

# The Big One

*Unprecedented. Phenomenal. Unique and Valuable.  
This is the Big One.*

Those were just a few of the adjectives used on August 23, 2023 to describe the magnitude and impact of AWF's Cedar Point Beach Oyster Restoration Project. Located just west of Dauphin Island Parkway, this 77-acre relic oyster reef restoration project represents AWF's fifth oyster restoration project in the last six months.

In March, 2023, AWF completed a one-acre enlargement of the Bender Austal Reef just north of Gaillard Island, a 2.6-acre enlargement of the Lynn Dent Boykin Reef near Little Dauphin Island, and redeployment of reef balls to the Dog River Reef. In August, 2023 AWF started a 12-month water monitoring project at the Point Clear Reef on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, and The Big One at Cedar Point Beach. Collectively, these five projects represent an investment of \$850,000 in private sector funds towards oyster restoration in Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound.

The AWF Cedar Point Beach Oyster Restoration Project was unique in three unique ways: size, logistics, and partners.

After completing our three projects in March, we sat down with our partners at the Alabama Marine Resources Division (MRD) to identify our next potential project. From earlier discussions, we all knew that we were looking for something in the Cedar Point area as it would provide a project site between Bender Austal Reef to the north and the Lynn Dent Boykin Reef to the south. This position would provide the opportunity for oyster larvae exchange between the three reefs. After sampling some water bottoms for hardness and oyster presence at Cedar Point East, conditions were not suitable. From there we turned our attention to Cedar Point West, more specifically the area known as Cedar Point Beach. Bottom hardness and water conditions were favorable and the site was immediately adjacent to some of Alabama's most productive natural oyster beds. AWF and MRD agreed it would be a good site for another oyster cultch planting project. MRD developed the specifications for the project which called for 6,500 tons of #4 limestone cultch material spread over 77-acres. Estimated cost \$500,000. AWF went to work.

The first two priorities focused on where we could get the #4 limestone and how would we get it from point A to point B. AWF tapped into our network and reached out to Vulcan Materials Company to see



Steve Forehand, President



Tim L. Gothard, Executive Director



After a nine day journey from Tuscumbia, Alabama, 6,500 tons of limestone oyster cultch material passes under the Cochran Bridge in Mobile in route to the Cedar Point Beach project site near Dauphin Island.



**Cranes offload limestone cultch material from the deep hopper barges onto flat barges capable of entering the shallow waters at the Cedar Point Beach Project site.**



**High pressure water cannons disperse the limestone oyster cultch material onto the Cedar Point Beach project site. The goal: one inch thickness across the 77-acre project site.**

if they would partner with us on the project. Once we shared with them the details and the limestone rock needs, they were quick to come and board and agreed to donate the entire 6,500 tons from their Pride Quarry in Tuscumbia, Alabama. This was a major, early boost to making the project a reality.

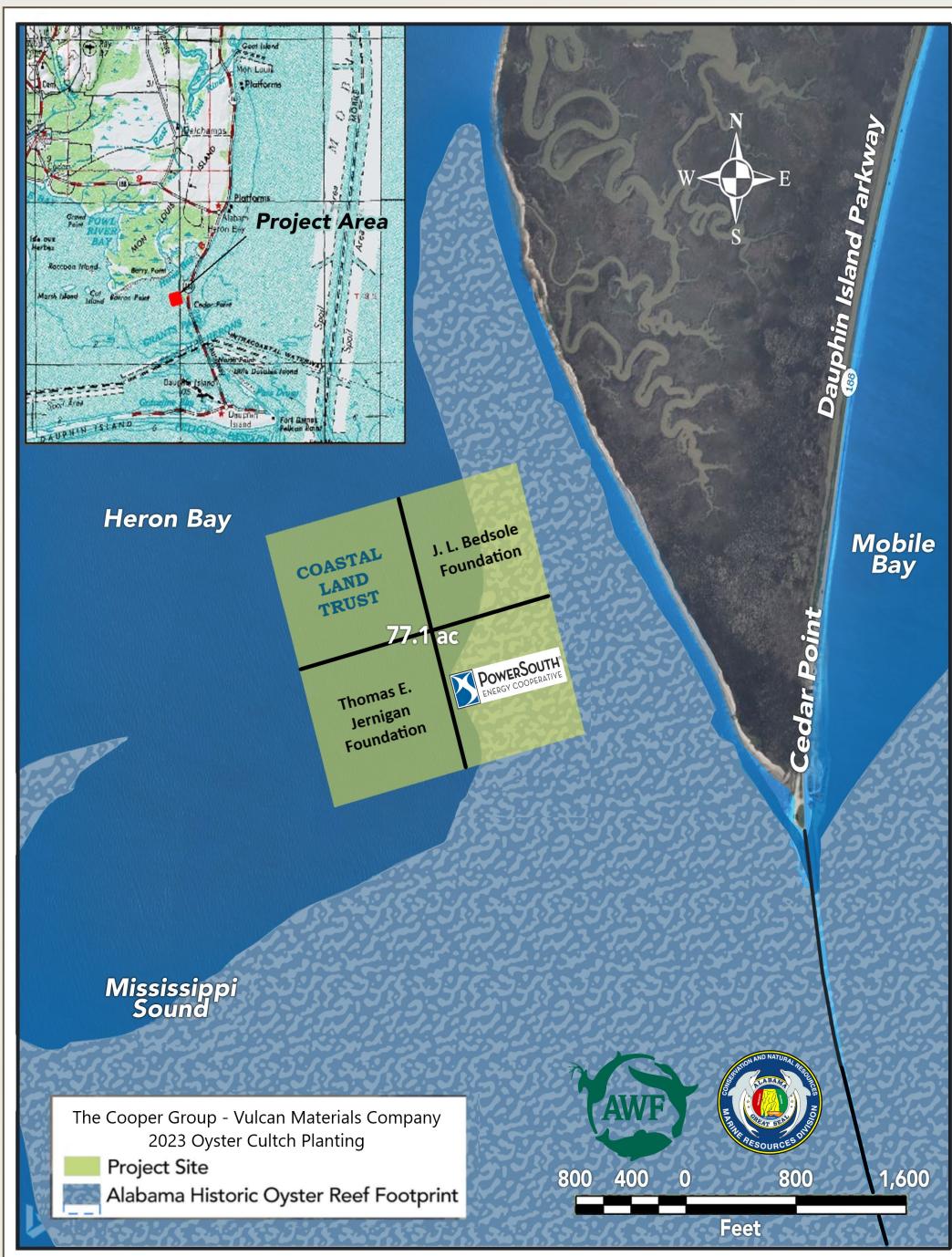
From there, AWF Past President, Angus Cooper, III, also President of The Cooper Group, stepped up and committed to donate the barging of the material from Tuscumbia to Mobile Bay. A second major and early boost to the project. With the #4 limestone secured and transportation from point A to point B in place, we turned our focus to deployment logistics – who and how would we place the 6,500 tons of cultch material onto the 77-acres of water bottom at Cedar Point Beach?

We reached out to Wayne Eldridge with J&W Marine, the company who handled our deployments at the Bender Austal, Lynn Dent Boykin, and Dog River Reefs. Wayne advised that when the deep hopper barges containing the 6,500 tons of limestone arrive in Mobile Bay, J&W Marine would offload the limestone onto flat barges, capable of entering shallow water at the Cedar Point Beach project site, and they would use high pressure water cannons to spread the material at the needed thickness of one-inch across the 77-acre site. Cost: \$200,000. AWF went to work.

AWF committed \$100,000 in organizational funds from the AWF Oyster Restoration Fund. We divided the site into four quadrants and set a goal of finding four partners to join us at \$25,000 each to complete funding for the deployment. First, we reached out to the Coastal Land Trust in Mobile and they quickly committed to fund one of the quadrants. Our next call was to the J.L. Bedsole Foundation in Mobile and they too funded one of the quadrants. Next stop, Andalusia and PowerSouth Energy. It was a success and our third quadrant secured. And finally, we reached out to the Thomas E. Jernigan Foundation in Birmingham and they honored AWF by gladly joining the effort and committing to fund the final quadrant. With the deployment now fully funded, we turned our efforts to the logistics of project execution.



**Over 50 people from AWF, our project partners, local elected officials, and community members joined us on August 23rd to view and celebrate the Cedar Point Beach project deployment.**



On Sunday evening, August 13th, The Cooper Marine tug, Mr. David, and the four hopper barges filled with #4 limestone, left the Pride Quarry in Tuscumbia, Alabama. That was the beginning of a nine-day journey along the Tennessee River, the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, and the Tombigbee and Mobile Rivers to reach Mobile Bay. On Tuesday night, August 22nd, the hopper barges passed under the Dauphin Island Bridge and moored in the deeper waters near the Cedar Point Beach Oyster Restoration Project Site. Early Wednesday morning, August 23rd, J&W Marine equipment and personnel started offloading the limestone cultch material onto flat barges and moved them into position at the project site.

At 10AM on August 23rd, over 50 AWF friends, including all of our project partners, local elected officials, and news media joined us at the Cedar Point Pier to view and celebrate the deployment and the project. It was a moving day and a historical moment. As MRD Director, Scott Bannon, said that day *“To have a 100% privately funded cultch planting - I think it’s absolutely unheard of. I don’t think we’ve had that occur in any other state, other than on a private lease. It’s absolutely phenomenal that we’re getting 77 acres of*



*public bottom that is privately funded. I can't stress enough how unique that is and how valuable that is."*

Bannon also noted that, *"It is not to be taken lightly that the AWF has decided to put its muscle behind oyster restoration efforts. The AWF is a statewide organization, so it has a natural interest in statewide wildlife issues, such as those that benefit deer and turkey hunters. For it to back a coastal effort is a very deliberate and significant decision."*

At 5:21PM on Friday, August 25th, the AWF Cedar Point Beach Oyster Restoration Project was officially complete. In honor of the significant and early leadership commitments from The Cooper Group and Vulcan Materials Company, the deployment will be officially called "The Cooper Group-Vulcan Materials Company 2023 Oyster Cultch Plant"

AWF owes tremendous thanks to Alabama Marine Resources Division, The Cooper Group, Vulcan Materials Company, The Coastal Land Trust, The J.L. Bedsole Foundation, PowerSouth Energy, and The Thomas E. Jernigan Foundation for investing with AWF in this significant oyster restoration project. Exceptional teamwork and exceptional results.

And as Angus Cooper, III stated at the deployment viewing and ceremony, *"AWF isn't finished. We're just glad to be part of getting something started, and I can promise you this, there's more to come."*



Marine Resources Director, Scott Bannon, addresses the group at the Cedar Point Beach project site.



Angus Cooper, III, AWF Past President and President/CEO of The Cooper Group, shares his thoughts on the Cedar Point Beach Oyster Restoration Project.