



Source: Ryan Pilewski

**The Sand Beach** has been an important part of Harrison County since the Harrison County Board of Supervisors authorized the construction of the seawall in 1925. The result of the seawall has been ongoing protection of property from storms and a sand beach that has been enjoyed by residents and visitors alike for many decades. The Sand Beach Master Plan examines ways to maintain and enhance the beach as an amenity and hazard mitigation tool over the next twenty years.

## Executive Summary

The coast of Harrison County and its 26 miles of Sand Beach is a destination to be treasured by visitors and residents alike. The Sand Beach, its history, heritage, leisure activities, and host of resources, strikes a chord in the mind of those who call the area home and to those visitors it welcomes. From the beach, visitors can view breathtaking sunrises and sunsets, enjoy the sounds of gentle waves lapping at the beach, feel the sun's rays warming their skin, and waft the briny breezes. This combination of sensations creates a unique experience for the visitor and is an important part of the county's identity as a major vacation destination. Creating a comprehensive and engaging experience for visitors and residents will ensure high quality tourism environment for years to come.

The *Sand Beach Master Plan* has been designed to guide redevelopment and growth along the Harrison County Sand Beach over a period of 20 years. This Plan proposes a series of goals that reflects the county's desire for a sustainable future. Community input was collected through the Harrison County Ideas Forums, beach user surveys, and stakeholder meetings. Site analysis was conducted along the 26 miles of beach. Issues identified as priorities by the community and county are the foundation of this Plan. The vision of this plan is to create a premier tourism destination

that provides high quality amenities and unique experiences while embracing design that is resistant to natural disasters. This vision can be expressed as two overarching themes:

- 1) **The *Sand Beach Master Plan* must respect existing land uses and preserve local identity.**
- 2) **The *Sand Beach Master Plan* must provide spectacular recreational opportunities by balancing responsible new growth with preservation of the beach.**

These themes have been translated into goals and proposals for managing the Sand Beach. This Plan outlines detailed actions to be implemented by the county. To guide implementation, this Plan provides a timeline that prioritizes the goals and action statements.

The Policy Plan outlines goals for the beach and provides specific strategies to meet these goals. The Physical Plan proposes design guidelines and provides a 26-mile site plan with an illustrative program for future development along the Sand Beach. Text and supporting illustrations describe the program. These recommendations are reflections of both the citizens' and county's vision of the beach. Citizen participation

in the form of surveys, mapping, and a stakeholder meeting guided the development of the Policy Plan and the Physical Plan.

The Harrison County Board of Supervisors is the responsible party for carrying out most of the action steps, since it is the entity with the authority to adopt any recommended regulatory and physical measures. However, in order to assist in the implementation of the Plan, the county is encouraged to engage with nonprofit organizations to solicit and receive grant monies, coordinate local citizen efforts, and undertake other action steps, especially those that are nonregulatory.

This Plan is organized into Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: Context, Chapter 3: Vision and Goals, Chapter 4: Physical Plan, and Chapter 5: Policy Plan. The Appendix includes supplemental information for those interested in the detailed data and citizen comments that support the recommendations of the Plan.



Source: Ryan Pilewski

**A Natural Asset.** The Sand Beach is a natural asset for Harrison County. The beach attracts not only visiting people, but also visiting wildlife. The beach serves as a nesting location for several bird species. As a result the Least Tern nesting area is protected from the intrusion of beach goers. The *Sand Beach Master Plan* recognizes the needs of people and wildlife to create a balanced plan that supports all users.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### Purpose

Residents across the Gulf Coast will never forget August 29, 2005. The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina on the Sand Beach destroyed the dunes, boardwalk, comfort stations, and other amenities. The hurricane did not, however, break the resolve of Harrison County to rebuild the beach and manage change in a way that is consistent with the values of the citizens of the county.

Harrison County established its first *Sand Beach Master Plan* in 1986. At the time of Hurricane Katrina, the 20 year master plan was coming to completion and it was time to develop a new master plan. Given the impact of the hurricane it was an ideal time to rethink the beach and consider new ideas for the future of the beach. Local officials, residents and businesses have come together to make decisions about the future of the Sand Beach. The 2008 *Sand Beach Master Plan* articulates this future.

Shortly after the hurricane, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour established the Governor's Commission for Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal. The Commission provided local leaders with information that has helped guide decisions for the future of their communities. As part of this effort, they hosted the Mississippi Renewal Forum in partnership with the Congress for the New

Urbanism. The Renewal Forum focused on planning and visioning for the incorporated areas of the coast. As part of the Renewal Forum, design ideas were presented for the areas fronting along the beach. The *Sand Beach Master Plan* incorporates many of the ideas provided by the Governor's Commission and integrates them in a manner consistent with existing and proposed development patterns adjacent to the beach.

The *Sand Beach Master Plan* complements the County's comprehensive planning process, and the plans for the adjacent municipalities. The *Plan* promotes new facilities in suitable locations, while maintaining undeveloped stretches of natural beach for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The *Plan* has been funded through a grant from the Mississippi Development Authority. It is provided at no cost to the citizens of Harrison County.

To assist the Sand Beach planning and design team, Harrison County Supervisors Marlin Ladner, William Martin, Connie Rockco, Kim Savant, and Windy Swetman instructed Bobby Weaver, Director of the Sand Beach Authority to serve as a local point of contact for plan development. Weaver has acted as a liaison between citizens, businesses, the County and the planning and design team. He and other County leaders have provided input throughout the planning

process. In addition, retired Supervisor Eleuterius has provided invaluable advice and support through the master planning process.

Plans prepared by the adjacent communities of Henderson Point-Pass Christian Isles, Pass Christian, Long Beach, Gulfport, and Biloxi were consulted during the preparation of this plan to ensure compatibility between planning efforts. Plans prepared by the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Coast Transit Authority (CTA), the US Army Corp of Engineers, and FEMA long-term recovery plans were also taken into account.

The *Sand Beach Master Plan* has a long-range perspective. Its primary purpose is to aid in managing change along the coast by:

- Formulating goals to fulfill the County's vision for the beach, and
- Developing a series of strategies to achieve those goals.

The plan serves as a policy and physical guide for the County. It does not create any laws or regulations; it only identifies methods that are appropriate for carrying out policies and physical proposals. Any recommendations for new laws will

require a separate public process.

The Plan recognizes the authority of both the City of Biloxi and Harrison County over different stretches of the beach. The Plan promotes the partnership of both of these jurisdictions in effectively managing the beach, as well as working with the surrounding municipalities to ensure the successful implementation of this plan.

### Description of the Planning Process

The plan was created over an eight-month period of time beginning in January 2008. Following the development of the planning process in collaboration with the County, the team began gathering data and background information in the winter of 2008. The team next traveled to Harrison County in March 2008 to gather information and survey the beach's opportunities and challenges. As part of that fieldwork, the team held a Stakeholder Meeting on March 18th. The meeting was attended by approximately 20 representatives of local communities along the coast and agencies involved with the beach and US Highway 90, and the Harrison County Parkway Commission. During the meeting, local representatives completed a written survey seeking their opinions on development issues facing Sand Beach. The attendees also participated in a roundtable discussion to share their preferences regarding future amenities, access points, road maintenance, recreational opportunities, and natural resource conservation along the Sand Beach.

On March 18th and 19th, Ideas Forums were held to solicit citizen input on how to redevelop the beach. Citizens provided a wide variety of ideas

on what they would like to see for the beach. They engaged in a mapping activity where they located where they would like to see activities and amenities along the beach, as seen in the Physical Plan chapter. Participants also completed a citizen survey describing how they use the beach and their perceptions of the beach.

Throughout March team members

interviewed visitors to the beach asking them about how they arrived at the beach, their experience, and what they would like to see for the future on the beach. The team drafted community goals based on the input of the Stakeholder meeting, the citizen and beach user surveys, as well as through observations while conducting fieldwork on the Sand Beach. The



Source: Ryan Pilewski

#### OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE DAY

The Sand Beach provides opportunities for enjoyment throughout the day. The Sand Beach offers opportunities for those wishing to get up early to enjoy a sun rise at low tide, as shown above. The cool morning weather offers the opportunity for a pleasant stroll along the beach. Sunbathers can be found across the beach throughout the day. At night, bonfires are a common sight with local residents setting up for an evening of entertainment. The *Master Plan* ensures that the existing beach experiences that users have become familiar with remain while exploring opportunities for new and unique visitor experiences.



Source: Robert Cowell

**Citizen Involvement** is an important part of any planning process. Above Sand Beach Director Bobby Weaver and Civil Defense Director Rupert Lacy talk with citizens about the Sand Beach. Citizens were invited to present their ideas for the Sand Beach at two Ideas Forums held in March, 2008. Some citizens came prepared with specific ideas such as walking and biking trails along the beach, and others provided locations of where they would like to see comfort stations and other amenities to support visitors. The ideas generated from these meetings, a stakeholder meeting, and surveys of visitors to the beach informed this plan.



Source: Neetika Wahi



Source: Ryan Pilewski

**Opportunities for Exercise** The Sand Beach offers numerous opportunities for residents and visitors to engage in exercise. Popular activities include canoeing or kayaking from the beach to the National Seashore. Runners and walkers are a frequent sight along the beach. Kite Surfing is another popular exercise activity. The *Sand Beach Master Plan* ensures that opportunities for exercise are available at points along the beach.

team then researched policies, strategies, and design solutions to enable Harrison County to implement these goals.

In June 2008, team members will meet with stakeholder groups involved with the Sand Beach, including economic development officials, the Parkway Commission, outdoor recreation professionals, and businesses to discuss the draft plan. In addition, two public meetings are planned for June 19 and 21 for citizens to provide feedback on the draft plan.

### Acknowledgements

A warm thank you goes out to all the citizens of Harrison County, who welcomed the planning team into their county and took the time to share their vision for the beach so willingly. It was truly this vision that guided the team and made this Plan possible. A special thank you goes out to all those who provided background information that informed the creation of this plan.

The team would like to extend acknowledgements to the following people who assisted throughout the planning process. These people include Director Bobby Weaver of the Sand Beach Authority who was an incredible source of information and graciously answered the team's many questions about the Beach. Patrick Bonck, of the Harrison County Zoning Administration Office also offered valuable insights. Paul Barnes with the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District provided much of the mapping information found in this plan. Thanks to Harrison County Supervisors Marlin Ladner, William Martin, Connie Rockco, Kim Savant, and Windy Swetman who

coordinated with the planning team. The entire Harrison County Board of Supervisors deserves thanks for the support during the effort to complete the *Sand Beach Master Plan*.

Community representatives from the Harrison County Parkway Commission, Coast Transit Authority (CTA), Harrison County Tax Assessor's office, Harrison County School District, City of Pass Christian, City of Long Beach, City of Long Beach Port Commission, City of Gulfport, and the City of Biloxi were also instrumental in compiling the plan. The Mayors and City Councils of Biloxi, Gulfport, Long Beach and Pass Christian are thanked for their ongoing participation in the planning process. Additionally, the many stakeholders who participated in this planning process are to be thanked for their time including members of the Gulf Coast Hotel and Motel Association, the Sand Beach Summit, Gulf Coast Business Council, Harrison County Development Commission, and the casinos in Harrison County.

Professors of Landscape Architecture at Ohio State University Deborah Georg and Jesus Lara provided valuable feedback on this plan throughout the process. Zhiguo Chen, Jane Lantner, Susan Noblet, and Mike Smith for their assistance with field work. The team would also like to thank the other members of The Ohio State University planning team who assisted with the Ideas Forums.

The team must acknowledge the funding sources that made this work possible, the Mississippi Development Authority.



**Hurricane Protection** The seawall was constructed to protect property from damage in the event of a storm event. The seawall provides an important role in the County's hazard mitigation efforts.



**Maintenance** The Sand Beach Authority regularly cleans the beach allowing visitors to come to a clean and comfortable location. Debris and trash can quickly build up and identifying strategies and resources to minimize days between beach sweeping is an important consideration of this plan.

## Organization of the Document

### Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction provides an overview of the planning process and the plan.

### Chapter 2. Context

Planning Context summarizes the important characteristics of the Sand Beach, key trends, and pressing planning issues.

### Chapter 3. Vision and Goals

The Policy Plan outlines overall goals and objectives to address the issues identified in Chapter 2 and provides specific strategies and actions to achieve these goals and objectives.

### Chapter 4. Physical Plan

Design guidelines and a 26-mile site plan are proposed in Chapter 4. This section is organized presenting design guidelines, the

physical plan for the beach, and detailed design studies for specific locations of the beach. This chapter presents concepts with illustrations and perspectives showing ideas of how the goals of this plan can be achieved through site design.

### Chapter 5. Policy Plan

The policy plan addresses the policies, strategies and action steps required to implement the plan. A timetable is included to guide the implementation of the goals over the plan's 20-year duration.

### Appendix A. Background Assessment

Background Assessment provides relevant background information on Harrison County and the Sand Beach. Information on the field research conducted by the planning and design team including results from the beach user survey, team observations, and the stakeholder meeting.

## Planning and Design Team

Professor Jennifer Cowley, PhD, AICP, served as Project Manager. She worked in conjunction with the Harrison County Board of Supervisors and Bobby Weaver, Harrison County Sand Beach Director. Cowley, who teaches planning at The Ohio State University, assembled the following team to work on the *Sand Beach Master Plan*.

Vince Bednar, is registered landscape architect and a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. He has over 35 years experience in the planning and design of public spaces. For 22 years Bednar was a principal with Schooley Caldwell Associates; a multidisciplinary design firm. He has recently started a private practice focusing on planning, landscape architecture, and site development as well as taken a position as an adjunct professor at The Ohio State University.

Team members included the following students at The Ohio State University: Ma'ayan Citron is a graduate student in his final year of a City and Regional Planning and Public Administration dual degree program. He is an intern with the Ohio Department of Development. Singleton Hicks is a senior undergraduate student in the Landscape Architecture program. He has been the lead designer on numerous projects from residential to institutional. James Hughes is also a senior undergraduate student in Landscape Architecture. He works as a co-op intern for NBBJ Design in Columbus, Ohio, as well as a residential architecture firm in his hometown of Bexley, Ohio. Courtney Keys is a second year graduate student in the Landscape Architecture program. During her first year she assisted the Ohio Department of Natural Resources with the Resource Management Plan for North Bass Island in Lake Erie. While in school she also maintains a position as a teaching assistant and a curator in the KSA Digital Library. Eric Lowry is a first-year graduate student in City and Regional Planning. Erik Martig is an undergraduate student in his final year of Landscape Architecture. He has a year of professional experience with NBBJ Design and four years as student GIS technician at Ohio State. Rebecca McCarthy is an undergraduate student in her final year of the Landscape Architecture degree program. She gained internship experience in site design and graphic production with Mahan Rykiel Associates in Baltimore, Maryland. Ryan Pilewski is a first year graduate student in City and Regional Planning and is currently interning for the City of Dublin, Ohio. As an undergraduate he worked as a recreation planning intern for two years under the U.S. Forest Service assisting with recreation condition surveys within the Allegheny National Forest. Elizabeth Ries is a senior Landscape Architecture student and is a co-op intern for NBBJ Design in Columbus, Ohio.