

**United States Army Corps of Engineers
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Cahaba River Society
The Nature Conservancy
The Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley
Cahaba Sportsmen's Club
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
World Wildlife Fund**

News Release

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Dam Removal on Cahaba River is First for Alabama

State's longest free-flowing river gets help from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and conservationists.

BIRMINGHAM, AL –Marvel Slab Dam on Alabama's Cahaba River is being removed this week, the first dam to be removed in the state for environmental reasons. The work is being done with the cooperation of eight government agencies, conservation groups and the landowners alongside the river.

"This dam has served its useful purpose and now it's time for it to be taken out," said Wendy Smith, director of World Wildlife Fund's Southeast Rivers and Streams program. "The dam has had an enormous impact on the river but we expect the river to recover quickly. This is an important project because the waterways of the southeast, particularly the Cahaba River, are home to an incredible array of aquatic animals. The rivers and streams of the southeastern United States rival places like the Amazon Basin and the Mekong Delta in the rich diversity of their aquatic life."

The dam is 6 feet tall, 210 feet long and 24 feet wide. It was constructed about 40 years ago in northern Bibb County to allow coal and logging trucks to cross the river. The dam is basically a giant slab of concrete with 46, 3-foot diameter culverts that allow water to pass through. Removing it will cost about \$200,000, the majority coming from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with additional funds from World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, the Cahaba River Society and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

More than 131 species of fish and more than 75 species of freshwater mussels and snails have been observed in the Cahaba including five fish and eleven mollusk species protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

"Removal of this dam will significantly improve the ecological integrity of the Cahaba," said Dr. Randy Haddock, field director for the Cahaba River Society. "An essential quality of a healthy river is its 'connectedness.' Marvel Slab leaves shoals inundated and prevents aquatic wildlife from connecting with upstream and downstream populations, movements essential to their life cycle. Our thanks go to the Corps and our partners who have worked so hard to make this removal a reality."

The dam is also a significant hazard for boaters, swimmers and other recreationists because the design of the dam can cause dangerous conditions on the river. The dam is also an inconvenience since boaters have had to portage around it even under normal conditions.

"We are pleased to partner with the Corps of Engineers and several other conservation partners in this effort to restore more natural flow conditions in Alabama's longest free-flowing river," said Paul

Freeman, aquatic ecologist with The Nature Conservancy of Alabama. “This project will aid in the recovery efforts for nine species of fish and mollusks protected under the Endangered Species Act by improving the habitat that these animals need to survive.”

To minimize the harm to mussels and freshwater snails from the project, scientists and technicians spent three days transplanting the animals out of harms way. They picked by hand thousands from the bottom of the river, counting and classifying them, and then carrying them upstream away from the dam removal site. After the dam is removed, scientists say, animals will colonize and migrate through the newly restored natural river.

“The Cahaba River ranks as one of Alabama’s biological treasures,” said Patric Harper with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “The removal of the Marvel Slab is an important conservation event. It removes a barrier for migratory fishes and isolated populations of invertebrates, restores natural historic river conditions, and expands areas available for fishing, boating, and other human activities. The service is excited to be a part of this environmental milestone.”

Debris from the dam will be disposed of on land adjacent to the river owned by Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley. Their involvement, along with the other landowner, the Cahaba Sportsmens Club, has been an essential part of the dam’s removal.

“As an adjacent landowner, we are excited to be a part of a project that will enhance the environmental health of the Cahaba River,” said Robert S. Hay, associate executive of the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley. “As stewards of this earth, we believe we are called to work towards the protection and enhancement of the environment of this earth given to us by God.”

Thousands of abandoned small dams and diversions still exist on waterways across the southeast. The removal of Marvel Slab sets a precedent that will likely be repeated in the years to come. The Corps is already considering the removal of two dams in the Chattahoochee River on the Georgia/Alabama border.

“Removal of Marvel Slab is important to the Corps because it enhances the health and integrity of the Cahaba River and provides an opportunity to work in a collaborative partnership with agencies and organizations concerned with water resources and achieve a lasting betterment for the Cahaba River,” said Beverley Stout with the Mobile District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“We view this effort as significant in the Alabama conservation arena and are privileged to have worked with a number of dedicated partners,” said Will Brantley, Natural Resource Manager for the Alabama State Lands Division. “We believe that this project will be the first of many partner habitat restoration projects supported by the Alabama State Lands Division of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.”

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Note to Editors – photos of the dam, river and the transplanting of animals are available.