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April 14, 2009

Greg Lein
State Lands Division
Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
64 North Union Street, Suite 464
Montgomery, AL 36130

Re: Nomination of the Birmingham Water Works Board's 3,200 acres along the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River in Jefferson County & Blount County, Alabama to the Forever Wild Program

Dear Mr. Lein:

On behalf of Black Warrior Riverkeeper and The Friends of the Locust Fork River I am writing to nominate the Birmingham Water Works Board's 3,200 acres along the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River in Jefferson County & Blount County, Alabama for consideration of purchase by the Alabama Forever Wild Program. The Locust Fork, a significant river in many respects, currently has little public access despite considerable public use for recreation, fishing, and paddling. Acquisition of this property would constitute a win for the river and for future generations.

The Birmingham Water Works Board (BWVB) is interested in selling this property. While they do not wish to earmark the property for a conservation purchase, they are interested in all offers and are not opposed to the idea of Forever Wild purchasing the property. This property was purchased by the BWVB in anticipation of building a dam to create a water supply reservoir. Now that this project is no longer going to occur, the threat to the Locust Fork's free-flow is no longer, and the time is right to protect this property. The Locust Fork is one of Alabama's longest remaining free-flowing rivers.

The BWVB property is separated into two large tracts with a few outlying parcels. These two tracts are close to one another, separated by about 2.5 river miles. While most of the land within these tracts is forested there is some pasture, and coal mining has taken place on the southern tract in the past. For the most part riparian buffers are intact along the river, leaving scenic vistas on the riverfront and abundant wildlife habitat. A number of tributaries flow into the Locust Fork through the two tracts. Protection of the tracts equals protection of water quality in these vital tributaries to the river.

The northern tract covers some of both sides of the river along Gilman Bend and Standridge Bend. Standridge Bend has a nice sandy beach at its tip and a large rock bluff is on the opposite side of the river. Just upstream, a small waterfall runs over some rocks and into the river. Rocky shoals along this stretch of the river are home to the Shoals spider-lily (a.k.a. Cahaba lily). The remnants of an old covered bridge can be seen in the river. Wooded hills extend uphill away from the river, and rock bluffs can be seen far above hidden in the trees. A number of islands can be found in the river through this stretch of property, which touches approximately 7 miles of river frontage.

The southern tract extends over the Jefferson County – Blount County line. Here a railroad trestle crosses the river not far downstream of the proposed BWVB dam site. Just upstream the

property adjoins the old Dean's Ferry crossing. This is a calm and scenic stretch of the river with only a few shoals. This stretch of property touches approximately 5 miles of river frontage.

Alabama geologist Jim Lacefield's observations along the banks of the Locust Fork lead him to believe the river flows within the same channel as an ancient river that was formed some 300 million years ago during the Pennsylvanian Period, also known as the Coal Age. The Locust Fork is unique because it flows through ridges in the tail end of the Appalachian Mountain range's Cumberland Plateau, rather than alongside them. As the mountains rose up slowly, the river cut through them, allowing it to maintain its flow through the mountain's ridges. This unique attribute sets the Locust Fork apart.

The Locust Fork is a home to many rare aquatic species. (Please see attached species list.) The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has designated sixty-three miles of the river as a "Critical Habitat Unit 12" for the conservation of six federally listed mussel species as a part of the Mobile River Basin Aquatic Ecosystem Recovery Plan. It is also a World Wildlife Fund "Priority Watershed."

The Locust Fork is frequented by paddlers of canoes and kayaks as well as by fishermen seeking the spotted bass. The Locust Fork is known for its classic whitewater, beautiful scenery, and superb spotted bass fishing. These two tracts would allow river access and the ability to put-in and take-out boats from public property. This property is central in location to Birmingham, Oneonta, Cullman, and Jasper.

Conserving these large, undeveloped tracts of land along the Locust Fork will provide valuable watershed protection critical to water quality, riparian habitat, and species diversity. The riparian buffers and uplands on these tracts are home to an abundant array of wildlife, birds, and plants which offer an opportunity for photographers, hunters, bird watchers, hikers, wildflower enthusiasts, and more. The U.S. National Park Service recognizes the Locust Fork with seven of its Outstanding Remarkable Values: Scenery, Recreation, Geology, Fish, Wildlife, History, and Culture. Such an acquisition will provide much needed public access for the many recreational users that visit the Locust Fork each year.

Please contact me if you have any questions or need further information. My contact information is at the top of the page.

For the River,



Nelson Brooke
Riverkeeper & Executive Director

Attachments:

- Nominated Property Information form
- Property maps
- Blount County plat map pages
- Locust Fork rare species list
- Organizations in support list
- Birmingham News article

Cc: Mac Underwood, General Manager, BWWB