



Cahaba
River
Society



Mission: To restore and protect the Cahaba River watershed and its rich diversity of life

About Cahaba River Society

Cahaba River Society (CRS) is **building the community of support** needed to achieve our shared vision of a healthy future for the Cahaba River and for all lives relying on this vulnerable, valuable resource.

We **help residents, businesses, and wildlife thrive** by working with many partners to achieve good water quality, abundant drinking water, nature that supports healthy lives, well-educated people connected with their rivers, and growth that does not degrade our natural water assets, but instead connects with them to spread quality of life and economic opportunity through all communities.

With **core values of education, collaboration, stewardship, and integrity**, CRS is a science-based expert resource and a partnership catalyst. We **bring together people from development, business, the environment, utilities, faith, recreation, science, government, and education** - a powerful combination for wise growth and conservation.

About the Cahaba River

The Cahaba's water and groundwater in the River basin provide **essential drinking water sources** for most Birmingham area residents and businesses.

The Cahaba River is the heart of Alabama's **globally-significant biodiversity** and imperiled freshwater life, with more species of fish per mile than any other river of its size or larger in North America. 11 Cahaba fish & mussel species are threatened or endangered; 69 freshwater/land species are rare or imperiled.

From the southern Appalachians to the rural Black Belt, the Cahaba spans forests, prairies, "lost world" glades of wildflowers found nowhere else, and river shoals white with the largest stands of Cahaba Lilies on Earth. The River gives us **unique recreation, educational, and tourism opportunities**. The Cahaba is a treasure and is essential to many lives.

Education, Connection, Commitment

CLEAN, our unique program that provides water-based, hands-on science education, is connecting youth with the River, increasing educational impact, and growing to reach more urban and disadvantaged students.

CRS's Shane Hulsey CLEAN program **has provided 30,000 youth with hands-on, river-based environmental science activities** as part of stream walks, canoe trips, and restoration projects. In a typical year CLEAN serves 35 public, private, and home schools and colleges. We are expanding CLEAN to serve more schools, especially for urban youth, to give them positive outdoor experiences that enhance learning. **With the CLEAN expansion we aim to serve 2,000 youth in 2015.**

Meet Our Newest Staff member – La'Tanya Scott

In 2014 CLEAN achieved a milestone when we raised the funds to hire Environmental Educator La'Tanya Scott, who is helping us expand CLEAN. She recently received a BS degree with an Environmental Science major from Miles College. La'Tanya is a gifted outdoor educator and role model who is **strengthening our outreach and service to urban schools and youth**. She is skilled at giving urban youth a positive first experience in natural, flowing freshwater.



Environmental Educator La'Tanya Scott

Education, Connection, Commitment ~ Reaching Urban Youth

Today's youth spend too much time indoors. CLEAN engages youth in **healthful, fun outdoor education** that connects them to local water resources and wildlife, improves learning and retention, and sparks stewardship. For many environmental, science, and natural resource professionals, fun times spent in nature when they were young helped set them on their **career paths**. We aim for more youth, especially disadvantaged youth and youth of color, who are under-represented in environmental fields, to become **committed professionals who work for environmental quality in their communities and wisely manage water resources**.



*CLEAN's growth was made possible by **The Independent Presbyterian Church Foundation, The Mike & Gillian Goodrich Foundation, The Coca-Cola Foundation, The Daniel Foundation of Alabama, Vulcan Materials Company Foundation, CLEAN lead corporate supporter, The McWane Foundation, and International Expeditions.***

New CLEAN Partnerships Reach Urban Students

CRS is building a new partnership with the **Village Creek Human & Environmental Justice Society** to reach out to teachers and administrators of the **Birmingham City Schools** and book field trips with more schools and Career Academies. CLEAN partnered with **Summer Adventures in Learning (SAIL)** in 2013-15, which strengthens math/reading academics in summer youth programs, with an aim that Birmingham students will no longer lose up to 5 months of grade-level equivalency during summer. CLEAN is a perfect fit since it provides outdoor fun and learning together. In 2014-2015 we brought **850 SAIL youth** as young as rising 3rd graders on CLEAN trips, from programs such as Fresh Start Family Solutions, New Rising Star Baptist Church, and Fresh Air Farm.

Restoring Wildlife Habitat, Forests, & Water Quality

CRS works with volunteers and partners to restore the Cahaba's health.

Left photo ~ 50 employees of Hancock Forest Management, a sustaining CRS Corporate Member, & CRS staff **planted over 200 trees to restore the Cahaba riverside forest** at Trussville Middle School. Our thanks go to Alan Bruce, Region Manager, Al Lyons, Manager of Silviculture, Stewardship, & Safety, and Michael Wolf, President, for organizing & supporting this project.



Right photo ~ At Cahaba River Frydown 2014, CRS and friends planted **seedlings raised by the Birmingham Botanical Gardens (BBG) from seeds of local native trees and riverside plants**, as part of BBG's Centennial Trees Project. We thank Chris Williams, of the American Bar Association Birmingham Chapter and Maynard, Cooper and Gale, Barry Stallnaker of Trussville Springs, Henry Hughes and the BBG staff, and Eleanor DelBene, a CRS Board member, for organizing this demonstration project, which we will repeat here and all along the River as we **rebuild native forests for years to come**. Also in Trussville, CRS advised a **major remediation, now underway, of serious erosion of the Cahaba River through Trussville** caused by increased urban runoff. The project will reduce sediment pollution and restore habitat – but only if stormwater controls for upstream future development are greatly improved.

CRS brought **Black Warrior Riverkeeper** into our team with Southern Environmental Law Center and US EPA to continue to press **Jefferson County to complete repairs and operational upgrades to end raw sewage overflows**. We responded to **multiple pollution complaints from citizens and worked with responsible parties to get them cleaned up**, such as ending fish kills from chlorine discharge from the Riverview wastewater treatment plant.

Cahaba Blueway ~ Improving Recreation & Tourism

The Cahaba Blueway partnership is developing plans, funds and best practices to improve river access and information and multiply tourism and recreation opportunities.

CRS, The Nature Conservancy, Alabama Innovation Engine (jointly funded by the U. of Alabama and Auburn U.), the National Park Service Rivers Trails & Conservation Assistance Program, the Freshwater Land Trust and others are collaborating to **develop more Cahaba river access and unified signage, public information, and marketing**. Over the coming years many projects will improve Cahaba River public access and link the river with trails, parks, historic sites, and cultural attractions in surrounding communities, boosting recreation & tourism-related economic development from the Birmingham area down to the Black Belt.

In 2015 **Best Practices Design Guidelines for Cahaba River Access and Blueway signage & wayfinding design guidelines** were completed. These are being shared online and with stakeholders as a resource for siting and building safe, low impact, durable river access. CRS also helped with an **inventory of existing river access sites and their improvement needs**. We applaud AL Innovation Engine for bringing Brian Rushing on board as the Blueway project coordinator, as the partners develop plans and resources to sustain the Blueway effort.

We have engaged public officials, potential funders, and developers in **planning for improved river access**. CRS is advising the design to improve the **Grants Mill** river access, a project of The Nature Conservancy, and the **Old Overton** launch in Vestavia Hills. The Freshwater Land Trust's new **Moon River** launch in Leeds will be built as soon as road access is resolved. We are identifying locations for new river access with **Hoover** officials and met with **Mountain Brook** about their new Cahaba River Park. We are exploring an **ADA-accessible** canoe/kayak launch for the flat-water section of the river upstream from Highway 280. We are supporting projects of The Nature Conservancy to improve river access in the **lower watershed**.



Blueway team discusses what improvements are needed at the eroded Highway 52 access

Curbing Mud Pollution ~ Low Impact Development

CRS educates and collaborates to encourage development best practices that restore water quality.

The Cahaba is losing ground – literally – as increased stormwater flows from more paving and roofs erode Cahaba tributaries and collapse the river's banks. This, in addition to construction runoff, is a growing source of the river's mud pollution and most serious degradation challenge. CRS promotes feasible, cost-effective solutions. **Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater design is essential to reduce mud pollution**, restore water quality and freshwater wildlife habitat and protect drinking water supplies.

CRS collaborates with and educates development professionals and government officials to **increase their capacity to support and deliver LID solutions**. We advise developers and have helped bring LID solutions to residential, commercial, and school projects. We've trained over 1300 professionals and officials in LID, and plan to deliver a major LID training for city-county officials in 2016.

Our collaboration with the AL Department of Transportation (ALDOT) is **improving stormwater management for highways**. In past years CRS and partners secured improved requirements in ALDOT's statewide stormwater permit. In 2014 we advised ALDOT's 1st statewide policy to implement improved post-construction and Low Impact Development stormwater design for highways.

Northern Beltline demonstrates stormwater solutions

Phase I of the Birmingham Northern Beltline (BNB) is under construction. We respect that other groups oppose the BNB for many environmental and financial reasons. CRS focused on collaborating with ALDOT on the best possible plans to reduce waterway impacts. As a result, the BNB is the first highway in the state with LID design to reduce post-construction runoff impacts of erosion and pollution, and construction runoff controls were greatly strengthened. At CRS' request in 2014 ALDOT held a stormwater workshop and a tour of the BNB construction site for community and environmental leaders, including opponents. The **Beltline's extensive, innovative stormwater controls and strong contractor management tools** are among the best in the state and have **helped reduce impacts of runoff to Self Creek** in the Black Warrior basin. Still, this is a massive earth-moving project. Despite best efforts, water pollution has occurred during the recent heavy November rains.



ALDOT shows results of their leadership for stormwater improvements at June 2014 tour of Northern Beltline construction site.

Strengthening City~County Stormwater Programs

CRS works with many watershed leaders to strengthen state / city / county stormwater requirements, programs, and codes.

An ADEM-adopted study has set the **official target to restore the Cahaba: the river's mud pollution must be reduced by 48%**. CRS brought stakeholders together at "Cahaba Connections," the 1st Cahaba State of the Watershed conference, in 2015 to explore ways to collaborate on water quality restoration and measure progress. There is an urgent window of opportunity: for the 1st time in 12 years, ADEM is revising stormwater permits for Birmingham-area local governments, in 2015-17. This is the time to implement LID as standard practice to restore water quality. CRS and the AL Stormwater Partners improved Mobile's permit in 2014 and are now focused on the Birmingham metro area permits and implementation codes.

In 2014 CRS and partners unsuccessfully tried to prevent **passage of a state law that seeks to greatly restrict local governments from controlling stormwater pollution**. CRS deeply appreciates the hard work of Alabama Rivers Alliance and Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) in that effort. We educated city officials, and several actively opposed the legislation. We continue to work with local officials, EPA and ADEM to ensure cities and counties can build effective stormwater programs that meet local needs and Clean Water Act requirements. CRS is currently serving on advisory committees to upgrade development codes for Birmingham and Jefferson County, to give developers greater flexibility and also improve stormwater management.

Collaborating to Secure Affordable, Abundant Drinking Water

CRS promotes water/energy efficiency & collaboration with business, utilities, faith, and environmental leaders

Drinking water efficiency practices **stretch existing water supplies, save energy, and meet needs of growing communities at least cost to ratepayers and the environment**. In 2014 CRS, American Rivers, Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Birmingham Water Works, and Alabama Rivers Alliance delivered a workshop that taught 52 utility staff from our metro area and statewide how to **control leaks, water theft, and other water loss**, improve revenue, and reduce costs. We aim for a follow-up, in depth training in 2016.

UAB completed a major water efficiency retrofit that is saving around 85 million gallons of water a year. To show the power of **water efficiency retrofits by large water users**, the **combined water savings** of UAB, Alabama Power's HQ, and Children's of Alabama are **equivalent to more than one full day of drinking water withdrawals from the Cahaba**. These projects also save energy and money.

CRS and faith, utility, business, government, and environmental leaders in the Collaborative Environmental Network of Alabama (C.E.N.A.) secured resources from the Vulcan Materials Company Foundation for a **3-year program of collaboration trainings that develop a resources toolkit** to increase skills and deepen support for collaboration among C.E.N.A. participants and the community.

Building Partnerships & Resources for Our Mission

Our 25th Anniversary event in March 2014 celebrated the story of our accomplishments, the evolution of our effectiveness, and the many members and partners who made this possible. Thank you!

In 2014 CRS was very proud to receive one of My Green Birmingham's First **Champions of Sustainability Awards**. My Green Birmingham was founded to serve as our community's resource for creating a healthier, progressive, and more environmentally responsible city, and is helping the City of Birmingham plan towards achieving the sustainability vision of its Comprehensive Plan.



CRS is deeply grateful for the many partners, friends and supporters who help grow our capacity for the advancement of our mission. Through the unique educational outreach opportunities these valued relationships support, we are able to continue widening the net of those committed to preserving the Cahaba's beauty and significance to our region. We are especially thankful to these businesses that either hosted established CRS fun(d)raisers, or held events that benefited CRS in 2014-15: **Amerex – Presenting Sponsor of the 5th Annual Cahaba River Fry-Down; Alabama Outdoors – Cahaba River Ramble and Party on the Porch; Tonya Jones SalonSpa – Aveda Earth Month events; Cahaba Brewing Company – Cahaba Brewfest; Rojo – 10% Tuesday; and Black Market Bar & Grill – Coney Island Mermaid Festival.**

CRS Board of Directors, staff and partners are working to develop new opportunities to engage members and the broader community in protecting the Cahaba. With your support, we will have the resources in place to bring more CRS members and friends together to celebrate and protect our River. Please stay tuned to **www.cahabariversociety.org** for information on networking and education events, volunteering, and the many other ways you can support Cahaba River Society in the coming year.