



January 14, 2012

For Immediate Release - Ocean Springs, MS.

It's time to register for the 2012 CLASS of the Mississippi Habitat Stewards Program! Habitat Stewards is a program designed to train volunteers to understand our coastal natural areas and how to manage those resources.

Mississippi Habitat Stewards Program is a project of Mississippi Wildlife Federation and National Wildlife Federation. The 2012 class is sponsored by BP. In exchange for 24 hours of training, each participant will commit 100 hours of volunteer service on partner lands: working to build nature trails, monitor existing nature trails, public relations, management and monitoring for invasive species, planting native plants and many other exciting projects.

Mississippi Habitat Stewards Program Partners are the owners and managers of important natural areas where we work. **In 2011, the inaugural year of Habitat Stewards Program, volunteers contributed approximately 700 hours of class training and 400 hours of labor caring for Partner properties:**

1. Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Coastal Preserves Program
2. Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge
3. Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain
4. USM Marine Education Center, Cedar Point

Says project partner Ali Leggett, MS Department of Marine Resources Coastal Preserve Program, *"It can be frustrating at times to be spread so thin and unable to give each Preserve the attention that it demands and deserves, so I am thoroughly pleased to have such skilled and dedicated stewards for(Coastal Preserves)."*

The program is now recruiting for classes to begin March 9. Check out our NEW website: www.mshabitatstewards.org. If you are interested in learning more or would like to sign up for this program, please call or email: Cynthia Ramseur at 228-875-1032 or cynthia@naturalcapitaldevelopment.com

2012 Mississippi Habitat Stewards Class Schedule:

- Spring Fling – Habitat Stewards and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College students – volunteer work day on Pascagoula River Coastal Preserve, Indian Point Coastal unit, Gautier: February 25, 2012
- First Five Classes will be held on Friday afternoons from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm: March 9, March 23; April 13, April 27, May 11.
- The final class will be held with individual students to mentor on site at the work site of their choice.
- Graduation and awards celebration is scheduled for Thursday evening, June 7.

Quotes from graduates of the Mississippi Habitat Stewards Program

From Julia O’Neal, first graduating class: “Mainly we got to know the lay of the land and what it meant. We learned how it had been before and what we might be able to do to make it better for the future.”

From Janet Wright, first graduating class: “There are lots of people out there who have the attitude or intention to do something to conserve habitats and biodiversity, but they don't feel empowered to do it. The HS program gives that empowerment.”

From Gayla Schmidt, second graduation class: “Habitat Stewards Training involved more fun outings than we have had in years. Working 4 hours outdoors is worth a week of relaxation training.”

From Chris Marshall, second graduation class: “(in Habitat Stewards) I have been able to learn a lot about the environment and its importance to everyday life. Given this opportunity to ... be part of a great group of people has taught me valuable lessons about the environment and life itself.”

CONTACT INFORMATION for Habitat Stewards Program in Coastal Mississippi

Local contact in coastal Mississippi:

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Photo of Habitat Stewards class at Cedar Lake Island, Tchoutacabouffa River, October 2011



Photo of Habitat Stewards work day at Ansley Preserve, Hancock County October 2011