

The Wonders of Alabama

Preparations

Arrange a classroom table “altar” with a cloth, a candle, a clear container with water, and a Bible open to Deuteronomy 8:7. Before participants arrive, familiarize yourself with the Legacy posters, so that you can refer to them as you share information about the Wonders of Alabama. Decorate the room with the posters that will be referred to in today’s Session. As class begins, invite participants to add their gifts to the table “altar” – representing the beauty and wonder of Alabama.

Reflection: 10 minutes

1. Prayer

We thank you Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ... To him, to you and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP p. 306, excerpt from the Thanksgiving over the Water)

2. Someone reads the Scripture

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills. Deuteronomy 8:7 NRSV

3. Meditation

Invite participants to meditate quietly for one minute and then to identify special places in Alabama, particularly those in and around water (lake, river, creek, beach, Camp McDowell, etc.) Make a list on newsprint.

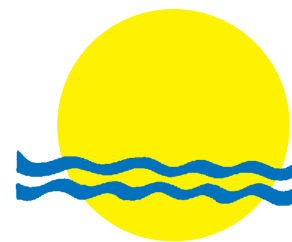
Education: 25 minutes

Teach from the following.

As we learn more about “Watersheds and Warming” – that is, how our home waters are related to climate change – our focus today is The Wonders of Alabama. What is so significant about the lakes, rivers, streams and water features of our Diocese, and the state of Alabama?

The World Wildlife Fund, whose support contributed to this Guide (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/>), has targeted 200 places worldwide for their focus over the next 50 years. Out of these select 200 places around planet Earth, WWF is focusing more closely on just 19 places – worldwide – between now and 2015. One of their top-focus 19 places is the combined Tennessee River and Mobile Basins. This includes most of the state of Alabama, and therefore the Diocese of Alabama. The region of our Diocese is among the most biologically diverse and beautiful geographical areas in the world. Our rivers and streams are the richest in North America, and among the richest on Earth. And we have just named several wondrous places and features of God’s Creation in Alabama.

The term “biologically diverse” is used to describe the number of different organisms that live naturally and thrive in our state. Alabama’s rich diversity exists because our state is uniquely located where some of the great landscapes of North America come together.



During the last ice age, as glaciers advanced southward, they pushed nutrient-rich topsoil ahead of them, right into Alabama. (Refer to Legacy “Soils of Alabama” poster.) The glaciers themselves did not reach as far south as Alabama, so we did not experience their adverse effects. These factors contribute to our rich biodiversity. (Refer to Legacy “Alabama’s Water Resources” poster.)

The region of our Diocese is among the most biologically diverse and beautiful geographical areas in the world.



*For the Lord your God
is bringing you
into a good land,
a land with flowing streams,
with springs
and underground waters
welling up
in valleys and hills.*

Deuteronomy 8:7 NRSV

Topography/Landscapes

Alabama has a broad range of topographies or landscapes.

At the south end of the state, the Gulf of Mexico creates beaches, dunes and coastal habitats that support a wealth of plants and animals. (Refer to Legacy “Plants of Alabama” and “Wildlife of Alabama” posters.)

Further inland, great pine forests dominated by longleaf pine once stretched across more than 2/3 of Alabama. The remnants of these forests contain a unique and rich diversity of plants and animals; indeed, the plant diversity of longleaf pine forests is the richest in North America. Places like the Bankhead National Forest (near Camp McDowell) contain elements of both the coastal pine and Appalachian hardwood forests and contain a rich tapestry of species from both regions. (Refer to Legacy “Common Trees of Alabama” poster.)

At the northern end of Alabama the Cumberland Plateau is home to the rugged mountains and deep caves that contain a wealth of species that make the Appalachians one of the biological “hot-spots” on the entire continent. Alabama ranks first among the 50 states for cave diversity – the number of different life forms that live underground.

Plants and Animals

Plants and animals, on the land, in the water, and underground—all of these species make our state of Alabama fifth-ranked among all the U. S. states for biological diversity, and the

highest-ranked state east of the Mississippi. To travel the scope of the Diocese of Alabama and the length of our state from the Gulf Islands to the Cumberland Mountains is an experience of the incredible richness of God’s Creation.

A Network of Water Courses

(Refer to Legacy “Alabama’s Water Resources” poster.) Fresh water is always moving through the State and among the different physiographic regions described above. (See the Alabama River map from <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu>.) About 8% of the fresh-water in the continental U.S. originates in or flows through Alabama. Our state has more navigable rivers (1,438 miles) than any other state.

High in the mountains, **rocky streams and creeks** fall through the forests, joining together into increasingly larger streams and eventually small rivers.

There are a number of **small and medium rivers** crossed by Alabama citizens every day – the Paint Rock, the Cahaba, the Sipsey, the Choctawhatchee, the Perdido. These small rivers and their headwater streams are among the most biologically rich freshwaters on Earth.

Two Great River Systems

Most of Alabama’s small rivers flow into one of two great river systems of North America.

In north Alabama, they flow into the Tennessee River, one of the great biological treasures

on the continent. The Tennessee flows into the Mississippi River.

In south Alabama, most of the rivers flow into the Mobile River system which ends in the Tennessee Delta and Mobile Bay. Like the Tennessee River, the Coosa/Tallapoosa/Alabama system of rivers, and the Tombigbee/Black Warrior system, have been of great importance to the development of our state, and are also among the biologically richest river systems on Earth.

Biological Diversity

Because of the rich biological heritage of Alabama, our state is one of the most popular for ecological research, conservation efforts and naturalists.

Alabama is ranked among the top 10 states for reptiles and amphibians, and is home to a large numbers of species of mammals and birds. (Refer to Legacy "Wildlife of Alabama" poster.) Birdwatchers arrive annually from around the country to experience bird migrations, contributing to the state's economy.

According to The Nature Conservancy **Alabama ranks #1** among the 50 states for freshwater diversity, the number of species that live in our rivers and streams.

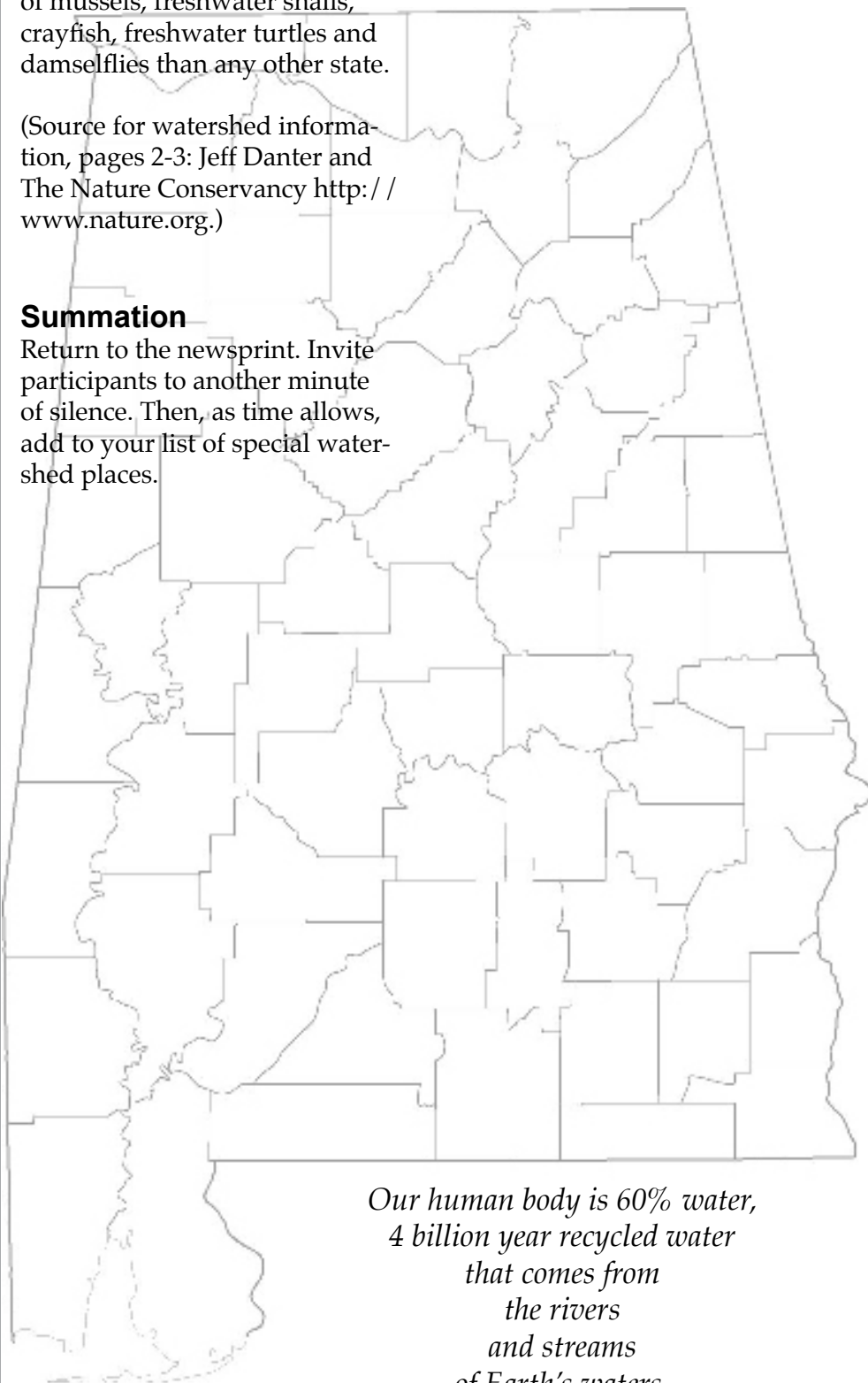
Alabama has more species of freshwater fish than any other state. The Cahaba River alone contains 135 species of fish, compared to 99 species that exist in the entire state of California. (Refer to Legacy "Fishes of Alabama" poster.)

Alabama has more species of mussels, freshwater snails, crayfish, freshwater turtles and damselflies than any other state.

(Source for watershed information, pages 2-3: Jeff Danter and The Nature Conservancy <http://www.nature.org>.)

Summation

Return to the newspaper. Invite participants to another minute of silence. Then, as time allows, add to your list of special watershed places.



*Our human body is 60% water,
4 billion year recycled water
that comes from
the rivers
and streams
of Earth's waters.
Healthy rivers and streams
are crucial to the future of life -
and there are no refills.*

Session Two

Wonders

Action: 10 minutes

Invite participants to select one or more of the following Care of Creation activities.

1. As you pray, worship, study and work this week, notice various features that contribute to the beauty, wonder, and natural biodiversity of the Diocese of Alabama. Invite family and friends to notice too. Write what you find in a journal or notebook, take photos, sketch images, or look for pictures in magazines. Bring your reflections/ images to place on the table "altar" for Session Three.

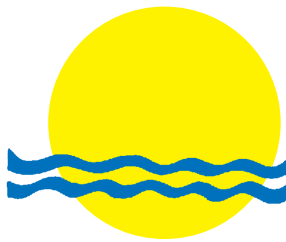
2. When rain falls at your church or at home, where does it go? Delineate the route that water takes from your home site to the river, or groundwater. Describe how the waters of baptism for your parish get from their source to the baptismal font.

3. Bring pictures of your home river or stream to place on the table "altar" for Session Three.

Prayer

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and forever. Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Beauty of the Earth,
BCP p. 840 #8



*We join with the earth
and with each other.*

*To bring new life to the land
To restore the waters
To refresh the air
We join with the earth
and with each other.*

*To renew the forests
To care for the plants
To protect the creatures
We join with the earth
and with each other.*

*To celebrate the seas
To rejoice in the sunlight
To sing the song of the stars
We join with the earth
and with each other.*

*To recreate the human community
To promote justice and peace
To remember our children
We join with the earth
and with each other.*

*We join together
as many and diverse expressions
of one loving mystery:
for the healing of the Earth
and the renewal of all life.*

Prayer from U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program
Earth Prayers From Around the World, p. 94

Resources: *Wading in the Waters*

<http://www.legacyenvd.org/index.htm>

The beautiful and informative posters used in this session, along with other resources, are produced by Legacy, Inc. Their website contains a wealth of information for citizens. To order your own set of posters, go directly to the poster page by using the address below. One free set is available to each citizen of Alabama. Remember to put an "underline" in the space between "materials" and "poster."

http://www.legacyenvd.org/materials/materials_poster.htm

<http://www.riversofalabama.org/index.htm>

This is a beautiful website. It features Beth Maynor Young's photographs. As you click on the photo for a particular watershed, the site will open to an enlarged photo, plus that watershed with its river and tributaries superimposed on a map of Alabama, outlined by county. Under the picture you can click on a topic of interest and will find not only good information but usually more pictures. This site is wonderful. This website gives information about the wonders of our biodiversity, with beautiful photos of our rivers and pictures of river creatures. It also connects to the EPA watershed site for access to even more information. Have fun!