

A Fresh START for Turkey Creek. Part 2

by Sarah Gilkerson. Turkey Creek Nature Preserve Current (blog). July 2013

After START (Society To Advance the Resources of Turkey Creek) successfully convinced Jefferson County in 1998 to build the new prison somewhere other than Turkey Creek, they turned their attention to protecting the property around Turkey Creek for future generations. The members of START came to the conclusion that the best way to reach this goal would be to create a nature preserve, where people would have a clean, safe place to relax, walk, swim, and enjoy this beautiful part of Pinson. START had the support of the area's commissioner, Bettye Fine Collins, who created the Turkey Creek Watershed Committee as a starting point for creating the preserve.

START was not only interested in protecting the land for the benefit of people, but also in knowing what animals could be protected by a nature preserve. With START's support, the US Fish and Wildlife Service began surveying Turkey Creek within the area proposed for protection. Biologists found a small fish known as the Vermilion Darter. At the time, the darter was being considered for placement on the US Endangered Species List. Now, START was not only resolved to create a preserve for the enjoyment of the public, but also to protect the habitat of Turkey Creek's rare and possibly endangered fish.

After much discussion, START and the Turkey Creek Watershed Committee decided that the best course of action would be to nominate the property for purchase by Alabama's Forever Wild Land Trust as a preserve. Though START nominated the property to Forever Wild in 2000, the area was not selected because the property had multiple owners. START took this setback in stride and began to find a way to consolidate the land ownership for the Turkey Creek property.

This was not a task START could handle on its own, so the group partnered with the Freshwater Land Trust in 2001. After many meetings and discussions between START, the Freshwater Land Trust, and local property owners, the land for Turkey Creek Nature Preserve was purchased by the Freshwater Land Trust. Late in 2001, the Vermilion Darter was officially listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species. START again nominated the property to Forever Wild, this time with a single landowner and the presence of an endangered species. Forever Wild unanimously approved the creation of Turkey Creek Nature Preserve in 2003. When accepting the preserve, Forever Wild specifically acknowledged and admired START's hard work and years of dedication towards creating the preserve.

With the land now protected from any future development, the newly developed partnership between START, the Freshwater Land Trust, and Forever Wild reached out to Birmingham-Southern College's Southern Environmental Center to provide onsite management and environmental education. Each year, BSC provides to thousands of students some of the best opportunities in the area for hands on, environmental education. Additionally, the partnership has led to improvements in the preserve's recreational opportunities and overall safety.

It is due to the dedication of the Pinson community and START that we have the amazing Turkey Creek Nature Preserve. This area is unique, beautiful, and used by people from all over the southeastern United States. But just like the commitment to the area didn't end once the prison plans were cancelled, the commitment continues past the creation of the preserve. Turkey Creek Nature Preserve depends on the support of dedicated volunteers who help keep the preserve clean and enjoyable for all. Without support and commitment from the Pinson community, Turkey Creek Nature Preserve would not exist.

Please keep this story in mind, on your next visit to TCNP. It has, and continues to take a lot of work to keep TCNP clean and beautiful. Make sure that you leave the preserve as you found it, or better! Also, please consider

supporting TCNP either through volunteering or financial contributions. It will go a long way toward ensuring its continued success.

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