MEDIA ALERT

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Freshwater Land Trust Marks 30 Years with Freshwater Fête, Featuring Three Major Pronouncements For Central Alabama

Largest ever land acquisition, international major grant award for species protection, and the official naming of the Red Rock Trail System®'s future 36-mile connected loop will be unveiled at the November 13th event.

WHAT: Freshwater Fête: From Idea to Impact — Freshwater Land Trust's 30th anniversary celebration and fundraiser. The evening will feature a celebration of accomplishments, recognition of honorees, dinner, a live auction and music, along with three major pronouncements (EMBARGOED UNTIL THE EVENT):

1. **A significant land acquisition** — Freshwater Land Trust just closed on a nearly 2,100-acre conservation easement, the largest single property acquisition in the organization's history.
2. **A major grant award** — Freshwater Land Trust is set to receive an international grant to front efforts to protect one of nine North American endangered species, which is found only in Jefferson County.
3. **The naming of the Red Rock Trail System®'s loop** — Freshwater Land Trust is working to develop a 36-mile connected loop of trails that will circle the greater Birmingham metro, linking six cities and the area's three largest greenspaces. Several mayors of the included municipalities will be in attendance to reveal the formal name of the trail loop.

WHEN: Friday, November 13, 2026, 5:30-9:00 p.m. CST [Media check-in / best time for interviews and announcements: e.g., 6:00 p.m.; pronouncements at approximately 7:00 p.m.]

WHERE: The Club, 1 Robert S. Smith Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209

WHO:

- Freshwater Land Trust leadership, including Executive Director Rusha Smith and Board Chair Sid J. Trant (also Chancellor, University of Alabama System)
- 30th anniversary honorees: 30 honorees and 11 posthumous honorees who have impacted Central Alabama through their work with Freshwater Land Trust (see attached list)
- Sponsors, government officials, distinguished guests, supporters, former and current board members, partners, and friends who have shaped three decades of conservation and trail development in Central Alabama

WHY: Freshwater Land Trust was born out of a 1996 consent decree following litigation against Jefferson County for large-scale wastewater pollution in local waterways. Thirty years later, the organization leads the region in protecting environmentally significant land and connecting people to the outdoors. Freshwater Fête celebrates that journey and launches Freshwater Land Trust's bold future vision.

Interview Opportunities

Freshwater Land Trust's past and current leadership are available for interviews before and at the event:

- **Rusha Smith, Executive Director** — the organization's 30-year impact, the three pronouncements, and the vision for the organization's next 30 years
- **Jennifer Andress, External Affairs and Special Projects Director and Mayor of Homewood** — the impact of the organization on local municipalities and the importance of public access to greenspaces on local economies
- **Carolyn Buck, Red Rock Trail System® Director** — the regional impacts (economic, health, and transportation) of trails and the status of the Red Rock Trail System®'s trail loop
- **Sam McCoy, Land Stewardship Director** — the significance of land conservation and stewardship for biodiversity throughout Central Alabama and the status of the international major grant award
- **Wendy Jackson, longest-serving former Executive Director (2001-2016) and event honoree** — the organization's 30-year impact and major lasting projects
- **Dr. William "Mike" Howell, discoverer of the endangered watercress darter and event honoree** — the organization's work benefiting species of concern, including notable partnerships created to aid the rare and federally endangered darter fish

The Idea: From a Sewer Crisis to a Conservation Legacy

In the early 1990s, Jefferson County's aging sewer system was discharging raw sewage and wastewater into the Cahaba and Black Warrior Rivers — the primary sources of drinking water for much of Central Alabama. In 1993, the Cahaba River Society (now part of the Cahaba River Coalition) and private citizens sued the county under the federal Clean Water Act. The case was settled with a federal consent decree in December 1996.

Rather than paying fines to the federal government, the county was directed to invest $30 million in a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) — one of the first and largest of its kind in the United States — to protect land along the county's creeks and rivers. As a result of the decree, the Black Warrior-Cahaba Rivers Land Trust was created to do it. Today, that organization is known as Freshwater Land Trust. With the SEP funds, Freshwater Land Trust protected roughly 4,000 acres in Jefferson County to safeguard habitat and drinking water.

Over the next 30 years, the land trust kept going as an independent nonprofit — and kept growing.

30 Years of Impact

- **Conserved 15,000+ acres** across 14 Central Alabama counties
- **Received first national accreditation** as land trust in Alabama
- **Launched the Red Rock Trail System®** with the goal of putting every Jefferson County resident within one mile of a greenspace; completed more than 175 miles of trails (including bike lanes, greenways, and complete streets)
- **Helped create signature public greenspaces** such as Red Mountain Park and Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, including protecting more than 2,000 acres in the Turkey Creek watershed
- **Restored multiple habitat locations** for threatened and endangered species, including the watercress, vermilion, and rush darters
- **Removed more than 26,000 pounds of trash** from local creeks and streams through Project Litter Gitter

The Next 30 Years

Funds raised at Freshwater Fête will support the organization's future goals to:

- Protect 30,000 additional acres of land throughout Central Alabama, reaching 50,000 conserved acres
- Complete the Red Rock Trail System®'s 36-mile connected loop around the Birmingham metro, growing the system to 200+ walkable and bikeable miles
- Open six new greenspaces across the region, doubling Freshwater Land Trust's current number of publicly accessible properties

Visuals

B-roll and photos of Red Mountain Park, Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, the Red Rock Trail System®**,** and the Black Warrior and Cahaba River property sites are available on request.

About Freshwater Land Trust

Freshwater Land Trust conserves, connects, and cares for land and water in Central Alabama, creating dynamic green spaces for future generations. Founded in 1996, it was Alabama's first nationally accredited land trust and leads the development of the Red Rock Trail System® in Jefferson County. Learn more at freshwaterlandtrust.org.