

ELHEW LEGACY

*The Elhew Field Station
is a new biological
research facility of
the Wehle Land
Conservation Center*

The origins of the Elhew Field Station date back to a vision the late Robert G. Wehle had when he initially offered his 1,546-acre life-estate near Midway, Ala., to the Forever Wild Land Trust in the early 1990s. Not only would the land he restored be protected in perpetuity for the citizens of Alabama, but new opportunities would arise to educate the public about the importance of conservation and sound land stewardship.

Forever Wild's initial tract acquisition in 1994 paved the way for the establishment of a unique conservation project, which included the donation of additional land and the development of two on-site facilities by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' State Lands Division—the Wehle Nature Center in 1998 and the Wehle Land Conservation Center in 2004 (following the passing of Mr. Wehle in 2003).

The establishment of these facilities led to the development of the Elhew Field Station in 2011, named in honor of Elhew Kennels. The Elhew Kennels hosted Mr. Wehle's prestigious line of world-class English pointers. The name "Elhew" is derived from "Wehle" spelled backwards. Today, the Elhew line of English pointers continues in private hands, while Mr. Wehle's spirit of conservation persists on these public lands. In recognition of Robert G. Wehle, the Elhew Field Station is dedicated to supporting sound land stewardship principles and promoting the understanding and appreciation of Alabama's natural heritage through research, conservation, and outreach initiatives. The Field Station is a component of the Wehle Land Conservation Center and provides the infrastructure necessary to support this mission.



JOHN TRENT

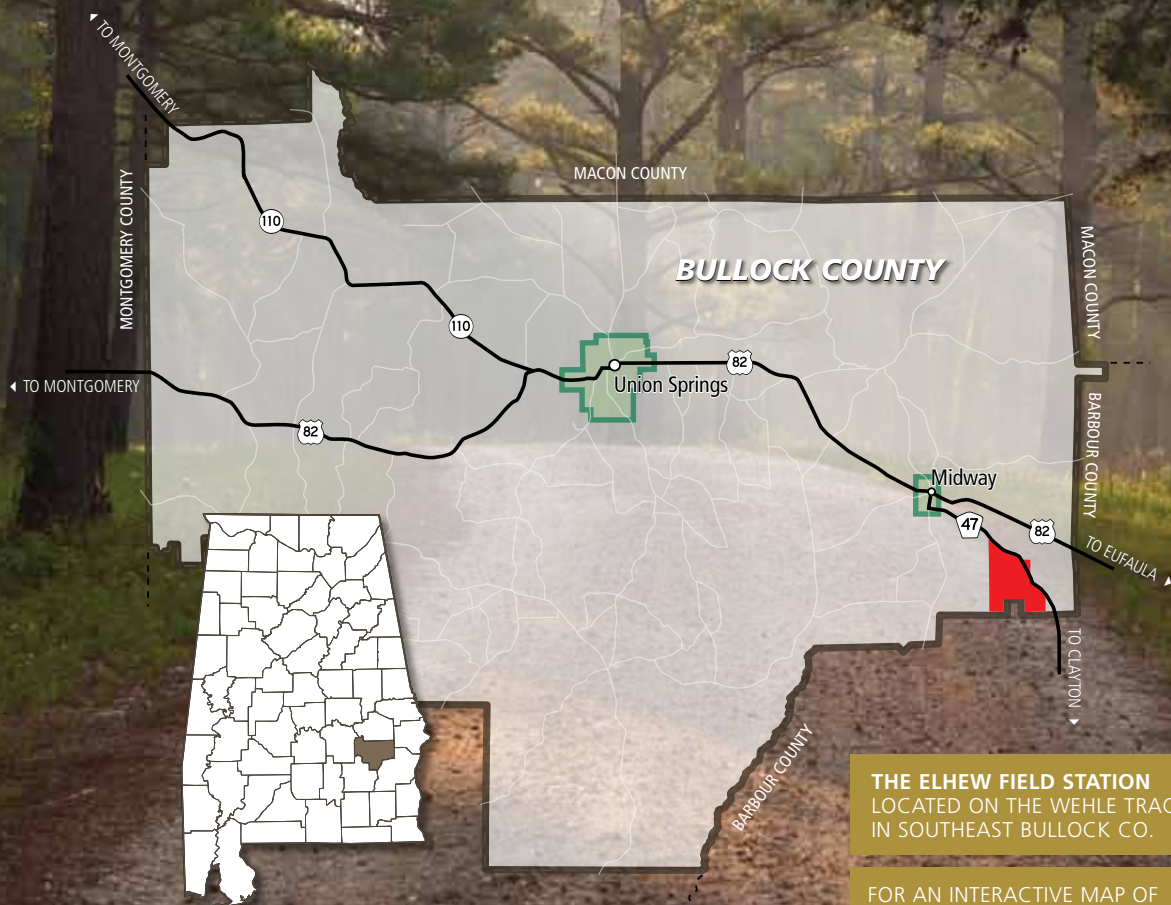


ERIC SOEHCEN

Above: Merchant's cabin on the Wehle Land Conservation Center grounds.

Below: Bachman's sparrow nest on the Wehle Forever Wild Tract (June 3, 2011).





THE ELHEW FIELD STATION
LOCATED ON THE WEHLE TRACT
IN SOUTHEAST BULLOCK CO.

FOR AN INTERACTIVE MAP OF
FOREVER WILD PROPERTIES VISIT
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WEHLE TRACT BACKGROUND

Most Forever Wild properties are purchased from willing sellers through fee simple title acquisition, immediately turning over

to the appropriate entities within the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to manage under the provisions of the Forever Wild Constitutional Amendment. However, the Wehle tract was purchased under unique circumstances. Mr. Wehle negotiated the sale of his estate to Forever Wild at a discounted price (50 percent of the appraised value), but retained ownership of a small inholding surrounding his compound including his house, outbuildings and cabins in a life estate. This was necessary because manmade structures are not permitted on Forever Wild lands. Additionally, Mr. Wehle retained the management rights on the surrounding property until his death, which is known as a life-estate interest.

The existing natural attributes of the property coupled with its proximity to the adjacent Barbour Wildlife Management Area supported a high score in three of the four Forever Wild management designations. As a result, the entire tract was purchased as a nature preserve, recreation area and wildlife management area under Forever Wild's multiple-use philosophy. Shortly after the sale in 1994, Mr. Wehle donated an adjacent 25-acre parcel to the State Lands Division to provide a location for the construction of a nature center and generously contributed half of the expenses to build it. After its completion in 1998, free conservation-themed programs and special events were regularly offered to the public.

In 2004, one year after Mr. Wehle's passing, the State Lands Division and the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division received designated areas of the tract to manage following the terms of the acquisition. The inholding surrounding Mr. Wehle's compound transferred to the State Lands Division under

the life-estate agreement. Shortly afterwards, the Wehle Land Conservation Center was established on the former compound grounds to expand upon the existing programs of the Wehle Nature Center. Additionally, the stewardship of the upper two-thirds of the Forever Wild tract shifted to the State Lands Division for management as a nature preserve and to provide for recreational opportunities, while the remaining southern parcel was added to the Barbour Wildlife Management Area.

Maintenance of both the Wehle Nature Center and Wehle Land Conservation Center is financially supported, in part, through annual distributions from the Robert G. Wehle Charitable Trust, a perpetual trust established by Mr. Wehle before his death. Annual distributions from the trust also support the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's maintenance of the Robert G. Wehle State Park in upstate New York; Mr. Wehle's former 1,067-acre estate sold to the State of New York under similar arrangements.

ELHEW FIELD STATION OPERATIONS

The mission of the Elhew Field Station is very similar to other biological research stations, offering a balance of wildlife research, on-site conservation and environmental outreach as major components of the day-to-day operations. Additionally, partnerships with various organizations, institutions and researchers are fostered to increase program opportunities for public interests.

The Station is currently staffed with two biologists — a program manager and a wildlife biologist. Current amenities of both Wehle facilities include a 20-room dormitory that can sleep 40 guests, two guest cottages, a large covered pavilion, and a meeting room and theater in the nature center. Ground will soon be broken on construction of a new dining hall, which will complete the Center's infrastructure.

Although only recently established, Station operations are near full capacity, and the following summary highlights many of the projects or programs that are currently underway.



DAN BROTHERS

Robert G. Wehle left an enduring legacy to Alabama through the Wehle Land Conservation Center and the Elhew Field Station.

Opposite page: Examples of wildflowers found on the Wehle Forever Wild tract. Clockwise from top left: Narrowleaf sunflower, fragrant water-lily, blazing star and Turk's-cap lily.





JOHN TRNET



BILLY POPE



JOHN TRNET



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WILDLIFE RESEARCH AND MONITORING

The natural attributes of the Wehle Forever Wild Tract provide an outdoor laboratory for research and monitoring opportunities to study the wildlife resources inhabiting the property. Given the ornithological (scientific study of birds) backgrounds of the staff, a primary focus of the Elhew Field Station is managing an Avian Conservation Center and performing a variety of projects addressing national and statewide bird conservation interests. Several long-term projects are underway and include operating a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding station, coordinating and participating with the U.S. Geological Survey's Breeding Bird Survey in Alabama, and performing status surveys

for coastal marsh birds, swallow-tailed kite, golden eagle, cerulean warbler, rusty blackbird, Bachman's sparrow, yellow rail and other species of conservation need.

Station personnel are also collaborating with guest scientists focusing on research projects that address knowledge gaps in bird ecology. An example of this is a current study addressing the nesting strategies of Eastern bluebirds in response to fire disturbance and frequency, which will assist in reevaluating existing management plans for private and public lands, to benefit not only bluebirds but other species with similar habitat preferences.

On the other end of this "science in action" spectrum, the Elhew Field Station recently established a bioacoustics monitoring station to record and archive

migratory bird's night-flight calls during seasonal movements. This is a rapidly advancing technology in a relatively new field of ornithology. Recordings allow for the determination of bird species migrating overhead, the number of birds present during the migration, and the seasonal patterns of these night-flight movements over southeast Alabama through the scientific analysis of time-stamped spectrographs (graphical recordings of flight calls). The Elhew Field Station is currently one of only a few night-flight call monitoring stations established in the Southeast.

Although these projects are currently focused on birds, it is anticipated that future projects will expand to include other groups of animals as new opportunities for collaboration develop.

A recently banded Kentucky warbler is released at the Elhew Field Station.





BILLY POPE

Eric Soehren and John Trent band birds at the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) banding station on the Wehle Tract, one of more than 500 such stations in the United States. Analyses of the banding data provide critical information relating to the ecology, conservation, and management of North American landbird populations, and the factors responsible for changes in their populations.

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL OUTREACH

While research and monitoring are significant components of addressing wildlife management, the other primary objective of the Elhew Field Station's mission focuses on promoting conservation and providing outreach opportunities to the public. Within the past year, station personnel have developed several partnerships with other entities to foster these outreach needs in a region of the state where such opportunities rarely exist. The audiences vary from elementary students to adults of all ages, and the conservation programs provided emphasize applied learning in the field.


One of the station's primary education partners is the Auburn University Environmental Institute, which coordinates environmental programs for Bullock and Barbour counties' fourth grade students each spring and fall at the Wehle Nature Center. Other partners include the Alabama Cooperative Extension

System in Bullock and Barbour counties, the Bullock County Forestry Planning Committee, and the Birmingham Audubon Society, where their respective outreach events are hosted at both Wehle facilities annually. Station personnel contribute in each of these events by presenting programs.

The State Lands Division also hosts a conservation-themed event each spring and fall on the Wehle Land Conservation Center grounds, helping the public learn about the importance of conservation and proper land stewardship through exhibits, lectures and demonstrations. These events have drawn crowds of up to 1,100 people.

In addition to public outreach, Station personnel also work with academic institutions providing technical programs for college students majoring in wildlife science or similar fields of study. Programs are tailored to introduce students to advanced topics in the natural sciences and demonstrate various wildlife techniques.

The Elhew Field Station recently hosted Auburn University's Summer Wildlife Practicum and Jacksonville State University's ornithology class for weekend programs. Future plans include developing academic short courses focusing on these subjects for college credit.

Whether it is wildlife research or environmental outreach for the public, none of this would have been possible without the vision and generosity made by the late Robert G. Wehle. The legacy he has given us is a treasure to be enjoyed by all. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Elhew Field Station, call (334) 529-3003 or (800) LAND-ALA or visit www.outdooralabama.com.