

**A Year in Review: Working
for Alabama's Trails in 2023**



The Alabama Trails Foundation (ATF) supports trails that can bring Alabama’s many cultures and peoples together. We support using trails to help tell stories that are woven of the many cultures from Alabama’s past who have made this land a home, while bringing us together on a common path moving forward.

We’ve worked with our partners, we’ve tackled projects, big and small, concentrating on those projects requiring the leadership only a nongovernmental organization like ATF can provide. Through all these partnerships, we’ve balanced the need for long-term solutions to Alabama’s trails that rely on recognizing the value of getting outside, of experiencing the best Alabama has to offer while ensuring that everyone feels welcome to enjoy Alabama.

Together, we’ve made some great strides in 2023!

The national outdoor recreation participant base grew for the eighth consecutive year to a record 168.1 million participants, and new participants are increasingly diverse and looking to businesses to lead on sustainability, equity, and conservation. This new data demonstrates the strength of the outdoor recreation industry and our collective power to drive sustainable economic growth while protecting – and growing access to – the benefits of the outdoors for everyone.



Alabama Trails Foundation joins the Innovate Alabama Network

Innovate Alabama is building a network of organizations who are shaping the future of Alabama - and they invited us to join their team! We're very excited to be part of a collaborative network of change agents working for our state. One of the keys to Alabama's future is building outdoor recreation infrastructure that will recruit and retain the next generation of innovators and leaders.

Alabama Trails Foundation is ready to answer that call, as the state-wide non-governmental organization working with multiple levels of government

to ensure sustainable and inclusive outdoor recreation. Official recognition was presented on December 13, 2023 as Governor Kay Ivey declared the day as Innovate Alabama Day. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, who's team from the Hoover Institution helped advance Innovate Alabama's focus spoke. "To see my home state of Alabama come together in this way to put the future of Alabama on this road is really exciting," says Dr. Rice.

Above: Board member Paul DeMarco attended the ceremony to accept the award.



Shining A Light on Flagg Mountain

To share the beauty of this special place we commissioned award winning photographer, Art Meripol to take quality photos of the tower, trail, and landscape. We were blessed with a beautiful day with an array of green hues as Alabama’s forest awoken in the spring. Art’s skills as a photographer were at their best as he captured the sun coming through the windows of the tower, giving a beautiful early-morning glow to the whole mountain. These photographs are finding their way to magazines and marketing materials that share Alabama’s beauty across the world. (photo above)

The Flagg Mountain’s beauty is important, but it also has a cultural history and a rare ecology. Sharing and better understanding the multiple assets at Flagg led us on a journey in 2023. Joining us in this exploration was the Alabama Council for the Arts. We began building a team to exam how the tower building could be a refuge and a respite as

well as a place of inspiration and instruction. Our team included Cheryl Morgan, Auburn University Professor emeritus and known for her ability to convene groups and inspire them to create great things; Will McGarity, Stick Architecture and the visionary behind the design of the renovated stairs in the tower; and Jay Lamar, recently the executive director of the Alabama Bicentennial celebration and someone deeply knowledgeable about arts and artisans across Alabama.

We spent the winter and spring talking to everyone we could about arts engagement developing a network of artists, historians, and natural resource professionals. We dug deep into conversations with local and state-level art program leaders so that we could better understand what is working well, what is missing, and what if anything needs to be duplicated. We were very cognizant of others working on what seemed to be similar programs.



In June, we invited this network to Flagg Mountain for a conversation. The meeting room at the base of the tower provided a comfortable place to share ideas and ask questions. The thick rock walls let the room be a refuge from the elements. Acknowledging that the Flagg Mountain Tower is a “commissioned artwork” that is not likely repeated was a moment of reckoning. We delved into the ways the “mountain” could be used to share the culture of the people who live, work, and play in east Alabama.

In the fall, with support from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, we hosted two events that combined the arts, culture, and ecology of the mountain. In September, Birds, Beats, and Bach showcased Alabama musicians and experts in conversation about the mountain’s ecology and

natural history, and helped introduce new people to Flagg. In October, Poets, Pines and Plein Air featured artists, writers, and naturalists who shared information about the mountain’s ecology and natural history. Over 100 people attended the two events, highlighting the potential for Flagg Mountain to bring people into Coosa County and experience Alabama’s First Mountain first hand.

In November we enhanced the trail to the tower by adding native stone to serve as seating and pause points. Travelers now have places to rest and soak in the landscape, enjoy a snack, or a conversation. Stone was chosen for its durability and natural resilience to the managed fire that is an integral part of the native montane longleaf ecosystem.



Good Science and Due Diligence

Jogloma Scott Lake on the Pinhoti Project Moving Forward

Working with a professional team of consultants and in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service we have been hard at work designing potential improvements that will accommodate new users and change this location into a destination. From flagging trees to researching the historical significance of the site we are collaborating to develop a plan to enhance the recreation experience and restore the watershed health. Flagging the trees was an important step in identifying the invasive plant species (pictured right) that need to be removed so the native plants can thrive. Other trees were flagged so they can be incorporated into the site plan that is being developed by Macknally Land Design, the lead consultant on this project.

Katie Shakour, PhD, RPA (pictured right) with the University of Alabama worked to catalog the cultural resources found at Jogloma Scott Lake and to explain the process to everyone with a passion for the place.





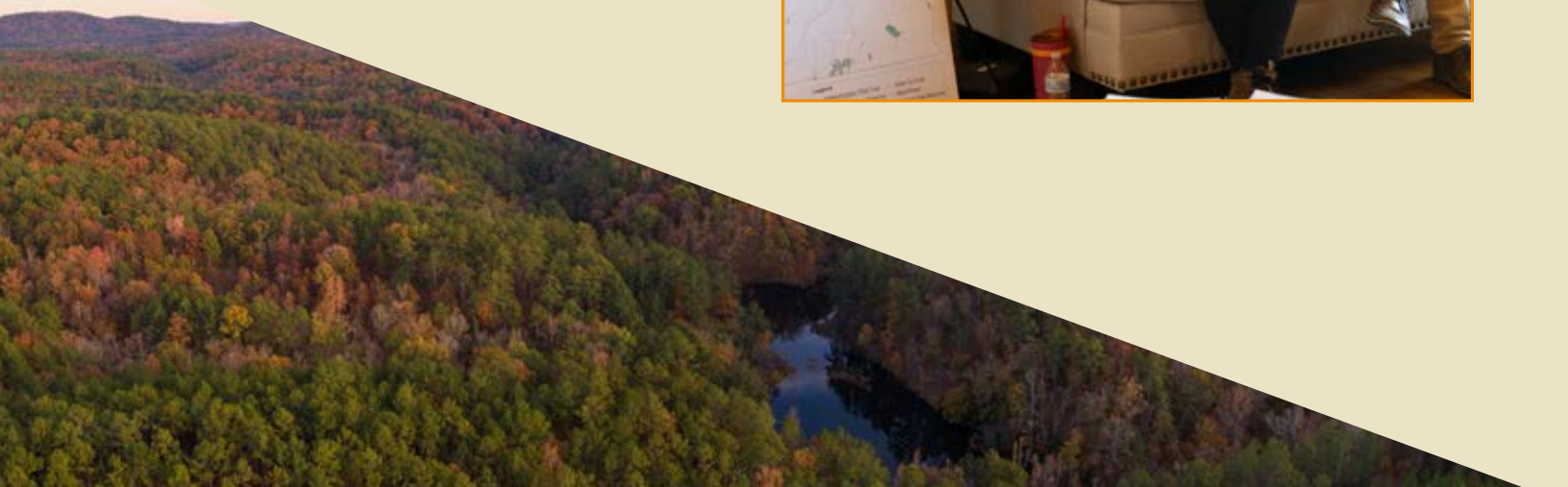
Upcoming partnership with Talladega College

Working with Dr. Andy Coleman, Biology Department Chair of Talladega College, ATF is looking for a student from the school who can participate in a one year VISTA program in association with AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps is the federal agency for national service and volunteerism. AmeriCorps provides opportunities for Americans of all backgrounds to serve their country, address the nation's most pressing challenges, and improve lives and communities. Plans for this partnership are to develop a multi-year program to engage Talladega College in trail activities and gain their insights on new ways to engage a wider community of potential trail users. (Dr. Coleman pictured taking water samples at right.)



ATF Board Planning Session at Pinhoti Ridge Retreat

Board members David Perry, Paul DeMarco, Katherine Avants, Maggie Cunningham, Ann Haas, Wendy Jackson, Taylor Pursell, Tom Carruthers, and Maye Head joined ATF staff on the trail for a day of planning, of looking at past successes, upcoming challenges and ways to broaden our reach statewide while continuing to provide steady leadership for Alabama's longest footpath, the Pinhoti.



Supporting Communities, Building Partnerships



Alabama's Corporate Leaders Invest in Trails

2023 began with Alabama Power Company's Power of Good Foundation investing \$150,000 in Alabama Trails Foundation. Their partnership has allowed the incorporation of the design of an outdoor education component in the proposed improvements at Pinhoti at Jogloma-Scott Lake. Working with Talladega College's Biology Department, the design now includes easier access to the lake and riparian ecosystem along the trail. Terry Smiley, Vice President Eastern Division, Alabama Power Company and Alabama Trails Foundation Board Member, shared "it is our pleasure to invest in the Jogloma Scott Lake Project. The site plan for the improvements continues the high caliber planning and design that has become the norm for the Alabama Trails Foundation. We are proud to be a partner."



The Honda Foundation also invested in Jogloma-Scott and in June they came to visit. Honda Foundation's Nicole Hilton (Corporate Social Responsibility, Community Relations) joined board members Wendy Jackson, 2nd VP; Tom Carruthers Past President, and Katherine Avants along with Cindy Ragland, Joe Watts, and DeForest Tuggle to tour Piedmont, Alabama and hear the importance of the trails to small town economies.

During the visit we got an inside look at the soon-to-open Pinhoti Pizza Company, had lunch at a local restaurant, and made a trip to the Pink E. Burns trailhead in Rabbitown. Several business owners were on hand to share the importance of trail users to their business strategies. We were invited to continue the conversation with Honda and are planning a Honda volunteer day in the spring.

Alabama Outdoors in Homewood Hosted the Alabama Trails Foundation

With live music, food trucks and support from many friends and the wonderful folks at Alabama Outdoors, \$1700 was raised to support our efforts along the Pinhoti and across Alabama.

Celebrate Trails Day 2023 Was a HUGE Success!!!



This event was a collaboration between the Alabama Trails Foundation, Northeast Alabama Bicycle Association, Pinhoti Pizza Company, and others. The cities of Anniston, Jacksonville and Piedmont all contributed with staff support and collaboration, Jacksonville State University (JSU) helped with the Economic Development program conducting surveys and the Trail Science Institute recruited new students.

The day highlighted how important trails are for economic development, community well-being, and regional connections. Maggie Cunningham, board member and secretary of the Alabama Trails Foundation joined in the celebration as a board member, a resident and business owner. "It was so exciting having the municipalities, university, state level organizations and businesses all working together. I appreciate all of you and your efforts. The coolest thing to me is I think we can do better. We've already started planning for the 2024 Celebrate Trails Day!"



AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service (VISTA)

The Alabama Trails Foundation expanded their partnership with the UAB AmeriCorps Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) program in 2023. Our VISTAs in Calhoun and Clay Counties work alongside towns to identify economic, community, and public health needs that can be met by trails, and they work to implement projects that can create sustainable positive change in these areas. One of our VISTAs collaborated with the City of Piedmont and East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission to apply for and receive \$350,000 in funding for a Recreational Trails Program grant to repave the Piedmont Section of the Chief Ladiga trail.

Our newest VISTA has worked to analyze data collected from events at Flagg mountain and from trail counters at various locations along the Pinhoti. This information can be utilized to better understand trail users and how to encourage them to engage more with local business and trail maintaining groups. Both of our VISTAs work on our grant writing team to fund various projects along the trail, and they help with events supporting the trail.



Governor Ivey signs agreement that will improve Alabama's Pinhoti Trail

Governor Ivey signed an agreement on August 1, 2023 to strengthen the coordination between the USDA Forest Service, Alabama Forestry Commission, and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for the sustainable management of Alabama's Pinhoti Trail System. The result of decades of successful collaboration between government, non-profit steward organizations, and volunteers, the Alabama Pinhoti Trail is one of the principal treasures of the state's trail system – both a major asset to local communities and a driver of outdoor recreational tourism across the region.

David Perry, President, Alabama Trails Foundation commented: "The Pinhoti would not be the trail it is today without decades of hard work and dedication of trail volunteer groups and successful collaboration between government and non-profit steward organizations. We will continue to support these and other stakeholders in having their voices heard as we collaborate and partner to sustain and improve the Pinhoti Trail."

Our Values



The Alabama Trails Foundation was created to serve all of Alabama. Our bylaws continue the theme of inclusion of all of Alabama. As the Alabama Trails Foundation continues to grow and garner public success, clearly communicating our values is important.

2023 Alabama Trails Foundation Board and Officers

Officers

David Perry
Board President
Paul DeMarco
First Vice President
Wendy Jackson
Second Vice President
Maggie Cunningham
Secretary
Ann Haas
Treasurer
Tom Carruthers
Past President

Board Members

Katherine Avants
Rob Fowler
Maye Head
Kate Nielsen
Taylor Pursell
Terry Smiley

What We Do



The Alabama Trails Foundation works to enrich investments made along trails by building a long-term base of support with local leaders and the larger community. Building this base is critical to the success of the trail and of the communities it connects with.

Our goal is to weave the fabric of trails into the future of Alabama, from the most rural landscape to the most urban.