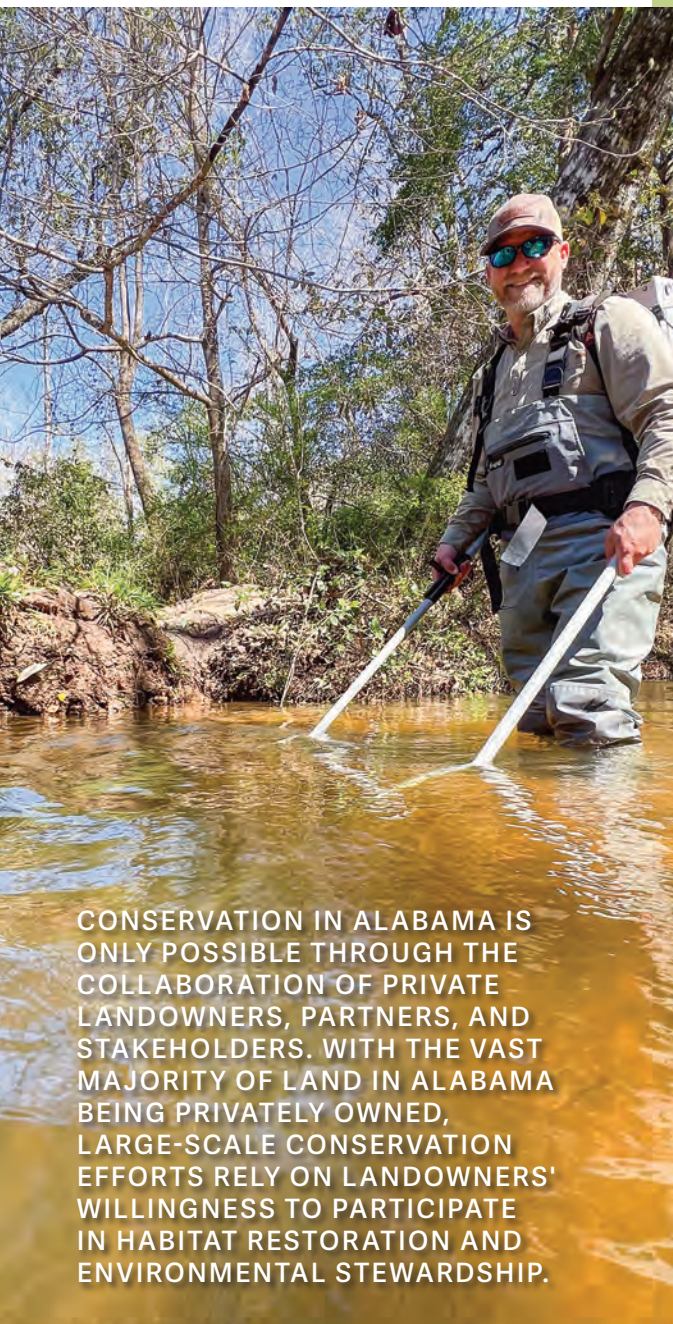


Conservation
Through
Collaboration:



Working Together for Alabama's Future

by Whit Carroll



CONSERVATION IN ALABAMA IS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE COLLABORATION OF PRIVATE LANDOWNERS, PARTNERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS. WITH THE VAST MAJORITY OF LAND IN ALABAMA BEING PRIVATELY OWNED, LARGE-SCALE CONSERVATION EFFORTS RELY ON LANDOWNERS' WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN HABITAT RESTORATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP.

Above: Whit Carroll using backpack shocker.

The Alabama Forestry Foundation (AFF) is committed to ensuring that landowners' rights are protected while also providing them with opportunities to engage in conservation efforts that align with their management objectives. By working with programs such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), landowners can enhance conservation outcomes while maintaining the ability to manage their land according to their goals.

PARTNERING FOR CONSERVATION SUCCESS

The Alabama Forestry Foundation actively engages in conservation projects statewide with the primary goals of improving habitat for at-risk species, enhancing water quality, and restoring critical forest ecosystems, including shortleaf, white oak, and longleaf pine forests. By partnering with private landowners, AFF ensures that conservation initiatives support both ecological health and landowners' interests. AFF provides essential services such as technical assistance, management plan development, and training opportunities. Additionally, by leveraging resources from conservation partners like the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and NRCS, landowners have access to financial assistance to reach their management goals. The key to success lies in fostering cooperative relationships where conservation goals and land management objectives align.

SOUTHEAST AQUATICS

One of AFF's conservation initiatives funded through NFWF, the Southeast Aquatics Project, shows the power of collaboration. Concluding in March of this year, the project covered 10 counties in South Alabama. This focal area spanned seven Strategic Habitat Units (SHU's) and four Strategic River Reach Units (SRRU's), watersheds and river corridors identified by the Alabama Rivers and Streams Network (ARSN) as priorities for restoration and future surveys. These SHU's and SRRU's provide crucial habitat for federally listed aquatic species in the Escambia River, Yellow River, Choctawhatchee River, and Alabama River basins. ARSN has identified 57 priority aquatic species within this region, highlighting its significance for conservation.

Among these species is an endangered freshwater mussel, the Alabama pearlshell. The largest remaining

population of this imperiled species resides in the Murder Creek SHU in Conecuh County, specifically in Jordan Creek, a small headwater tributary. Recognizing the need to protect this critical habitat, AFF, along with partners including ArborGen, the Alabama Forestry Commission, the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Geological Survey of Alabama, undertook a riparian buffer expansion project on Jordan Creek that was finished in 2023.

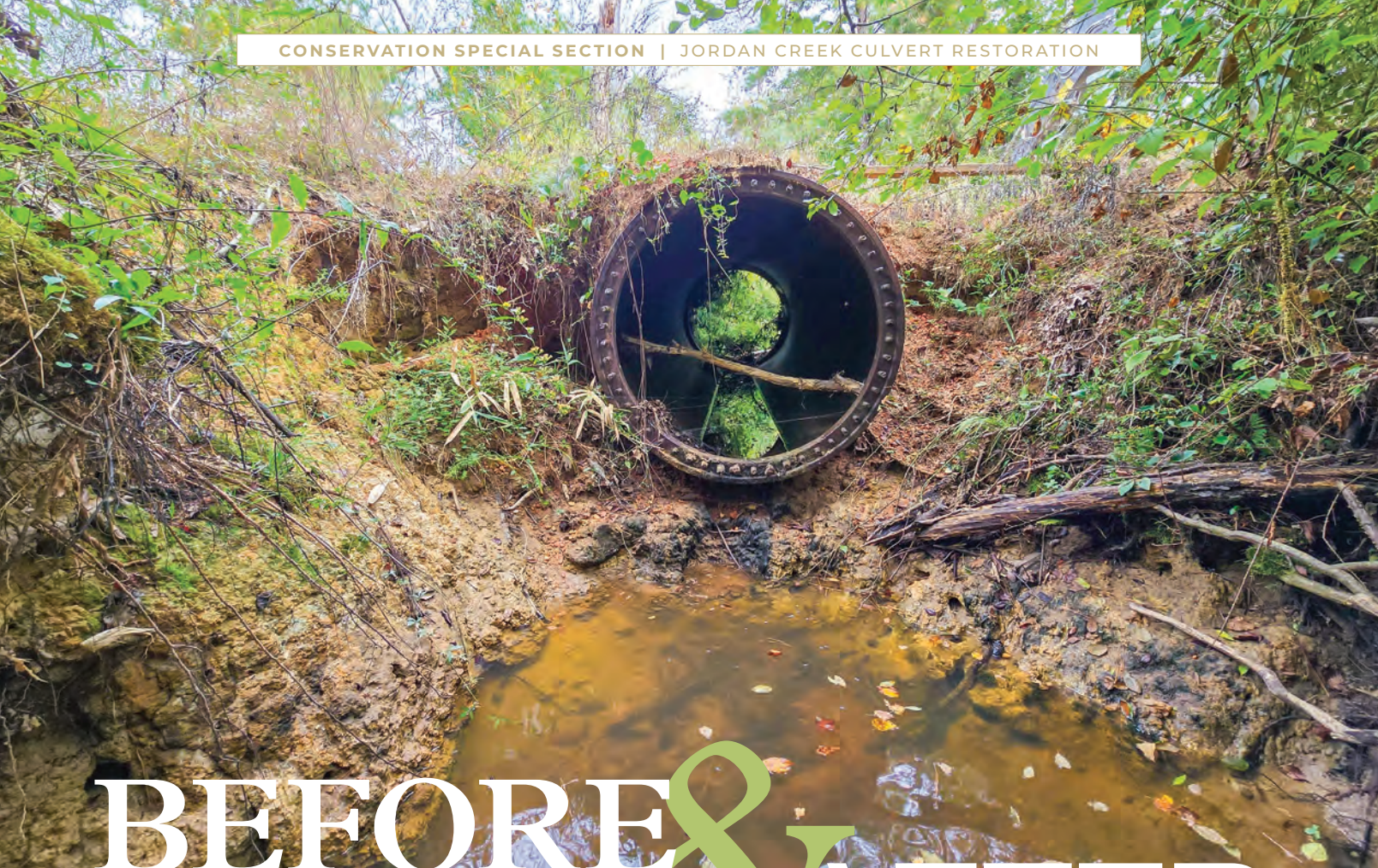
LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT: A KEY TO CONSERVATION SUCCESS

The impact of this work extended beyond the immediate project. Following a feature on the Jordan Creek riparian buffer project, Dr. John and Mary Margaret Bailey, landowners with property along Jordan and Murder Creeks, reached out with interest in contributing to conservation efforts for the Alabama pearlshell. By working collaboratively with the Baileys and USFWS, the team identified a problematic creek crossing that was both a source of sedimentation and a barrier to fish passage.

Matt Hodges of the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program worked closely with the Baileys to develop a solution that met both their land management needs and conservation priorities. The goal was to replace the failing culvert with a bottomless arch culvert, allowing log trucks to cross safely while reducing sedimentation and restoring aquatic connectivity. This project demonstrates how conservation and land management objectives can be successfully integrated through collaboration.

A FUTURE BUILT ON PARTNERSHIPS

AFF remains committed to fostering partnerships between landowners, conservation organizations, and agencies to ensure Alabama's natural resources are protected for future generations. By engaging with conservation programs, landowners can play a crucial role in sustaining Alabama's forests, water quality, and wildlife habitats while continuing to manage their properties effectively. The success of conservation in Alabama depends on these cooperative efforts, reinforcing that when we work together, we achieve more for the land, the people, and the environment. ▲



BEFORE & AFTER



Inset: Matt Hodges (left) & Dr. John Bailey (Mary Margaret's husband)

As part of a series of habitat enhancement projects on Jordan Creek to protect the endangered Alabama pearlshell, this failing culvert was replaced with a bottomless arched culvert to allow log trucks to cross safely while reducing sedimentation and restoring aquatic connectivity.