

Restoring the Lower Perdido Islands



THE ISLANDS

The Lower Perdido Islands and their beautiful blue-green waters, sandy beaches, and unique wildlife are easily one of the most popular spots in all of Alabama – for both people and nature.

Many of the roughly 8 million annual visitors to Baldwin County make a trip out to the islands. During holidays, well over 1,000 boats park along the white sands. The islands are vitally important to the local economy with tourists spending \$6.7 billion – supporting more than 55,000 jobs – visiting the Perdido Islands and the surrounding area each year.

Birds also love the spot. During peak migration, between 10-30 million birds a night fly over Baldwin County and the islands. Tricolored herons, reddish egrets, little blue herons, snowy egrets, clapper rails, willets, and woodcocks forage in the marsh and waters in this popular coastal spot.

The islands are also vulnerable and diminishing in size due to years of storm damage, erosion caused by boat wakes, and impacts from the DW Horizon Oil Spill.



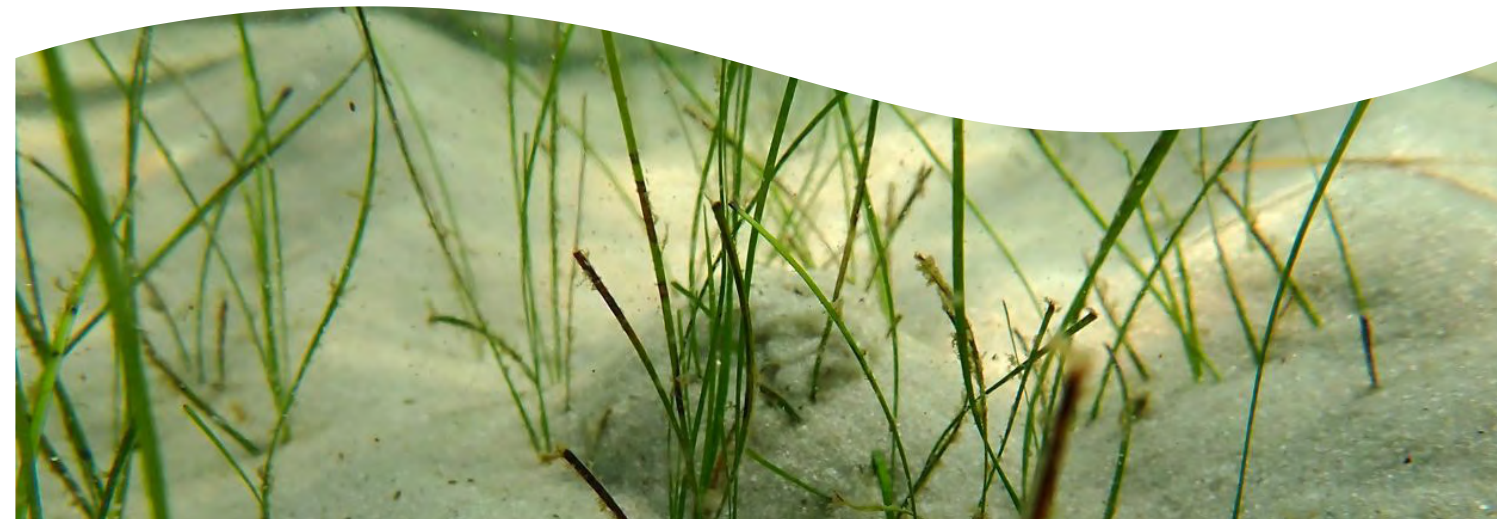
Conservation Balance

Robinson and Walker Islands are small but ecologically rich. Osprey, herons, pelicans, and migratory shorebirds loaf, nest, and forage on the islands. Seagrass beds and other submerged habitats provide nursery grounds for fish such as speckled sea trout, redfish, and Atlantic croaker. They're also home to shrimp and blue crabs.

Due to the significant biodiversity found on and around the islands, conservation goals included protecting and sustaining wildlife habitat while maintaining recreational opportunities for the public. This meant focusing on habitat protection and raising public awareness of current rules and regulations on the importance of the unique habitats of the Lower Perdido Islands.

These strategies included:

- Planting trees, shrubs, and marsh for nesting and roosting wading birds
- Cordoning off areas to maintain distance between birds and humans
- Installing signs for public awareness (seagrass, no motor, no dogs, trash, etc.)
- Enforcing rules and regulations to protect natural resources and for public safety
- Developing a safe boating app



The Future of the Islands

The islands will remain vulnerable to storms and beach traffic but are now more resilient to these impacts due to the new improvements. Walker Island will remain off limits to visitors for the birds' safety, a no-motor zone will be maintained to protect the seagrass beds, and a no-wake zone around the islands will continue to exist for the safety of boaters and wildlife in the area.

While protection strategies will support the islands into the future, the completed project means there is more room for wildlife to feel at home, and for people to visit this Gulf Coast jewel long into the future.



The Work of Rebuilding

On Robinson and Walker Islands, construction teams created and restored:

- 6 acres of subtidal habitat (sand flats)
- 4 acres of marsh habitat
- 13 acres of shrub habitat
- 3 acres of dunes
- 4 acres of upland habitat

They also reinforced the breakwater on Robinson Island and planted native sea oats and marsh grasses. As they grow, the plants will stabilize the newly placed sediment and provide habitat for fish, blue crabs, birds, and other wildlife.

By expanding the islands and creating new habitat, this project is helping to repair damage to the land and wildlife caused by erosion and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Protecting the seagrass beds around the islands during construction posed a unique challenge. Seagrass beds support a vast diversity of marine species but are in decline worldwide. Remarkably, seagrass beds are thriving in the Lower Perdido Islands. To avoid damaging the beds, the team carefully transplanted the seagrass that was in the project footprint.



“With upwards of **8 million tourists annually**, the island system is at risk of being loved to death. This project is very exciting and thanks to our partners we were able to both restore habitat and provide space for recreation.”

– Katie Baltzer
Coastal Projects Manager,
The Nature Conservancy in Alabama

By the Numbers

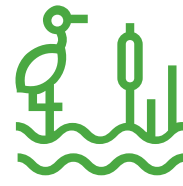
As many as **30 million birds** migrate through the area around the Perdido Islands in one night.



More than
500 boats
a day visit the
islands during peak
season.



More than
**200,000
native plants**
planted to
stabilize habitat



Nearly
30 acres
of barrier island
habitat on Robinson
and Walker Islands
restored



Tourists will spend **\$6.7 billion**
—supporting more than 55,000 jobs—visiting the
Perdido Islands and the surrounding area each year.



“We know that our
revenue is generated from
our natural resources,
our ecosystems, and
environment. What fool
would destroy that?”

— Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon



In Partnership

The restoration of the Lower Perdido Islands is the result of private and public partners working together to protect and restore a special place for people and nature. From drafting initial plans, to placing protective fences and signs around the islands, to keeping the public informed, the project is only successful because of the many people who chose to work together to make the vision a reality.

The Nature Conservancy worked with the City of Orange Beach for more than a decade to plan this restoration project. Funding through NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Natural Resources Damage Assessment funds helped make it a reality. In addition to restoring habitat, the project supported the local economy. Seven local and two regional subcontractors, along with more than 130 local workers—including engineers, scientists, and construction crews—contributed to the effort.

Thank you to all those who contributed to this important project.



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