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Endangered Fish Habitat Improved Thanks to Black Warrior Riverkeeper and Freshwater Land Trust

Birmingham, AL: The Powderly neighborhood in west Birmingham is home to something incredible: the watercress darter, a federally endangered fish species found only in the Black Warrior River watershed in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Watercress darters, less than two inches in size, enjoy cool, well-vegetated spring runs and exist in only a handful of locations throughout the county. In Powderly, these fish reside on property conserved by Freshwater Land Trust (FLT) in a 26.1-acre conservation easement (CE). A CE is a voluntary, legally binding agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization, such as a land trust, which restricts future land development in order to protect the land for conservation purposes. FLT manages the stewardship of this property with funding from two supplemental environmental projects (SEPs) given to FLT as a result of Black Warrior Riverkeeper's successful completion of two previous water pollution lawsuits.

"This conservation easement helps safeguard watercress darter habitat and promote the long-term survival of the species. We are glad that the funds resulting from these pollution lawsuits are going towards Freshwater Land Trust's valuable work in the watershed and the Powderly community." -Katie Holmes, Outreach Coordinator of Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

The process to conserve the property began after landowner Emily Godsey purchased the property in 2018. In 2021, Godsey generously placed the land in a CE with FLT, ensuring its permanent preservation and the protection of sensitive species habitat from any future development. FLT documented that the property within the CE contains 228 feet of Seven Springs, which is known habitat for watercress darters.

A larger stretch (1,142 feet) of Nabors Branch also courses through the property; the recently identified *Etheostoma birminghamense* (Birmingham darter) has been found here and was successfully seined (caught carefully with a vertical, weighted net) during FLT's Endangered Species Tour held on October 17th. Yale biologists described the Birmingham darter in April of 2025 as a new species found only in the Black Warrior River watershed. Both Seven Springs and Nabors Branch, as well as an unnamed tributary of Valley Creek elsewhere on the property, flow into the Black Warrior River.

As the holder of the CE, FLT has utilized the SEP funding for some of the property acquisition costs and also has worked closely with Godsey to address issues such as invasive vegetation, erosion, and illegal dumping on the property. In the fall of 2023, FLT and partners undertook a [stream restoration project](#), amending a perched culvert under 24th Street SW that prevented watercress darters from moving upstream. In 2024, [extensive efforts to rid the habitat of invasive vegetation](#) were begun; a dense understory of Chinese privet, mimosa, Bradford pear, and

autumn olive were ground up by a large mulcher, and later, herbicide was applied to the young resprouted growth.

“What’s so great about this property’s restoration is that the vegetation management directly benefits darter habitat in Seven Springs. Removing the invasive plants is important on its own because those species wreak havoc on local ecosystems, but by opening up the understory, more sunlight reaches the stream. This allows aquatic vegetation to flourish, which is crucial for the watercress darter, and none of this work would have been possible without help from our partners at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Black Warrior Riverkeeper.” -Sam McCoy, FLT Land Stewardship Director.

Most recently, environmental contractor Action Environmental removed 1,416 tires and 129 tons of trash from the Godsey CE and an adjoining property. Additionally, entrances used by would-be trash dumpers have now been blocked to further help protect the darters and their habitat.

“It requires the intentional partnership of many caring people to preserve our land and species. We must work together to protect these precious parts of our world for future generations.” - Emily Godsey, Landowner.

The two nonprofit organizations will continue to provide updates on further improvements to the habitat.

To view photos of the Godsey easement before and after tire removal and vegetation management, [click here](#). Photos by Sam McCoy, Freshwater Land Trust.

To view photos of the Godsey easement before and after litter removal and vegetation management, [click here](#). Photos by Sam McCoy, Freshwater Land Trust.

To view a photo of a watercress darter, [click here](#). Photo by Nelson Brooke, Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

To read an October 14, 2025 interview with Dr. W. Mike Howell, who discovered the watercress darter in 1964, [click here](#). Interview by Charles Scribner, Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

For information about conserving land with Freshwater Land Trust, [click here](#).

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[Black Warrior Riverkeeper](#)’s mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. The citizen-based nonprofit organization promotes clean water for the sake of public health, recreation and wildlife habitat throughout the Black Warrior River watershed.

[Freshwater Land Trust®](#)’s mission has two distinct but complementary objectives: to conserve and care for environmentally significant land throughout Central Alabama, and to connect the Red Rock Trail System® throughout Jefferson County. In the simplest terms, we conserve land and build trails to create happier and healthier communities.