



**Governor of Alabama**

Welcome to Gulf State Park's  
Interpretive Center and  
East Pedestrian Bridge

**May 24, 2018**

- 2:00      Welcome and Introductions**  
Chris Blankenship  
Commissioner, Alabama Department of  
Conservation and Natural Resources
- 2:05      Tourism in South Alabama**  
Lee Senteel  
Director of Alabama Tourism Department
- 2:10      Remarks**  
The Honorable Kay Ivey  
Governor of Alabama
- 2:20      Building Introduction**  
Bill Bennett  
Regional Director & General Manager, Valor Hospitality
- 2:25      Ribbon Cutting**  
The Honorable Kay Ivey  
Governor of Alabama
- 2:30      Self-Guided Building Tours**



Gulf State Park is an international benchmark of economic and environmental sustainability demonstrating best practices for outdoor recreation, education, and hospitality.

# WHAT IF A *Building* COULD MAKE THE WORLD BETTER?

The Living Building Challenge (LBC) creates a path to help buildings do just that.

As of January 2018, only 16 buildings have succeeded in fully answering this challenge.

The Gulf State Park Interpretive Center has accepted this challenge to provide leadership in developing Sustainable Tourism on Alabama's Gulf Coast.



**WATER** is a precious resource. Around the Park, there has always been a deep respect for the water (and a lot of it!). However, fresh, clean drinking water isn't always easy to find. That's why the Interpretive Center is designed to capture, store and clean more than 105% of the water the building uses without upsetting the natural flow of this precious resource.



**PLACE** is crucial for helping people connect to the natural environment. The Interpretive Center was designed to honor this special place by acting as a gateway to the park.



**BEAUTY** means the Interpretive Center is built with respect for and as part of the dune landscape. When you're on the IC's porch, you're never far from a gorgeous view or an inspiring discovery.



**HEALTH & HAPPINESS** in the design of the Interpretive Center means windows and walls that give you access to plenty of sunshine, fresh air and nature whether you are indoors or out.



**ENERGY** from the sun brings things to life on the Gulf. The Interpretive Center's design combines over 50 solar panels, clever materials and efficient batteries to make and store more than 105% of the electricity it needs.



**EQUITY** means everyone deserves to be able to enjoy this amazing Park. The Interpretive Center is built to bring together all types of people and provide access to nature for everyone.



**MATERIALS** can make a big difference. The Interpretive Center is made out of things that do no harm to people or the environment (today, tomorrow and forever!), that reuse as much as possible while wasting as little as possible and come from sources as close to the site as possible.





## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Commissioner Chris Blankenship, 334-242-3486

### Governor Kay Ivey Presents First Look at the Gulf State Park Interpretive Center and East Pedestrian Bridge

**Gulf Shores, AL** – Today, Governor Kay Ivey introduced two major parts of the Gulf State Park Enhancement Project, the Interpretive Center and East Pedestrian Bridge. The first look took place at the newly constructed Interpretive Center located at 22250-A East Beach Boulevard, adjacent to the Beach Pavilion. These facilities create a gateway to Gulf State Park, inspiring visitors to explore the park's 6,150 acres and connect to nature.

“There is simply no place like Alabama’s beautiful Gulf Coast, which is why I’m committed to protecting its natural beauty and furthering its growth. Today, I am glad to join Conservation Commissioner Chris Blankenship and Tourism Director Lee Sentell at Gulf State Park to receive a first look at the progress we’re making on the construction of the Interpretive Center and Pedestrian Bridge,” Governor Ivey said. “The Gulf State Park is a crown jewel in Alabama tourism, and I very much look forward to the success these enhancements will bring.”

The Gulf State Park Interpretive Center acts as a gateway to the park that welcomes all visitors to the natural beauty of the park. Divided into three major components, this building will reveal the breadth of experiences available inside the 6,150-acre state park. An open-air porch will contain a series of interactive exhibits describing the nine distinct ecologies from the Gulf to the inland forest. A multi-use room is available for reservation by the community and individuals for use as a gathering space for meetings and other events. The at-grade play area includes shade, a water play exhibit, and sky viewing benches. All of these features are tied together by an elevated plaza that provides stunning views of the Gulf of Mexico. The building also includes public restrooms, bike parking, and amphitheater seating.

The entire building is the launching point for visitors to move across the newly opened pedestrian bridge that connects the beach to the majority of the park and the twenty-eight mile trail system. This eastern bridge complements the western pedestrian bridge that was opened earlier this year. Both bridges were included in the Gulf State Park Master Plan in direct response to a public survey describing the number one barrier to pedestrian and bicycling in the park as lack of safe passage across East Beach Boulevard. These two bridges provide separated access for park visitors to the entire trail system and a unique amenity for all park guests.

The Interpretive Center is seeking full Living Building certification under the Living Building Challenge awarded by the International Living Future Institute. Widely regarded as the world’s most rigorous environmental certification, the challenge consists of seven performance categories: water, energy, materials, place, beauty, equity and health and happiness. Together, these categories ensure a building performs at the most aspirational levels. In order to meet the challenge, the Interpretive Center will provide 105 percent of its energy, treat 105 percent of its water and was constructed using healthy materials. As of January 2018, there are only 16 fully certified Living Buildings and, if successful in meeting the challenge, the Interpretive Center will be the first of its kind in the southeast. A series of exhibits in the elevated plaza and multi-use room describe how the building responds to the Living Building Challenge and explore the interaction between nature and the built environment.

The Interpretive Center is one part of the overall enhancement project. The Dune Restoration was completed in 2016 and is being monitored to inform adaptive management techniques. The Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel is

currently under construction and will open in November 2018. The Learning Campus, which includes overnight accommodations, indoor and outdoor classrooms, laboratories, meeting space and a restaurant that is open to the community, is under construction and will be complete in December 2018.

The state has contracted Valor Hospitality Partners to operate the Interpretive Center, Learning Campus, Trails and Visitor Enhancements and the Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel. “We are excited to partner with the state of Alabama to increase public access to the natural beauty of Gulf State Park,” said Bill Bennett, Regional Director and General Manager, Valor Hospitality Partners. “Together with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, we can position the state at the forefront of the sustainable tourism market through engaging educational programming and responsible stewardship of our natural resources.”

To learn more about Gulf State Park, visit: [www.mygulfstatepark.com](http://www.mygulfstatepark.com)

Gulf State Park is an international benchmark of environmental and economic sustainability demonstrating best practices for outdoor recreation, education, and hospitality.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama’s natural resources through four divisions: Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. For more information, visit [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).

Valor Hospitality is a global hospitality management company operating in the USA, UK & Europe, and Africa. For more information, visit [www.valorhospitality.com](http://www.valorhospitality.com).

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## Interpretive Center and Enhancement Project Questions & Answers

For more information, please visit: [www.mygulfstatepark.com](http://www.mygulfstatepark.com)

### Q: What is the Interpretive Center?

**A:** The Interpretive Center is a gateway to Gulf State Park, inspiring visitors to explore the park's 6,150 acres and connect to nature. It features interactive exhibits that educate visitors on the park's nine distinct ecosystems and the building's response to the Living Building Challenge, the world's most rigorous environmental certification. Its connection to a vast and diverse trail network via pedestrian bridge makes it the perfect place for a visitor to start their adventure. It contains a variety of functions: interpretive exhibits, a multi-use room, a covered porch with interactive exhibits, an elevated plaza, public restrooms, bike parking, sand-play area, amphitheater seating, and skyview benches.

### Q: What is the Living Building Challenge?

**A:** The Living Building Challenge is widely regarded as the world's most rigorous environmental certification. The challenge consists of seven performance categories: water, energy, materials, place, beauty, equity, and health and happiness. Together, these categories ensure a building performs at the most aspirational levels. The building will provide 105% of its energy, treat 105% of its water, and was constructed using healthy materials. For more information on the Living Building Challenge, please visit: [www.living-future.org](http://www.living-future.org)

### Q: Why pursue Living Building certification?

**A:** The Living Building Challenge aligns with the park's vision to become an international benchmark of environmental and economic sustainability. Pursuing such an ambitious certification positions Alabama at the forefront of the sustainable tourism industry. Living Buildings are magnets for sustainable tourists; and, those particular tourists represent one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry.

### Q: How many buildings have achieved full Living Building certification?

**A:** As of January 2018, there are only 16 fully certified Living Buildings in the world. If successful in meeting the challenge, the Interpretive Center will be the first of its kind in the southeast.

### Q: When will Living Building certification be awarded?

**A:** Before certification, fully certified Living Buildings must undergo a 12-month performance review period, during which the building must demonstrate that it can perform as designed. It will take a few months for the operator, Valor Hospitality Partners, to calibrate the building's systems. Once they are confident the building is performing optimally, we will begin the performance review period.

### Q: Is the Interpretive Center pursuing other certifications?

**A:** Yes, the Interpretive Center is also pursuing LEED Platinum certification, the highest possible certification awarded by the US Green Building Council. The facility is also a pilot project for FORTIFIED Commercial certification, awarded by the Insurance Institute for Building & Home Safety.

### Q: How is the building designed to be resilient against storms?

**A:** FORTIFIED buildings are built to a more resilient standard to protect against severe weather events, like hurricanes and high winds. Also, the building is elevated and set back 225' from the Coastal Construction Line to protect against storm surges.

### Q: When will the exhibits be installed?

**A:** The building will have several exhibits that introduce the park's ecologies and describe how the building responds to the Living Building Challenge. These exhibits are currently being fabricated and will be installed in August 2018.

**Q: Why is the building opening before the exhibits are installed?**

**A:** The opening of the East Pedestrian Bridge coincides with the opening of the Interpretive Center, as it passes directly through the building. This connection is so important to mobility, the pedestrian experience, and the Master Plan, that we want visitors to enjoy this car-free experience during the peak season.

**Q: Who designed and built the Interpretive Center?**

<b>A:</b> Architect:	ArchitectureWorks*
Landscape Architect:	Sasaki
Gulf Sustainability Consultant:	Watershed*
Interpretive Designer:	Hersick + Webster
Civil Engineer:	Thompson Engineering*
Construction Manager:	Volkert* and Skanska
Environmental Compliance:	Volkert*
General Contractor:	The Lemoine Company
Interpretive Fabricator:	Southern Custom Exhibits*

\* Alabama-based firm

**Q: Who will operate the Interpretive Center?**

**A:** Valor Hospitality Partners has been contracted by the state to operate the Interpretive Center; the Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel; Learning Campus; Trails and Visitor Enhancements. This new partnership is aligned to make Gulf State Park an international benchmark of environmental and economic sustainability.

**Q: Who can reserve the meeting room at the Interpretive Center?**

**A:** The meeting room is open for all organization, non-profit, community, and educational events. It is well suited for groups that want to hold a meeting in one of the most environmentally sensitive buildings in the world.

**Q: Why is sustainable tourism so important?**

**A:** Sustainable tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. It leads to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining our quality of life and protecting our valuable natural and cultural resources.

**Q: When is the Lodge opening?**

**A:** The Lodge will open in November 2018.

**Q: When can I make a reservation at the Lodge?**

**A:** The Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel, is live on [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com) for reservations beginning February 1, 2019.

**Q: When will the Enhancement Project be complete?**

**A:** The project will be complete in December 2018, however, several components of the project are already complete, such as the Master Plan, Dune Restoration, and Trails. This summer, interpretive signage, exhibits and trail wayfinding signage will be installed. The Lodge will open in November 2018 and the Learning Campus will open in December 2018.

**Q: Who will maintain the trails?**

**A:** Valor Hospitality Partners has been contracted by the state to operate several facilities constructed at Gulf State Park, including the Trails and Visitor Enhancements; the Lodge at Gulf State Park, a Hilton Hotel; Interpretive Center; and Learning Campus.





## Interpretive Center and Enhancement Project Fact Sheet

For more information, please visit: [www.mygulfstatepark.com](http://www.mygulfstatepark.com)

Gulf State Park spans 6,150 acres along the Gulf of Mexico and preserves 3.5 miles of beach, including a remarkable 2 miles of contiguous beach in the main park area. The size and diversity of the park's ecosystems attract more than two million visitors annually, providing vacationers the unique opportunity to experience and interact with nature. The park's nine distinct ecosystems also play an important role in the Mississippi Flyway and provide critical habitat to hundreds of migratory bird species wintering along the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, the dunes on Gulf State Park's pristine beaches provide habitat for endangered species such as loggerhead sea turtles, least terns, and the Alabama beach mouse.

The Gulf State Park Enhancement Project incorporates five elements into the park's existing conditions to make the park an international benchmark of economic and environmental sustainability. The project's key goal is to expand public access to this special place through dune restoration, increasing the number and types of accommodations, expanding and enhancing the trail network, and furthering educational outreach through the creation of a Learning Campus and Interpretive Center.

### Interpretive Center

#### *Environmental Certifications:*

- The building is seeking full Living Building Certification under the Living Building Challenge. This certification, awarded by the International Living Future Institute, is widely recognized as the most rigorous environmental certification in the world.
- Fully certified Living Buildings must meet performance criteria in seven categories: water, energy, materials, health & happiness, place, beauty and equity.
- Before certification, Fully certified Living Buildings must undergo a 12-month performance review period, during which the building must demonstrate that it can perform as designed.
- The Interpretive Center is also pursuing LEED Platinum certification, the highest possible certification awarded by the US Green Building Council.
- The facility is also pursuing FORTIFIED Commercial certification, awarded by the Insurance Institute for Building & Home Safety. FORTIFIED buildings are built to a more resilient standard to protect against severe weather events, like hurricanes and high winds.
- Gulf State Park will be the only place in the world where a visitor can experience and learn about this combination of certifications in a single location.

#### ***Building Design***

- The Interpretive Center contains a variety of functions: interpretive exhibits, a multi-use room, a covered porch with interactive exhibits, an elevated plaza, public restrooms, bike parking, sand-play area, amphitheater seating, and skyview benches.
- The Interpretive Center collects, stores and treats 105 percent of the water needed by its guests and the surrounding landscape. It features an 11,000-gallon water cistern that stores rainwater collected from the building's roof.
- The building is completely self-sufficient and will generate 105 percent of the power needed with solar panels placed at the site's southwest corner.
- The exhibit porch offers expansive views of the Gulf of Mexico and its open-air design is reminiscent of the southern tradition of porches as a place to gather to enjoy nature's cooling breezes.

- With its connection to the park via pedestrian bridge, the Interpretive Center will inspire exploration of the park with interpretive elements placed along the expanded 28-mile trail network.
- Most of the materials used during construction were sourced regionally. All building materials are free of pollutants and materials harmful to humans and the environment.
- The bridge and facility will open to the public in June and final interpretive exhibits will be installed in August. Because of the unique nature of the Living Building Challenge, the building will briefly close periodically for tune-ups and adjustments.

#### ***Building Program***

- To enhance the public's recreational use of the park, this building includes a variety of interactive exhibits that introduce visitors to the park's nine distinct ecosystems and invite them to learn more by exploring the park and experiencing the natural environment. The building also includes a multi-use space that can hold between 35 and 75 people, depending on configuration; amphitheater; public restrooms; bike parking; outdoor gathering space; and a direct connection to the park via an elevated pedestrian bridge.

#### ***Economic Impact***

- As of January 2018, there were only 16 fully certified Living Buildings in the world. Living Buildings are magnets for sustainable tourists; and, those particular tourists represent one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry.
- The Brock Environmental Center on Chesapeake Bay in Virginia opened in 2015 and in that first year received in excess of 20,000 visitors that wanted to learn more about its Living Building certification.

#### ***Design and Construction Team***

Architect:	ArchitectureWorks*
Landscape Architect:	Sasaki
Gulf Sustainability Consultant:	Watershed*
Interpretive Designer:	Hersick + Webster
Civil Engineer:	Thompson Engineering*
Construction Manager:	Volkert* and Skanska
Environmental Compliance:	Volkert*
General Contractor:	The Lemoine Company
Interpretive Fabricator:	Southern Custom Exhibits*

\* Alabama-based firm



## Dune Restoration

- Dune Restoration was completed in October 2016 and is undergoing regular evaluations to inform adaptive management techniques.
- An innovative restoration technique was designed to allow the dunes and their habitat to naturally regenerate over time. Sand movement corridors were inserted into a man-made, engineered berm to allow for wind-borne sand to accumulate and form new dunes. Recycled Christmas trees and native plantings help stabilize the moving sand, allowing dunes to grow naturally over time.
- The Dune Restoration was featured in the March 2016 issue of Landscape Architecture Magazine, where the project was called “as low tech as it is imaginative.”

## Lodging

- The Gulf State Park Enhancement Project will add to the park’s current mix of accommodations with a 350-room Lodge on the Gulf of Mexico that includes multiple food and beverage concepts and meeting space. In addition, a student lodging facility is planned for the Learning Campus near the park headquarters. This facility will offer flexible lodging options for families and large groups and a food and beverage concept.
- The Lodge is nearing completion and will open in November 2018. The Student Lodge is under construction and will be complete in December 2018.

## Trails and Visitor Enhancements

- The Trail and Visitor Enhancements are complete, with the addition of 16 miles of new, ADA accessible trails, pause places, overlooks and fishing piers. Wayfinding and interpretive signage will be installed in the summer of 2018.

## Learning Campus

- The enhancement project will increase educational opportunities within the park with the creation of the Learning Campus. Designed to supplement existing park programs, this campus will include indoor and outdoor classrooms and laboratories for k-12 education and beyond, flexible lodging accommodations and a food and beverage concept that will serve the park and surrounding communities.
- Construction on the Learning Campus began in February 2018 and is on schedule for completion in December 2018.

## Pedestrian Bridges

- A 2015 survey was conducted as part of the Master Plan and received over 2,600 responses. It found that the number one barrier to bicycling and walking in the park was safe passage across East Beach Boulevard. As a result, two Pedestrian Bridges were constructed across this highway.
- The West Pedestrian Bridge, connecting the Picnic Area to the Fishing & Education Pier and the Lodge, is open. The East Pedestrian Bridge, connecting the Campground to the Interpretive Center and Beach Pavilion, is opening with the Interpretive Center in June 2018.
- The bridges are designed to act as gateway markers to the park for vehicles while minimally impacting the view from inside the park.
- Both bridges are entered via ADA accessible ramping, so everyone, including people of differing abilities, can use this amenity.

