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## **MOON RIVER CANOE LAUNCH INAUGURATES THE CAHABA BLUEWAY**

Birmingham, Ala.—The Freshwater Land Trust announced today a collaborative partnership to establish the Moon River Canoe Launch, the first recreational site that will be developed as part of the recently announced Cahaba Blueway. The canoe launch is being built with the support of the Alabama Power Foundation, and will be maintained through cooperative agreements with the cities of Leeds and Irondale.

Details of the project, which will be built on Freshwater Land Trust property, were unveiled during a press conference at Bass Pro Shops in Leeds. Officials with the Land Trust and Alabama Power were joined by the mayors of Irondale and Leeds and representatives from the founding organizers of the Cahaba Blueway: The Nature Conservancy, The Cahaba River Society, and Alabama Innovation Engine.

The planned canoe launch, which will be located on U.S. 78 between Irondale and Leeds, is expected to draw a large number of outdoors enthusiasts, because of its proximity to people across metro Birmingham. In addition to being part of the new Cahaba Blueway, the launch also ties into the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System now under construction across Jefferson County.

The launch will be named *Moon River* after a combination river camp/gas station/dance hall that used to exist nearby during the 1930s.

The Cahaba River is Alabama's longest remaining stretch of free-flowing river, the primary drinking water source for one-fifth of the state's people in the Birmingham metro area, and a treasure of biological diversity of national and global importance. The Cahaba has been named by The Nature Conservancy as one of eight "hotspots of aquatic biodiversity" in the U.S.

The Cahaba Blueway, once fully developed, is expected to provide multiple public access sites along the entire river for recreational purposes including boat-fishing, canoeing, swimming, bank fishing, hunting, hiking, picnicking, and sightseeing.

"We are excited to be a part of the ongoing efforts to expand access and recreation along the Cahaba River," said John Hudson, president of the Alabama Power Foundation. "This project aligns well with one of the Foundation's areas of focus: to help preserve and enhance our state's natural resources for the benefit of all Alabamians."

Mayor David Miller, City of Leeds, agreed that "Moon River will provide easy access to canoeists of all ages, giving the community a much needed entry point," one that can be responsibly used and monitored by both the cities of Leeds and Irondale. "I'm particularly happy to partner with our neighboring municipality in this project and to see the site developed in such an ecologically sound manner. I remember the old Moon River site and think it is great we are preserving the memory of that name and place."

Mayor Tommy Joe Alexander, City of Irondale, reflected on the Moon River Beach site, remembering the pavilion-like log cabin just off of the road. "My grandfather used to take me there. We would have a coke and sometimes get gasoline,

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speaking to the travelers who used it as a rest stop.” He added, “I am happy that we are using the original name to keep memories of the fishing camp culture alive.”

Beth Stewart, executive director of the Cahaba River Society said, “The Cahaba is a world-class river, with great potential for more recreation use and tourism. When public access is well designed, well managed, and well known, people in Cahaba watershed communities will have better recreation and economic opportunities that are compatible with the health and beauty of the River and its wildlife. The Cahaba Blueway project aims to support the commitment of partners like the Alabama Power Foundation, the cities of Leeds and Irondale, and Freshwater Land Trust to help them reach their goals for the River.”

Wendy Jackson, Executive Director of the Freshwater Land Trust, applauded the diverse partners involved in the effort. “We are honored to connect the community based efforts of the Red Rock with the vision of the Cahaba Blueway partnership through the establishment of the Moon River Canoe launch. We thank the Alabama Power Foundation for their generous support and commend the cities of Leeds and Irondale for their collaborative spirit. We also thank the Cahaba Blueway partners for their commitment not only to the health of the river but also to the community’s desire to be connected to the river.”

“When The University of Alabama’s Center for Economic Development and Auburn University’s School of Architecture Urban Studio collaborated to create Alabama Innovation Engine, they hoped that it would demonstrate the benefits of non-traditional collaborative efforts to Alabama. The partnerships being formed to imagine and develop The Cahaba Blueway as a community asset show that this model of economic development resonates with communities and organizations. Continued development of the project will focus on creating a Blueway that reflects and embraces the diverse communities that exist along the length of the Cahaba River from Birmingham to Old Cahawba,” said Matt Leavell of Innovation Engine.

“The Nature Conservancy has been working to protect the Cahaba River and its unique biodiversity for many years, including the protection of over 3,800 acres in the watershed. We understand the importance and benefits of the Cahaba and can raise awareness for others by improving river access and encouraging them to experience it for themselves,” said Chris Oberholster, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Alabama. “Our partnership with the Cahaba River Society and Alabama Innovation Engine is raising the visibility of the Blueway, as well as its importance to the state of Alabama and local communities along the trail.”

Construction of the Moon River launch is expected to begin this fall and be completed by 2014.

*The Freshwater Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that acquires, conserves and connects open spaces that are critical for the protection of rivers and streams and that provide recreational opportunities for the community. Its mission is the acquisition and stewardship of lands that enhance water quality and preserve open space. It is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, which recognizes it as meeting standards of excellence, upholding the public’s trust and ensuring that conservation efforts are permanent. The Freshwater Land Trust conserves land in Jefferson, Shelby, Blount, Chilton, Bibb, St. Clair, Tuscaloosa, and Walker counties. For more information, please visit [www.freshwaterlandtrust.org](http://www.freshwaterlandtrust.org).*

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