCCOS (2014). "Marine Life in Gulf of Mexico Face Multiple Challenges." <https://coastalscience.noaa.gov/news/marine-life-gulf-mexico-face-multiple-challenges/#~:text=Additional%20environmental%20threats%20for%20this,oil%20spill%20in%20April%202010>.
National Library of Medicine (2015). "Climate Change and Health on the U.S. Gulf Coast: Public Health Adaptation is Needed to Address Future Risks"

Destination Development

- GSOB has some of the cleanest waters and beaches in the U.S.; water quality is routinely tested and reported to be of high quality.
- Yearly coastal cleanups keep beaches and waters clean and keeps community involved in conservation efforts.
- The Leave Only Footprints Campaign is an environmental stewardship program fostering responsible enjoyment of the coast and nature. Rules and regulations are thoroughly outlined and enforced.
- Small Town, Big Beach Vision 2025 For Sustainability

Sources: Brett/Robinson. "Gulf shores beaches – Among the cleanest in the US." <https://www.brett-robinson.com/gulf-shores-beaches-cleanest-in-us/>

City of Orange Beach: Alabama Coastal Cleanup - <https://www.orangebeachal.gov/departments/coastal-resources/alabama-coastal-cleanup>

City of Orange Beach: Leave Only Footprints Campaign - <https://www.orangebeachal.gov/departments/coastal-resources/leave-only-footprints-campaign>

Sustainability Practices - Restaurants

- Watchman's Seafood in Georgia focuses on sustainable seafood fishing in order to lessen their environmental impact while still providing quality food.
- Busboys and Poets in D.C. uses renewable energy throughout their restaurant, cutting their energy bill and curbing emissions.
- Woodberry Kitchen (MD) uses food grown on local farms in all of their recipes.
- Restaurants can focus on clean ingredients, clean energy, and community impact in their practices.

Sources: <https://spoonuniversity.com/lifestyle/the-10-most-sustainable-restaurants-in-america>

Sustainability Practices - Lodging

- Aria Las Vegas has earned six LEED gold certificates for its water efficiency and improvement in energy efficiency by over 30%.
- Proximity Hotel in North Carolina has over 70 sustainability practices, including lending guests bikes to explore Greensboro in an eco-friendly way.
- Hotel Terra in Wyoming boasts irrigation-free landscaping and expansive recycling measures throughout the property.
- Hotels, or any other lodging, can prioritize cutting back on water and energy use by pulling back on room service and other measures, and can invite guests to use eco-friendly options while vacationing.

Sources: <https://www.insider.com/guides/travel/best-eco-friendly-sustainable-hotels-us>

Sustainability Practices – Retailers

- Alabama Chanin was recognized as an exceptionally sustainable business. Their clothes are made with repurposed, recycled, and thrifted materials.
- Glenn Avenue Soap Company uses sustainable and clean ingredients in their soaps and bath products, keeping them free of chemicals and dyes.
- Green Door Company in Mississippi uses recycled materials to make furniture and décor.
- Retailers can practice sustainability by recycling, focusing on green products or resources, buying local, and making simple switches (i.e. plastic to paper, cheap products to long-lasting, etc.)

Sources: <https://www.rubicon.com/blog/53-sustainable-small-businesses/>

Sustainability Practices – Resources

- 12 Ways to Make Your Restaurant More Sustainable
 - <https://restaurant.opentable.com/resources/ways-restaurant-sustainable/>
- The Best Sustainability Trends and Initiatives For Hotels
 - <https://www.mews.com/en/blog/sustainability-in-hotels>
- What is Green Lodging and Why is it Important
 - <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4094772.html>
- Sustainability in Retail: 5 Ways to Make Your Business More Sustainable
 - <https://www.vendhq.com/blog/sustainability-in-retail/>
- NEF Spotlight: The Path Forward For Retail's Sustainable Future
 - <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/nef-spotlight-the-path-forward-for-retails-sustainable-future>
- Sustainable Economic Development Strategies
 - <https://sustainable-systems-inc.net/economic-development/sed-strategy/>

Economics



**Sustainable
Tourism is
environmentally
friendly
operations and
facilities.**

Place



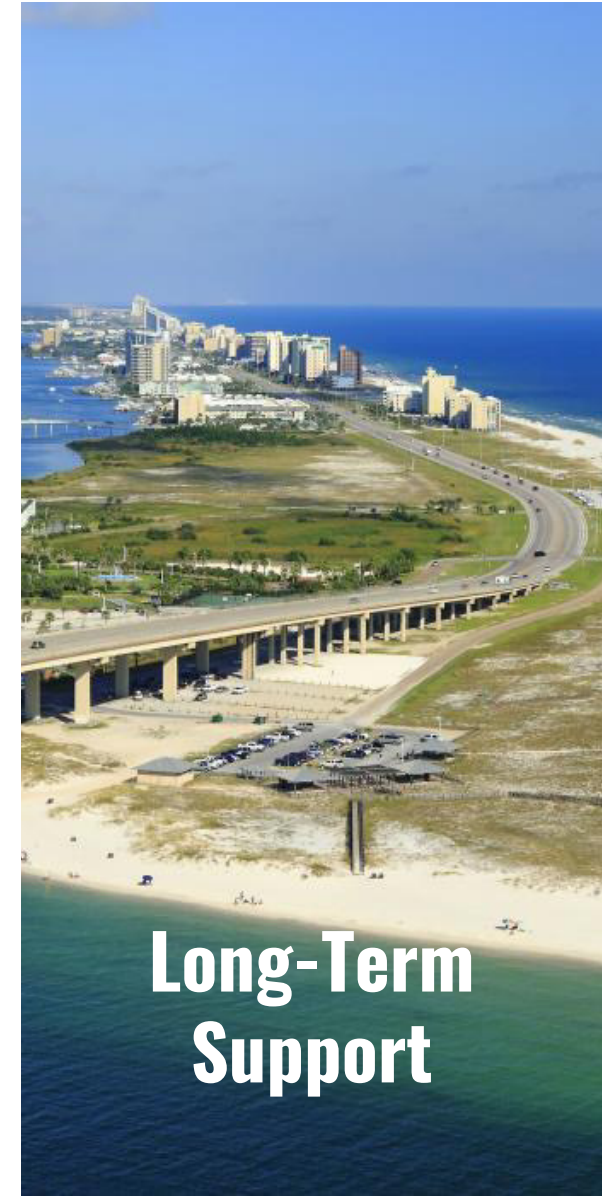
**Sustainable
Tourism is
support for the
protection of
cultural and
natural heritage.**

Dauphin Island

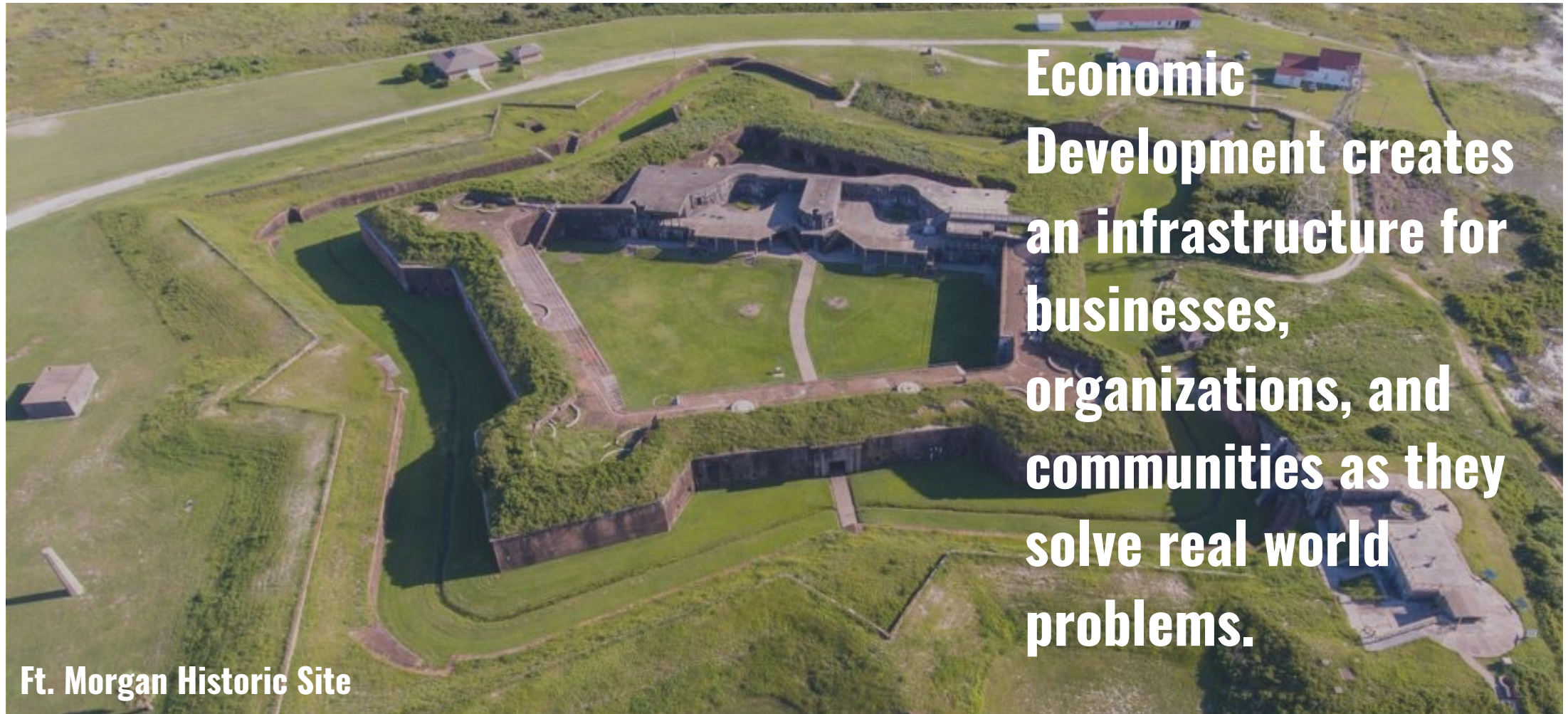


- Graveline Bay Marsh Restoration
- DI East End Beach and Dune Restoration
- Sensitive Habitat Protection Plan
- Dauphin Island Eco-Tourism and Environment Education Area Project

What is Economic Development?



Infrastructure



Ft. Morgan Historic Site

Promotion



**Economic
Development markets
and promotes the
value of those
solutions.**

**Coastal Alabama Ecotourism
Mobile & Baldwin Counties**

Vitality & Quality of Life

**Economic
Development
improves vitality and
quality of life through
programs for
communities.**



Gulf Shores

Long-Term Support



**Economic
Development
provides long-term
support that develops
independent
economic
sustainability.**

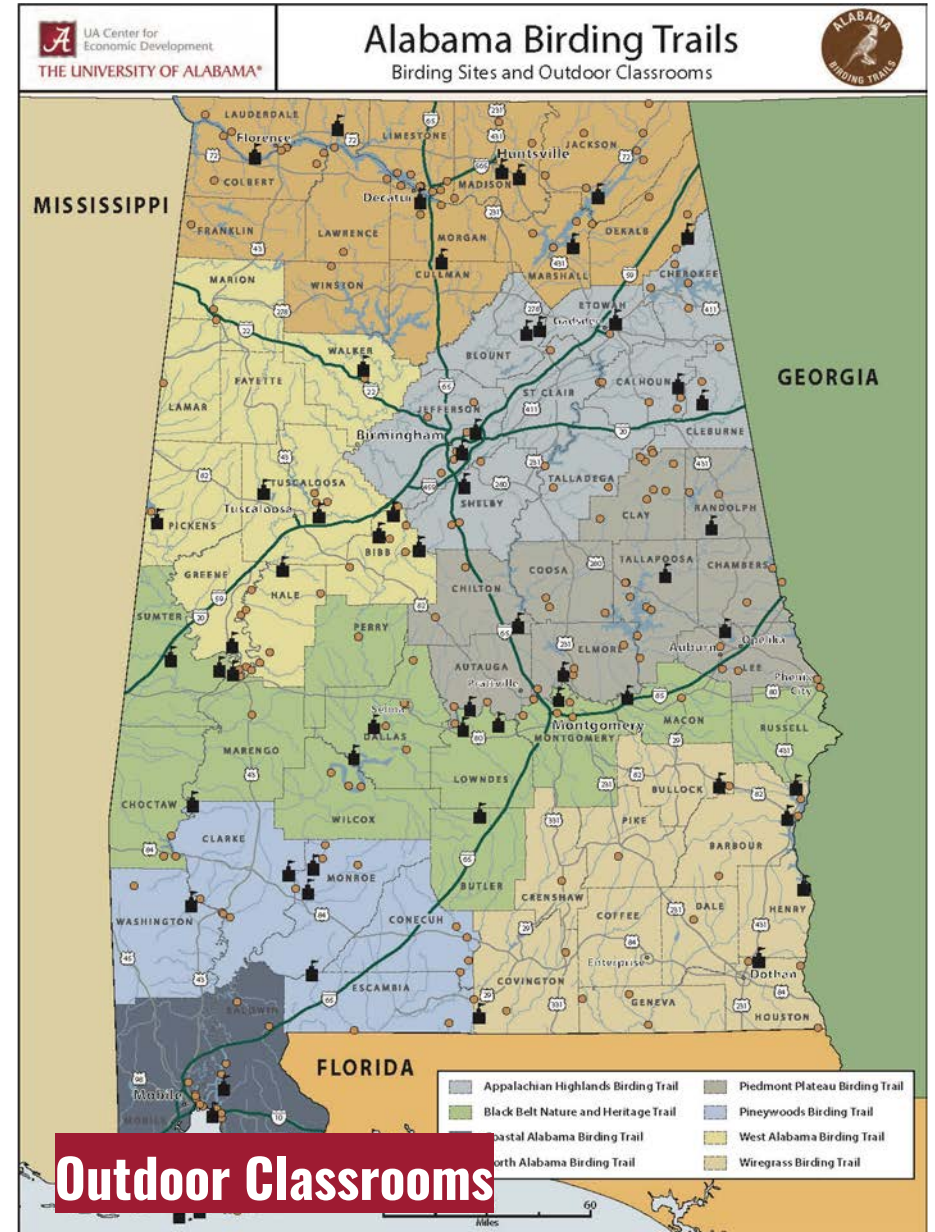
Education Programs

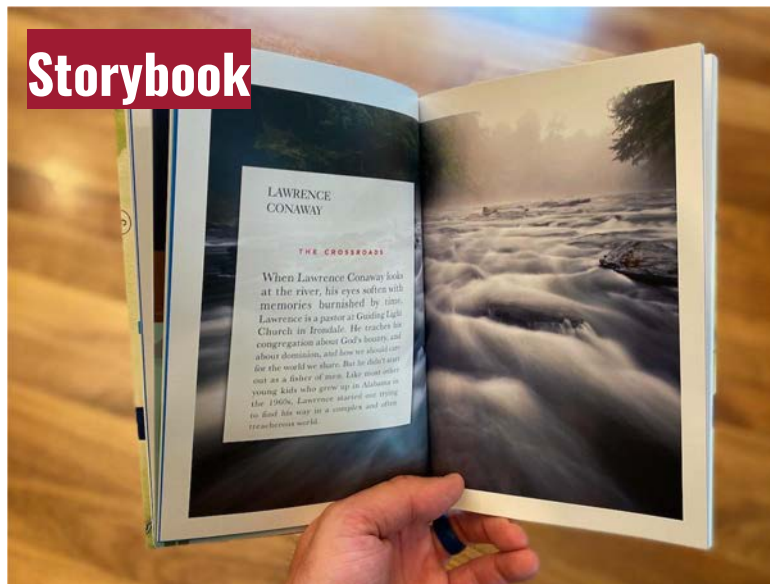


Branding



Alabama Birding Trail





Interpretive Center



Learning Campus



The Lodge



Trails



Dunes



Gulf State Park

Environmental Sustainability

- All buildings certified LEED rating
- Lodge is SITES Platinum
- FORTIFIED certification
- Lower than average water usage
- Lodge exceeds USFW turtle lighting requirements
- Bikeshare System has had over 5,500 users (38,000 rides) since 2017
- Community Shelter during storms

Economic Development

- Lodge Yr 1: >15% above revenue expectations
- Lodge Yr 3: >30% above revenue expectations
- Open through Hurricane Sally

Thank you!

Candace Beers, TMP
Director of Tourism and Community Development
UA Center for Economic Development

candace.c.johnson@ua.edu
www.uaced.ua.edu