

# Overnight CAMPING

on the Bartram Canoe Trail



PHOTOS BY KEITH GAUDLIN

*Floating platforms can be reserved for only one night. A group (limited to 8 people) can reserve the platforms at different locations when taking a multiple night trip. Pets are not allowed on floating camping platforms.*

CANOEISTS WISHING TO  
MAKE OVERNIGHT STAYS  
IN THE MOBILE-TENSAW  
DELTA NOW HAVE THAT  
OPTION WITH THE  
OPENING OF SEVERAL  
PLATFORMS ON THE  
BARTRAM CANOE TRAIL.



Fifty miles have been added to the Bartram Canoe Trail, bringing to 200 the total number of miles comprising the popular venue. Extending the canoe trail is the latest in a series of moves to increase recreational opportunities in the ecologically rich Delta while at the same time preserving and protecting it. Reservations for the overnight platforms can be made online at [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com) under the "Outdoor Adventures" prompt.

The Delta is an environmental showplace 30 miles long and 12 miles wide just north of Mobile Bay. It drains 70 percent of the state's water, resulting in a 200,000-acre wetland – Alabama's largest. There are 105,000 contiguous acres in the Delta that are either federal or state property and which are open to the public.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' State Lands Division has spearheaded efforts in recent years to acquire much of that property, in many instances on behalf of the Forever Wild Land Trust. The Bartram Canoe Trail now has six day routes and three overnight routes, according to Greg Lein, State Lands Division assistant director. This includes two land-based and four floating platforms for overnight camping along the Bartram

Trail. "We've added more platforms for overnight camping, and that made it possible to extend the canoe trail by 50 miles," Lein said. "Very little has changed in the Delta since William Bartram first traveled there in the late 1700s. The Delta is a precious natural resource for this state, and we feel that adding to the canoe trail is another plus for those who want to get back to nature and experience its wonders in a virtually pristine state."

The Delta serves as a huge sponge that filters water before it enters Mobile Bay, thus helping ensure cleaner water for the region's sport and commercial fishing. Water draining into the Delta deposits rich soils that have created marshes, cypress-tupelo swampland and bottomland hardwoods – all of which are rich with plant and animal life. The Delta is an outdoor lover's dream, offering everything from birding and wildlife observation to hunting, fishing, camping, boating, canoeing, kayaking, hiking, historic sites and night swamp excursions to view alligators. Since 1999, \$11 million in federal and private funds have been secured for the acquisition of land, creation of new recreational opportunities and execution of environmentally beneficial projects in the Delta.

The ADCNR's State Lands Division played the primary role in securing those funds through its administration of the state's Forever Wild Land Trust in conjunction with several state, federal and private entities. In 2004, ADCNR-led efforts resulted in a \$6 million purchase of wetlands in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and uplands that buffer the Delta from developed areas near Saraland. Four million of the \$6 million in that purchase were covered by federal grants that ADCNR obtained.

"The Mobile-Tensaw Delta is a great example of ADCNR's efforts to make the public more aware of the superb natural resources this state has to offer," said James Griggs, director of the State Lands Division. "The Delta has something for everybody. You don't have to be a great yachtsman or fisherman, and you don't have to be able to be fit enough to canoe all day on the Bartram Canoe Trail. All you have to do to enjoy the Mobile-Tensaw Delta is to sit in a boat and savor the moment. And there are plenty of excursions into the Delta where you can do just that." **AA**

## A Closer Look at the Mobile-Tensaw Delta

Located north of Mobile Bay, the Mobile-Tensaw Delta is 30 miles long and 12 miles wide, consisting of some 200,000 acres of rivers, swamps, marshes and bottomland hardwood forest. The Delta is an outdoor lover's dream, but to see it usually requires access by boat. There are several private boat launches available in Baldwin and Mobile counties. For more information about access, wildlife in the Delta, recreational activities and other information, visit [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).

The Delta's plant and wildlife species are extremely diverse. There are more than 500 species of plants, ranging from cypress to swamp lilies, cardinal flowers and butter weed. One of the more interesting plants is the pitcher plant, a tubular, carnivorous species that attracts, envelops and "eats" bugs, flies, ants and other insects. More than 50 rare and endangered plants and animals are currently known to inhabit the Delta.

The Delta's wildlife includes alligators, black bears, deer, turkey, wild pigs, alligators, the rare red-bellied turtle and game fish. Especially popular in the Delta are night excursions into swamps to view alligators.

Birds include herons, kites, owls, warblers, vireos, wrens, egrets, and different kinds of woodpeckers

including the pileated woodpecker, which at 16 inches long is the largest in Alabama.

The Delta has ample numbers of bass, blue gill, bream, crappie and catfish. In addition to hunting and fishing, outdoor activities include birding, boating, canoeing, kayaking, hiking and camping.

Also in the Delta are historic burial sites of the Moundville Indians, who inhabited the region prior to the coming of white settlers. Given the convergence of several rivers in the Delta and the Moundville tribes' reliance on canoes for transportation, the Delta was a favorite meeting place for tribes living in Alabama, Florida and Mississippi.

The Delta is managed as part of the Upper Delta Wildlife Management Area for hunting and fishing purposes. A WMA permit is required in addition to regular hunting and fishing licenses. Seasons as well as allowable firearms, fishing gear and bag limits are provided on the WMA permit. Permits are available from the Spanish Fort office of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) began acquiring marsh habitats in the lower Delta in the 1980s. That was followed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers' purchase of 22,000 acres of wetlands. Those purchases led to an overall feeling that more of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta should be protected yet made accessible to the public. Now, more than 105,000 acres in

the Delta are either federal or state land open to the public.

The Forever Wild Land Trust, and the support staff within ADCNR, came to be seen as the primary agency to foster conservation in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. By 1999, more than 47,400 acres had been acquired through the leadership of the Forever Wild Board. Those efforts were supported by the State Lands Division and financial assistance from the Alabama Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy of Alabama and federal funds obtained through the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division.

Since 1999, the State Lands Divisions, acting under the guidance of the Forever Wild Board, has secured an additional 7,000 acres using four \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Acts grants, which are administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The State Lands Division also secured \$1.3 million through federal programs such as the Coastal Impact and Assistance Program and the Environmental Protection Agency's wetland restoration programs. Those funds are for Delta projects that have included improved habitat restoration and enhancement, new recreational opportunities and programs to enhance the inventory of the Delta's flora and fauna. Funds from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program also have been obtained to conserve threatened upland habitats adjacent to the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. **AA**