

# AABC Facts

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## What:

Former Alabama Governor Bob Riley announced the new Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center on May 9, 2006. The Biodiversity Center is the largest state non-game recovery program of its kind in the United States.

In 2004, the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources began efforts to establish the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center (AABC). The core funding for this program is a \$2 million five-year State Wildlife Grant split equally between federal and state funds. Additionally, the Department of Conservation will actively promote partnerships to advance the Center's efforts and provide further funding.

Partnerships with state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, watershed recovery groups, universities, public utilities and corporations will be sought. Alabama Power Company, Bass Pro Shops and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have committed to partnering with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources on this project.

The mission of AABC is to promote the conservation and restoration of rare freshwater species in Alabama waters and, in turn, restore cleaner water in Alabama's waterways.

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### **Why:**

Alabama is known to have the greatest number of freshwater species of mollusks and fish in the United States. However over the past 80 years, Alabama has lost over 67 species of these mollusks and fish to extinction. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have listed more than 54 species as threatened or endangered in Alabama's waters. The AABC will help to restore threatened or endangered species of mollusks and fish through propagation and restoration. By restoring and conserving these species, we can help aid in clean water efforts in Alabama's waterways.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 183 lakes and streams in Alabama are considered troubled water bodies. Even though this is far less than other states including Georgia, Tennessee and Mississippi, introducing mollusks into streams and waterways will promote water-quality improvements throughout the state.

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### **How:**

Mollusks act as Mother Nature's vacuum cleaner by filtering water through their bodies. In the most basic terms, they are filter feeders who suck in water and pull out bacteria and suspended solids. A small mussel can filter over 12 gallons of water per day. In healthy ecosystems throughout the Southeast, freshwater mollusks historically numbered in the hundreds of millions.

To restore the mollusk populations in Alabama, the Center will first target Mobile River Basin species because these are the most endangered groups that we have in Alabama. Initially, the Coosa River at the Weiss Lake bypass will be the first targeted waterway.

The Department of Conservation is also assisting in additional outreach efforts in Alabama such as requiring and monitoring sanitation devices on boats to further promote water-quality issues through the Alabama Clean Boating and Clean Vessel Act.

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**Where:**

The Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center is located near the City of Marion, in rural Perry County, Alabama. The Center is a complex of four buildings that sits on 36 acres of property near the Cahaba River and adjacent to the Marion State Fish Hatchery, Perry Lakes Park and The Nature Conservancy's Barton's Beach Preserve. The facility was last operated by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Biological Resources Division as the Claude Harris National Aquaculture Research Center. In 1995, the USGS closed the facility, and the property was deeded to the State of Alabama from the U.S. Department of Interior in 1999.

The facilities at the Center include three aquatic buildings with over 7,500 square feet of space under roof, a 4,300-square-foot administration building with office and laboratory space, and approximately 30 surface acres of aquatic ponds.

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**Staff:**

The Program Supervisor is [Dr. Paul Johnson](#), former Director of the Tennessee Aquarium Research Institute, who joined the program in October 2005. The telephone number is (334) 683-5000.

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