



Steve McConnell/Staff Photo

With a unanimous ruling, the Alabama Environmental Management Commission granted Wolf Bay the highest state classification for water quality – Outstanding Alabama Water. (Pictured) - Al. Dept. of Environmental Management officials Lynn Sisk and Trey Glenn; Al. Environmental Management Commissioners Kathleen J. Felker, Anita L. Archie and Laurel G. Gardner; Wanda Ramos, president of the Wolf Bay Watershed Watch; Cindy Lowry and Adam Snyder of the Alabama Rivers Alliance

World class water

Unanimous ruling designates Wolf Bay as an Outstanding Ala. Water

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MONTGOMERY – With a unanimous ruling, the Alabama Environmental Management Commission, an appointed board who oversees the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), granted Wolf Bay the highest state classification for water quality – Outstanding Alabama Water (OAW).

The 6-0 vote validates nearly a decade of work, including constant volunteer water quality monitoring, the development of a comprehensive watershed plan and a public awareness campaign reaching out to government officials throughout Baldwin and Mobile counties, by the Wolf Bay Watershed Watch (WBWW), a non-profit environmental organization based near Wolf Bay.

The classification applies to Wolf Bay from the Intracoastal Waterway to Moccasin Bayou, according to Jerome Hand, public relations director for ADEM.

In order to receive OAW, ADEM must certify, according to federal and state regulations, that the proposed area meets stringent water quality standards which take into account bacteriological, dissolved oxygen and turbidity data, among other indicators.

WBWW members contributed to the data by collecting water quality samples over the years, according to Stan Mahoney, executive director of the group.

He said that without the efforts of citizen volunteers boating and even wading through the waters of the bay on steamy summer days and frigid winter months, Wolf Bay would not have the data to earn the designation.

James McIndoe, head of ADEM's Water Division, said that Wolf Bay is only the

fourth waterway state-wide to receive OAW and the first estuarine system.

"We certainly thought (the designation) was an appropriate step to take with Wolf Bay, it's not something we take lightly," said McIndoe

Segments of the Cahaba River, Hatchet Creek, and the Tensaw River are also deemed OAW, he said.

Wanda Ramos, president of the Wolf Bay Watershed Watch, said: "I'm very excited for our volunteers that have put in many hours testing water quality.

"And, it's paid off for the people of Wolf Bay and the State of Alabama. A big part of this goes out to Liz Langston of the watershed watch for keeping the water quality program going and for sending many letters to ADEM over the years requesting OAW."

Mahoney realizes that the designation is a beginning - not an end - for the environmental quality of Wolf Bay and the county's resources.

"This is not a final step, but rather one more step in the process," he said, noting that with sustainable development and government action the Intercoastal Waterway, Perdido Bay, Little Lagoon and the Bon Secour Bay could be classified as outstanding waters.

The watershed watch, he said, needed nearly 8 years of data to verify that Wolf Bay deserved the designation.

But, Mahoney said: "I don't think we have that much time to wait."

He recommended the usage of real-time water quality devices submerged in the county's waterways so that data can be consistently measured, reported and verified.

"There needs to be a cooperative approach among the municipalities and the county in order to get a system in place," he said, adding that local chambers of commerce, developers and businesses should join the cause and promote action for environmental quality in the county.

"We would like to see an increased awareness from those who are benefiting from the county's resources," he said.