



YOUR DELTA ADVENTURE STARTS HERE!

Five Rivers, Alabama's Delta Resource Center, is your new Gateway to Outdoor Recreation in the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta



By Hank Burch, Alabama State Lands Division

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ALABAMA'S DELTA RESOURCE



From Hernando DeSoto to the great naturalist William Bartram, explorers have been drawn to the wild lands of the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta for centuries. The allure of the Delta continues to draw new generations of explorers today. And now, as the Alabama State Lands Division puts the finishing touches on Five Rivers, Alabama's Delta Resource Center, exploring the Delta is going to take on a whole new direction and meaning.

Five Rivers is located on the Mobile Bay Causeway in Spanish Fort, Alabama, where the well-traveled waters of the Delta settle into historic Mobile Bay via five river channels – Mobile, Spanish, Tensaw, Apalachee and Blakeley. It is in a unique location of the state where nearly all divisions of the Conservation Department are represented. Adjacent to the Lands Division's Five Rivers facility is the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division office. Across the street is Meaher State Park, which is adjacent to a Marine Resources Division boat ramp.

Conservation's presence is certainly strong on the Mobile Bay Causeway!

Your Delta, Delivered!

Five Rivers is the new gateway to outdoor recreation, conservation education and land stewardship in the vast Mobile-Tensaw River Delta. Many do not realize that this delta is the second largest river delta system in the continental United States or that it is Alabama's largest federally designated National Natural Landmark. The Mobile-Tensaw Delta encompasses

more than 250,000 acres of land, over 100,000 of which are publicly owned and managed. The Mobile-Tensaw River Delta is a tremendous asset to Alabama, and Five Rivers facilitates sharing this resource with visitors from across Alabama and the United States.

Five Rivers provides new access to the expanding public land resources of the Delta and highlights the efforts of the Alabama Forever Wild Program, which has purchased over 50,000 acres in the Delta in the last decade.

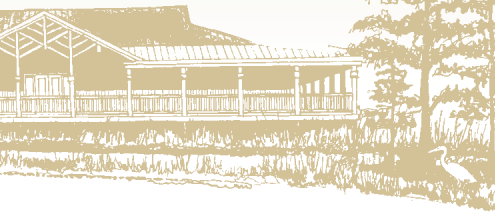


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Left: The Nature Center Complex includes three buildings with wrap-around porches and decks overlooking the Delta. One of those, Delta Hall, includes a powerboat dock.

Right: The Tensaw Theater is a 90-seat, high definition, surround-sound theater. It will show a variety of outdoor-related films and can also be used as a meeting space.

CENTER



Five Rivers, Alabama's Delta Resource Center, is located off the Mobile Causeway across from Meaher State Park. Most easily identified in this aerial photo are the Nature Center Complex, the cluster of three buildings with boat docks to the right; and the State Lands Division's Coastal Office and Blakeley Hall, the two buildings near the bottom of the photo.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THIGPEN PHOTOGRAPHY

What's There?

The facilities at Five Rivers are designed to take a comprehensive approach to outdoor education and recreation. Within the 80-acre complex are seven buildings, each with its own approach to telling the great stories of the Delta.

Entering the Five Rivers campus, the first building is the *Shellbank Visitor Center*, named for the historical shell middens left behind by our Native American ancestors. This facility introduces new visitors to the Delta and assists in planning your Delta experience. Within five minutes of entering Shellbank, you will know what opportunities exist at Five Rivers and beyond. We also provide information on other nature-based

tourism opportunities in coastal Alabama, such as the Dauphin Island Estuarium, Blakeley State Park, Gulf State Park, the Weeks Bay Reserve and others.

The call of the water is strong at Five Rivers, and *Bartram Landing* has everything you need to get started. The landing consists of an Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant floating canoe and kayak dock and retail space, which provides canoe and kayak equipment sales, rentals and lessons. This site will soon become the terminus of the widely used and very successful Bartram Canoe Trail.

Five Rivers will attract school field trips and the *Blakeley Hall* classroom and workshop facility provides classroom space for

up to four concurrent groups. It can also accommodate professional meetings, seminars, and workshops.

Nature Center Complex

The heart of Five Rivers is its Nature Center Complex, a cluster of three pile-supported buildings with wraparound porches and decks overlooking the Delta.

For the traditional museum aficionado, *Apalachee Exhibit Hall* provides over 4,000 square feet of conservation exhibits. Its open floor plan and truss ceilings provide a unique, three-dimensional exhibition space. Exhibits will be changed every three to four months to ensure a different user experience with each visit. The opening exhibit is an introduction to the Delta's rich natural history, focusing on the plants and animals of the Delta and how it has changed over the centuries. Other exhibits being planned for 2007 include a juried outdoor Alabama art show sponsored by the Bay Rivers Art Guild and an exhibit on the great naturalist William Bartram, accompanying the regional Bartram Trail Conference this fall.

One can relax and simply enjoy the surroundings inside the *Delta Hall*, which is a grand reception hall with meeting and office space, additional exhibit area, a screened porch, and a powerboat dock. Perched above Sardine Pass, Delta Hall has a treasured sunset view across the lower Delta with the city of Mobile skyline in



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the backdrop. It is from here that chartered delta pontoon and air boat tours will depart. The Longleaf Room at Delta Hall is clearly one of the most attractive meeting and reception spaces in coastal Alabama, with its oversized stone fireplace and custom milled 1800s heart-pine paneling. Rental of Delta Hall is available for all manner of private functions, including weddings, receptions, luncheons and meetings.

Rounding out the Nature Center Complex is a third building that contains the *Cypress Gift Shop* and *Tensaw Theater*. The *Cypress Gift Shop* offers a variety of outdoor themed gifts for all occasions, some of which are handcrafted locally. It provides the opportunity for visitors to take home something that will long remind them of their Delta experience.

The *Tensaw Theater* is a 90-seat, high definition, surround-sound theater with everything but the \$5 bucket of popcorn! For those who can't get out into the Delta, the *Tensaw Theater* brings a bit of that experience indoors. The theater hosts a variety of outdoor films, including the

Outdoor Alabama and *Discovering Alabama* television series. The *Tensaw Theater* is available for use as meeting space, particularly when the meeting can take full advantage of the realistic audiovisual technology.

Land Stewardship Initiatives

Conservation education does not just apply to the buildings at Five Rivers. In addition to walking trails, picnic pavilions and other outdoor amenities, several land stewardship demonstration activities are underway. Every square inch of the site can be seen as a demonstration space, right down to the parking lots!

The parking lots around the complex feature a demonstration of several different approaches to permeable parking. By demonstrating these technologies, other commercial and residential developments in coastal Alabama will consider these alternatives to traditional asphalt.


For the last two years, Lands Division staff has engaged in controlling invasive, exotic plants that have taken over portions of the Five Rivers site. The invasive Chinese tallow tree (popcorn tree) and cogongrass have a strong hold on the site, and are working their way further into the Delta. As we work to control these plants, we are documenting our efforts and costs in order to show how challenging yet critical it can be to control invasives even in a relatively small area.

South Alabama is the only home to the Alabama red-bellied turtle, which has been designated as the official state reptile by the Alabama Legislature. The red-bellied turtle is known to nest along the Causeway and at the Five Rivers site. Lands Division staff is working with experts and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance and protect areas of the site for nesting for this threatened species.

Come Experience Five Rivers

Beginning this spring, Five Rivers is hosting a routine schedule of weekend events. Our *Saturday Adventurers* program offers opportunities to learn about fly-tying and fishing, canoe and kayak lessons, wilderness survival training, and seafood cooking presentations, among others.

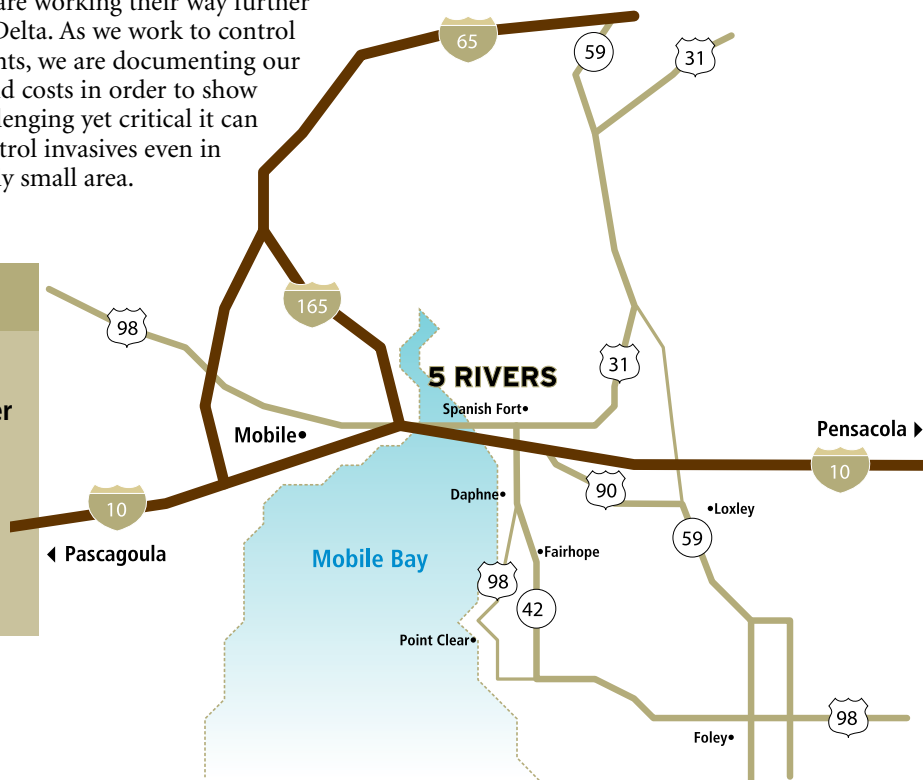
In addition to routine Saturday events, larger festivals are planned for the site. Later this fall, Five Rivers will be one of the venues for the growing Alabama Coastal Birdfest. We will also host the 2007 Bartram Trail Conference this fall.

These events are only the beginning, as we are continuously adding exciting new events to the Five Rivers calendar. Visit our Web site at www.alabama5rivers.com for a complete schedule of activities. The Web site also contains information on reserving the various meeting spaces. 



For More Information:

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30945 Five Rivers Boulevard
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