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Improvements by Freshwater Land Trust Enhance Historic Mardis Mill Falls

Blount County, AL — Freshwater Land Trust (FLT) has completed a series of conservation and visitor improvements at Mardis Mill Falls in Blountsville, a popular recreational site featuring cascading falls over sandstone ledges and a well-loved swimming hole. The projects benefit habitat protection and recreational access at one of Blount County's most cherished outdoor destinations. The Birmingham-based nonprofit acquired the 23-acre site in December of 2024 when the property, located on Graves Creek upstream of the Locust Fork River, was donated to FLT by landowners Bill and Anne Blackerby, who worked with the land trust to ensure the permanent protection of cherished family land.

The area surrounding the falls is known for both its ecological and recreational importance. The waters of Graves Creek and the Locust Fork are part of the Black Warrior River watershed, and are home to the federally endangered Black Warrior waterdog (*Necturus alabamensis*), a salamander found only in the Black Warrior River basin and a species of high conservation concern, per the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources State Wildlife Action Plan. These waters are also prized by paddling and fishing enthusiasts, and the falls themselves have been enjoyed as a summer swimming destination by Blount County residents for decades.

"The donation of Mardis Mill Falls to FLT was incredibly meaningful; by entrusting this property to FLT, the Blackerby family ensured this special place would receive long-term care and remain accessible to the community" said Liz Sims, FLT's Land Conservation Director. "We're proud to conserve and steward a place so important both ecologically and recreationally."

Upon FLT's acquisition of the property and its comprehensive survey of the site, the organization's stewardship staff identified areas where dedicated conservation improvements and site enhancements could be made. FLT worked with local partners, the Friends of the Locust Fork River and Blount County Commission, to draft plans addressing the issues: invasive vegetation, habitat degradation, litter, inadequate parking, and limited signage. Since the start of 2025, FLT has undertaken and completed a number of transformative projects to benefit Mardis Mill Falls, including:

- The clearing of well-established invasive shrubs and trees with a prescribed burn, revealing the unique sandstone glade overlooking the falls. The burn, conducted in partnership with Further Forestry and Friends of the Locust Fork River (FLFR), greatly enhanced prior efforts to combat invasive species like Chinese privet and has since allowed the growth of heat-tolerant glade species, such as Menges' flame flower (*Phemeranthus mengesii*) and lanceleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*).
- The increase of available parking with the expansion of a dedicated gravel lot, reducing excessive roadside parking and site degradation occurring during the busy summer season. Additionally, FLT placed boulders as natural barricades between the conservation site and road to prevent vehicular disturbance to the sensitive sandstone glade.
- The installation of trash and recycling receptacles to provide secure units for responsible disposal of waste and recyclables. The availability of these will aid FLFR's cleanup efforts, which the volunteer-led organization has held since 2017. FLFR's long-time stewardship of the falls includes trash collection and water quality monitoring.
- The addition of informational signage, encouraging the safe and responsible enjoyment of Mardis Mill Falls. The new signs have details about the property's ecological importance and history, site rules and guidelines, and vital recreational safety notices.

View photos of Mardis Mill Falls and some of these improvements:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/pboyum4d8bx9pg8e8b5nq/AGoC3q6G86KukleHBdCnhMQ?rlkey=jxoytk7jl3ap58skgn2xb8bu6&st=v49g69nc&dl=0>

FLT is delighted to reveal these recent improvements with an unveiling at Mardis Mill Falls on Tuesday, June 16th at 11:00am. FLT will present its conservation updates and stewardship progress, acknowledge its partners in the recent projects, and celebrate the impacts made with a ribbon cutting.

Event details:

Mardis Mill Falls Unveiling

Tuesday, June 16th at 11:00am

546 Mardis Mill Rd., Blountsville, AL 35031

Freshwater Land Trust conserves, connects, and cares for land throughout Central Alabama. Since 1996, FLT has preserved land critical to the protection of Alabama waterways and created outdoor recreational opportunities for communities. In the last 30 years, FLT has protected over 12,500 acres of land in 14 counties and facilitated 175 miles of the Red Rock Trail System® throughout Jefferson County. Mardis Mill Falls is the land trust's fifth public-access conservation property and its first in Blount County. See locations of FLT's other public-access properties at <https://freshwaterlandtrust.org/get-involved/get-outside/>

FLT is celebrating its 30th founding anniversary this fall with Freshwater Fête. See more at <https://freshwaterlandtrust.org/2026/05/freshwater-land-trust-celebrates-30th-founding-anniversary-with-momentous-event/>

Friends of the Locust Fork River (FLFR) is an all-volunteer river advocacy organization that works to preserve the free-flowing and natural wonder of the Locust Fork River and its tributaries. FLFR has provided vital care to Mardis Mill Falls since 2017, including trash cleanup, water quality testing, and continued advocacy. Learn more about FLFR at <https://www.friendsofthelocustforkriver.org/>