

# Field Notes

*News from the Alabama Ecological Services Field Office*



## Partners for Fish and Wildlife: A Recipe for Success in Shades Creek

The value of clean water in Alabama is priceless. Not only is it essential for human consumption. It's also necessary for recreation, outdoor activity, and wildlife. So when water quality is threatened, Alabamians take action. Just ask folks who live near Shades Creek.

Shades Creek is a major tributary to the Cahaba River, and flows through six major urban areas: Irondale, Mountain Brook, Birmingham, Homewood, Hoover, and Bessemer. In the past, sewage overflows, construction, and stream bank erosion have had negative effects on water quality. But the Creek was also facing another problem: Abandoned rail cars – a relic of the area's coal mining past were littering the waterway causing ecological degradation and creating a safety hazard for recreationists. As a result, the Friends of Shades Creek, a local non-profit, contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for help. Upon his investigation, Service biologist Eric Spadgenske learned the creek contained three threatened and endangered species: the round rocksnail, goldline darter, and Cahaba shiner.

“The rail cars were continually degrading habitat by deflecting the flow and causing a “fire nozzle” effect that was scouring the downstream shoal,” explained Spadgenske. “The rail cars were also thought to be a fish passage barrier.”

Through the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Spadgenske was able to assist in removing the cars out of Shades Creek, helping to restore the natural flow of the water and restoring the habitat for several imperiled aquatic species. The massive project took years of planning, and biologists gathered input from more than ten agencies and non-governmental partners.



*Above and below: conservationists worked tirelessly to remove traces of rail cars from Shades Creek, USFWS.*



*The goldline darter is a threatened species found in Shades Creek, USFWS.*

The next step will be measuring the success of the project through surveys and data collection by several contributing partners. Conservationists anticipate a positive outcome for both the stakeholders and the aquatic life, proving

that partnerships can produce amazing results. In summary, Spadgenske said, “Partnerships really are the backbone of what we do, and this project is no exception.”