

Hello and good morning everyone. I am so happy to be with you all and honored to be invited as a guest speaker for the season of creation. My name is Blair Morrison, and I am a relatively new member of All-Saints (started attending last summer thanks to the Perkins family). In my day job, I work as the lead scientist for the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program; I have to give a disclaimer that I'm here speaking in my personal capacity this morning, but many of the same truths that I work on in my professional role underlie our message today.

I'm excited to share details about our developing Gulf Coast Eco-Region, a collective of churches and parishioners dedicated to creation care of the living waters across our coast. Eco-regions were initiated by the Episcopal church in 2023 and have since expanded to 12 regions aligned by geography or environmental challenge. Our Ecoregion (the Watersheds of the Gulf Coast or WogC for short) spans from Apalachicola, FL to Brownsville, TX. That's pretty ambitious! There's a lot of variation across that coastal gradient, habitats, wildlife, languages, industries, cultures, but two things unite us all – water and the Gulf. Water sustains us all, underlying the health of coastal communities and our collective quality of life - humans and nature intertwined.

Watersheds are the cornerstone of our ecoregion. But what are they? In a nutshell, a watershed is an area of land that all drains to the same stream. Watersheds are all around us. No matter where we are, we're in one and impacting one. Right now, we're actually on the boundary of two watersheds – the front entrance on Ann Street is in the Three Mile Creek Watershed, and the back parking lot is in the upper Dog River watershed. Why does this matter? And why are watersheds a key component of our creation care? Waters don't follow political boundaries. Watersheds are like nesting dolls- smaller ones feed into larger ones, and everything moves downstream. Our beloved Mobile Bay is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Although we sit along the coast, the watershed that feeds the Bay begins hundreds of miles north – encompassing most of the state, and portions of Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi. Decisions that are made in communities upstream can impact the quality of water and habitats on the coast. As an eco-region, watersheds allow our creation care activities to reach across the upland-coastal continuum, and can connect communities across the watershed to have an active role in caring for their waters.

So why now? And what is at stake here? It's no secret – we have a tendency to take our ecosystems for granted (myself included). Our fast-paced lives aren't quite structured to let us be still and rest in quiet reflection of nature. How many of us can name the plants in our yards, the birds singing in the trees, the creeks and streams that we cross on our way to work? Yet, we live in one of the most biodiverse regions in the US. Our state lands are home to the greatest diversity of oak trees and carnivorous plants, and our rivers host over half of

US freshwater turtle species, over 330 species of fish, 100 species of crayfish, 61% of US freshwater mussels and over a quarter of US freshwater snail species. A veritable treasure trove of nature. Famed conservation biologist and local Mobilian E.O. Wilson famously said that to find another location at the same latitude with comparable diversity as southern Alabama, you'd have to travel across the world to the foothills of the Himalayas. Even amongst riches, how are so many of us blind to it? Even as these landscapes and watersheds are threatened by land use change, unsustainable development, pollution, and both direct and indirect impacts from climate change? These challenges are not unique to our state, nor to our ecoregion, but require collective action- diverse communities- each and every one of us to address. Resource management, climate action, and creation care are team sports – we all have to participate to make things happen. Hence, this is an open invitation to join the ecoregion and plug in where your interests, passions, and skills can contribute to our work.

In our ecoregion, we are developing tools to inform, inspire, and invite folks from across our dioceses to get involved. “Inform” connects parishioners with accurate science and experiential learning about watersheds, environmental pressures, climate change communication, and equitable community-level solutions. “Inspire” integrates creation care with worship, preaching, retreats, and discipleship, helping congregations understand watershed stewardship as an expression of love for God and neighbor. “Invite” creates accessible pathways for action by matching participants’ interests and abilities with volunteer opportunities, creation-care ministries, and programs offered by local environmental partners. Together, these strategies position congregations as trusted conveners and mobilizers within coastal communities, sharing knowledge, projects, curricula, and best practices to expand the reach of nature-based climate action and environmental justice.

To close, I'd like to return to the sacred diversity that we are entrusted with in this state and beyond. In science, we're taught that biodiversity has inherent value in its existence – once it is lost, it is unlikely to be regained (at least on human timescales). And its loss is often a great destabilizer, like pulling a thread from a sweater – it's hard to keep the garment in one piece. Just like in our human communities, those that are most overlooked often suffer the greatest losses. But beyond the science of the matter, how much joy are we missing when we don't revel in the complexity, diversity, and beauty of creation? How much wonder and inspiration can we gain in our work to preserve it?

On this final day of National Estuaries Week, let us reflect on the bounties, blessings, and stories of Coastal Alabama. And let us be bold enough to join the call to love our downstream neighbors.