

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

HARRISON COUNTY 2030

Outdoor Recreation Stakeholders meeting March 17th, 2008 ; 8:30am Mississippi State University Marine Extension Center

Harrison County Attendees:

Smokey Johnson, Harrison County Engineer's Office
Mike Murphy, The Nature Conservancy
David Taylor, Gulf Regional Planning Commission
Cynthia Ramseur, Natural Capital Development
Jim Foster, Gulf Coast Bicycle Club
Judy Steckler, Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain
Rhonda Jenkins-Price, MDMR
Tina Shumate, MDMR
Liz Smith-Incer, National Park Service

Ohio State University Attendees:

Aaron Domini
Alicia Jackson
Christine Godward
Remya Kumar
Jennifer Cowley

Purpose of meeting

Outdoor recreation/Environmental stakeholders were invited to a meeting to discuss outdoor recreation in Harrison County. The purpose of this meeting was ultimately to identify barriers to outdoor recreation for local residents and tourists, discuss natural resource preservation potential, and to identify opportunities for increased outdoor recreation activities.

Stakeholders were split into two groups to answer a series of questions

Questions asked:

- 1) From your point of view are residents taking advantage of existing outdoor recreational activities?
- 2) From your point of view are tourists taking advantage of existing outdoor recreational activities?
- 3) How can outdoor recreation play a role in preservation of natural resources in Harrison County?
- 4) What do you perceive as the limitations to outdoor recreation activities in Harrison County?

- 5) Beyond what is available now, can you think of other outdoor recreational activities that could be successful in Harrison County?
- 6) When development occurs-either residential or commercial-what provisions should be made for recreation?

Key Issues identified by participants

People don't know what resources currently exist (local residents, shop owners, and tourists)

There are too many different groups working on the same issues (lack of coordination)

Need for quality amenities

Lack of education, advertising, and coordination between businesses and activities

Lack of facilities (no place just to park and fish) access problems

Safety issues, people don't feel safe going hiking/canoeing/kayaking/boating.

People are afraid of being robbed or having their cars broken into.

There are opportunities for preservation/conservation

-----DETAILED MEETING NOTES-----

- 1) From your point of view are residents taking advantage of existing outdoor recreational activities?

Group 1

Facilities are used, but not to their potential

After clean-up things are better

People may not have a boat and without a boat = no trip to islands

Ecotourism – Cat Island

Trails:

-Residents do use them, but not much visible information along trails – way finding is hard.

-Tourists – not promoted at all, not enough information.

Canoeing/kayaking:

There are small groups taking advantage

Rental facilities not available at easily accessible locations.

Should be smaller stations along the way.

Cycling:

Jim says roads are quite hospitable, but there should be more off road facilities. People are afraid, and want to ride in groups instead.

Only 2% auto-bike accidents

Rural areas very popular

Sport fishing:

-very popular, people are very aware of locations, details.

General lack of information:

Do facilities exist? Don't know that they are available Where do we go?

Eg. – walking on trails, you need to stop and think too much. /Visible information is absent.

Other trails beside DeSoto – Gulf Islands?

-Wolf River no trails

-Bethel international trails – maintain

-ATV – in DeSoto National Forest but some closed

-Hilliard Park loop

-Map my ride/fun – people don't know

-Bay Trail – trying to make it public

Severe damage after Katrina, make like conference center

Access: Have to go far for access – discouraging. Signs are not put up that tell you where to go. Walk/bike paths are hard to find.

Group 2

1. From point of view are tourists taking advantage of existing outdoor recreational activities?
 - Saltwater fishing (good for tourists) \$500/day
 - Beach activities (good for tourist)
 - Activities are bound by money (lack of affordability)
 - Winter Classics \$10-30K per event. This is an international event. Good for small business related to horses.
 - Golf/casinos- cheaper than most counties.
 - Problem is that most golf courses here are not profitable
 - So the combined casino and golf course makes a way to lure tourists to these facilities. Casinos have taken away the family-oriented atmosphere and they are very expensive.
 - In the past, there were family owned hotels that were affordable.
 - Lost RV parks (good for tourists) there was a ordinance for 6 months in these parks
 - There is not a well developed economic structure around these activities (cross-pollination of different organizations)
 - There is no mindset, vehicle to link everything together (safety, economic development, finance, science and technology, etc)
 - All people need to be included in the planning process in a recreational/ economic development strategy not be included after the plan has already been created. “Collective strategy”
 - There is a need for brochures, information needs to be advertised.
 - Mississippi Power has control over easements for potential bikes (multi use) trails

Well served by team sports

Need for education, where (these activities are), safety

Knows where they are but limited (knowledge)

Need for amenities

“Trip” Education (what are trips available)

Offshore fishing too expensive

Backwater fishing, fly fishing etc. Many groups.

Freshwater fishing very limited

People don't know how to access enjoy inter-waterways

There are cultural limitations (National)

NIMBYism

Theme: Access, collaboration, education, amenities

Safety

Perception of outdoor space as havens for crime

- 2) From your point of view are tourists taking advantage of existing outdoor recreational activities?

Group 1

No, not enough.

Promotion:

-Activities are not promoted well enough (not sure though)

Golfing – huge

Fishing is very popular – fishing piers.

Sport fishing is big

Access issues (crab farm)

Under major development low access until renovation is done

-Charter boats – tourism – expensive

Launch ramp lights in ferry crossway – good!

Fishing – locals know everything

Outside Harrison County – it is getting out to county fishing in specialty magazines
Doing new campaign prior to Katrina
Campaign: fishing, golfing, canoeing, Winter Classic, with beach emphasis, food quality,
historic/cultural, Biloxi, schools
Show diverse area

Recreational shopping

Beach – very accessible and popular.

Used to be cultural tours – bike ride/driving plus audiotape. Tour train was popular
among tourists – cemetery?
1700 Cemetery / Heritage Book

Bike trail of historic site – laid out after Katrina, monuments, driving and/or biking tour
Chase Eagle Scout (CD of route)

Tour train – local sites; Tellis Manor in Biloxi ; Tourist enjoyed
History/culture or areas

Lack of boat harbors
Taking advantage of beach
Fishing piers – no boat needed, advertise to bring poles (hotels should promote)
Hotel/motel advertise charter boats
Yes tourist in car – fish, boat, historic, golf

1st indentured servants – front door to Biloxi,

Biloxi – good to promote tourist
Long Beak Pass Christian etc. Need to promote people do not take advantage in those
areas

All County – birding – not promoted

Jackson promoted – Harrison is not
Lots of locations only locals know
Avallon Riding trail – improve on maps in welcome centers
Festivals

Lagoon Hancock and Jackson County – sewage lagoons

Land trust property on birding map – update; on hold until facilities in good shape.

Access to Mississippi Sound – canoe/kayak, fishing, biking
Need to rent, no opportunities for renting

Wolf River canoe –only one, no kiosks or pickup/drop off points on water
Need trail maps

trails and forest – not promoted to tourist
No ecotourism promotion in Harrison
Jackson does better

Group 2

2. From your point of view are residents taking advantage of existing outdoor recreational activities?
 - Team sports are good in the County.
 - No media (new residents do not know where these activities are and if it is safe)
 - People know where to go but there's no diversity, there are limited resources
 - Good waterways for residents but nothing is organized for access
 - Fishing- off-shore is decreasing because of gas prices (other water activities bass boats, fly fishing, pier fishing)
 - Hardly no access to freshwater fishing
 - Horses- most likely kept singularity; boarding horses (\$400/\$500 a month)
 - No biking facilities unless you are in Desoto National Forest (David said they are working on bike routes)
 - Could use MDOT Right of way
 - Barriers- National Culture: there is a lack in participating in outdoor recreations. Local limitation: no one wants to give land, always want to exclude "those" people
 - Education is needed to make people have a more pedestrian friendly mindset

Yes and no

Yes: saltwater fishing, beach activities

There is an affordability issue this is why they do not
Ability to pay hampers
Especially for fishing, for offshore fishing the cheapest is \$500

Winter classic is successful on an international level (tourists take advantage)
This is also very expensive \$10,000 - \$30,000 to be a player and the reason that it is so successful is because of the good (weather) climate and you can ride all winter.

Golf is comparably affordable (compared to other places), golf is a big draw. Before this was a family destination and people came down during the winter (not so many winter tourists now?).

Golf is not breaking even though, people used to come golfing, but now casinos now have golfing and local golf courses are missing out (even locals want to golf at the casinos) it is cheaper to golf at the casinos. The casino courses are the premier golfing destinations now.

Less? Mom and Pop hotels (locally owned and operated)
Now confined to more expensive hotels

Lost a number of RV parks -gone

Grand Bear (gulf course)

Not a well developed economic strategy

Lacks collaboration

There is no mind set to bring diverse groups together

Not geared to cross pollinate ideas and strategies

Need more human resources

Implementation - tools exist (though tools exist, there is no implementation)

3) How can outdoor recreation play a role in preservation of natural resources in Harrison County?

Group 1

Bikers, those canoeing/kayaking etc. can identify areas of natural beauty that need to be preserved. The Land Trust can make such appropriately identified land to be made available for these activities.

Judy question – Land Trust

The Land Trust promotes the use of land that have to balance over use / don't want to destroy

Advertise – buy / girl scouts; Audubon birding areas

D'Iberville local promote family activities, ATVs keep going in and take down rights to prohibit (take down signs?)

ATV in your face and on the water

Go wherever they want

Expand ATV trails – would they stay on trails or more ATV owners

There are more ATV owners in Mississippi then anywhere else

George Park trail – more problems then resolved

If could have area – but ATV wants mud so they want to go off the trail

Noise also trail

Regulations for certain hours if within residential area

ATV interrupt

People enjoy one outdoor / enjoy all

They can identify land for conservation

tourist or local

For a visitor (canoe/kayak/boat) need to identify the vistas

Outer islands appealing because don't want to see houses; if want help Land Trust; LT make available to public

Land Management needs to be applied all water vegetation to prevent erosion, filter water
Timber 150-300 feet buffer on Tuxachanie creek (or is it Tchoutacabouffa River?) and Wolf River

Watershed formed group to replant water's edge

Tourist – educate on importance of natural resources
Wolf River guide does education
Promotes education.

Shudica Suft????? The watershed – wildflower tour
Mountain laurel lines water
Magnolia
Bay trees
Dogwood

Not coordinated, need schedule and publicity
Seasonal coordination of activities is required – Eg: season when wildflowers bloom.

Familiarization with area
Service station attendants
Market store
Hotel/motel
Educate the people serving tourists
Take a tour, tourist for a day, to learn resources

Familiarization – People in the hotel industry (ask who else?) taken on tours to cover different areas – thus able to give away the right information

People research on the web – make available and help people get here
Highway 15 – only / sign small not big

Group 2

3. How can outdoor recreation play a role in preservation of natural resources in Harrison County?
 - Stormwater Ordinance- Smokey Johnson
 - Point out bad areas, areas in need of preservation
 - Turkey Creek, needs a preservation effort to clean up the creek
 - Land Rich and Cash Poor; Cash is disposable, a lot of resources to preserve and little effort
 - Out of sync as a culture, need to get back in sync with how great it could be
 - Cheap strategies
 - Private land for public use
 - Need place for ATVs to preserve land, otherwise the riders will go anywhere and ruin more land.

- ATV club maintains trails and rules
- ATVs looked at as a nuisance
- Need a specific AVT facility

- “Is my 100 acres more valuable as a subdivision or open space?”
- Need for government cooperation
- Need to educate public decision maker
- Need to change behavior
- Green Infrastructure- cost benefit of a road v. forest
- Need to show economic benefits when promoting and trying to get buy in for preservation
- Standard of living issue
- “Let’s go walk in Mississippi”
- Tucachwat (sp?) Trail
- Safety
- Hospital Memorial Foundation
- Need to Build Leadership

Stormwater ordinance

- blueway
- provision for activity
- education about pollution/abuse
- current clean-up issues

Land rich and cash poor

Need to value land, establish standards for preservation

Providing access, making it affordable

For preservation, private lands will need to be purchased to provide multiuse trail (prevent nuisance)

Education, outreach, leadership (at all levels)

To promote preservation, start business for both tourist and residents
-Few investment opportunities for small businesses

Leadership and mindset to preserve outdoor space

Pilot project to illustrate success

Promote “green infrastructure” (negative implications)

Show money when concerning preservation
“Smart growth” – quality of life

Including public health, law enforcement

Including leadership

Plan/action to build leadership locally

Mandates (and regulations) for preservation, recreation, stormwater

4) What do you perceive as the limitations to outdoor recreation activities in Harrison County? (special emphasis on the items that MS residents have already identified as their priorities- canoeing/kayaking/rafting/tubing, hunting/bow hunting, and fishing; possibly the facilitator could encourage some conversations around these items if they do not come up)

Group 1

Transportation (CTA (doing a good job) buying new equipment with bike racks

-bike commute not feasible

No tourist info center (Biloxi doing at light house)(Ponter and 9th)

Temperature

-Heat and temperature is a limitation – May/June through October its hot (need to focus on early morning/late afternoon, use sea breeze)

Casinos don't promote other activities

-hotels need to increase information laid out at hotels

-casino hotels don't have ; want people to stay (have to ask)

-(Hard Rock TV automatically turns off)

-May promote something close by Beau Rivage does a good job

-Casinos don't need money

Eco/cultural tourism – one in party not jumble make large destination choose selective events to promote so gambles and will stay longer

Ex: ladies luncheon in old museum in process

Tours and conventions as well – some events local places

Whatever affects them they jump on it

i.e. Beau Island – they look at it; want to replat/give money

Rentals/ equipment not available

Access to waterways

Board walk replacement required

-(gives more diversity)

-encourages more people to use beach – especially seniors

-on paved sections, different age groups

E-W corridor – should be a beach blvd instead of I90

-(E-W connector to 21 bay bridges)

-need one really good service

-(ride cyclist county/Gulf Coast)

5) Beyond what is available now, can you think of other outdoor recreational activities that could be successful in Harrison County?

- Before there was the Jeff Davis Home trail (21 miles long for boy scouts – big accomplishment) – can't find now
- Actual camping sites the scouts would camp hills, Beauvoir to 21- don't know if still attractive
- -Camping sites
- Botanical Garden at BeauVoir (second choice for tourists)
- Have walking/biking, casinos (1), gardens (7)
- Conservation, make accessible
- Continue land acquisition – set aside natural areas – make accessible for walking/biking
- Bird watching – enhance map, signage at sites, way finding
- Designating blueways with markers saying how many miles with maps of info with markers and places to eat etc.
- Sand beach – break up monotonous 26 miles into planted natural areas (can be around the outflow drains)
- Difficult to cross I-90. Make beach Blvd.
- Designate blueway trails with:
 - mile marker (need interpretation)
- Ipod/video info etc? (visible way-finding)
- Birding trails, maps, signage at sites needs to improve)
 - maps, food bathrooms, takeouts
 - signage
 - boat pickup at the end
 - visual keys for landmarks along the way
- pay attention to islands for blueways
 - Canoeing/Kayaking to the Islands
 - racks on boats for kayak/canoe
 - one-way options back after paddle
- Trails / Designated bike lane on any road?
 - we really need safe routes on roads – tell drivers
 - on the beach – v good idea – people will come from far – potential for a draw
 - can attract teenagers
 - debege road? – I-90 and Biloxi not favorable (difficult to walk across I-90)
 - need to improve I-90, change to blvd.
- Teenage population needs to be targeted – wave-runners etc. (teens like)
- Natural areas along 26 mile land beach will break up monotony
 - Eg. Bird nesting area

- focus areas on beach
- outflow (surface runoff) drains planted/natural areas and boardwalk

6) When development occurs-either residential or commercial-what provisions should be made for recreation?

Group 1

- Have sidewalks w/ green space between road and walkway
- Bike/ pedestrian paths away from vehicular traffic, but next to roads
- Paths which are tree-lined for shade to promote going outdoors
- Swales replace curbs
- Allotted greenspace for parks, birding nature walks, community centers (condo dev- adv is that they have large green spaces.
- Like to have community centers
- Require a level of fuel/energy efficiency (say 20% self sufficient), or LEED certification for more sustainable development
- Avoid wetland developments

Final comments from Group 2

-Need for updated zoning codes and regulation. Developers are “good” and they can do what is needed

-Negative stigma with smart growth, smart code