



GULF COAST CENTER FOR  
**ECOTOURISM &  
SUSTAINABILITY**

## **SAFELY EXPLORING ALABAMA'S GULF COAST**

### **Essential Activities**

Outdoor recreation in Alabama is considered an essential activity in the Order of the State issued by the Health Officer on April 3, 2020. That means outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, trail use, boating, and paddling can still be enjoyed by all Alabamians as long as groups are kept to 10 people or less and a consistent 6-foot distance between persons can be maintained. It's advisable that everyone observe the State Health Order and to practice CDC recommendations regarding hand washing and social distancing (maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from others). Violating the State Health Order can result in criminal charges and fines. (Outdoor Alabama <https://www.outdooralabama.com/COVID-19> updated on April 8, 2020)

Due to the evolving nature of the pandemic, please call individual parks, municipalities, businesses and other facilities if you have questions about reservations or operational hours.

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### **Wild Places to Explore by land...**

Hike, bike, horseback ride, and wildlife watch your way through some of the prettiest spots you may not have known about in Baldwin County.

- ❖ The [Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail](#) network is an extensive system connecting the cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach with the Gulf State Park and part of the Fort Morgan peninsula. With over 25 miles of paved and dirt trails and boardwalks, this trail network is a fantastic way to explore some unique coastal ecosystems by biking or hiking. With several trailheads scattered throughout Orange beach and Gulf Shores, you won't have trouble finding a convenient spot to embark on your outdoor adventure. [map](#)
- ❖ The City of Foley's [Graham Creek Nature Preserve](#) off of Wolf Bay Drive has plenty of rustic, unpaved nature trails to hike, run, or mountain bike on through pine savannas, pitcher plant bogs, pine flatwoods, and open succession fields. There is also an ADA compliant trail and wetland boardwalk that gives visitors a view of the headwaters of Graham Creek. Marked and unmarked trails are perfect for people who want to feel like they are "in the middle of nowhere" without leaving town. Pets are welcome on leashes. [map](#)
- ❖ [Wolf Creek Park](#) is a little hidden gem in the Elberta area. Owned and managed by the City of Foley, this pocket park has a kayak launch, a boardwalk through a cypress wetland, and a fishing pier. Pets are welcome on leashes.
- ❖ [Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge](#) is a great spot about halfway down the Fort Morgan peninsula where visitors can hike four different nature trails; all of which will provide excellent



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opportunities to catch a glimpse of wildlife. Trails are easy to follow and pass through maritime forests, dunes, wetland forests, and scrub habitats. Leave pets at home, please. [BSNWR map](#)

- ❖ [Weeks Bay Reserve](#) has natural trails and ADA accessible boardwalks that visitors can use to view gorgeous pitcher plant bogs, examples of landscaping with native vegetation, and estuarine habitats.
- ❖ [5 Rivers Delta Resource Center](#) on Mobile Bay's eastern shore has some easy walking trails throughout their property, "where the Mobile, Spanish, Tensaw, Apalachee, and Blakeley rivers meet and flow into Mobile Bay" (Outdoor Alabama, 2020).
- ❖ And just across the street from 5 Rivers is [Meaher State Park](#) with a fishing pier and a couple nature trails. There are fees to access these grounds ranging from \$2 to \$4.
- ❖ [Historic Blakeley State Park](#) in Spanish Fort will reopen April 20, 2020, giving park goers access to 16 miles of hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails. You do have to [purchase entry tickets](#) online before you go and present them to the front gate attendant upon arrival (\$2-\$8). [Map](#)
- ❖ [Perdido River hiking trail](#) is a nearly 18 mile trail along the Alabama-Florida state line in a tract of Forever Wild Land Trust designated land owned by the State of Alabama. Nice trail, well marked, and a good way to get away from the crowd! [interactive trails map](#)
- ❖ [The Alabama Coastal Birding Trail](#) could provide you with months of exploration opportunities along the Gulf Coast! This trail weaves all through Mobile and Baldwin counties. Birding is a great way to get outside and learn how to actively watch and appreciate the plethora of wildlife that lives in and visits our area.
- ❖ And a few smaller green spaces that are nice to watch a sunrise, take a quiet break, or just to breathe some fresh air while social distancing: [Meyer Park](#), [Wade Ward Nature Park](#), [Wetlands Park](#), [Melvin Roberts Park's nature trail and the Wilbourne Antique Rose Trail](#).

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### **...and by water**

Whether you want to motor around or paddle your own watercraft, there are plenty of places to enjoy the water with others (who are at least 6ft away) or off on your own (perhaps at least 6 miles from anyone else!). There are opportunities for either nearby. Remember to always wear a US Coast Guard approved life vest while enjoying the water in a kayak, canoe, or from a paddleboard.

- ❖ [Lake Shelby](#) is the largest lake of the three within the [Gulf State Park](#). People can try their luck at fishing or launch a kayak, canoe, or boat (no jet skis though). A great place to look for wildlife and seasonal lakeside flower blooms!



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- ❖ [The City of Orange Beach's Canoe Trail](#) has 12 launching points that are easy to use and provide paddlers access to multiple water bodies and coastal sites. Visit each to see what all there is to love about the back bays and bayous of coastal Alabama. OB Canoe [water trail map](#)
- ❖ Adventurous paddlers will see freshwater creeks, salt marshes, bayous, and Wolf Bay on an 8 mile round trip from [Graham Creek Nature Preserve](#) to [Wolf Creek Park](#) and back. Depending on weather, plan for a 4 hour paddle or shorten the trip by doing an out-and-back route from either launch point. Plenty of birds and dolphins to be spotted! GCNP & WCP water [trail map](#)
- ❖ [Robinson and Bird Islands](#) are public parks accessible by water and owned by the City of Orange Beach. The Islands are protected from development and serve as important nesting grounds for migratory sea birds. Leave pets at home, please.
- ❖ [Alabama State Land's Bartram Canoe Trail](#) can be accessed from several points including [Historic Blakeley State Park](#), [Meaher State Park](#), and [5 Rivers Delta Resource Center](#). This adventure calls for a member of your party to be a more experienced paddler that is preferably a little familiar with the area. Paddlers can make reservations to stay overnight in a number of land-based or water-based shelters within the Delta. This exploration idea is perfect since groups must consist of 8 people or less and these shelters are accessible only by canoe or kayak!
- ❖ Among the [City of Orange Beach](#) and the [City of Gulf Shores](#) , there are six [public boat launches](#) with paved parking lots and ramps. Other boat launches in south Baldwin County are a bit more rustic with little to no parking and potentially shallow water: [Palmetto Creek boat ramp](#), [Pirate's Cove](#), [The Pines boat launch](#), [Mullet Point](#), and [View Point launch](#). Not as many people use these, so they are perfect to get away from crowds.

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### Other Outdoor Recreation Opportunities:

- ❖ **Geocaching** is a modern day treasure hunt of sorts that people from all over the world participate in. You'd be surprised at how many geocaches are hidden right under your nose around the Gulf Coast area! It's free and easy to get started; check out the rules of the game at [the official Geocaching website](#) and get started with your search! (just don't forget to bring some hand sanitizer with you to disinfect after handling anything that you find).
- ❖ [The Preserve, The Prairie, and The Pecan Hollow](#) **disc golf** courses are each full 18-basket disc golf courses at [Graham Creek Nature Preserve](#) in Foley, AL. You can download course maps and score cards to take with you. These beautiful courses are designed for players of all skill levels and is a great way to spend a day outside! If you are looking for a shorter course if you are stretched for time, the [Orange Beach Disc Golf](#) course off of Canal Road by Sportsman Marina is



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a 9-basket par 3 course with waterfront views. If you feel like making it over to the Eastern Shore, [the Fairways of Fairhope](#) is a full course with some challenging baskets. All of these courses require players to bring their own discs.

- ❖ A community [Archery Range](#) at [Graham Creek Nature Preserve](#) offers bag targets ranging from 10 yards to 80 yards and a tower to target practice from. No broadhead arrows, please. This range is managed by Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries and requires users age 16-64 to hold a hunting, fishing, wildlife heritage, or wildlife management license which can be bought [here](#). There is no other access fee and archers are required to bring their own equipment.
- ❖ **Fishing** (public docks/piers) is great this time of year. Anyone fishing must have a current license to do so and fees go towards conservation efforts within the State. You can purchase them online here: [Hunting/fishing licenses](#). Some good south Baldwin County sites to reel one in include [the Gulf State Park Pier and Lakes](#) and [Wolf Creek Park](#) where fresh and saltwater species can be caught.
- ❖ Exploring the lands that your taxes help preserve is a special way to build appreciation for Alabama's natural resources. Some of the Forever Wild tracts of land that are open for public access in Baldwin County are [Splinter Hill Bog](#), [Live Oak Landing](#), [Perdido River Wildlife Management Area](#), and the [Lillian Swamp Complex](#).
- ❖ See more outdoor spots to explore along the Eastern Shore and in Mobile County can be found on [Mobile Baykeeper's](#) list if you're looking for more to do a bit farther away from southern Baldwin County!

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### Some online learning sources:

Some of our favorite environmental educators from The Gulf State Park's Nature Center, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Reserve, Alabama Coastal Foundation, and Dauphin Island Sea Lab have created fun and informative lessons we're happy to help share here.

- ❖ Gulf State Park Nature Center has a handful of virtual tours and lessons you can join to discover areas of the Park with the Naturalist team and meet some animals that live in the park. Take a guided [tour of a pitcher plant bog](#), watch the [release of a Common Snapping turtle](#), and learn about [Alabama's Beach Mouse](#), [Barred owls](#), [venomous snakes](#) of Alabama, [alligators](#) and more! You can also check out the [Gulf State Park's Facebook page](#) for field photos and videos posted almost daily.
- ❖ [Dauphin Island Sea Lab](#) has posted a ton of super cool videos, virtual tools, guided activities, and they've been hosting regularly scheduled Zoom meetings if your student is interested in all things related to marine biology and coastal ecology.



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- ❖ Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve educators have created a neat [virtual seine netting field trip in Weeks Bay](#) with accompanying [Estuary Activity Sheets](#) for elementary through high school students. This is a great resource to gain further understanding of local estuaries.
- ❖ Alabama Coastal Foundation has offered their [Gulf Coast Bay Buddy](#) program online for 1st-3rd graders; learn conservation concepts that are relevant to our local bays! They also have made some of their famous [Water Festival](#) activities for 4th graders available online. Students can learn about watersheds, why we need to protect them, and have fun while they're doing so.
- ❖ [Science Buddies](#), [Green Kids Now: For Kids by Kids](#), and [Generation Genius](#) are blogs and websites for kids that have focus on ecology, climate, biology, zoology, and other science topics.

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### **And some ways to be an Explorer in your backyard and community:**

- ❖ You could join a local, state, or national citizen science group to help monitor environmental events and natural resources. [National Geographic](#) lists out some groups you can join to help with environmental research. Science does not have to be limited to a classroom! [CoCoRaHS](#) monitors precipitation rates all over the country, [observe and record wildlife sightings](#), [record light pollution](#) with [Globe at Night](#), join [Frog Watch](#) to learn about wetlands and amphibians, help project [BudBurst](#) by learning about plants and climate, or help [monitor for Monarch larva and butterflies](#). There are so many ways to be an Earth scientist and contribute your and your student's data!
- ❖ [Scholastic 100](#) is a website built for teachers that is filled with free lesson plans. You could conduct some of these lessons and projects in your backyard, on the patio or deck, or even at your kitchen table! They even have a [collection of Earth Day lessons and activities](#) for grades K-8. Some favorites that may not require an extra trip to the store for supplies are [Sunny Science](#), the [Catalog Cancel=Save Trees project](#), planning out and [starting an eco-project](#) that will benefit your community, [creating a Tunnel Book](#), and more!