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## **ADEM installs sea turtle sculpture at Grand Bay Welcome Center to highlight ‘Help Keep Our Waters Clean’ project**

*Part of campaign to keep state watersheds free of litter*

**MOBILE** – As part of its campaign to educate the public about the need to keep Alabama’s bio-rich watersheds free of litter that could pose threats to marine life, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) has installed in Mobile County the first of several wildlife sculptures to be placed at state welcome centers.

The “Help Keep Our Waters Clean” project is designed to promote awareness about watersheds and reduce nonpoint source pollution entering waterways that drain to the Gulf of Mexico. A goal of the project is to engage citizens in the fight against litter through education and outreach.

The project is funded with a \$500,000 competitive grant awarded to ADEM by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Trash Free Waters Program in late 2020. Since then, ADEM has been working with the Alabama Department of Transportation and the Alabama Tourism Department to implement the project.

One part of the “Help Keep Our Waters Clean” project is the placing of signs along interstates to inform motorists that they are entering a watershed and to encourage them not to litter. Another part includes the sculptures and signs placed at welcome centers to draw motorists’ attention by highlighting wildlife and conveying a message about reducing land-based trash from entering waterbodies by abating roadway litter.

The first of eight such sculptures, a loggerhead sea turtle, has been installed at the Grand Bay Welcome Center along Interstate 10 in Mobile County. Approximately 321,800 people visit the welcome center each year.

The 10-foot-long sea turtle sculpture is filled with plastic bottles – items that are commonly discarded and found in litter. Litter along roadsides and on other grounds often ends up in the water. According to EPA’s WasteWise Program, plastics can require 100 to 400 years to break down. In addition, producing new plastic from recycled material uses only two-thirds of the energy required to manufacture plastic from raw materials.

Proper disposal or recycling of plastics and other items can help keep them out of our waterways, according to ADEM Director Lance LeFleur.

“This project educates participants about the importance of our rivers, streams and other bodies of water, and creates opportunities for them to actually get involved in efforts to prevent and collect litter,” LeFleur said.

ADEM encourages visitors to the welcome centers to take pictures with the sculptures and share them on their social media channels using the hashtags #HelpKeepOurWatersClean and #TrashFreeWaters. More information about this project is available [here](#).