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BIRDING



PADDLING

# NATURE-BASED TOURISM PLAN FOR COASTAL MISSISSIPPI PROCESS AND STRATEGY DOCUMENT

AUGUST 2016

Prepared for:

Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program  
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources





DEPOT CREEK GREENWAY

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The preparation of the *2016 Nature-Based Tourism (NBT) Plan for Coastal Mississippi* would not have been possible without the vision and guidance of the passionate and dedicated NBT community in South Mississippi.

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The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* fulfills one of the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program's primary goals, and underscores the many resources South Mississippi has to offer. This plan firmly establishes NBT as a sustainable opportunity for future tourism growth and development of the region, while offering incentives for our residents to protect the area's national heritage and increase our resilience in the process. This plan is the first of its kind in Mississippi!

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MARY WALKER MARINA - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY SYLVIA EKEDAHL WALDSMITH



**1.0**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



Picture the perfect getaway..... sweeping views of the Gulf of Mexico; the meandering path of the Pascagoula River; wind whistling through the Wet Pine Savannahs; and vibrant sunrises over the barrier islands.

The rivers, bays, bayous, and Gulf shape a world of natural experiences and provide many nature-based adventures for travelers to South Mississippi. Whether paddling, hiking, biking or just leisurely exploring the area's many natural and cultural resources, visitors to Coastal Mississippi and locals residing in the six counties of South Mississippi will find a wealth of opportunities to reconnect with nature and recharge their spirits.

A dedicated team of advocates in Coastal Mississippi believes Nature-Based Tourism (NBT) is a source of untapped value that distinguishes our unique region from other tourist destinations along the Gulf Coast.

There is ample evidence that NBT is a great investment for Coastal Mississippi. Consider the following facts:



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

- Wildlife tourism - wildlife watching, recreational fishing, hunting - generates nearly **\$2 billion in tourist spending** every year and supports **26,000 related jobs** in Mississippi (Data Report, 2013).
- Nearly **one in five jobs** on the Coast is tourism-related (*MS GoCoast 2020 Report*, 2013).
- **Gulf Islands National Seashore** draws over **1 million visitors** each year, supporting **584 local jobs** and generating **over \$43 million** for the local economy (National Park Service, 2014).
- Mississippi's commercial and recreational fishing-related activities generate over **\$700 million in sales annually** (National Marine Fisheries Service, 2012).

Since 2011, members of the NBT Task Force have been developing an emerging vision of how investment in this rapidly growing sector of the tourism industry will improve the region's economy, while conserving precious resources, like clean water and wildlife habitat, for future generations. This *2016 NBT Plan*

*for Coastal Mississippi* is the first of its kind in the State and represents the culmination of years of evidence gathering, consensus building, stakeholder engagement, and eco-tourism advocacy. It has been developed to provide a sustainable framework to successfully achieve the following goals:

- Package and share Coastal Mississippi’s story at home and around the country;
- Improve the small business climate for NBT to survive and thrive;
- Attract tourists whose travel is linked to conservation and appreciation of the area’s natural assets; and
- Enhance and protect natural heritage resources for future generations.

The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* plans for 10 years of economic growth in Mississippi’s six coastal counties. While encouraging a local culture of natural resource stewardship, it also proposes strategic planning, marketing and management actions to achieve an optimal balance between growth and conservation. The Plan begins by introducing the natural heritage story of Coastal Mississippi. Chapters 2 and 3 describe how the plan developed and outline the industry’s prospects for growth. Chapter 5.0 charts the recommended steps toward a thriving future for NBT. These recommendations for public education; outreach and marketing; trails, blueways and byways; small business development; infrastructure investment and resource management are summarized in **Table 1.1**.

**Table 1.1 NBT Recommendations**

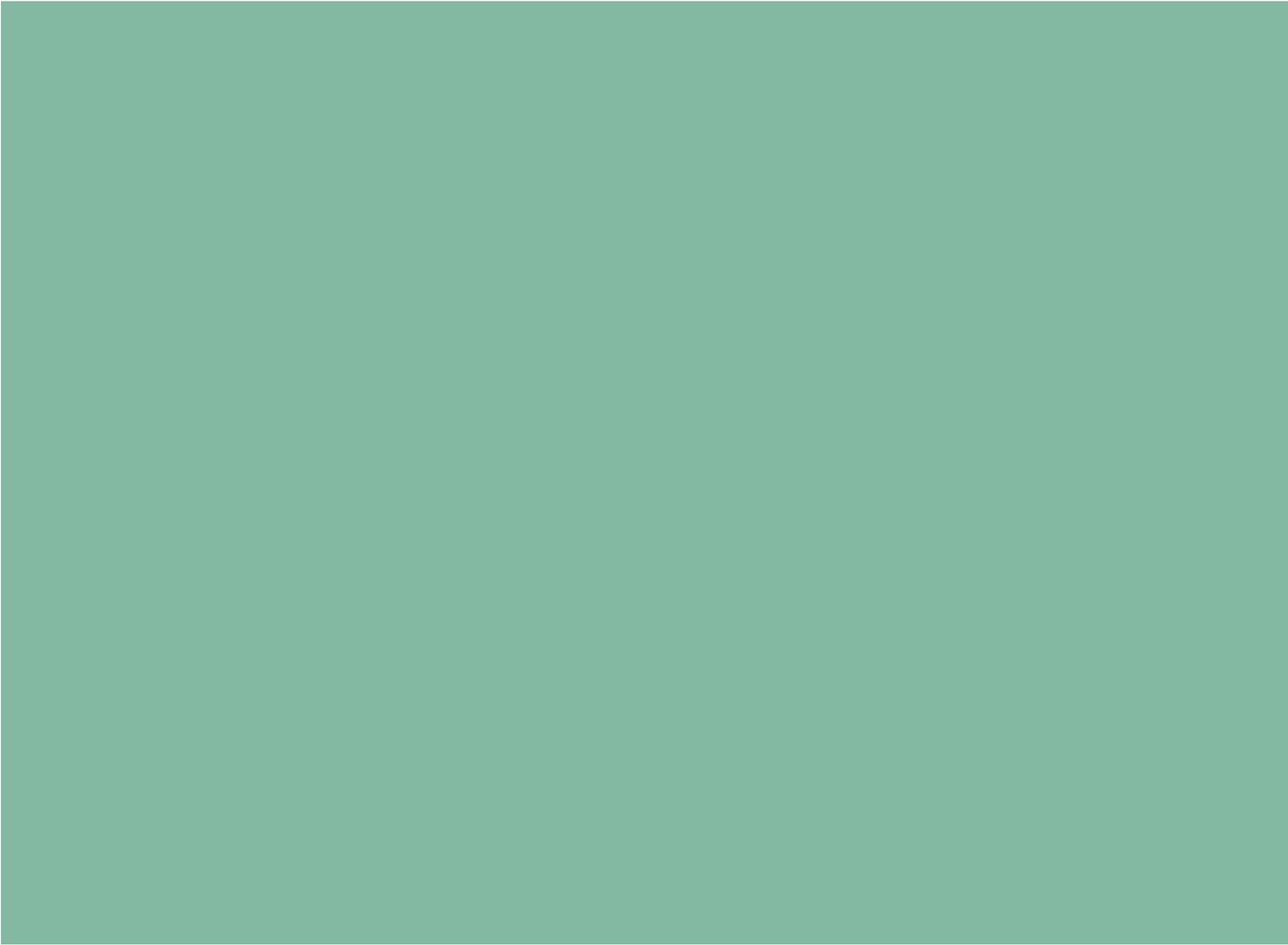
PUBLIC EDUCATION	
Create a one-stop website to host NBT information	Improve signage to educate visitors
Promote environmental stewardship	Engage public officials
Develop common tourism metrics	Create a campaign to reduce litter
OUTREACH AND MARKETING	
Improve image through consistent branding, story and messaging	Provide and promote diverse, year-round activities
Develop a long-term advertising strategy	Use social media to promote NBT activities
Develop cross-promotional plan to link NBT opportunities	Engage visitors through NBT Passport Program
TRAILS, BLUEWAYS & BYWAYS	
Invest in Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail safety, accessibility and attractiveness	Extend Scenic Byways Program from Hancock County across the coast and install signs
Invest in existing Blueways with amenities, signage and publicity and develop a Design Guide	
INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS	
Inventory NBT destinations, public access points and businesses and develop interactive map	Reduce vehicular and bike/pedestrian conflicts
Build and repair additional boat launches, docks and piers for canoes, kayaks & paddleboards	Connect destinations through improved transportation infrastructure
Provide ferry service to barrier islands	Support efforts to bring Amtrak routes back to the Coast

SMALL BUSINESSES: RECOGNITION PROGRAM & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	
Establish a Recognition Program	Dedicated Business Incubator Program
Enhance workforce training opportunities	
MANAGE & RESTORE NATURE BASED ACTIVITIES AND DESTINATIONS	
Establish NBT Council with advisory and coordination capacity	Budget and adequate maintenance
Hire staff person to manage NBT activities and improvements	Pursue opportunities to restore natural habitats
Monitor and maintain access points	

Expanding the share of the tourism market for NBT will require the continued cooperation of the public, private and non-profit stakeholders who lay the foundation for this planning effort. The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* concludes with a strategy to implement the short-, mid- and long-term actions that will establish a successful platform for growth. The Plan’s lasting legacy for the region will be economic growth occurring hand in hand with the creation of a more sustainable, resilient region.



CEDAR LAKE ISLAND - JOHNNY MARQUEZ AND ALLEN REED - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALLISON ANDERSON



**2.0**

**SOUTH MISSISSIPPI'S  
RICH HISTORY**

Although we have few records of the Native Americans that were the first inhabitants of South Mississippi, we know the region's abundant fish and shellfish were at the center of their culture. As evidenced by the "middens", or piles of oyster and other shells that mark early settlements, these earliest residents of Mississippi recognized the value of the natural resources. It is also well known that since the French explorers Pierre and Jean Baptiste LeMoyne arrived on Mississippi's shores in 1699 seeking treasure for their King, visitors from many lands have been returning to marvel at the richness of the area's natural resources. Before the Civil War, whole households made seasonal migrations from New Orleans to Coastal Mississippi by steamboat, and visitors from northern states would travel the Mississippi River by steamers to visit Southern Mississippi. Later, railroads connecting the Mississippi Coast with cities as far north as Chicago spurred an even greater tourism and commercial boom.<sup>1</sup>

The Mississippi Coast's natural resources have long been a source of economic wealth. The area's fertile fisheries developed into a thriving seafood industry with the arrival of railroads, new canning methods, and commercial ice production. These innovations made it possible to preserve and ship seafood nationwide. By 1904, Biloxi was the world's largest exporter of seafood, drawing its labor from people of many cultures - Cajuns from South Louisiana, Yugoslavians, African Americans, and most recently, Vietnamese immigrants. Their descendants make up the rich cultural mix that is South Mississippi today. The dense piney woods to the North provided lumber to other French colonies in the Caribbean. With growth of technology, the area's sawmills supplied the nation.<sup>2</sup>



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## 2.1 ABUNDANT NATURAL RESOURCES IN SOUTH MISSISSIPPI

### 2.1.1 Critical Habitats

South Mississippi's Outer Coastal Plain is a region of low-lying plains and forests that borders the Gulf of Mexico from southern Louisiana to eastward to Florida's Atlantic Coast.<sup>3</sup> Water, both salty and fresh, shapes the environment in the form of beaches, bayous, marshes and wetlands. Upland areas near the coast form part of the rare Pine Savannah habitat. Visitors may also explore the temperate evergreen forests populated by live oaks and magnolia or the cypress swamps in the lowlands festooned with Spanish moss.<sup>4</sup>

Animals and birds that make the region home include whitetail deer, raccoons, opossums, flying squirrels, rabbits, and numerous species of ground-dwelling creatures. In rare instances, visitors may spot Louisiana black bear in forested areas, and locals and visitors alike target bobwhite and wild turkey as principal game birds.<sup>5</sup> Another nature-based attraction is one of the great birding experiences of the Gulf Coast called the spring "fallout," when northbound birds swarm a patch of woods after crossing the Gulf of Mexico. Several sites along the coast, including Ansley Preserve in Hancock County, are hosts to the breathtaking spectacle, though such events are always weather-dependent and can't be predicted very far in advance.<sup>6</sup>

The diversity of habitats available for the visitor to explore in South Mississippi, from the lowlands to the upland forests, is presented in greater detail in **Table 2.1**.



AUDUBON BIRDING GROUP AT SPENCE'S WOODS, HANCOCK COUNTY - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALLISON ANDERSON

**Table 2.1 Habitats of South Mississippi with Plants, Animals and Bird Species<sup>7</sup>**

Habitat Type	Plant Species	Animal Species	Bird Species
<b>Brackish &amp; Salt Marshes</b>	Black Needlerush Wax Myrtle/Southern Bayberry Yaupon holly Sea Ox-eye Saltwort Glasswort Sea Lavender	Fiddler Crabs Common Buckeye Butterflies White-tailed Deer Diamondback Terrapins Raccoons, American Alligators	Brown & White Pelicans Oyster Catchers, Clapper Rails Black Crowned Night Heron
<b>Freshwater Marshes</b>	Sawgrass Arrowhead, Pickerelweed, Cattail, American Eelgrass	Alligators, Otters, Beavers, Muskrats	Ospreys
<b>Swamps and Bottomland Hardwoods</b>	Tupelo Gum, Pond and Bald Cypress	Siren Salamanders, Frogs, Toads, Turtles, Alligators	Egrets, Herons
<b>Wet Pine Savannah</b>	Pine trees, Carnivorous Plants: Pitcher Plants, Sundews, Bladderworts, Butterworts Orchids: Grass Pink and Ladies' Tresses	Raccoons, Gulf Fritillary Butterflies, Blue Darner Dragonflies, Red Foxes and Rainbow Snakes	Bluebirds, Blue Grosbeaks
<b>Woodlands</b>	Tupelo Gum, Bald Cypress, Long Leaf Pine, Pitcher Plant Meadow	White-tailed deer, foxes, raccoons	Redstarts, Black and White Warblers, Wood Thrushes



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

### **2.1.2 Wet Pine Savannah**

With only 3-5% of the original acreage remaining, wet pine savannas are one of South Mississippi's most endangered ecosystems. These communities once extended along the coast from the western edge of Florida to Louisiana in a band approximately 62 miles wide. The Grand Bay Reserve and Weeks Bay Reserve contain some of the best remaining examples of this habitat type along the northern Gulf of Mexico. Pine savannas are fire-maintained grasslands with scattered pines and shrubs and a sun loving, species-rich ground cover. These wetland habitats support as many as 40 species per square meter of grass, sedge and wildflower species.<sup>8</sup>

Carnivorous plants in the savannas, including pitcher plants, sundews, bladderworts and butterworts, attract, capture and digest prey such as insects and other small animals. Grass Pink and Ladies' Tresses orchids mingle with native grasses. Raccoons, Gulf Fritillary Butterflies, Bluebirds, Blue Grosbeaks, Blue Darner Dragonflies, Red Foxes and Rainbow Snakes regularly visit or live in these habitats. The endangered Mississippi Sandhill Crane is the most notable inhabitant of the wet pine savannas of south Mississippi.<sup>9</sup>

### **2.1.3 Salt and Brackish Marshes**

Estuaries occur where freshwater from rivers and streams mixes with the saltwater of the sea to form brackish water influenced by the rise and fall of the tides. The Smooth Cordgrass of the lower marsh is found where the brackish tidal waters regularly sweep in, bringing small animals to feed in and among the vegetation. As the tides flush out of the area, they take tiny bits of food called detritus on which many important species of small coastal finfish and shellfish feed. Scattered within the mid-marsh are salty areas of sparse vegetation known as salt pannes. Plants and animals living in these salt pannes must be extremely salt and heat tolerant. Common plants found are Saltwort, Glasswort and Sea Lavender. Animals frequently found include Fiddler Crabs, Common Buckeye Butterflies and White-tailed Deer that use these areas as salt licks. Other species of plants include Southern Bayberry (Wax Myrtle), Yaupon Holly and Sea Ox-eye, a salt-tolerant wildflower that resembles a yellow daisy.<sup>10</sup>

Salt marshes provide nursery, feeding and shelter habitats for many coastal species of fish, shellfish and other animals, buffer the mainland from powerful storm surges, filter pollutants flowing off the adjacent land, and provide recreational opportunities for fishermen, hunters and birdwatchers. Diamondback Terrapins, Raccoons, American Alligators, Oyster Catchers, Brown and White Pelicans (migratory), and Clapper Rails are just a few of the animals that live here.<sup>11</sup>

### **2.1.4 Freshwater Marshes**

Vegetation in freshwater marshes is generally grass-like, although it can be home to a few water-tolerant species of trees like pond and bald cypress. Dense stands of Sawgrass provide habitat for nesting birds, alligators, frogs, otters, and snakes. Ospreys, fish-eating birds of prey, nest in trees or tall structures on the edges of freshwater marshes. Tidal freshwater marshes are found upstream from brackish waterways. The ebb and flow of the tide still moves the water levels up and down in these streams, but there is



very little movement of salt into these systems except during periods of extreme drought or tidal surge. Common plants include Arrowhead, Pickerelweed, Cattail and submerged American Eelgrass (*Vallisneria americana*). Freshwater marshes filter polluted runoff from adjacent uplands, store floodwaters, recharge groundwater aquifers and provide nesting and over-wintering sites for recreationally important species of fish and waterfowl. Mammals such as Beavers, Muskrats and the invasive Nutrias also utilize these habitats throughout the year.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.1.5 Woodland Habitats**

Woodland habitats are dominated by Slash Pines and Wiregrass and are often referred to as wet pine flatwoods; however, there are a few habitats located on higher ridges or relic American Indian shell middens (refuse piles) that support upland (nonwetland) hardwood species such as the evergreen Live Oak. The wooded areas located close enough to the saltwater bayous and bays to be periodically impacted by saltwater flooding or the salt spray are called maritime forests. During the early spring and fall months, these woodland habitats serve as critical “refueling” and resting stopover sites for birds migrating to and from Central and South America across the open water of the Gulf of Mexico. In the spring, it is not unusual to find Redstarts, Black and White Warblers, Wood Thrushes and other birds as they pass through this area on their way to their nesting habitats in the north. The Oak Grove Birding Trail leads through one of the Grand Bay Reserve’s few accessible examples of a maritime oak forest.<sup>13</sup>

In the northern reaches of the area, the DeSoto National Forest is characterized by gently rolling terrain covered by southern pine ridges and hardwood bottoms with clear, tea-colored streams meandering throughout. Woodland habitats in the Forest include dry, sandy longleaf pine/scrub oak ridges, frequently flooded tupelo/bald cypress swamps, and the steep upland hardwood forests of Ragland Hills to the vast pitcher plant savanna at Buttercup Flats.<sup>14</sup>



TURKEY CREEK CROSSING WASHINGTON AVENUE - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY PETER A CADA

### 2.1.6 Swamps and Bottomland Hardwoods

Freshwater wetlands are characterized by the presence of standing water during part of the year and the presence of woody vegetation. It is the coastal swamp that many visitors to our area associate with the Deep South. The most common trees found in these habitats include the Tupelo Gum and two species of cypress — Pond and Bald. These trees have special adaptations that allow them to live in standing water. Both have what is called a buttress (swollen) base. Additionally, the cypress trees have “knees,” structures that arise from the ground and are thought to help the trees deal with the variable conditions that occur in wet soils. Many coastal species of wildlife, such as waterfowl and warblers, utilize these habitats for water, food and protective cover. The swamps and bottomland hardwoods may serve as rookeries for egrets, herons and other colonial nesting species of birds. These wetlands also provide important breeding sites for many of our coastal species of amphibians and reptiles such as sirens (large, aquatic salamanders), frogs, toads, turtles and alligators.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2 NATURAL DESTINATIONS

Local, state and national leaders had the foresight to conserve South Mississippi’s unique natural habitats in a series of public lands, including parks, preserves and wildlife management areas in South Mississippi. Travelers today can explore many of these wild areas, transporting them back to the world that Native Americans and the first European visitors experienced. Each type of natural area offers the traveler unique opportunities, including nature trails, wildlife viewing areas, hunting and fishing, paddling, and camping. Small businesses offer guided tours of many destinations, complementing the visitor’s enjoyment of their environment with a deep ecological understanding of the history and inter-relationships of the habitats. A list of these publicly owned destinations is provided in **Table 2.2** below.

**Table 2.2 Publicly-owned National, State Parks, Preserves, Wildlife Management Areas and Research Centers**

<b>NATIONAL PARKS</b>		
	<b>Management Entity</b>	<b>Location</b>
De Soto National Forest	National Park Service	Perry, Wayne, Harrison, Forrest, Stone, Greene, Jones, Jackson, George, and Pearl River Counties
Gulf Islands National Seashore - Davis Bayou District	National Parks Service	Jackson and Harrison Counties
<b>NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES &amp; VIEWING AREAS</b>		
	<b>Management Entity</b>	<b>Location</b>
Hancock County Marshes Preserve	National Parks Service	Hancock County
Mississippi Sandhill Crane Wildlife Refuge	National Parks Service	Jackson County
Pearl River Wetlands @ Infinity	National Parks Service	Pearlington, MS, Hancock County
<b>STATE PARKS</b>		
	<b>Management Entity</b>	<b>Location</b>
Buccaneer State Park <sup>16</sup>	Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks	Waveland, Hancock County
McLeod State Park <sup>17</sup>	Hancock County Park Commission	The Kiln, Hancock County
Shepard State Park <sup>18</sup>	Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks	Gautier, Jackson County
<b>RESEARCH CENTERS</b>		
	<b>Management Entity</b>	<b>Location</b>
Crosby Arboretum	Mississippi State University Extension	Picayune, MS
Estuarine Education Center	Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College	Gautier, MS
Institute for Marine Mammal Studies	IMMS	Gulfport, MS
Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR)	NOAA/ DMR/ Mississippi Secretary of State/ USFWS	Moss Point, Jackson County
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory Marine Education Center	University of Southern Mississippi	Multiple Campuses
Pascagoula River Audubon Center	Audubon Society	Moss Point, Jackson County
<b>WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS</b>		
	<b>Management Entity</b>	<b>Location</b>
Pascagoula River Wildlife Management Area	Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks	Jackson & George Counties
Red Creek Wildlife Management Area	Mississippi Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks	Jackson, George & Stone Counties
<b>Trails Networks</b>		
Mississippi Coastal Birding Trail	Pascagoula River Audubon Society	Coastwide
Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail	Heritage Trails Partnership	Coastwide
Pascagoula River National Blueway	Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain	Jackson & George Counties



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Coastal region also benefits from an extensive public and private network of lands in conservation that contribute to both its natural beauty and wildlife habitat. The majority of these lands are managed by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), through the Coastal Preserves Program, or by the non-profit Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain. Some of these destinations are accessible to the public as well, and offer activities such as nature trails and paddle sports. Coastal Preserves are listed in **Table 2.3**.

**Table 2.3 Coastal Preserves**

	Management Entity	Location
Bayou La Croix Preserve	MDMR	Bay St. Louis, Mississippi
Bayou Portage Preserve	MDMR	Harrison County, Mississippi
Bellefontaine Marsh Preserve	MDMR	Jackson County
Biloxi River Marshes Preserve	MDMR	Harrison County
Cat Island Preserve	MDMR	Harrison County
Davis Bayou Preserve	MDMR	Ocean Springs, Mississippi

Deer Island Preserve	MDMR	Barrier Island, Harrison County
Escatawpa River Marsh Preserve	MDMR	Jackson County, Mississippi
Grand Bay Savanna Preserve	MDMR	Jackson County
Grand Bayou Preserve	MDMR	Waveland, Hancock County
Graveline Bay Preserve	MDMR	Jackson County
Hancock County Marshes Preserve	MDMR	Hancock County
Horn Island Preserve	MDMR	Barrier Island, Jackson County
Jourdan River Preserve	MDMR	Bay St. Louis, Mississippi
Old Fort Bayou Preserve	MDMR	Ocean Springs, Mississippi
Pascagoula River Marsh Preserve	MDMR	Pascagoula, Mississippi
Petit Bois Island Preserve	MDMR	Barrier Island, Jackson County
Round Island Preserve	MDMR	Jackson County
Sandhill Crane Refuge Preserve	MDMR	Gautier, Mississippi
Ship Island Preserve	MDMR	Barrier Island, Harrison County
Wolf River Preserve	MDMR	Harrison County

There are also a number of private land trusts and non-profit organizations that maintain privately owned, but publicly accessible lands in the Gulf Coast Region. Because the policy of each organization varies with respect to public access, visitors are encouraged to contact them directly for more information. The managing organizations for these privately owned public lands are listed in **Table 2.4** below.

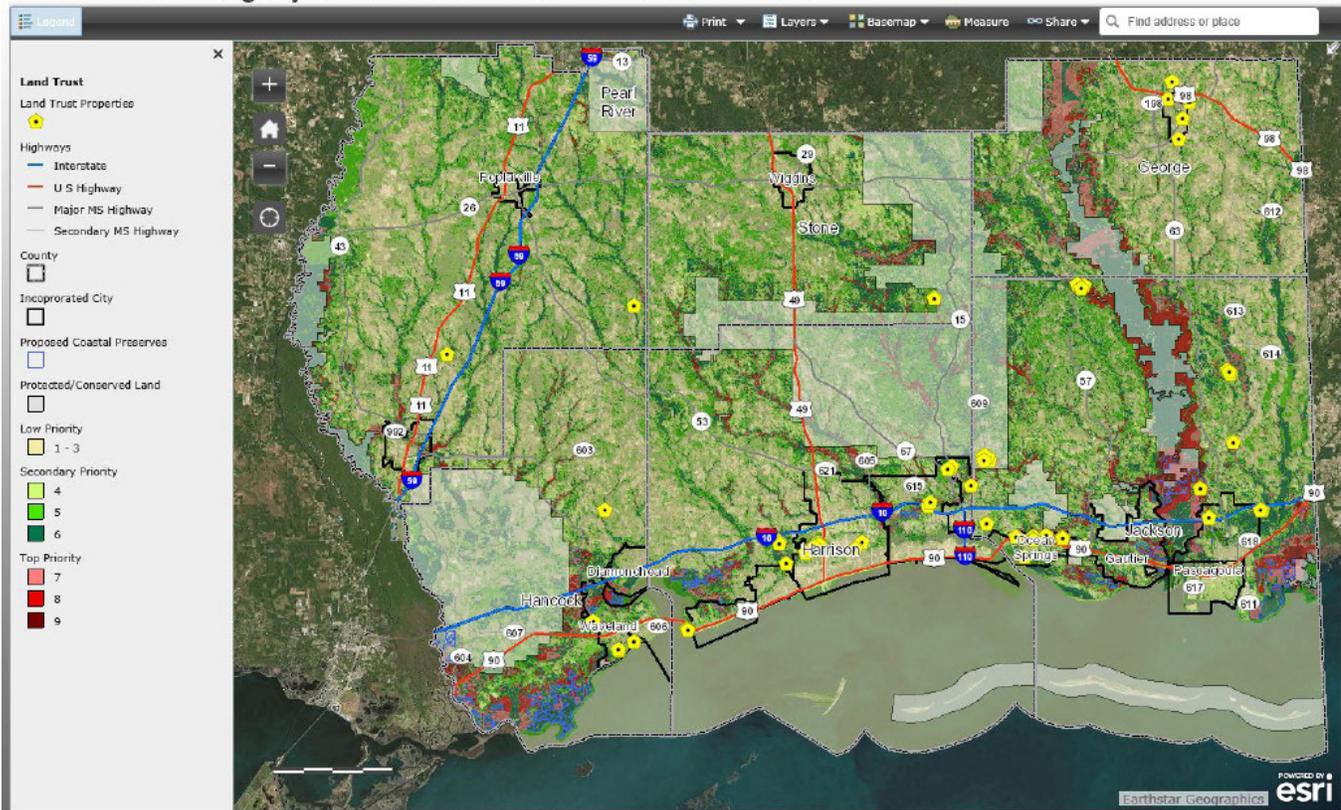
**Table 2.4 Land Trust Contact Information**

Management Entity	Director / Coordinator	Address
Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (LTMCP)	Judy Steckler Executive Director	PO Box 245 Biloxi, MS 39533-0245 <a href="mailto:judyltmcp@aol.com">judyltmcp@aol.com</a> 228-435-9191 office
Mississippi Land Trust	Mississippi Gulf Coast Office Robert Smith, Coastal Program Coordinator	P.O. Box 1374 Biloxi, Mississippi 39533-1374 <a href="mailto:rsmith@wildlifemiss.org">rsmith@wildlifemiss.org</a> Office: 228-990-0559
Audubon Society	Mark LaSalle Executive Director	5107 Arthur Street Moss Point MS 39563 <a href="mailto:mlasalle@audubon.org">mlasalle@audubon.org</a> Office: 228-475-0825
Pelican Coast Conservancy	Walter Ernest Director of Operations	403 Conti Street Mobile Alabama 36602-2405 <a href="mailto:wernest@atlanticcoastconservancy.org">wernest@atlanticcoastconservancy.org</a>

The Conservation Fund	Ray Herndon Director - Lower Mississippi Region	895 Park Avenue Mandeville, LA 70448 <a href="mailto:rhoerndon@conservationfund.org">rhoerndon@conservationfund.org</a> 985-674-3332
The Nature Conservancy	Alex Littlejohn Associate State Director	7716 Old Canton Road, Suite A Madison, MS 39130 <a href="mailto:alittlejohn@tnc.org">alittlejohn@tnc.org</a> Office: (601)713-3355
The Trust for Public Land	Stacey Shankle Senior Project Manager	1010 Cedar Hill Drive Jackson, MS 39206 <a href="mailto:Stacey.shankle@tpl.org">Stacey.shankle@tpl.org</a> 601-213-8077
Wolf River Conservation Society, Inc.	Bob Fairbank President c/o R.E. Fairbank	PO Box 447 Pass Christian, MS 39571-0447 <a href="mailto:rfairbank@icloud.com">rfairbank@icloud.com</a> Office: 228-861-5515

The Potential Conservation Lands image provided by the LTMCP depicts lands to be considered for conservation.

### Conservation Legacy: Potential Conservation Lands - LTMCP





## 2.3 NATURE-BASED BUSINESSES

The number of NBT businesses and destinations in South Mississippi is dynamic and ever-changing. The largest share of businesses documented through the research conducted in the development of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* is in charter fishing operations.

At least five businesses offer tours of popular attractions like the Pascagoula River and the barrier islands of the Mississippi Sound. Several offer rentals or sales of canoes, kayaks and paddleboards, often providing lessons or guiding tours as well. The museums and visitor centers of the region welcome thousands of visitors annually to learn about South Mississippi’s unique habitats, and a network of campgrounds offer travelers the opportunity to truly experience the wild, by sleeping under the stars. A more complete list of identified businesses supporting NBT is provided in **Appendix A** with example businesses provided in **Table 2.5**.

**Table 2.5 Nature Based Tourism Small Businesses and Destinations**

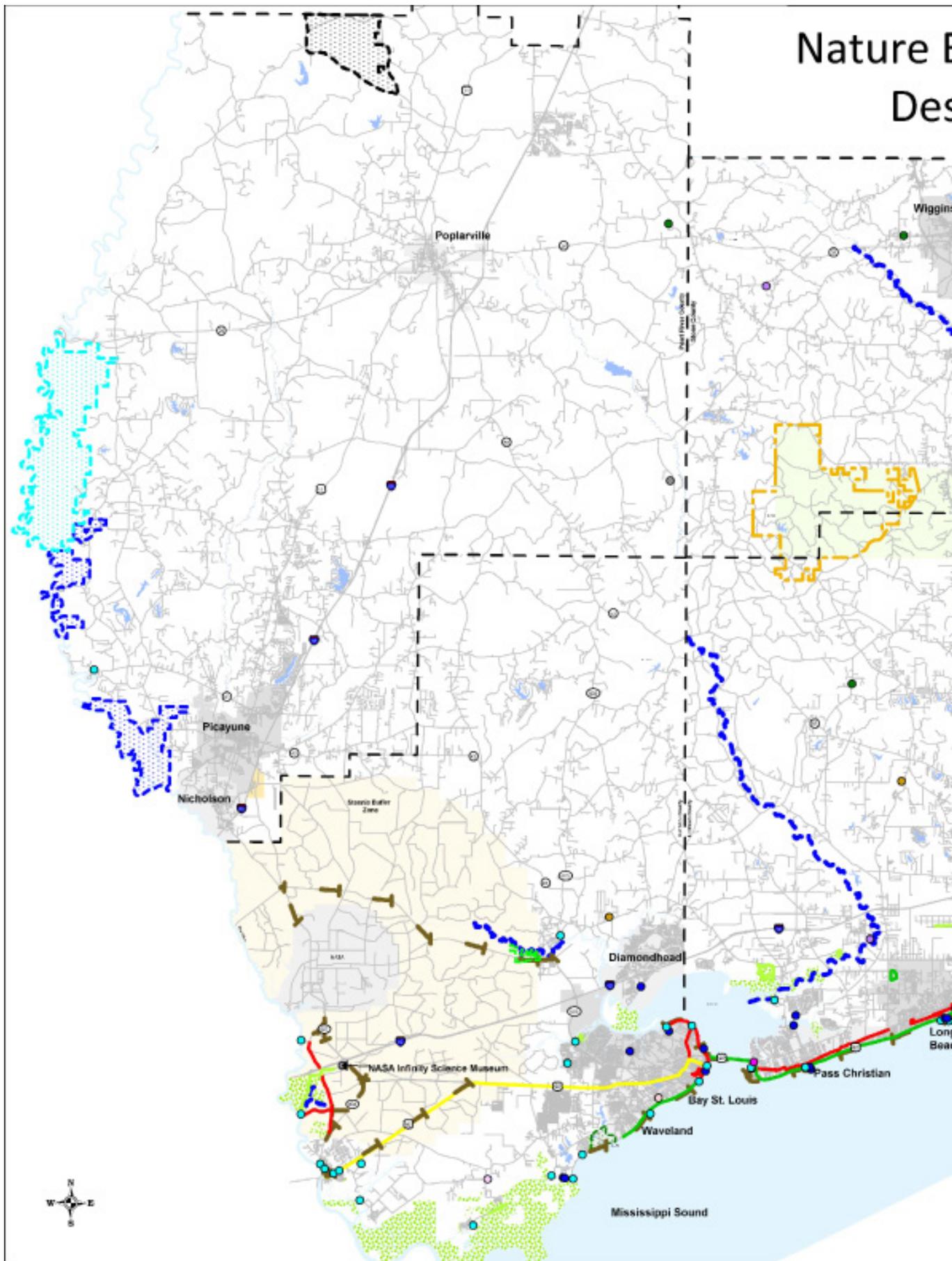
BUSINESS/DESTINATION NAME & SERVICE	E-MAIL OR WEBSITE
<b>TOURS</b>	
Biloxi Schooners	<a href="https://www.maritimemuseum.org/w/?page_id=136">https://www.maritimemuseum.org/w/?page_id=136</a>
Biloxi Shrimping Trip	<a href="http://www.biloxishrimpingtrip.com/">http://www.biloxishrimpingtrip.com/</a>
Eco-Tours of South Mississippi	<a href="mailto:ecotours.ms@gmail.com">ecotours.ms@gmail.com</a>
McCoy’s River & Marsh Tours	<a href="http://www.mccoyrivertours.com/">http://www.mccoyrivertours.com/</a>
Ship Island Excursions	<a href="http://www.mshipisland.com/">http://www.mshipisland.com/</a>
<b>VISITOR CENTERS &amp; MUSEUMS</b>	
Lynn Meadows Discovery Center	<a href="http://www.lmdc.org">http://www.lmdc.org</a>
Institute for Marine Mammal Studies	<a href="http://www.imms.org/">http://www.imms.org/</a>
Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum	<a href="http://www.maritimemuseum.org/">www.maritimemuseum.org/</a>
NASA Infinity Science Museum	<a href="http://www.visitinfinity.com/explore/galleries-exhibits/possum-walk-trail/">http://www.visitinfinity.com/explore/galleries-exhibits/possum-walk-trail/</a>
Pascagoula River Audubon Center	<a href="http://www.pascagoula.audubon.org/">www.pascagoula.audubon.org/</a>
Scranton Nature Center an L.G. Levy Park	<a href="http://cityofpascagoula.com/scranton-nature-center">http://cityofpascagoula.com/scranton-nature-center</a>
Scranton Shrimp Boat Museum	<a href="mailto:kducote@cityofpascagoula.com">kducote@cityofpascagoula.com</a>



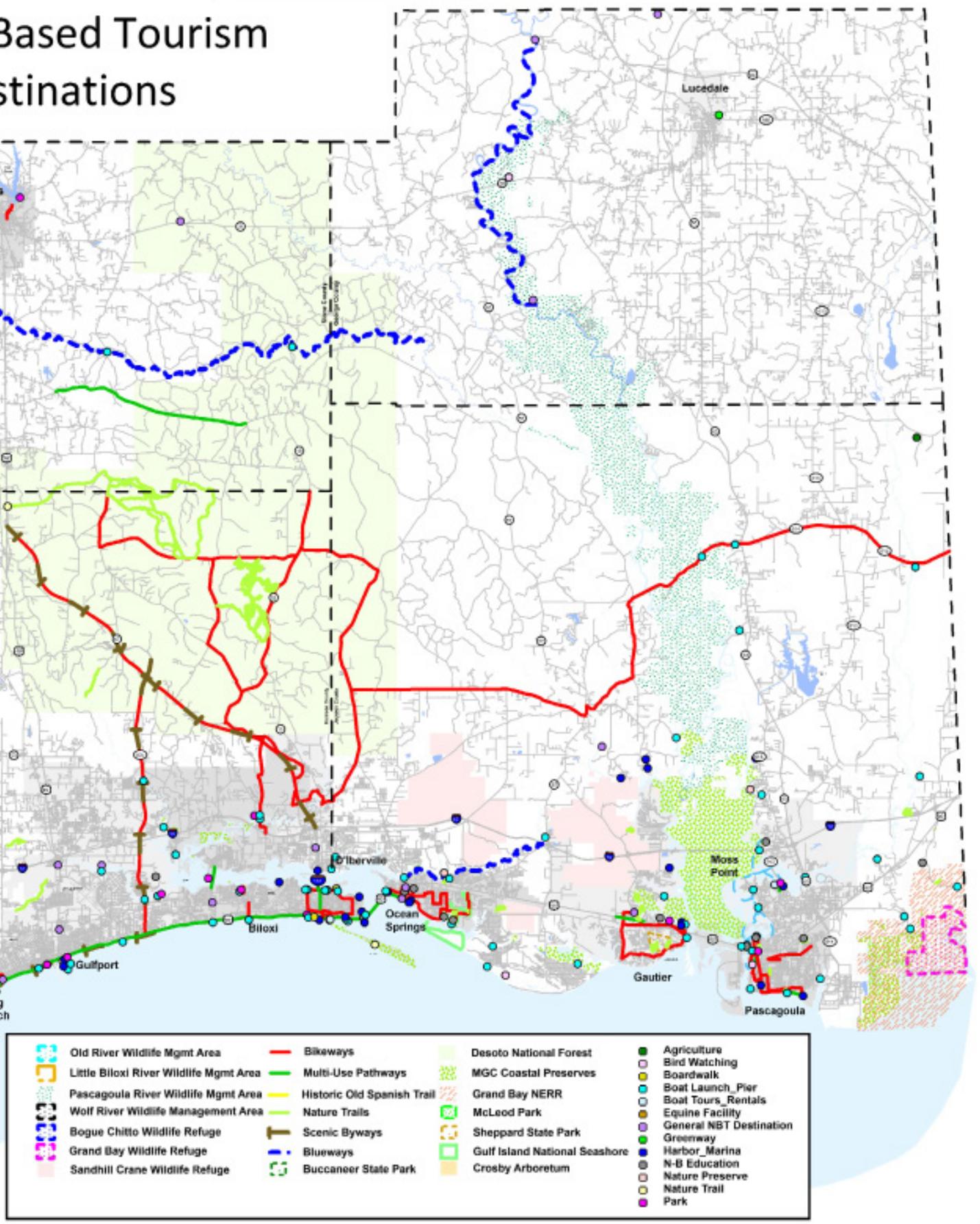
MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST PADDLE BUSINESS

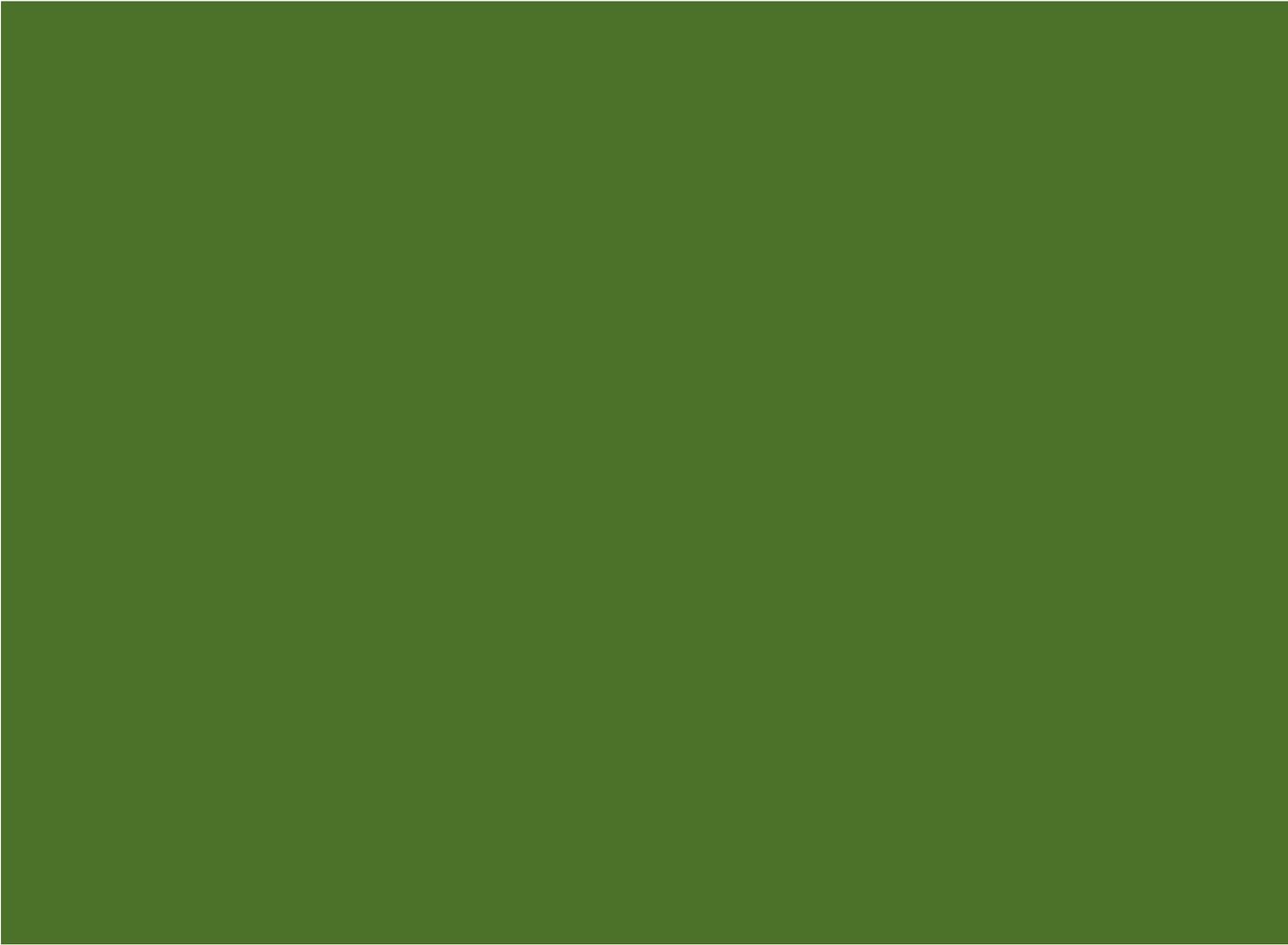
CHARTER BOATS & FISHING	
Adventure Charters & Dive	<a href="mailto:captteddc@yahoo.com">captteddc@yahoo.com</a>
Biloxi Bay Charter Tours	<a href="http://biloxibaycharter.com/">http://biloxibaycharter.com/</a>
Cat Island Excursions/Southern Way Charters	<a href="http://www.catislandms.com/">http://www.catislandms.com/</a> & <a href="http://www.southernwaycharters.com/">http://www.southernwaycharters.com/</a>
Fish South Mississippi	<a href="http://www.fishsouthms.com/">http://www.fishsouthms.com/</a>
Fort Bayou Charter & Cruises	<a href="http://www.fortbayoucharters.com/">http://www.fortbayoucharters.com/</a>
Horn Island Charters	<a href="http://www.hornislandcharters.com">www.hornislandcharters.com</a>
North Star Sailing Charters, LLC	<a href="http://www.northstarsailingcharters.com/">http://www.northstarsailingcharters.com/</a>
OutKast Charters	<a href="http://www.outkastcharters.com/">http://www.outkastcharters.com/</a>
Reel Experience Fishing Charters	<a href="mailto:capt.gary@reelexperience">capt.gary@reelexperience</a>
Rock-N-Reel Sportfishing Charter	<a href="http://www.rocknreel.org/">http://www.rocknreel.org/</a>
Shallow Draft Charters	<a href="mailto:shallowdraft@cablone.net">shallowdraft@cablone.net</a>
Skipper Charters	<a href="http://www.skipperchartersms.com/">http://www.skipperchartersms.com/</a>
Strictly Fishin' Charters	<a href="http://www.strictlyfishincharters.com/">http://www.strictlyfishincharters.com/</a>
PADDLE SPORTS	
Paddles Up!	<a href="http://paddlesupms.com/">http://paddlesupms.com/</a>
Wolf River Canoe & Kayak	<a href="http://www.wolfrivercanoes.com/">http://www.wolfrivercanoes.com/</a>
Wut Sup Paddleboards & Rentals	<a href="http://wutsuprentals.com/">http://wutsuprentals.com/</a>
CAMPSITES	
Presley's Outing/ Goode's Mill Lake	<a href="http://www.presleysouting.com/">http://www.presleysouting.com/</a>
Shepard State Park & Campground	<a href="http://shepardstatepark.com/">http://shepardstatepark.com/</a>
AGRITOURISM	
Boggy Creek Vineyard	<a href="http://www.boggycreekvineyard.com/index.html">http://www.boggycreekvineyard.com/index.html</a>
Heaven's Best Compost & Gardens	<a href="http://www.heavensbestcompost.com/">http://www.heavensbestcompost.com/</a>
Seward Farms	<a href="http://www.sewardfarms.com/index.htm">http://www.sewardfarms.com/index.htm</a>

# Nature B Des



# Based Tourism Destinations





**3.0**

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
*2016 NBT PLAN FOR  
COASTAL MISSISSIPPI***



The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* reflects a comprehensive program framework developed through collaboration and communication among diverse stakeholders in Coastal Mississippi. The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* was built on the shoulders of NBT champions and their previous efforts, in addition to a renewed NBT planning effort spearheaded by the MDMR Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program.

Following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Disaster in April of 2010, advocates for the region's natural resources joined forces to identify goals, objectives and needs for the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which led to the conclusion that nature tourism would be one of the region's most promising methods to protect natural resources and promote environmental stewardship.

A Nature Tourism Task Force of business leaders, scientists, naturalists, educators, and outdoor recreation specialists were the guiding force in the development of this document. The initial task of the Nature Tourism Task Force was to better understand the current capacity of the Nature Tourism industry on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and to accomplish the following:

- Develop an inventory of all elements that directly or indirectly support eco-tourism;
- Understand the current economic impact of nature tourism; and
- Assess the visitors' experiences.

The Nature Tourism Task Force shared their research and recommendations in the *GoCoast 2020* strategic plan. They projected economic impacts of NBT through 2020, identified the needs and goals of the industry, identified major gaps that may hamper meeting those goals, and proposed initiatives to address these needs and gaps. The Nature Task Force remained active, holding a 2013 Nature Tourism Summit and produced a report recommending the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program to lead the effort.



CROSBY ARBORETUM - PINECOTE PAVILION 6931 - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY LANA GRAMLICH

Influenced by these efforts, the leadership of Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast integrated Nature Tourism into their 2015-2016 Marketing Plan. As the primary marketing and promotion agency for Coast tourism, Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast's efforts will target appropriate sectors of the tourism market to increase revenues in nature tourism for South Mississippi communities.

The development of National Historic Trails and Blueways also shaped the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. Outdoor enthusiasts formed the citizen-led Heritage Trails Partnership (HTP) in 2010. Their vision for the *Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail*, a 101-mile long network that spans from the Louisiana to the Alabama border, was recognized as a *National Historic Trail* by The Department of the Interior in 2011. HTP advocates continue to work in their own communities to connect local trails with the broader network that links destinations together. Receiving similar national recognition is the *Coast's Blueway Network*, anchored by the Pascagoula River National Blueway. As a notable and respected private conservation organization on the Mississippi Coast, the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plan (LTMCP) has established half a dozen blueways adjoining over 8,000 acres under their protection. Together, these Blueways already attract paddlers to five of the six counties of South Mississippi, in an event known as "Paddlepalooza". The Mississippi Coastal Birding Trail, by the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society also attracts birders to over 40 publicly accessible sites throughout the coastal region.

### **3.1 BUILDING CONSENSUS FOR THE 2016 NBT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

In 2015, the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program submitted a Work Plan to the National Parks Service for seed funds to develop a long-range NBT Management Plan. Once funding was received, a reinvigorated effort began in the fall of 2015. With the assistance of a contracted team (Team) comprised of Allen Engineering and Science (AllenES), the Gulf Regional Planning Commission (GRPC) and the Heritage Trails Partnership (HTP), the DMR established a NBT Task Force comprised of nineteen (19) Gulf Coast leaders,

many of whom were on the original Nature Tourism Task Force. The members remained committed to the effort over a one-year period and provided invaluable guidance throughout the process.

The Team and the Task Force revisited *GoCoast 2020*, the *Nature Based Tourism Summit Report*; the *Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast 2015-2016 Marketing Plan*; *Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail Plan* and the Blueways Network, among many other documents, and helped establish the foundation for this comprehensive *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. Recommendations depicted in the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* are based upon a year-long period of consultation with stakeholders at every level of the nature tourism industry from small businesses to state leaders.

### 3.1.1 Task Force

The Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program established a NBT Task Force and worked in conjunction with Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast and other leading tourism stakeholders to establish a Task Force. The NBT Task Force set the direction of the plan by assessing the needs and objectives for this effort through in-person meetings and conference calls to provide opportunities for discussion regarding needs and recommendations for a comprehensive plan. Members of the Task Force are provided in **Table 3.1**.

**Table 3.1 Nature Based Tourism Task Force Membership**

Organization	Participants
Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast	Renee Areng, Karen Conner
Barber and Mann	Elizabeth Barber
Eco-Tours of South Mississippi	Kathy Wilkinson, Jeff Wilkinson
Grand Bay NERR	Jennifer Buchanan
Hancock County Chamber of Commerce	Tish Williams
Infinity Science Center	Joe Pettigrew
Heritage Trails Partnership	Bob Fairbank, Geneva Dummer
Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain	Judy Steckler
MS Gulf Coast Research Lab	Christopher Snyder
MS Tourism	Mike Jones
MS/AL Sea Grant	LaDon Swann, Chandra Wright
National Wildlife Federation	Jill Mastrototaro
NOAA	Kristin Ransom
Pascagoula River Audubon Center	Mark LaSalle
Wildlife MS	Robert Smith
Wolf River Society	Bob Fairbank

A motivating concern for the Task Force throughout the process was developing a consistent story for NBT that could be distinguished for its focus on promoting NBT through one coordinated website.

The Task Force identified the following priority needs for NBT:

- Service to Islands and Preserves;
- Completion of the Coastal Trails Network;
- Extension of the Scenic Byways;
- Enhancement of the Blueways Network;
- Growing the Number of ADA Accessible NBT Options
- Improvement of the Image of MS Coast as an Environmental Destination;
- Development of NBT Destination Maps;
- Connection of NBT destinations Border to Border;
- Development of a NBT Festival or Open House;
- Development of a Sustainable Tourism Recognition Program; and
- Development a Cohesive Signage Program with Consistent Symbols and Imagery.

The Task Force also desired the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* be responsive to the on-the-ground needs of NBT businesses and complement on-going efforts; therefore, a comprehensive survey for NBT businesses was developed, followed by a series of workshops across the coast. Approximately forty-one surveys were completed by NBT businesses and destinations and sixty local stakeholders participated in the workshops held in the East, West and Central sectors of the Planning Area.



MARY WALKER MARINA - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY SYLVIA EKEDAHL WALDSMITH

### 3.1.2 NBT Survey

The NBT Business Survey collected information on existing NBT businesses and destinations in Coastal Mississippi to better understand their characteristics. This survey was administered in 2015, and built on previous surveys prepared in 2010 and 2011. It addressed the following topics: Revenue, Number of Visitors, Employment, Growth Potential, Natural and Infrastructure Investment Priorities, and Business Needs.

When survey respondents were asked to rank the perceived value of investments in four categories of NBT, the following ranked in order of highest value to least value:

- Increased investments in NBT destinations through better restoration, amenities and management of parks and preserves;
- Stronger marketing of nature tourism opportunities by regional tourism entities;
- Better trained workforce; and
- Infrastructure investments such as road connections, bus routes, and boat ramps.

In addition, public transportation to NBT destinations was revealed in the surveys as a priority need. Participants identified the desire for more public access points in more convenient locations for coastal trails and waterways. The word cloud diagram illustrates the number of times respondents identified a particular barrier to NBT in open-ended survey questions. Large text terms were cited most frequently. For the complete survey report, see **Appendix B**.



NATURE BASED TOURISM STAKEHOLDER MEETING - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALLEN ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

### 3.1.3 Workshops

In January 2016, NBT supporters from across the Gulf Coast attended workshops hosted by the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program. These workshops were held in South Mississippi's East, Central and Western Coastal areas. Approximately sixty NBT stakeholders actively participated in these discussions, providing direction to the development of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. A cross-section of attendees included:

- Parks & Preserves representatives;
- Private business owners;
- Economic development agencies;
- State and Federal agencies;
- City and county staff; and
- Regional planning staff;
- Tourism agencies;
- Elected officials;
- Non-profit organizations;
- Citizens and Stakeholders.

Participants noted both short and long-term value in developing a NBT program for South Mississippi. Two over-arching themes repeated throughout the event were: Consistent and Sustainable. Participants desire a consistent message and branding structure and favor the development of an online "hub" for NBT that would include links to activities and information in addition to training opportunities. The term "One Voice" was used to describe the type of advertising desired. This would include cross promotion of all six (6) counties and their activities. The suggestions for resiliency included putting measures in place to support the sustainability of the businesses themselves and imparting processes and practices that protect the natural environment from damage. The workshop summary report is provided as **Appendix C**.

### 3.1.4 NBT Task Force Subcommittees

Upon completion of the survey and workshops, three key Subcommittees of the NBT began to research and report needs and recommendations for the future of the nature-based tourism industry: The Subcommittees and their membership are listed in **Table 3.2** below.



NATURE BASED TOURISM STAKEHOLDER MEETING - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALLEN ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

**Table 3.2 NBT Subcommittees:**

Subcommittee	Chair(s)	Members
Education and Outreach	Jill Mastrototaro (NWF) & Karen Conner (VMGC)	Chris Snyder, Gulf Coast Research Lab. Becky Ginn, LTMCP. Liz Barber, Barber and Mann. LaDon Swann & Chandra Wright, MS-AL Sea Grant. Darcie Crew, City of Pascagoula. Kristin Ransom, NOAA. Bridget Varone, DMR. Daryl Jones, MS State Natural Resource Enterprise. Bob Fairbank, Wolf River Society/HTP. Jennifer Buchannan, Grand Bay NERR.
Certification/Recognition	Ali Leggett, DMR and Judy Steckler, Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain	Darcie Crew, City of Pascagoula. Malcolm White, Visit Mississippi. LaDon Swan, MS AL Sea Grant. Eric Sparks, MS Extension Service. Kristin Ransom, NOAA. Kathy Wilkinson, Eco-Tours of S. Mississippi. Amanda Mavar-Schmidt, Paddles Up!
Small Business and Workforce Development	Tish Williams, Hancock County Chamber	Mark LaSalle, Audubon Society. Michael Jones, MDA Visit Mississippi. John Hosey, Gulf Coast Restoration Corps. Robert Smith, Wildlife MS. Malcolm White, MS Tourism. Becky Stowe, The Nature Conservancy. David Blackledge, Estuarine Education and Leadership Development Center at MGCCC. Jeff Wilkinson, Eco-Tours of S. Mississippi. Brandy Moore, Biloxi Shrimping Trip. Daryl Jones, MS State Natural Resource Enterprise.

- Each group prepared the results of their findings based on a three-month period of research and discussion.

#### **3.1.4.1 Education and Outreach Subcommittee**

The Education and Outreach Subcommittee identified the existence of many useful resources and excellent tools across the nation for the Task Force to review. From these programs, they identified desirable program components on which to build a comprehensive plan with a strong education and outreach focus. The education and outreach report defines core needs with focus on local education, visitor education, and promotion and marketing. A few key recommendations were (1) Create ongoing NBT Education/Outreach Working Group; (2) Establish a website to find current and up-to-date educational materials for visitors and locals; (3) Develop promotional and marketing materials to include itineraries to cross promote NBT destinations, a hospitality sheet, etc.; (4) Create a Seal of Excellence Recognition Program; (5) Consistent branding and story; and (6) Educate locals and visitors on litter prevention and environmental stewardship.

#### **3.1.4.2 Certification/Recognition Subcommittee**

The Certification Subcommittee identified the need to develop a voluntary recognition program for nature-based businesses to improve visitor experiences of the Mississippi Gulf Coast’s diverse ecology,

history and culture, to promote a consistent NBT message, to provide comprehensive training, and to achieve effective marketing.

The Subcommittee recommends hiring a NBT coordinator who could assist all the businesses seeking or maintaining recognized status and would provide additional support for marketing, mentoring and certification maintenance.

#### **3.1.4.3 Workforce Development and Small Business Subcommittee**

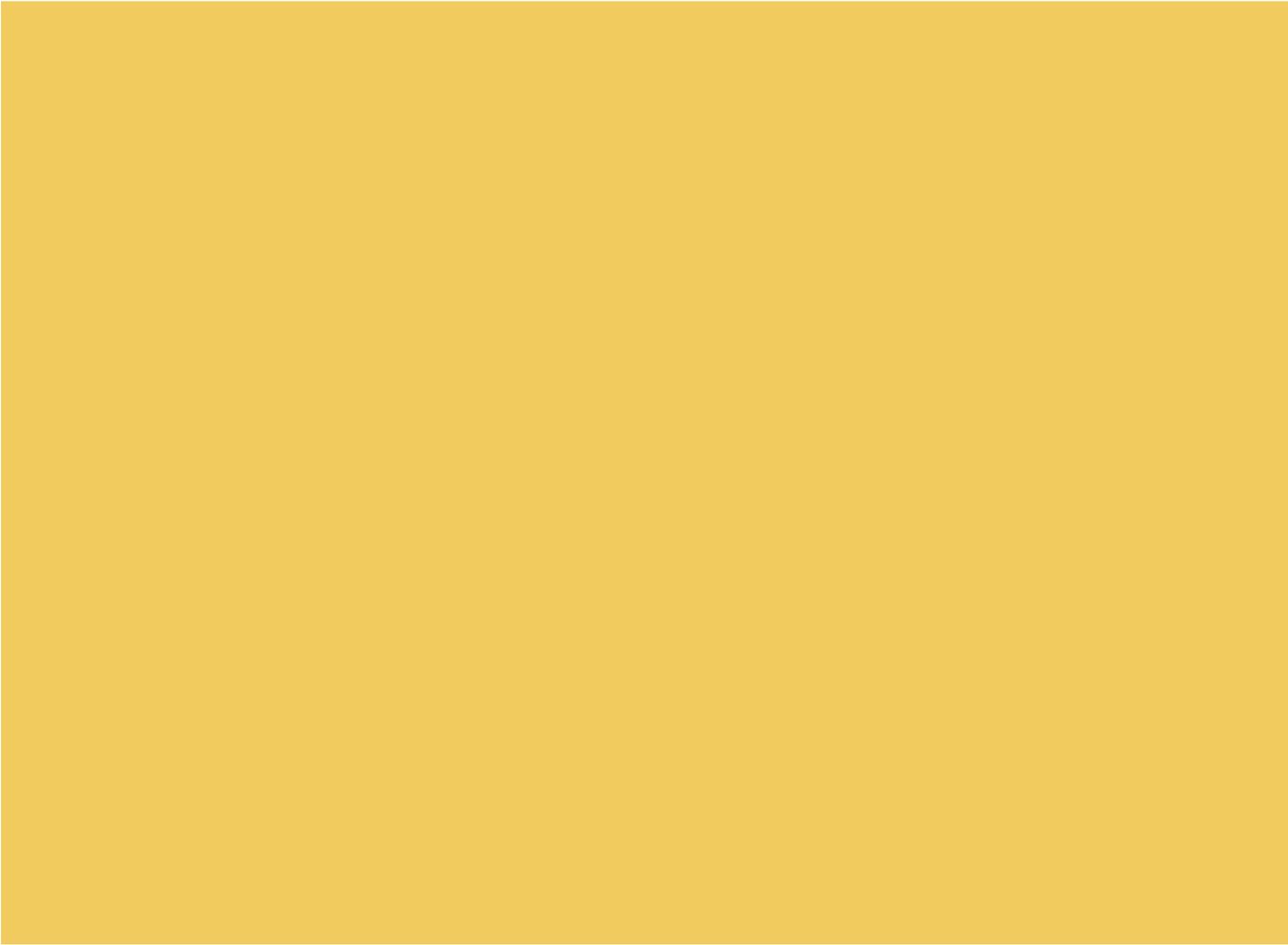
The Small Business & Workforce Development Subcommittee highlighted initiatives past and present that could form the backbone of a stronger NBT industry.

- A Seamless Signage & Wayfinding Program;
- Management of Consistent Messages and Information on the Web;
- Funding Stream for NBT to;
  - Promote Nature Tourism opportunities
  - Develop and Maintain Nature Tourism Resources
- Develop Common Metrics for Nature Tourism Activities;
- Improve Transportation Connections between Destinations;
  - Waterfront Access & Accommodations, such as Waterside Campsites
- Enhance Workforce Training Network;
  - Tourism Programs at Local Colleges
  - Apprenticeship programs in restoration
- Improved Natural Resource Protection; and
- Signature Nature Tourism event(s).

## **3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the 2015-2016 consensus-building efforts and building on the solid foundation established by the previous nature tourism advocacy efforts following the 2010 oil spill, the Team developed a comprehensive list of recommendations for the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. The recommendations include strategies to develop a Recognition Program for exemplary businesses and to strengthen NBT Education; Outreach and Marketing; Expansions of Trails, Blueways and Byways; and Improvements and Management Strategies to enhance the condition of Nature Destinations. **Appendix D** depicts the recommendations supported.

Regardless of age or desire for adventure, there are a multitude of eco-destinations and coastal recreation options for nature lovers, locals and tourists in South Mississippi. The variety and diversity of public and private options for nature-based recreation in South Mississippi is cause for great optimism and demonstrates the potential to expand the NBT industry in our region.



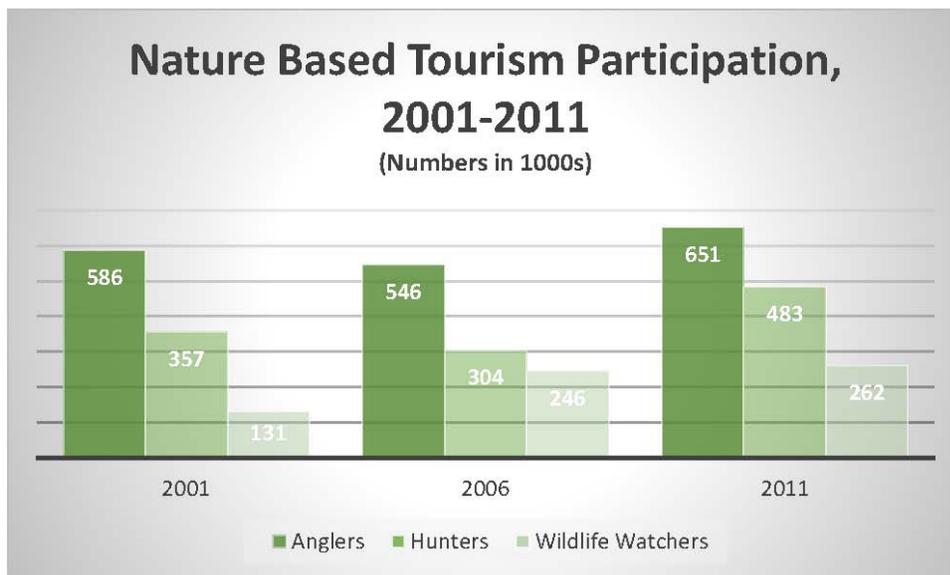
**4.0**

**UNDERSTANDING WHERE  
WE ARE AND WHERE WE  
WANT TO BE**

## 4.1 ANALYSIS OF CURRENT VISITORS DATA

Several sources have identified the potential for growth and development of NBT in South Mississippi. Every five years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau cooperate to produce the *National Survey of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. A new report is anticipated in 2016. The survey reaches out to households in all fifty states to measure participation in hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. **Table 4.1** takes a long view of statistics from the State of Mississippi that demonstrates long-term growth in all of these activities in the state since 2001. By the numbers, fishing is a staple of South Mississippi NBT and is the most popular of these activities. Another interesting statistic is that the number of people who pursue wildlife watching activities outside of the home doubled during that time.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 4.1 Historical Participation in NBT, Mississippi<sup>20</sup>**



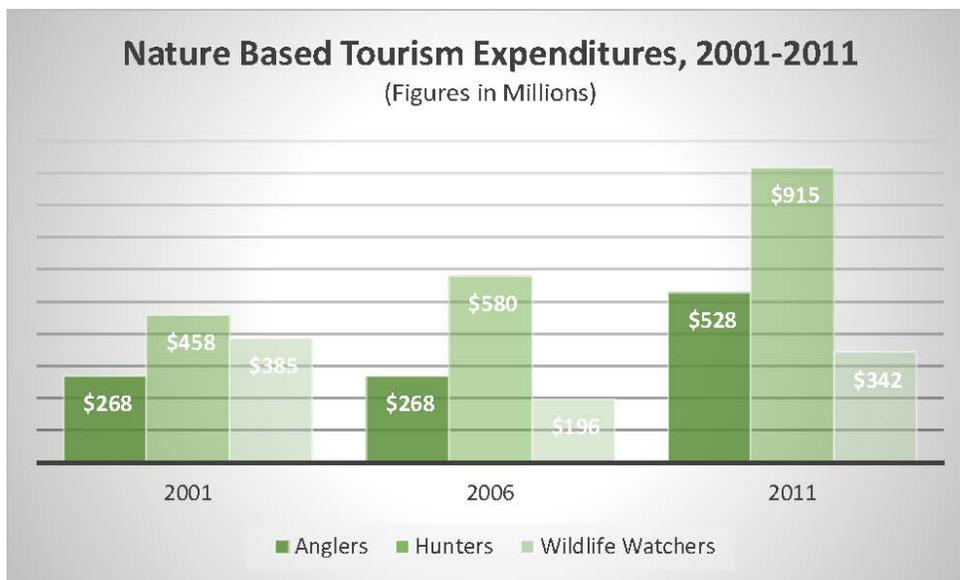
In 2011 all fishing-related expenditures in Mississippi totaled \$528 million. Of that figure, 60% was spent on trip related expenses and 38% on equipment purchases and rentals. Saltwater fishing, which only occurs on the Gulf Coast, generated the highest daily expenditures per angler at \$1,040 per day.<sup>21</sup>

All hunting-related expenditures in Mississippi totaled \$915 million in 2011. Trip-related expenses, such as food and lodging, transportation, and other trip expenses, totaled \$244 million—27% of the total expenditures. The average trip-related expenditure per hunter was \$505.<sup>22</sup>

Wildlife watchers, who are a target market for destinations like the Sandhill Crane Refuge, the Pascagoula River Audubon Center and many others, doubled between 2001 and 2011. The number of people who travelled at least one mile away from home to participate in this activity doubled from 131,000 in 2001 to 262,000 in 2011. Observing wildlife was the purpose of 148,000 of these participants, and approximately 194,000 engaged in wildlife photography. Of that population, over 150,000 people were visitors from out of State. Bird watching is one of the most popular activities, generating 135,000 trips away from home. Wildlife watchers spent \$342 million on wildlife-watching activities in Mississippi in 2011.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 4.2** shows a summary of all nature-related activities tracked by the National Survey from 2001 to 2011 demonstrates substantial revenue for the state of Mississippi is generated by these activities. Despite fluctuations in the reported income by activity per year, nature-based activities have consistently generated over \$1 billion in revenues in Mississippi over the last ten years. Although the data is statewide, a direct impact for this region can be seen in the amount spent on Saltwater Fishing, on which visitors spent \$240 million in 2011 alone.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 4.2 Historical Expenditures in NBT, Mississippi<sup>25</sup>**



## 4.2 PROJECTIONS FOR NEW VISITORS

In its *2015-2016 Marketing Plan*, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau, also known as *Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast*, set a target to increase annual visitation to the three coastal counties from 5 million in 2012 to 7 million annually. The revenue goal is to transform the current \$1.6 billion annual tourism spending into \$2.3 billion. Coupled with the expected increase in revenue generated by the NBT industry, employment in tourism will also increase, with the creation of approximately 10,000 new tourism jobs on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.<sup>26</sup>



The *2015-2016 Marketing Plan* depicts the importance of the NBT sector, anticipating that tourists drawn to the coast by the region's ecological resources will make up a significant portion of new revenue. The plan identifies different geographic tiers of tourists to target:

- Inner Markets: Working age tourists within driving distances in areas such as New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Western Louisiana, Jackson, Mobile, Pensacola, South Arkansas and the northern reaches of Mississippi.
- Outer Markets: Working age tourists from cities such as Atlanta, Houston, Memphis, Birmingham and Little Rock.
- Fly-In Markets: Working age tourists from major markets such as Washington DC, Nashville and Tampa where visitors are seeking a unique tourist experience.
- Midwest Markets: Over 50 and retired tourists in areas like Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis where the Gulf Coast is already a known destination.

NBT tourists seeking an authentic experience are likely to find Coastal Mississippi a surprisingly diverse and affordable option. During the preparation of the *GoCoast 2020* project, the Nature Tourism Task Force identified their own prospects for growth and development for the industry. In 2011, 2012 and 2015, the Nature Tourism Task Force conducted surveys to learn more about visitation and revenues. The



INNER HARBOR PARK, OCEAN SPRINGS - JIM HOWTON PHOTOGRAPHY

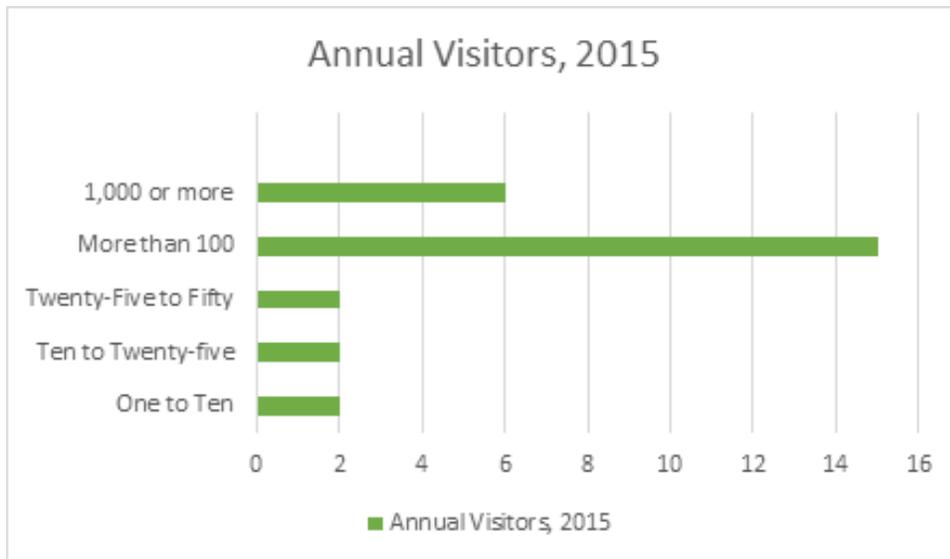
survey results identified both existing and prospective numbers of nature tourists, their place of origin and their economic impact. The survey results are provided in **Table 4.3**.

**Table 4.3 Key Performance Indicators for Nature Tour Providers:<sup>27</sup>**

	REPORTED		FORECAST
	2011	2012	2020
Visitation - Local	15,200	20,022	86,091
Visitation - State of Mississippi	7,239	10,163	43,699
Visitation - Out of State	45,729	58,243	250,434
Estimates of Gross Revenue	825,000	825,000	3,547,349
New Annual Investment	92,000	45,000	193,492

Again in 2015 as part of the consensus-building and data-gathering tasks associated with the development of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*, the NBT Team revisited the same parameters for individual destinations to better understand the current visitor data. The results are provided in **Table 4.4**.

**Table 4.4 2015 NBT Survey Results<sup>28</sup>**



### 4.3 FOCUS ON FUTURE VISITORS

Throughout the planning process, emphasis has been placed on providing a framework on which Coastal Mississippi can focus efforts to increase future visitors to NBT destinations and businesses. Ideas to expand upon include providing future tourists with the following:

- Holistic NBT experience to incorporate Coastal Mississippi culture and history;
- Authentic experience to incorporate the social aspects of travel related to the people and place;
- Custom-tailored experience to satisfy personal desires, connections, and travel goals;
- Multi-faceted travel experiences to include a diverse set of attractions and NBT activities;
- Opportunity to expand their experience, get off the beaten path, and discover something new;
- Local listings to enable the traveler to “go local” and patronize locally-owned businesses and attractions; and
- Opportunity to spend more and stay longer than average tourists.<sup>29</sup>

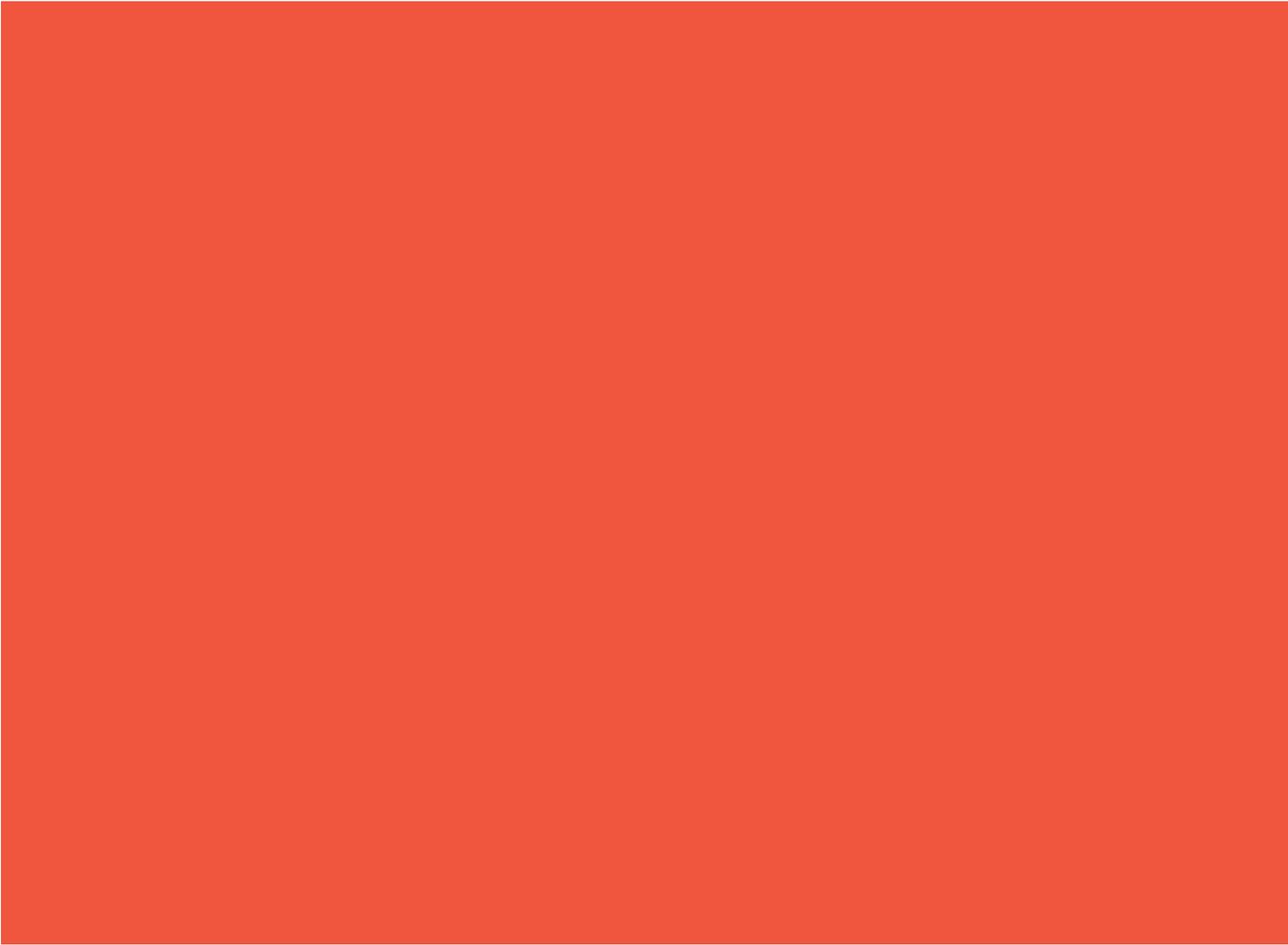
NBT enthusiasts agree to capture more tourists, Coastal Mississippi NBT leaders must bridge gaps between misconstrued perceptions of the Mississippi Sound and the reality of the beauty and diversity in Coastal Mississippi. There is also a need to anchor the coast with a NBT headquarter hotel at a state-of-the-art convention center. Improving transportation options into the area and between the destinations and accommodations could provide a more fluid experience and improve ease of travel. It is also clear that to successfully target, engage, and satisfy future nature tourists, continued funding for marketing is needed, in addition to continued funding for maintenance of signage and beautifications activities.



HOBIE CATS - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALLISON ANDERSON



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



**5.0**

***2016 NBT PLAN FOR  
COASTAL MISSISSIPPI***



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* reflects a comprehensive program framework developed through collaboration and communication among diverse stakeholders in Coastal Mississippi. The Plan was built on the shoulders of previous efforts, in addition to a renewed NBT effort spearheaded by the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program in conjunction with Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast. The reinvigorated effort began in the fall of 2015 with the establishment of a NBT Task Force comprised of Gulf Coast leaders. In addition to the establishment of the NBT Task Force, three key Subcommittees were developed: (1) Education and Outreach Subcommittee; (2) Certification/Recognition Subcommittee; (3) Workforce Development and Small Business Subcommittee.

Based on a dialog with key stakeholders during the consensus building process, establishing the Mississippi Gulf Coast as a premier nature based tourist destination emerged as the primary goal of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. Two key themes, “Consistency” and “Sustainability” remained at the forefront of every discussion. The final *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* provides recommendations that the Coast’s experts believe will support the regional expansion of one of the fastest growing sectors of the national tourism market and build on the solid foundation previously established by Mississippi’s NBT champions. These key initiatives of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* are provided in **Table 5.1**.

**Table 5.1 Key Initiatives in the 2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi**

<b>Public Education</b>	
Create a one-stop website to host NBT information	Improve signage to educate visitors
Promote environmental stewardship	Engage public officials
Develop common tourism metrics	Create a campaign to reduce litter
<b>Outreach and Marketing</b>	
Improve image through consistent branding, story, and messaging	Provide and promote diverse, year-round activities
Develop a long-term advertising strategy	Use social media to promote NBT activities
Develop cross-promotional plan to link NBT opportunities	Engage visitors through NBT Passport Program
<b>Trails, Blueways &amp; Byways</b>	
Invest in Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail safety, accessibility and attractiveness	Extend Scenic Byways Program from Hancock County across the coast and install signs
Invest in existing Blueways with amenities, signage and publicity and develop a Design Guide	
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>	
Inventory NBT destinations, public access points and businesses and develop interactive map	Reduce vehicular and bike/pedestrian conflicts
Build and repair additional boat launches, docks and piers for canoes, kayaks & paddleboards	Connect destinations through improved transportation infrastructure
Provide ferry service to barrier islands	Support efforts to bring Amtrak routes back to the Coast
<b>Small Businesses: Recognition Program &amp; Business Development</b>	
Establish a Recognition Program	Dedicated Business Incubator Program
Enhance workforce training opportunities	
<b>Manage &amp; Restore Nature Based Activities and Destinations</b>	
Establish NBT Council with advisory and coordination capacity	Budget for adequate maintenance
Hire staff person to manage NBT activities and improvements	Pursue opportunities to restore natural habitats
Monitor and maintain access points	

## 5.1 Public Education

Public education is a multi-faceted initiative with multiple targeted audiences, which can include students K-12, Gulf Coast leaders, businesses, visitors, and local residents. Promoting general education regarding environmental stewardship and informing both locals and visitors about the many opportunities for NBT in South Mississippi is emphasized in the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. In addition, creating a

consistent and sustainable message to promote and market NBT has been established as crucial to the success of the NBT effort.

### **5.1.1 Create a One-Stop Shop for NBT Information**

Streamlining the communication of NBT opportunities to local, regional and national visitors was identified as stakeholders' top priority. Using the internet as a primary means of communication with tourists, the NBT network can ensure that a consistent message is delivered through on-the ground signage and printed media that reinforce the messages delivered through that primary information source.

Website and social media communication expands the ability of local destinations and businesses to reach beyond the borders of South Mississippi. The Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program will soon launch its website, and this site has been recommended to serve as a central communication vehicle for NBT information. To maximize existing resources and information available to Nature Tourists, this site should connect seamlessly with other websites promoting common objectives; but is able to provide enough information without having to go to any other site.

To learn from the successes of others, participants in this effort surveyed successful nature tourism websites in Mississippi, as well as in Florida, Maryland, Arkansas, Alabama, Texas, New York and even international sites from Canada and Australia. The features of these websites identified to be the most useful were adopted into the recommendations below:

- Central NBT website with links to NBT partners and activities;
- Cooperating with [www.GulfCoast.org](http://www.GulfCoast.org) on search engine optimization;
- A common calendar of events in South Mississippi that can be shared across web platforms;
- Full color, high quality photography of the region with images of a diverse spectrum of tourists;
- Eye-catching statistics about Nature Tourism in South Mississippi;
- An itinerary builder;
- Pre-planned nature tourism packages;
- Downloadable maps;
- Consistent symbols and graphics for trail and blueway guides; and
- Boating safety and other emergency preparedness information linked to site.



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

### 5.1.2 Promote Environmental Stewardship

Environmental Stewardship refers to the responsible use and protection of our natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices. Creating awareness among the general public, the workforce and business owners regarding sustainable practices will lead to better protection of the Mississippi Coast's natural habitats. The following strategies are suggested to increase citizens' awareness of the unique habitats on the Coast and involve them in activities that promote good stewardship of the region's resources:

- Provide training opportunities like Leave No Trace available to school and family groups year-round.
- Include NBT in Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast's Visitor touch point training.
- Develop educational strategies to counter misinformation about environmental concerns.
- Identify habitat restoration projects that would benefit from volunteer efforts of youth and adults.
- Develop a Hospitality Sheet of NBT Destinations/Places, Things to Do, and Resources.
- Link with social media sites (Meet Up, TravelAdvisor, Instagram, Yelp, and MyCoast App).

South Mississippi's stakeholders have also raised concerns fearing potential visitors may not have a favorable opinion of the region's environment after the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010. Recovery efforts to bounce back after the 2010 oil spill are evident, as are planning efforts to prevent future catastrophic insults to our coast continue. Helping provide accurate information to prepare our local citizenry and workforce to address concerns is key to a successful NBT initiative. Strategies to enhance local awareness of environmental concerns include:

- Providing NBT providers with talking points to dispel myths;
- Educating locals to become our NBT Advocates;
- Networking across the coast from border to border;
- Engaging elected officials; and
- Organizing local events to raise awareness.



### 5.1.3 Develop Common Tourism Metrics

Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast carefully tracks tourist data and economic impact of tourism on local businesses. To enhance data gathered on current and future tourists, the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program could collaborate with the Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast to effectively communicate with business owners about the benefits of providing visitor data. Businesses could track elusive data such as the number of visitors participating in NBT activities and the economic impact of NBT on the Coast. A multi-tiered strategy to gather this information that includes website statistics, and surveys administered by Visitor Center and Visitor Touch point professionals would produce valuable information about current and potential spending in this tourism sector. Metrics to gather should include:

- Age;
- Gender;
- Family income;
- Number in party;
- NBT locations visited;
- Distance travelled;
- How many nights spent on the coast;
- Experience rating; and
- For website users, data such as original web search term and linked sites visited.

The investment in collecting this data will have ripple effects for area businesses, enhancing their marketing efforts without requiring a similar up-front investment. An ongoing dialog with the publishers



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

of established studies like the *National Survey of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, which are produced every five years, can also assist in developing this goal.

#### **5.1.4 Improve Signage to Educate Visitors**

The Mississippi Department of Transportation, Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast, Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program, local municipalities, parks and preserves are all currently designing and placing signage in Coastal Mississippi. For example: there are Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program signs located at historic and culturally significant sites; Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast's Shrimp Signs at key seafood locations; and Hancock County Scenic Byways signs designating the scenic byway.

To improve the experience of nature tourists in South Mississippi, there is a need for a coordinated signage program across the multiple jurisdictions to manage design and placement of wayfinding signs. With a clear network both of directional and interpretive signs, new visitors to the region as well as long-term residents will perceive the region as one inter-connected destination.

A comprehensive signage program with consistent standards for NBT could include consistent messaging and icons for signs for the purposes of:

- Orientation;
- Directional information;
- Destination identification; and
- Situation and object identification.

This Wayfinding Signage Program should include a common system of placement, colors, symbols/icons and images across South Mississippi. The Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program has an established color scheme and has also designed icons and images to be considered as coastwide symbols for NBT. These colors and images are provided in **Appendix E**. Signs for blueways, bikeways, scenic byways, and natural trails, in addition to NBT destinations could include the common colors and images.

### **5.1.5 Engage Public Officials**

The NBT industry must have the backing of South Mississippi's public officials in order to succeed. Fostering a dialog on the NBT story of South Mississippi will help create lasting engagement on this vital aspect of the region's economic development. Recommendations for Public Officials Engagement initiatives are listed below:

- Conduct quarterly educational briefings for elected officials.
- Develop positive publicity for elected officials to use in their social media platforms identifying them as a Coastal MS NBT Advocates.
- Lead periodic, well-planned NBT tours with elected officials.

### **5.1.6 Create a Campaign to Reduce Litter**

NBT Stakeholders in every community are concerned that roadside litter and illegal dumping are viewed by travelers and create a negative perception of our coast. To increase the region's prospects of becoming a premiere NBT destination, the region must address a culture of littering that spoils the beauty of our natural areas. The Annual Coastal Clean Up is one effective measure to combat this persistent problem, but a concerted program of public outreach and education that includes the following actions is needed to address litter year-round:

- Develop a slogan and logo to discourage littering in Coastal Mississippi.
- Target training and clean-up efforts to K-12 schools, Community Colleges.
- Expand volunteer outreach for Coastal Clean Up and other current litter prevention programs.
- Host a NOAA training workshop to develop a social strategy to change negative behaviors.
- Work with the Mississippi Wildlife Federation to promote increased use of the Adopt-A-Stream Program.
- Work with the Mississippi Department of Transportation to promote Adopt-A-Highway.
- Work with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance to promote the GOMA Marine Debris Initiative.
- Coordinate with Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality to promote Watershed Harmony.

## **5.2 Outreach and Marketing**

Outreach to promote coastal NBT is already occurring as a part of several larger efforts, including marketing by the MDA; Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast's tourism initiatives; and efforts of the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program. Two primary markets with great potential to grow tourism in South Mississippi

have been identified. The inner tier of potential tourists encompasses nearby metropolitan areas such as Baton Rouge, Mobile, Pensacola and Jackson. The outer tier of potential future visitors spans to Houston, Dallas, Memphis, Atlanta, Jacksonville and areas of the Mid-West with established markets for Mississippi Coastal tourism. The majority of Outreach and Marketing Initiatives recommended are therefore geared toward populations in these areas.

### **5.2.1 Improve Image through Consistent Branding, Story and Messaging**

NBT stakeholders stressed the importance of marketing South Mississippi as one destination, with a single identity that strengthens all destinations. Imagery, colors, and logos contribute to a uniform and consistent message. Telling the unique story of the region's natural and cultural heritage in a way that draws on common facts and references will serve to further enhance the attractiveness of the area to tourists looking for a unique experience. Key branding initiatives are as follows:

- Develop single NBT printed promotional/marketing piece for advertising in local, state, national and international media, having exhibit booths at trade shows and conferences.
- Consistent branding of NBT between key websites, especially VisitMississippi.org and GulfCoast.org, as well as in cross-promotion with MDA.
- Develop a series of Public Services Announcements (PSAs).
- Use Water Words that Work in marketing materials.
- Develop a General Factsheet.
- Develop a Hospitality Sheet.
- Develop an Activity Package to Engage and Educate Children.
  - o Word Search Puzzle
  - o Passport

**Appendix F** provides example education materials to be considered for use to support public outreach and marketing initiatives.

### **5.2.2 Develop a Long-term Advertising Strategy**

Through the engagement of a premier marketing firm, the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program in conjunction with Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast will establish a long-term advertising strategy for Coastal Mississippi to effectively and efficiently disseminate NBT information and highlight NBT opportunities in key local, state, regional, and nationwide publications. This could include the development and dissemination of information through print, social media, digital, radio and television. The bulleted list of recommendations for a consistent branding, story and messaging identified in Section 5.2.1 should be included as part of the long-term advertising strategy.

### **5.2.3 Develop a Cross-Promotional Plan to Link NBT Opportunities**

The various actors in NBT, from the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program to Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast to the Gulf Islands National Seashore and other park destinations, each have an important role

in educating potential visitors and attracting tourists. Whereas the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program is grounded in natural resource management and recreation, Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast and local Chambers of Commerce have access to economic data, visitor data and business data. These leading institutions can work together to complement each other's strengths and to expand the reach of NBT marketing and publicity efforts. Examples of key actions are listed below:

- Encourage broader use of existing web-based applications on the new Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program website, [www.GulfCoast.org](http://www.GulfCoast.org) and [www.visitmississippi.org](http://www.visitmississippi.org) to create custom NBT travel adventures.
- Support the development of a NBT Recognition Program to promote businesses with Green Tourism Practices.
- Create ½-day and 1-2-day itineraries for NBT activities for each of the 6 coastal counties that would consistently rotate to highlight different NBT businesses.

#### **5.2.4 Provide and Promote Diverse Year-Round Activities**

An effective way to promote NBT is by linking education and activities to the many successful events that already attract visitors to the region. At this time, the NBT industry does not have the staff or resources to create a new promotional event, but participating in well-attended and highly regarded events would raise its profile on the Coast for a reasonable investment. Strategies to accomplish that goal would include:

- Develop a comprehensive NBT calendar to promote all events with a nature tourism component.
- Use social media to promote NBT opportunities and to share the story of Coastal Mississippi to tourists outside the region.
- Identify a series of “off-season” opportunities that could provide income to operators year-round (for example, paddlers could shuttle hunters to remote locations).
- Cross promote nature destinations with South Mississippi festivals and public events EX: Cruisin’ registrants could be provided a guide for “Cruisin the Backroads” (hiking or bicycling tours).
- Identify a long-term, larger event such as a coast-wide birding or paddling festival to be developed in the future.

#### **5.2.5 Use Social Media to Promote NBT Activities & Special Events**

Increasingly, NBT businesses are using Facebook and other social media for promotion and booking; however, these businesses need training and support to learn additional tools for marketing and how to better use social media. NBT destinations and businesses also need better linkages to the social media platforms of Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast and other regional entities with a strong social media presence. To that end, the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* recommends the following:

- Training programs for small businesses to learn more about how to use social media;
- Networking to build awareness of regional platforms where businesses can promote their events and services;

- Financial support for NBT partners who are experienced in social media to mentor and assist smaller organizations in building a social media platform; and
- Partnership with local colleges to utilize internship opportunities.
- Increase the number of activities that are ADA Accessible

### 5.2.6 Engage Visitors with a NBT Passport Program

Many nature tourism enthusiasts may already collect stamps at the Gulf Islands Seashore as they participate in the National Parks Service’s Passport Program. To encourage visitors to visit more NBT sites during their trips to the coast, South Mississippi could develop a NBT Passport Program that complements the National Parks Service’s Passport Program. Visitors could collect stamps at different NBT destinations and be encouraged to fill the passport with stamps on each trip to the coast. An example of the NBT Passport is included in **Appendix F**. As part of the Recognition Program, each Recognized NBT Business could receive its own official stamper to “stamp” passports.

## 5.3 NBT Trails, Blueways and Byways

The Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail and the Blueways of Coastal Mississippi can serve as Coastal Mississippi’s NBT backbone, connecting a network of nature-based activities from the LA-MS border to the MS-AL border and then northward. Gulf Coast’s recreational leaders created this extensive network of bicycle paths, pedestrian trails and blueways. It holds tremendous potential to be expanded and promoted to attract tourists looking for an exciting active experience. The Coast’s Scenic Byways connect popular nature destinations, like its beaches and parks, and also lead travelers through the region’s little-known back roads. While the MCHT’s visitors are travelling on their own power, the Byways are a vital link in the NBT transportation network, offering motorists a relaxed way to experience the sights and sounds of the Coast.

### 5.3.1 Invest in Trail’s Safety, Accessibility and Attractiveness

For over five years, NBT experts and outdoor enthusiasts have been contributing to the development of the Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail (MCHT), which provides pedestrians and bicyclists with extended routes along the beautiful shores of the Mississippi Sound. Thanks to years of effort on the part of Trails advocates and the support of the National Parks Service, a determined hiker or biker could conceivably make the trek from the western to eastern borders of Mississippi without ever entering a motorized vehicle. Although there is room for improvement and expansion, this network of paved pathways offer tourism professionals an opportunity to market South Mississippi as a destination for Nature Tourists. To attract and retain those tourists, however, trail network improvements, signage, maintenance, and better connections are needed to promote and expand the experience. The NBT Plan offers many opportunities to build on the MCHT, nature trails network and Blueways. Future needs identified for these networks can be divided into the four categories below:

- Strengthening Connections to Nature Destinations;
- Consistent Trail Maintenance Standards;

- Access to Services; and
- Improved Standards for Design & Construction.

### 5.3.1.1 *Strengthening Connections*

The Mississippi Coastal Heritage Trail Network’s pedestrian and bicycle trails often follow routes of opportunity along existing public thoroughfares. In many instances, the MCHT also connects to a larger network of nature trails in the region’s parks, preserves and privately owned public lands. To strengthen connections and make the trails network more of a tourist destination in itself, the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* recommends filling gaps in the MCHT increased links to nature, and better connections to places tourists frequent. Trail networks can be supplemented with public transit as well, which is addressed in greater detail in Section 5.4. Steps to strengthening connections include:

- Identify the most desirable concentration of destinations, lodging, and primary points of connection for improvements.
- Identify existing trail connections between NBT destinations and lodging.
- Develop new connections where an identifiable user group could promote economic activity along the trail. (Ex: Newly established Long Beach Trail could bring business to Downtown Long Beach from destinations like the nearby Seabee Base).
- Reduce vehicle conflict at major intersections by improving crossing standards.
- Consider locating a bike-share program at strategic locations on the MCHT.

Specific segment improvements suggested for the MCHT bike and pedestrian trails are listed in **Appendix G**.



MULTI-USE PATH, MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

### **5.3.1.2 Plan for Consistent Trail Maintenance Standards**

Existing sections of the MCHT trail are maintained by a number of different entities, including Hancock County, the Harrison County Sand Beach Authority and the municipalities within Jackson County. Well-travelled segments such as the Biloxi Bay Bridge, connecting Biloxi with Ocean Springs, attract hundreds of walkers a day and connect a number of desirable destinations. The number of users will rapidly decline if there is no plan or budget allocated for maintenance. Debris such as litter, tire treads and even mounding sand can create safety hazards for the pedestrian or biker intent on enjoying the view. These sub-standard conditions represent obstacles to overcome and to be addressed in the implementation of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*.

Even seemingly minor maintenance issues can detract from the experience and deter people from using these paths. The existing and expanding segments of MCHT, as well as new nature trails should all develop consistent Trail Maintenance Plans to include:

- One entity that can coordinate maintenance of MCHT facilities;
- A Maintenance Plan for the entire stretch of the MCHT Network and connecting trails; and
- A Trails and Roadways Cleaning Plan to prevent build-up hazardous debris on the paths.
- Common standards for the maintenance of off-road nature trails.

### **5.3.1.3 Access to Services**

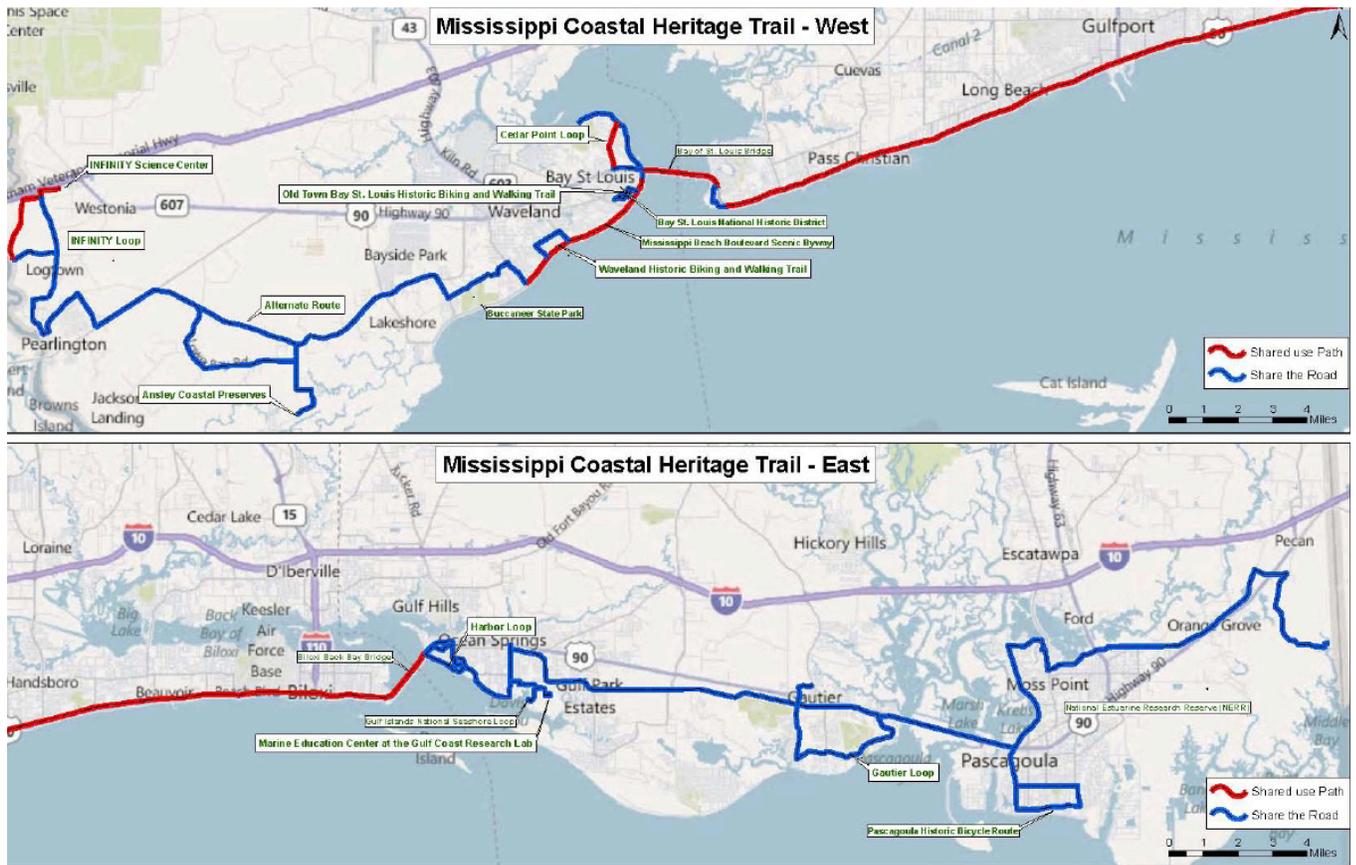
Pedestrians and bikers need to know the location of food, water, supplies and emergency services along the trails network. *Trail* signage can orient the traveler to the location of these services as well as the location of bike maintenance or repair stations and outdoor outfitters. *An engagement program* with bicycle shops and bike-related businesses can create an additional focal point for promoting Nature Tourism opportunities. *Metered bicycle* stations where riders are allowed to check out and/or drop off bicycles could encourage more people to be active and visit destinations without getting in their cars.

### **5.3.1.4 Improved Standards for Design and Construction**

The mapped MCHT exists as a route to traverse Mississippi from the western border to the eastern border. The primary types of trails are as follows:

- Shared Use Pathway – Bike-Ped Share;
- Bike Lane;
- Signed Shared Roadway (Bike Lane);
- Shared Roadway - Shared Road; and
- Blueways or River Trails.

While most of the MCHTs are shared pathways for bicycles and pedestrians; bicycles also often share the roads with car and truck traffic, with mixed success. Increased opportunities for off-road travel could



MISSISSIPPI COASTAL HERITAGE TRAIL MAP - PHOTOGRAPH OBTAINED FROM WWW.GULFCOASTTRAILS.ORG

generate higher ridership. When bikes and cars do share the road, a major safety concern is that many of the routes are not adequately protected from automobile traffic. Suggested design and engineering standards for bike lanes could include the following:

- Minimum bike lane width and suggested width for shared Bike/Pedestrian pathways;
- Standard road striping and symbols for bike lanes across South Mississippi;
- Reduced vehicle bike/pedestrian conflict through increasing miles of dedicated bike lanes;
- Improved bike/pedestrian crossing standards;
- Share the Road signs; and
- Directional signage at major destinations (food, water, medical assistance, biking supplies).

Local governments can refer to national publications on design guidance for off-road trails and roadside pathways. The Mississippi Department of Transportation refers to the Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (ASHTO) design guides for the development of bicycle and pedestrian facilities using state or federal transportation funds.

### 5.3.2 Invest in Existing Blueways with Design, Amenities, Signage and Promotion

Blueways, or water trails, are recreational routes on waterways with a network of public access points supported by broad-based community partnerships. Water trails provide both conservation and

recreational opportunities in states such as Maryland that are similarly shaped by their waterways.<sup>30</sup> In South Mississippi, the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (LTMCP) is the founding organization for a network of seven Blueways in South Mississippi.

The Pascagoula River George County Blueway is already a draw for knowledgeable nature tourists who wish to tour the waters of the largest free flowing river in the lower 48 states. In 2011, this Blueway and the MCHT were the two projects in Mississippi receiving national recognition by the U.S. Department of the Interior's America's Great Outdoors Initiative. Developing the George County Pascagoula River Blueway on the northern section of the River, and the Pascagoula River Blueway along the segment that drains to the Gulf has been a collaborative effort, providing a model for similar initiatives across the Coast. Participants include the National Parks Service, LTMCP, the Pascagoula River Basin Alliance, the DMR, the City of Pascagoula, MS Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, George County, Greater George County and the City of Pascagoula. Planned events are an important part of fostering a successful Blueway too. Visitors gather annually for Paddlepalooza.

With the extensive network of blueways developing on coastal rivers, the opportunities recommended below will better develop connections between Blueways and regional and national networks to promote South Mississippi as a paddler's destination.

- Pursue designation through the U.S. Secretary of the Interior as a National Water Trail.<sup>31</sup>
- Further develop connections to the Gulf Coast Heritage Paddling Trail (GCHPT), a water based trail linking the Florida and Texas blueway systems.
- Work with associations such as American Canoe Association to help promote Blueways and events.



KAYAKING - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ELLIS ANDERSON



- Work with the State of Mississippi to fund a statewide network of Blueways to cross-promote with the assistance of DMR, the Mississippi Development Authority and the state’s Wildlife Management Areas

#### ***5.3.2.1 Develop a Blueway Design Guide***

A Design Guide is recommended in this *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* to establish standards for every aspect of the South Mississippi Blueways from launch site to signage.

- Safety signage and mile-markers should be included to aid in the ability for emergency responders to access the blueways and offer assistance.
- Orientation signs should be consistent across blueways to ensure travelers stay on the trail.

#### ***5.3.2.2 Funding Support for Blueway Network Promotion***

Due to the seasonal nature of paddling sports and what is currently a small market for services that support them, seed funding is needed to start up, to promote and to expand paddling adventures into a more profitable business enterprise. Joint planning efforts to support the Blueway Network could result in the development of water trails comparable to similar efforts in Vermont and Maryland.<sup>32</sup> Consistent funding could support the following:

- Provide additional streamflow monitoring points.
- Signage on the Blueways, which can serve multiple purposes.



SCHOONER PIER - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALEX NORTH

- o Mile-markers for navigational purposes and tracking for emergency responders to assist boaters in distress.
- o Launch sites signage listing access points for supplies and emergency contacts.
- o Depth gages and posted websites with current navigability for a system of tracking water level in navigable waterways.<sup>33</sup>
- Develop a coordinated planning effort with municipalities, state and federal agencies, non-profits and community members to establish a *Mississippi Coastal River Trail*.
- Offer start-up funds to encourage the development of new paddling outfitters and guided tour businesses on all seven blueways.
- Provide booking services for paddling tours.
- Develop case studies of Blueway successes.

### **5.3.2.3      *Use Technology for Self-Guided Tours***

Technology is an ever-increasing element of the visitors' experience, even in the great outdoors. Finding inventive ways for tourists to utilize their personal electronic devices and smart phones to interact with NBT destinations could enhance the experience. A recommendation in this *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* is the following:

- Develop a Blueway Application for paddlers to scan signs and learn more about the destination.
  - o Provide an audio tour via plates imbedded in the ground or posted on signs at the NBT destinations.

- o Base the tours on similar experiences offered by Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) for the Culinary and Seafood Trails.
- o Design the signs to use technology to direct paddlers to upland sites of interest.

### **5.3.3 Scenic Byways**

The National Scenic Byways Program is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration. The program is a grass-roots collaborative effort established to help recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States based on one or more archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities, and has recognized a series of roadways in Hancock County for inclusion in this national program. As of yet, however, the designation is awaiting county approval before these roadways can be officially designated.<sup>34</sup>

#### ***5.3.3.1 Complete Hancock County Scenic Byways Program***

Hancock County established a “Byways to Space” network of roadways inside the 125,000-acre buffer zone surrounding the John C. Stennis Space Center. Since the Space Center was established over 50 years ago, most of this land has reverted to its natural state. Viewing sites of the Mississippi Coastal Birding Trail, a campground, and a blueway are all connected by 30 miles of roadway in this network.<sup>35</sup> An additional byway is proposed on Beach Boulevard, which parallels the Hancock County coastline from Cedar Point on the north end to Bayou Cadet on the south end. The byway connects the working waterfront, recreational areas (including Buccaneer State Park), scenic views, and wildlife habitat. Historic structures like the former Customs House located along the byway processed immigrants to our shores, and the Pirate’s House is said to have housed Jean Lafitte.<sup>36</sup>

Completing the Byways Program would involve the following steps:

- Develop and implement a strategy of interconnected wayfinding, birding, share-the-road and informational signage for the entire Byways to Space network.
- Designate appropriate parking and scenic pullovers for public use to allow for enjoyment of intrinsic resources along the Byways to Space.
- Complete bike and pedestrian pathway, including “Share the Road” signage, including north of Highway 90.
  - o Identify funding for maintenance of Byway infrastructure.
- Design and install interpretive signage for birds, fish, crabs, reefs, coastal plants, and beach dune development in various locations along the byway, including a Mississippi Historical Marker for the Old Spanish Trail (OST) to commemorate the original car bridge built across the Bay of St. Louis.
- Design a pilot project for storm water treatment along the beach to minimize or eliminate beach closings with interpretive signage to explain the process (funding from NFWF).
- Design and construction artistic plazas along the bike and pedestrian walking pathway to provide a place of rest and reflection on resources lost.

### 5.3.3.2 *Extend Scenic Byways Program from Hancock County across the Coast*

Communities across the Coast have begun to follow Hancock County's example with respect to establishing scenic byways. Harrison County has three designated Scenic Byways that include bike lanes on the shoulder. The byways along MS Highway 67 and MS Highway 605 run North/South, crossing the Biloxi River (Hwy 605) and the Tchoutacabouffa River (Hwy 67). The County's most recent designated scenic byway, the Gulf Coast Scenic Byway, is an extension of the Beach Boulevard Scenic byway. The Gulf Coast Scenic Byway connects Bay St. Louis to the City of Gulfport along Highway 90, also known as Beach Boulevard. Ocean Springs has recently submitted an application to designate a scenic byway in their community as well.

Therefore, the 2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi recommendation is to:

- Continue the development and adoption of Scenic Byway corridors to enhance the NBT experience of automobile travelers.
- MS 67, MS 605: Improve safety and quality of bike lane by creating a separated pathway or shared use pathway.
- Gulf Coast Scenic Byway: Improve the pedestrian pathway especially along the areas with narrow segments and where no buffer exists between the highway and the pedestrian.



KAYAK RACE - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY ALLISON ANDERSON

## 5.4 Infrastructure Improvements

Participants in the planning effort indicated the Coast's infrastructure remains inadequate to support a robust NBT Industry. The lack of trail and transit connections between desirable destinations is one aspect of this problem. Limited options to access destinations like the barrier islands is another. In other cases, the facilities to support tourists are inadequate to the demands of the activity. Recommendations addressing each of these concerns with the goal of adding value to the region's investment in NBT were identified. Details are provided below.

### 5.4.1 Create Inventory and Map of NBT Destinations and Businesses

The development of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* offered an opportunity to consult with NBT industry leaders in South Mississippi and create an inventory of:

- NBT Destinations and Businesses;
- Conservation Lands;
- Pedestrian and Biking Trails;
- Blueways;
- Byways; and
- Museums and Visitor Centers with content about the natural environment.

NBT leaders include but are not limited to the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources; Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks; The Nature Conservancy; Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain; Heritage Trails Partnership of the Mississippi Gulf Coast; Gulf Islands National Seashore - Davis Bayou District; Mississippi Sandhill Crane Wildlife Refuge; US Forest Service - DeSoto Ranger District; Visit Mississippi; Mississippi Coast Convention & Visitor's Bureau; Mississippi Fun.Org - Mississippi Gulf Coast Attractions Association; Mississippi's West Coast/Hancock County Tourism Development Bureau; Explore Mississippi's East Coast/Jackson County Chamber of Commerce; Gulf Coast Research Laboratory Marine Education Center; Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; and the Wolf River Society. Through consultation with each of these organizations, an inventory of NBT destinations and businesses was developed and is provided in **Appendix A**.

The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* recommends an interactive NBT map be developed as the next iteration of NBT Destinations and Businesses Map.

### 5.4.2 Build Additional Access and Facilities for Paddle Sports Boat Launches, Docks and Piers

Although recreational requirements for canoes, kayaks and paddleboards are not technically complex, they are different from launches for motorized craft. Investment in facilities and launch points will result in a stronger market for paddle sports. Recommendations for these infrastructure investments include:

- Designated trailer parking for non-motorized craft;

- Easy access from the vehicle to the water;
- Soft ground / base at the launches to avoid scratching bottom of the boats (Example: Possum Walk area needs a better way to get kayaks from the parking lot to kayak launch.); and
- Improved camping, comfort stations, and amenities on Pascagoula River and other waterbodies including floating or fixed platforms to accommodate paddlers on overnight trips.

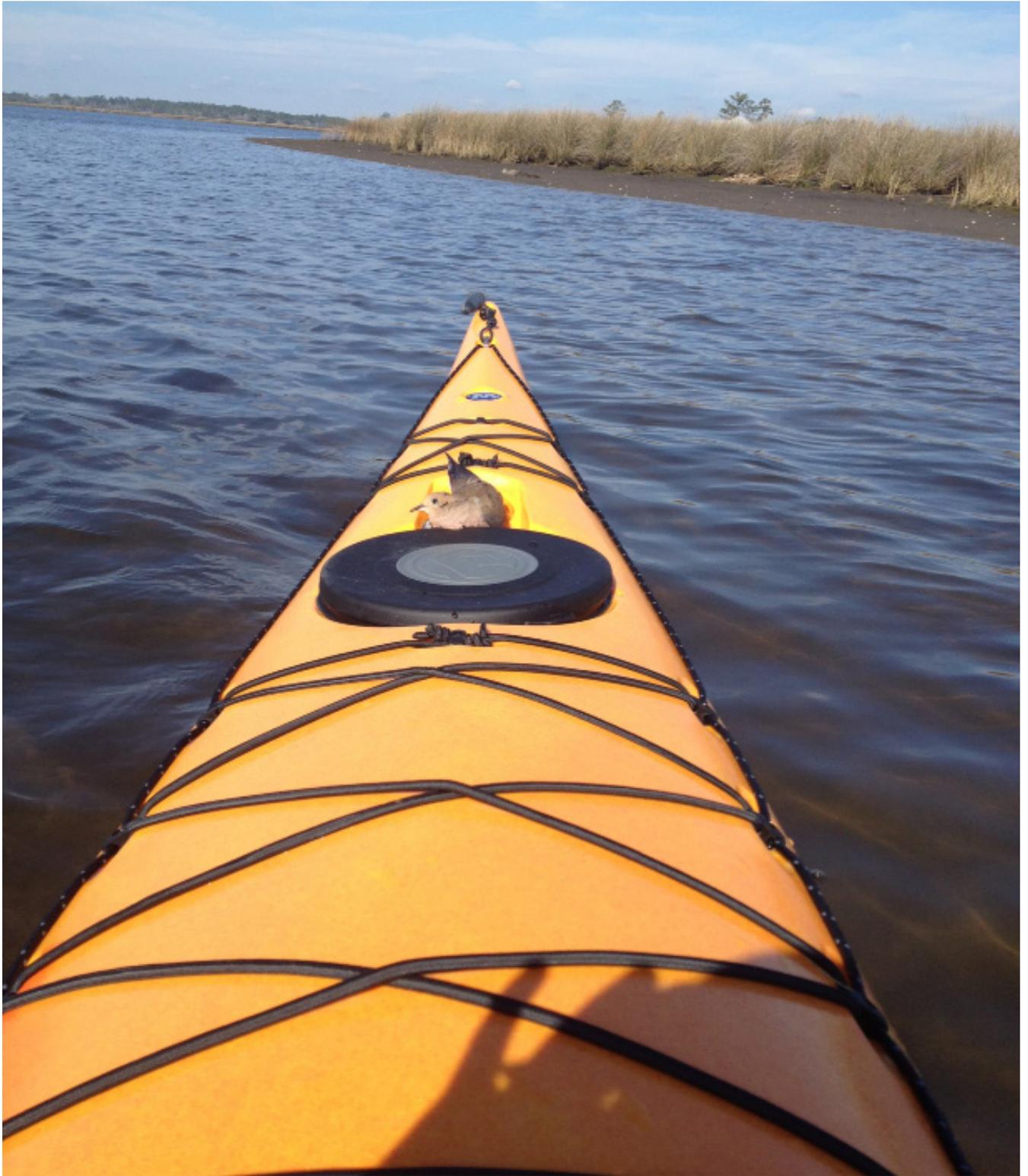


BOAT LAUNCH - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY GENEVA DUMMER, HERITAGE TRAILS PARTNERSHIP

### 5.4.3 Provide Increased Services to Barrier Islands

The barrier islands of the Mississippi Sound allow a wide range of nature-based activities, but with the exception of Ship Island and soon Deer Island; the islands are only accessible by private craft. Many nature tourists are seeking a unique and remote destination. Making the barrier islands more accessible to tourism will attract tourists seeking an unspoiled environment to explore. To better integrate the barrier islands into South Mississippi's NBT Framework, it is recommended that the State:

- Offer ferry transportation to additional islands when and if appropriate.
- Develop a Certification Program for charter services who use Clean and Green Practices.
- Establish island ferry information packages and provide the ferry information on the NBT website.



KAYAK - MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY GENEVA DUMMER, HERITAGE TRAILS PARTNERSHIP

#### 5.4.4 Reduce Vehicular and Bike/Pedestrian Conflicts

Although the MCHT is a tremendous asset for nature tourism, there are still a number of areas where narrow pathways and conflicts between users make travel more difficult and less desirable. As the region's bicycle network moves northward, many bike routes are actually shared roadways with vehicles. To make South Mississippi a destination for bicycle tourists, efforts must be made to reduce these conflicts wherever possible and to improve areas of the trails that make travel difficult. This can be accomplished in the following ways:

- Promote the "3-Foot Rule" for passing bicycles with roadway signage.
- Establish Safe Routes to School on multiple biking segments.
- Use road striping and signage to create a safer environment.
- Increase the number of off-road miles for the region's bicycle network.

#### 5.4.5 Connect Destinations through Improved Public Transit Routes and Infrastructure

Partnerships with the Coast Transit Authority (CTA) can fill gaps in the system that make it easier for NBT tourists who prefer not to travel by car during their visit. Active tourism promotion of CTA services such as Bike and Bus could increase demand, while benefitting local residents. The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* supports the following recommendations:

- Fixed Transit Route Expansion. - More stops and with greater frequency at NBT Destinations.
  - o The Beach Trolley serves Bay St. Louis, Waveland and destinations like Buccaneer State Park.
  - o Increase CTA service in Jackson County Beyond Ocean Springs.
- Promote and upgrade Bike and Bus Service. This service allows customers to attach at least two bicycles to a front-mounted rack on all fixed route buses, including the Beachcomber, Casino Hopper and (Hancock County) Beach Trolleys. There is no additional charge to use racks.<sup>37</sup>
- Coast Commuter, Carpool and Vanpool – Offer these shared vans on demand to nature-based tourists. Initial investment in subsidized routes could increase demand, and be phased out as tourism use begins to generate revenue for the program in hours that are currently idle. These vans could also operate on regular routes to remote destinations such as the Infinity Space Center and the Grand Bay NERR.
- Develop a Complete Streets Plan for CTA East - West Corridor for shared transit, bicycle and pedestrian roadway corridor north of railroad tracks in Harrison County.
- Extend the Complete Streets Initiative – Building on the Complete Streets Program in the City of Pascagoula, GRPC's Complete Street Policy and the City of Long Beach's Sidewalk Ordinance, encourage other local governments to adopt policies that will support the development of multimodal transit corridors in other South Mississippi counties and municipalities.

#### 5.4.6 Support Efforts to Bring Amtrak Routes back to the Coast

A feasibility study by Amtrak and the Southern Rail Commission (SRC) determined that it is both possible and desirable to bring national rail service back to the Gulf Coast. Four stops have been identified including Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula. Funding has been provided to the locations to improve ADA accessibility at the stations. To support this infrastructure development that could potentially deliver thousands of nature tourists to the Coast annually, the following actions are required:

- Work with local governments along the coast to adopt resolutions to support the Amtrak Service Implementation Plan
- Support local efforts to evaluate and upgrade local infrastructure and depot facilities.
- Engage SRC in the promotion of NBT opportunities near the proposed train stations.

### 5.5 NBT Small Businesses: Workforce Training and Recognition Initiatives

According to the survey completed during the development of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi (See Appendix B)*, approximately 30% of respondents plan to hire new staff in the coming year. With anticipated growth in employment comes the need for new skills training. The skill identified by survey participants as the most valuable in a potential employee is to be knowledgeable of the natural environment. Skills also desired and ranking closely behind are (1) natural resources management skills, (2) expertise in a specific sporting activity, and (3) hospitality industry experience. The survey also revealed the need for employees with knowledge of water and woodland safety procedures. A detailed list of specific training opportunities to support sustainable business practices and prepare employees for NBT careers is provided in **Appendix H**, and examples of general training opportunities are provided below:

- Continuing education courses (such as those offered by groups like the Grand Bay NEER and Pascagoula River Audubon Society);
- Apprenticeship programs such as the Gulf Restoration Corps;
- Mississippi Extension Service Trainings;
- Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) and Economic Development Groups; and
- Degree and Certificate Programs at Area Colleges and Universities.

#### 5.5.1 Establish Recognition Program for Exemplary Nature Based Businesses

Mississippi recently developed and implemented a successful recognition program for environmentally responsible marinas, known as the Clean and Resilient Marina Program. The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* proposes the creation of a similar program recognizing sustainable nature based tourism businesses. Safety training and environmentally responsible operations would be high priorities. The target audience for nature based business recognition includes:

- Tour guides;
- Charter boat operators;
- Eco-fitness guides;
- Outfitters; and
- Agri-tourism entities.

The 2013 Nature Tourism Summit recommended the development of a “Sustainability of Excellence” as part of a Recognition Program. A seal of approval would assure the sustainability of NBT businesses. The NBT industry is dependent on authentic experiences delivered and best advertised through word of mouth and positive social media, which means the person telling about their visit must have had an excellent experience.<sup>38</sup>

The Recognition Program will be promoted as voluntary. Through this voluntary Recognition Program, an individual or business could receive recognition as an exemplary NBT business. Potential titles for recognition designation include:

- Green Guide Business;
- Nature Tourism Gulf Coast Leader;
- Gulf Coast Green Guide; and
- NBT Business.

Not only will this Recognition Program provide training and publicity for excellent NBT efforts; but it will promote a common message that the Mississippi Gulf Coast supports and encourages the use of principles and practices to promote clean water and healthy habitats. These recognized businesses and individuals will be the front line for the Gulf Coast’s promotion as a NBT destination.

A recommendation of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* as part of the Recognition Program is the development of an Introduction to Nature Based Tourism class. The class would be mandatory for all potential Recognition candidates.

In addition, a NBT business would be required to participate in training courses over the course of the year, addressing some combination of the topics below:

- Ecology;
- Environmental Stewardship;
- Heritage and Culture; and
- Health and Safety.

As previously stated, many training workshops and course offerings are already active and available on the Coast and are provided in **Appendix H**. The checklist for the NBT Recognition Program is provided in **Appendix I**.



### 5.5.2 Enhance Workforce Training Opportunities

Workforce training is offered in a number of different venues in Coastal Mississippi and training opportunities can be highlighted on the NBT Website. The Task Force and Subcommittee members indicated an immediate need for the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* to address the following:

- Highlight existing training available on a central NBT website.
- Explore the possibility of creating a community college degree or certificate program to support growth in NBT.
- Support on-the-job training through the Gulf Restoration Corps.

**Appendix H** provides a comprehensive list of existing training programs that can encourage better local stewardship, train a nature based tourism workforce and lead to more sustainable NBT businesses.

### 5.5.3 Dedicated Business Incubator Program

Because NBT is still a young industry in South Mississippi, start-up businesses are learning the ropes. As new businesses establish and grow, they need initial support in basic tasks like finding a location, acquiring capital, hiring employees, and developing and implementing a business plan. The Hancock County Community Development Foundation provides a model demonstrating how the Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce network can play a central part in a NBT Incubator Program by:



BAYOU AT 12 OAKS, OCEAN SPRINGS - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY BOB EFFINGER

- Providing grant assistance to non-governmental organizations;
- Funding educational and community programs that stimulate job creation and job readiness;
- Fostering small business growth;
- Supporting college scholarships for individuals with the desire to enter the NBT industry; and
- Assist landowners with exploration of Nature Based Enterprise.

The identification and availability of reasonably priced office/storefront space with waterfront access for small businesses would reduce the upfront investment risks for small tour operators with limited resources. Such a facility would include:

- Dock spaces for tour boats;
- Storage for canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards; and
- Spaces for retail activities such as gift and snack shops, available at a reasonable cost.

## **5.6 Establish NBT Management & Maintenance Framework**

At the heart of any NBT Program is a unique natural environment with the capacity to draw both local visitors and tourists from outside the region. Participants in this planning effort indicated their support for coordinating efforts to manage and invest in Coastal Mississippi's natural resources. The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* provides recommendations for maintaining, restoring and improving South Mississippi's network of national, state and local parks, in addition to our preserves, wildlife management areas and private lands in conservation.

### 5.6.1 Establish NBT Council w/ Advisory and Coordination Capacity

A strong network of stakeholders exists on the Mississippi Coast to assist in the promotion and expansion of the NBT Industry. To achieve a consistent and sustainable NBT industry, coordination among all interested parties is required. A proposed management structure to provide consistency, promote growth, and develop a foundation of sustainability for the NBT industry in Coastal Mississippi is provided below.

- The NBT Council may have representation of major sectors of the industry (Public Agencies, Nature Destinations, Gulf Coast Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Small Businesses, Research Centers, Conservation Lands, and Research Institutions).
- The NBT Council may host quarterly meetings.
- Establish the NBT Council to serve as guiding council to assist with the implementation of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*.
- The NBT Council may assist in the Identification of funding opportunities for implementation of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*.

### 5.6.2 Hire Staff Person to Manage NBT Activities and Improvements

To successfully coordinate activities and to work with the NBT Council and other NBT Lead agencies, hiring a NBT Coordinator is recommended. An NBT Coordinator would promote a consistent message and assist with resource management to achieve sustainable growth of the NBT industry.



BEACH VENDOR LOCATION - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY JEFF LOFTUS, GRPC

As the primary state agency responsible for the management of the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program, the DMR is already in place and positioned well to take on the role of NBT Lead for Coastal Mississippi. The NBT Coordinator should be housed at DMR, serve as a single point of contact and be responsible for the following tasks:

- Coordinating the Implementation of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi's* Initiatives;
- Coordinating quarterly meetings of the NBT Council;
- Working with Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast to support the development of a long-term advertising and marketing strategy;
- Managing the review of NBT businesses pursuing Recognition;
- Assisting with message and marketing for NBT events and destinations; and
- Tracking maintenance needs of NBT destinations and coordinating support as available.

### 5.6.3 Monitor and Maintain Public Access Points

Without a single point of contact to monitor the condition of existing public access points like trailheads, paddling put-ins, and even parking areas, it is difficult to maintain a consistent standard of appearance. The *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* recommends a Public Access Improvement Plan be developed to focus on the monitoring and maintenance of public access points, which are provided in **Appendix J**. To improve the condition of the gateways to Coastal Mississippi's natural resources, the NBT Coordinator would facilitate conversation between responsible parties to:

- Verify inventory of current public access points.
- Identify needs at the existing public access points.
- Develop a budget for improvements.



LAUNCHING BOAT AT PASS HARBOR - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY JEFF LOFTUS, GRPC

- Develop schedule for monitoring and checklist to be completed during inspections.
- Create a “wish list” for future public access points and suggested locations.
- Develop a budget and schedule for the development of additional public access points.
- Announce the opening and availability of the new public access points on the NBT website.
- Allow the public to provide comments and suggestions for maintenance and improvements at public access points via a link on the NBT website.

#### **5.6.4 Budget for Adequate Maintenance**

While planning for new parks, preserves and trails can be an exciting endeavor, many communities struggle to find similar enthusiasm for the long-term maintenance of these facilities. Budgets often end with the construction phase, while failing to identify future resources for sustainable maintenance. A successful NBT program will ensure that South Mississippi’s nature destinations, trails and preserves offer visitors the opportunity to experience healthy natural habitats free from litter, debris and undue wear and tear. The following tasks can be used to achieve these standards:

- Develop a budget and schedule for invasive species removal on publicly-owned lands.
- Develop a budget and schedule for clean-up activities, including beach cleaning, roadway sand removal and post-storm debris removal across multiple jurisdictions.
- Identify state, federal, local and private funds that can assist with long-term maintenance.
- Identify volunteers or low-cost labor sources to assist with maintenance (Gulf Restoration Corps, MGCCC Jackson County Students, etc.)
- Work with municipalities to develop stormwater pilot projects, demonstrating techniques to naturally filter the water to help improve water quality and camouflage the drainage pipes at key access points.
- Plan for enhancements or improvements to public facilities as they attract additional users.

#### **5.6.5 Pursue Opportunities to Restore Natural Habitats**

Habitat restoration is a priority of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. To achieve the goal of maintaining and restoring the region’s unique coastal resources, the following strategies are recommended:

- Develop a Restoration Priority Plan with Maintenance Standards for each primary habitat type.
  - o Prioritize restoration of the following:
    - Wetlands restoration
    - Stream and streambank restoration
    - Coastal shorelines
    - Wildlife habitat restoration
    - Oyster resources
- Identify funding opportunities and potential resources for restoration of natural habitats.
- Implement Green Infrastructure and Living Shoreline practices to the extent possible in all new NBT facilities.



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



NATURE BASED TOURISM - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY HANCOCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



**6.0**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF  
THE *2016 NBT PLAN FOR  
COASTAL MISSISSIPPI***



Moving the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* into action begins now! Through consulting with experts to identify key NBT needs, learning from successful programs in other locations, and crafting specific recommendations based on stakeholder engagement and consensus-building, the NBT has produced a *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* that charts a path forward for the expansion and promotion of the industry for the next ten years.

The planning process for the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi* represents a new beginning for this growing field. In the brief time this plan has been in development, several NBT initiatives have already been accomplished and depicted in **Table 6.1**.

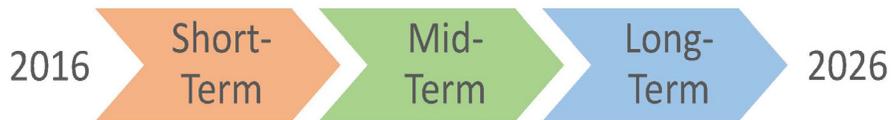
**Table 6.1 2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi Accomplishments to Date**

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE	
✓	Created a Master List of NBT Businesses & Stakeholders
✓	Created a Comprehensive List of NBT Destinations
✓	Conducted Three Stakeholder Workshops across the Mississippi Coast
✓	Prepared White Papers on Public Education, NBT Recognition Program, and Small Business and Workforce Development
✓	Prepared a Master Map of NBT Businesses, Nature Destinations, Trails/Blueways/Byways
✓	Developed GIS Data to use in NBT Plan Implementation
✓	NBT Website Established at the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area Program
✓	NBT Recognition Program Checklist Developed
✓	Establish Initiative for Ferry Service to Deer Island was Added in 2016
✓	Graphic Design of Color Palette and Icons were Developed for Signage
✓	NBT Educational Factsheets were Designed
✓	GulfCoast.org's GoogleTrekker for MS Gulf Coast goes Live

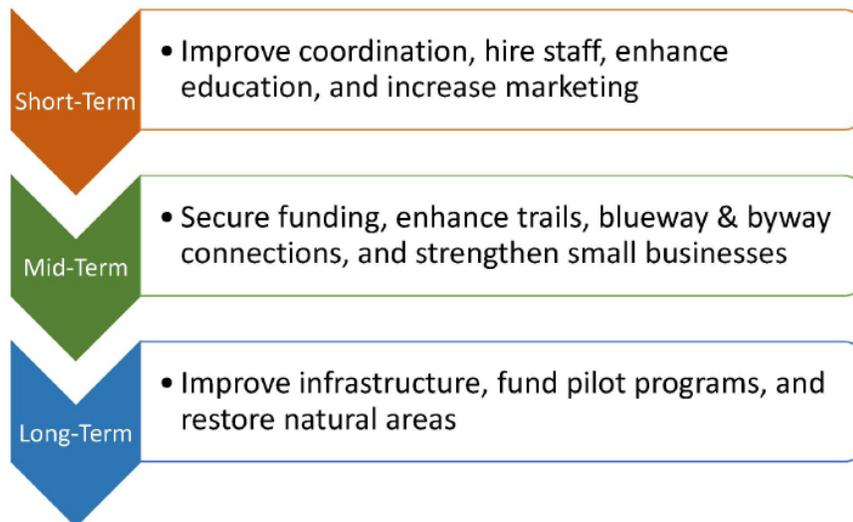


PASS HARBOR SHRIMP BOATS - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY JEFF LOFTUS, GRPC

This final chapter proposes a general timeline for implementation of the key initiatives. Each phase will build on the achievement of previous phases. Phases can be accelerated as resources become available.



*Short-Term* recommendations can begin to be addressed immediately upon adoption of the plan. *Mid-Term* activities will require the identification of resources and agreement of interested parties on a course of action. *Long-Term* activities are those that require the highest level of funding and coordination to be achieved.





## 6.1 Short-Term Initiatives for Implementation

Targeted initiatives related to education, public outreach and marketing, workforce development, and business owner training can all be implemented in the near-term with cooperative efforts and minimal additional support and funding. Near-term initiatives are anticipated to be achieved within two years of the adoption of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*. To ensure a sustainable framework for implementation is in place, the top priority should be developing a management structure to coordinate NBT stakeholder activities and facilitate the maintenance of NBT destinations. **Table 6.2** depicts actions proposed for short-term implementation.

**Table 6.2 Short-Term Initiatives for Implementation**

Public Education	
Create a one stop shop for NBT information	Improve signage to educate visitors
Promote environmental stewardship	Engage public officials
Develop common tourism metrics	
Public Outreach and Marketing	
Improve image through consistent branding, story, and messaging	Provide and promote diverse, year-round activities
Small Businesses: Workforce Development and Recognition Program	
Develop voluntary NBT Recognition Program	Enhance workforce training opportunities
Manage and Maintain Nature Based Activities and Destinations	
Establish NBT Council with advisory and coordination capacity	Hire NBT Coordinator
Infrastructure Improvements	
Develop interactive map to market priority NBT destinations	Inventory NBT destinations, public access points and businesses
Implement Hancock County Scenic Byways Program	Provide ferry service to barrier islands



BEACH VENDOR LOCATIONS - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY JEFF LOFTUS, GRPC

## 6.2 Mid-Term Initiatives for Implementation

Within two years after the adoption of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*, several key initiatives identified in Section 6.1 will have been achieved. In addition, the NBT Council and the NBT Management Structure should be in place and fully functioning. This formal structure will allow NBT stakeholders to deliver a unified message to local decision makers and the public. It will also provide an administrative framework for NBT businesses to seek information and identify resources and funding for improvements. The mid-term efforts anticipated to be achieved during years two through five are provided in **Table 6.3** and should reflect the benefits of a maturing industry with increased sophistication and ability to support both promotional activities for the businesses and destinations that offer NBT experiences.

**Table 6.3 Mid-Term Initiatives for Implementation**

Public Education	
Continue to engage public officials	Create a campaign to reduce litter
Outreach and Marketing	
Develop a long-term advertising strategy	Develop cross-promotional plan to link NBT opportunities
Trails, Blueways & Byways	
Invest in existing Blueways with design, amenities, signage and promotion	Invest in MCHT's safety, accessibility and attractiveness
Small Businesses: Workforce Development and Recognition Program	
Cross promote and market NBT businesses	Promote Exemplary Businesses/Seal of Excellence
Manage and Maintain Nature Based Activities and Destinations	
Establish funding sources for long-term NBT initiatives	
Infrastructure Improvements	
Reduce vehicular and bike/pedestrian conflicts	Support efforts to bring Amtrak routes to the Coast

### 6.3 Long-Term Initiatives for Implementation

In the final implementation stages of the *2016 NBT Plan for Coastal Mississippi*, South Mississippi should be well established as a premiere NBT destination. The long-term initiatives identified in **Table 6.4** will focus on larger infrastructure projects and the assurance of consistent quality of NBT destinations. Within a ten-year timeframe, many successes are anticipated. The Trails, Blueways and Byways will be expanded, gaps bridged, connections made, and safety improved. Consistent NBT signage with uniformed imagery and information will be across the coast. Public access points will be evaluated and maintained. Public transportation options will be more closely linked to centers of NBT activity. The end goal..... visitors to NBT destinations will enjoy a safe, clean, engaging trip to South Mississippi and realize everything they desire in for a natural escape can be achieved on the Mississippi Coast.

**Table 6.4 Long-Term Initiatives for Implementation**

<b>Small Businesses: Workforce Development and Recognition Program</b>	
Dedicated Business Incubator	Improve Signage and amenities
<b>Trails and Blueways</b>	
Build additional boat launches, docks and piers	Invest in existing Blueways with amenities, signage and publicity
Complete MCHT Network	
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>	
Build additional boat launches, docks and piers	Extend Scenic Byways Program from Hancock County across the Coast
Connect destination through improved transportation infrastructure	
<b>Manage and Maintain Nature Based Activities and Destinations</b>	
Budget for adequate maintenance of all new and expanding nature tourism facilities	Monitor and maintain access points
Improve and maintain amenities for visitors	Restore NBT destinations damaged by natural or man-made disasters

## 6.4 Conclusion

There are few places in the United States where the richness and beauty of the natural environment can transport the visitor back to the point when the first European settlers arrived. South Mississippi is just such a place. Young and old alike can find the adventures they seek awaiting them in its swamps, forests and open water. With coordination and proper funding, South Mississippi can build its NBT industry and share these experiences with the world while sustaining the beauty of its native habitats for future generations.

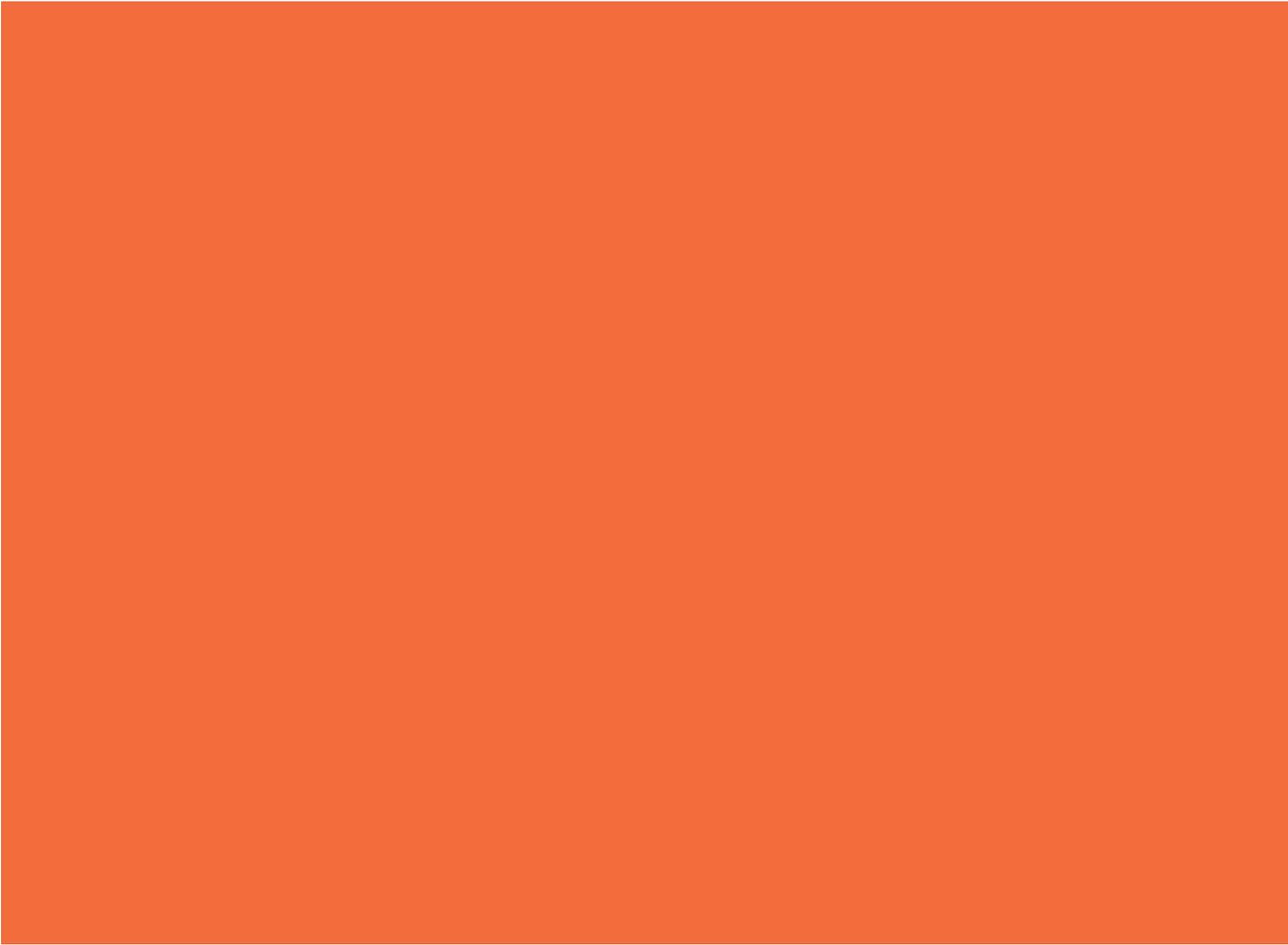


MARY WALKER MARINA - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY AARON RIDER WILSON

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# 7.0

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# APPENDIX A: LIST AND CONTACT INFORMATION FOR NBT BUSINESSES

Business Type	Business Name	Website	Phone	City
<b>Agriculture</b>				
Agriculture	Boggy Creek Vineyard	<a href="http://www.boggycreekvineyard.com/index.html">http://www.boggycreekvineyard.com/index.html</a>	228-283-0669	Vanceleave
Agriculture	Heavn's Best Compost & Gardens	<a href="http://www.heavnsbestcompost.com/">http://www.heavnsbestcompost.com/</a>	228-365-3744	Saucier
Agriculture	Seward Farms	<a href="http://www.sewardfarms.com/index.htm">http://www.sewardfarms.com/index.htm</a>	228-641-3936	Lucedale
Agriculture	Boggy Creek Vineyard	<a href="http://www.boggycreekvineyard.com/index.html">http://www.boggycreekvineyard.com/index.html</a>	228-283-0670	Vanceleave
Agriculture	Heavn's Best Compost & Gardens	<a href="http://www.heavnsbestcompost.com/">http://www.heavnsbestcompost.com/</a>	228-365-3745	Saucier
Agriculture	Seward Farms	<a href="http://www.sewardfarms.com/index.htm">http://www.sewardfarms.com/index.htm</a>	228-641-3937	Lucedale
Agriculture	Shroomdom	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/shroomdom-26416">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/shroomdom-26416</a>	601-795-2611	Poplarville
Agriculture	Mitchell Farms	<a href="http://www.mitchellfarms-ms.com/">http://www.mitchellfarms-ms.com/</a>	601-765-8609	Collins
Agriculture	Vesely's Nursery	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/vesely-s-nursery-28201">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/vesely-s-nursery-28201</a>	601-264-9518	Sumrall
Agriculture	A&W Christmas Tree Farm	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/a-w-christmas-tree-farm-28845">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/a-w-christmas-tree-farm-28845</a>	251-751-2596	Moss Point
Agriculture	Blue River Farms & Nursery	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/blue-river-farms-nursery-23502">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/blue-river-farms-nursery-23502</a>	601-797-3896	Mt. Olive
Agriculture	Old River Road Blueberry Farm	<a href="http://oldriverroadblueberryfarm.webs.com/">http://oldriverroadblueberryfarm.webs.com/</a>	228-806-5090	Vanceleave
Agriculture	Wilford Farms Pumpkin Patch & Christmas Tree Farm	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/welford-farms-pumpkin-patch-christmas-tree-farm-28202">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/welford-farms-pumpkin-patch-christmas-tree-farm-28202</a>	601-673-0287	Lucedale
Agriculture	Country Girl Creamery	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/country-girl-creamery-23992">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/country-girl-creamery-23992</a>	601-606-1762	Lumberton
Agriculture	Blue Tara Organic Blueberry Pick Your Own	<a href="http://pickaberry.com/">http://pickaberry.com/</a>	601-403-8272	Poplarville
<b>Campsites</b>				
Campsite	Presley's Outing/Goode's Mill Lake	<a href="http://www.presleysouting.com/">http://www.presleysouting.com/</a>	228-219-8816	Moss Point
Campsite	Shepard State Park & Campground	<a href="http://shepardstatepark.com/">http://shepardstatepark.com/</a>	228-497-2244	Gautier
Campsite	Black Creek National Scenic River	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/black-creek-national-scenic-river-23476">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/black-creek-national-scenic-river-23476</a>	601-928-4422	Brooklyn
Campsite	Tucei's Fish Camp	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tuceis-Fishing-Camp/115500821813217">https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tuceis-Fishing-Camp/115500821813217</a>	228-217-3883	Gautier

Campsite	Airey Lake Recreation Area	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/airey-lake-recreation-area/3642/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/airey-lake-recreation-area/3642/</a>	601-528-6160	Saucier
Campsite	Haas-Cienda Ranch	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/haas-cienda-ranch-rv-park-24653">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/haas-cienda-ranch-rv-park-24653</a>	601-795-2747	Poplarville
Campsite	Bay Hide Away RV Park & Campground	<a href="http://bayhideaway.net/">http://bayhideaway.net/</a>	228-466-0959	Bay St. Louis
Campsite	Baywood Campground	<a href="http://southernrvparks.com/">http://southernrvparks.com/</a>	228-896-4840	Gulfport
Campsite	Big Biloxi Recreation Area	<a href="http://forestcamping.com/dow/southern/desocmp.htm">http://forestcamping.com/dow/southern/desocmp.htm</a>	601-528-6160	Saucier
Campsite	Bluff Creek Campgrounds	<a href="http://bluffcreekcampground.com/">http://bluffcreekcampground.com/</a>	228-826-3958	Vancleave
Campsite	POW Lake Recreation Area	<a href="http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5213316.pdf">http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5213316.pdf</a>	601-528-6160	Saucier
Campsite	Red Creek Adventures	<a href="http://redcreekadventures.com/">http://redcreekadventures.com/</a>	228-217-5651, 228-623-5091	Perkinston
Campsite	Red Wolf Wilderness Adventures	<a href="http://www.redwolfwildernessadventures.com">www.redwolfwildernessadventures.com</a>	985-966-0668	Brooklyn
Campsite	Perk Beach RV Park & Campgrounds	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/perk-beach-rv-park-campgrounds-25979">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/perk-beach-rv-park-campgrounds-25979</a>	601-928-9111	Perkinston
Campsite	Okatoma Outdoor Post	<a href="http://www.okatoma.com/">http://www.okatoma.com/</a>	601-722-4297	Seminary
<b>Education/Research Centers</b>				
Education/Research Center	Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve	<a href="http://grandbaynerr.org/">http://grandbaynerr.org/</a>	228-475-7047	Moss Point
Education/Research Center	Gulf Coast Research Laboratory Marine Education Center	<a href="http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/mec/">http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/mec/</a>	228-818-8883	Ocean Springs
Education/Research Center	Gulf Islands National Seashore - Davis Bayou District	<a href="http://www.nps.gov/guis/miss.htm">http://www.nps.gov/guis/miss.htm</a>	228-230-4100	Ocean Springs
Education/Research Center	Institute for Marine Mammal Studies	<a href="http://www.imms.org/">http://www.imms.org/</a>	228-896-9182 x-1765/ x-1772	Gulfport
Education/Research Center	MGCCC - Estuarine Education Center	<a href="http://www.mgccc.edu/estuarine-education-center/">http://www.mgccc.edu/estuarine-education-center/</a>	228-497-7673	Gautier
Education/Research Center	Mississippi Sandhill Crane Wildlife Refuge	<a href="http://www.fws.gov/refuge/mississippi_sandhill_crane/">http://www.fws.gov/refuge/mississippi_sandhill_crane/</a>	228-497-6322	Gautier
Education/Research Center	NASA Infinity Science Museum	<a href="http://www.visitinfinity.com/explore/galleries-exhibits/possum-walk-trail/">http://www.visitinfinity.com/explore/galleries-exhibits/possum-walk-trail/</a>	228-684-6541	Stennis Space Center
Education/Research Center	Pascagoula River Audubon Center	<a href="http://www.pascagoula.river.audubon.org/">www.pascagoula.river.audubon.org/</a>	228-475-0825	Moss Point
Education/Research Center	Crosby Arboretum	<a href="http://crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/">http://crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/</a>	601-799-2311	Picayune

Education/ Research Center	Mississippi Master Naturalist Program	<a href="http://masternaturalist.msucare.com/">http://masternaturalist.msucare.com/</a>	228-546-1025	Biloxi
Education/ Research Center	The Scranton's Nature Center at I.G. Levy Park	<a href="http://cityofpascagoula.com/scranton-nature-center">http://cityofpascagoula.com/scranton-nature-center</a>	228-938-2356	Pascagoula
Education/ Research Center	Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve	<a href="http://grandbaynerr.org/">http://grandbaynerr.org/</a>	228-475-7048	Moss Point
Education/ Research Center	Gulf Coast Research Laboratory Marine Education Center	<a href="http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/mec/">http://www.usm.edu/gcrl/mec/</a>	228-818-8884	Ocean Springs
Education/ Research Center	Institute for Marine Mammal Studies	<a href="http://www.imms.org/">http://www.imms.org/</a>	228-896-9182 x-1765/ x-1773	Gulfport
Education/ Research Center	MGCCC - Estuarine Education Center & Leadership Development Center	<a href="http://www.mgccc.edu/estuarine-education-center/">http://www.mgccc.edu/estuarine-education-center/</a>	228-497-4971	Gautier
Education/ Research Center	Mississippi Sandhill Crane Wildlife Refuge	<a href="http://www.fws.gov/refuge/mississippi_sandhill_crane/">http://www.fws.gov/refuge/mississippi_sandhill_crane/</a>	228-497-3620	Gautier
Education/ Research Center	NASA Infinity Science Museum	<a href="http://www.visitinfinity.com/explore/galleries-exhibits/possum-walk-trail/">http://www.visitinfinity.com/explore/galleries-exhibits/possum-walk-trail/</a>	228-684-6542	Stennis Space Center
Education/ Research Center	Pascagoula River Audubon Center	<a href="http://www.pascagoula.audubon.org/">www.pascagoula.audubon.org/</a>	228-475-0826	Moss Point
Education/ Research Center	Crosby Arboretum	<a href="http://crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/">http://crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/</a>	601-799-2312	Picayune
Education/ Research Center	Gulf Islands National Seashore - Davis Bayou District	<a href="http://www.nps.gov/guis/miss.htm">http://www.nps.gov/guis/miss.htm</a>	228-230-4101	Ocean Springs
Education/ Research Center	Least Tern Nesting Areas	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/least-tern-nesting-areas/2599/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/least-tern-nesting-areas/2599/</a>	228-475-0825	Harrison County
<b>Museums</b>				
Museum	Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum	<a href="http://www.maritimemuseum.org/">www.maritimemuseum.org/</a>	228-435-6320	Biloxi
Museum	Scranton Shrimp Boat Museum	<a href="http://www.cityofpascagoula.com/scranton-museum">www.cityofpascagoula.com/scranton-museum</a>	228-938-2356	Pascagoula
Museum	Lynn Meadows Discovery Center	<a href="http://www.lmdc.org">www.lmdc.org</a>	228-897-6039	Gulfport
<b>Trails</b>				
Trail	South Bethel Mountain Biking Trail	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/south-bethel-mountain-biking-trail-26483">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/south-bethel-mountain-biking-trail-26483</a>	601-528-6160	Wiggins
Trail	Escatawpa River Observatory Birding & Wildlife Viewing Area	<a href="http://mscoastbirdingtrail.audubon.org/escatawpa-river-observatory.html">http://mscoastbirdingtrail.audubon.org/escatawpa-river-observatory.html</a>	228-475-3384	Moss Point

Trail	Ocean Springs Inner Harbor Birding & Wildlife Viewing	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/ocean-springs-inner-harbor-birding-wildlife-viewing-25809">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/ocean-springs-inner-harbor-birding-wildlife-viewing-25809</a>	228-875-4424	Ocean Springs
Trail	Pascagoula River Blueway	<a href="http://cityofpascagoula.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Blueway-brochure-inside-1.pdf">http://cityofpascagoula.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Blueway-brochure-inside-1.pdf</a>	228-938-6615	Pascagoula
Trail	McLeod Park (Jourdan River Blueway)	<a href="http://www.hancockcounty.ms.gov/Pages/McLeod-Park.aspx">http://www.hancockcounty.ms.gov/Pages/McLeod-Park.aspx</a> ; <a href="http://ltmcp.org/jourdan-river-blueway/">http://ltmcp.org/jourdan-river-blueway/</a>	228-467-1894	Kiln
Trail	Stone County MX	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/stone-county-mx-26601">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/stone-county-mx-26601</a>	601-528-2727	Perkinston
Trail	Black Creek Natural Wilderness Hiking Trail	<a href="http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mississippi/about-forest/districts/?cid=stelprdb5209588">http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mississippi/about-forest/districts/?cid=stelprdb5209588</a>	601-528-6160	Wiggins
Trail	MS Gulf Coast Birding Trail	<a href="http://mscoastbirdingtrail.audubon.org/index.html">http://mscoastbirdingtrail.audubon.org/index.html</a>	228-475-0825	
Trail	Lucedale Greenway Birding Trails	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/lucedale-greenway-birding-trails-25310">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/lucedale-greenway-birding-trails-25310</a>	228-435-9191	Lucedale
Trail	Old Ft. Bayou Blueway	<a href="http://ltmcp.org/old-fort-bayou-blueway/">http://ltmcp.org/old-fort-bayou-blueway/</a>	228-435-9191	Jackson County
<b>Charter Boat Operations</b>				
Charter Boat	Biloxi Schooner	<a href="https://www.maritimemuseum.org/w/?page_id=136">https://www.maritimemuseum.org/w/?page_id=136</a>	228-435-6320	Biloxi
Charter Boat	Fishing the Coast (Charter Boat Booking Booth)	<a href="http://www.biloxicruisecompany.com/">http://www.biloxicruisecompany.com/</a>	228-257-8357	D'Iberville
Charter Boat	Adventure Charters & Dive	<a href="http://www.yelp.com/biz/adventure-charters-and-dive-llc-moss-point">http://www.yelp.com/biz/adventure-charters-and-dive-llc-moss-point</a>	228-297-3278	Moss Point
Charter Boat	Biloxi Bay Charter Tours	<a href="http://www.biloxibaycharter.com/">http://www.biloxibaycharter.com/</a>	228-209-9977	Biloxi
Charter Boat	Cat Island Excursions/Southern Way Charters	<a href="http://www.catislandms.com/">http://www.catislandms.com/</a> & <a href="http://www.southernwaycharters.com/">http://www.southernwaycharters.com/</a>	228-323-5217	Pass Christian
Charter Boat	Fort Bayou Charter & Cruises	<a href="http://www.fortbayoucharters.com/">http://www.fortbayoucharters.com/</a>	228-697-4808	Ocean Springs
Charter Boat	Goin' Coastal Inshore & Offshore Charters	<a href="http://www.fishinginga.com/">http://www.fishinginga.com/</a>	228-297-0207	
Charter Boat	Horn Island Charters	<a href="http://www.hornislandcharters.com/">http://www.hornislandcharters.com/</a>		Biloxi
Charter Boat	North Star Sailing Charters, LLC	<a href="http://www.northstarsailingcharters.com/">http://www.northstarsailingcharters.com/</a>	228-617-8057	Gulfport
Charter Boat	OutKast Charters	<a href="http://www.outkastcharters.com/">http://www.outkastcharters.com/</a>	228-233-7760	Bay St. Louis
Charter Boat	Rock-N-Reel Charter	<a href="http://www.rocknreelcharters.net">www.rocknreelcharters.net</a>	228-229-7017	Ocean Springs
Charter Boat	Shallow Draft Charters	<a href="http://fishingcharters.com">fishingcharters.com</a>	228-234-2401	Ocean Springs
Charter Boat	Skipper Charters	<a href="http://www.skipperchartersms.com/">http://www.skipperchartersms.com/</a>	228-348-0483	Biloxi

Charter Boat	Strictly Fishin' Charters	<a href="http://www.strictlyfishincharters.com/">http://www.strictlyfishincharters.com/</a>	228-217-0458	Ocean Springs
Charter Boat	Impulsive Fishing Charters	<a href="http://www.captainscottsimpson.com/">http://www.captainscottsimpson.com/</a>	228-669-6204	Long Beach
Charter Boat	9-Ball Fishing Charters	<a href="http://www.ms fishingcharters.com/">http://www.ms fishingcharters.com/</a>	800-726-0919	Long Beach
Charter Boat	Stillwater Fishing Charters, LLC	<a href="http://stillwaterfishingms.com/">http://stillwaterfishingms.com/</a>	228-697-9002	Long Beach
Charter Boat	Fishing Frenzy Charters	<a href="http://www.fishingfrenzycharters.com/">http://www.fishingfrenzycharters.com/</a>	228-860-3494	Long Beach
Charter Boat	T&J Island Cruises	<a href="http://www.tjislandcruises.com/">http://www.tjislandcruises.com/</a>	228-217-6147	Biloxi
Charter Boat	Dawn's Angel Cruises	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/dawns-angel-cruises/4671/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/dawns-angel-cruises/4671/</a>	228-313-6633	Pass Christian
Charter Boat	Biloxi Boardwalk Marina Pontoon Rentals	<a href="http://biloxiboardwalkmarina.com/rentals">http://biloxiboardwalkmarina.com/rentals</a>	228-432-2628	Biloxi
Charter Boat	Set Sail Yacht Charters	<a href="http://www.setsailaway.com/">http://www.setsailaway.com/</a>	228-596-1670	Gulfport
<b>Eco Tours</b>				
Eco Tour	Eco Tours of South Mississippi	<a href="http://www.ecotoursofsouthmississippi.com/">http://www.ecotoursofsouthmississippi.com/</a>	228-297-8687	Gautier
Eco Tour	McCoy's River & Marsh Tours	<a href="http://www.mccoynrivertours.com/">http://www.mccoynrivertours.com/</a>	228-219-4583	Moss Point
Eco Tour	Ship Island Excursions	<a href="http://www.msshipisland.com/">http://www.msshipisland.com/</a>	228-864-1014	Gulfport
Eco Tour	Biloxi Shrimping Trip	<a href="http://www.biloxishrimpingtrip.com/">http://www.biloxishrimpingtrip.com/</a>	228-392-8645	D'Iberville
Eco Tour	MS Charter & Guide Services	<a href="http://msguideservices.wix.com/gofish">http://msguideservices.wix.com/gofish</a>	228-623-5727	Pascagoula
Eco Tour	Southeast Adventure Company	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/southeast-adventure-company-26501">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/southeast-adventure-company-26501</a>	228-239-7789	Biloxi
Eco Tour	Gulf Coast Gator & Ranch Tours	<a href="http://www.airboatswamptoursofmississippi.com/">http://www.airboatswamptoursofmississippi.com/</a>	228-475-6026	Moss Point
<b>Sales/Rentals/Tours</b>				
Sales/Rentals/Tours	Wolf River Canoe & Kayak	<a href="http://www.wolfrivercanoes.com/">http://www.wolfrivercanoes.com/</a>	228-452-7666	Long Beach
Sales/Rentals/Tours	Da Beach House Kayak & SUP Outfitters	<a href="http://dabeachhouse.weebly.com/">http://dabeachhouse.weebly.com/</a>	228-547-0085	Gulfport
Sales/Rentals/Tours	Everything Kayak	<a href="http://www.everythingkayak.com/">http://www.everythingkayak.com/</a>	228-865-1000	Gulfport
Sales/Rentals/Tours	MS Gulf Coast Paddle	<a href="http://msgulfcoastpaddle.com/">http://msgulfcoastpaddle.com/</a>	228-344-3212 or 228-223-5189	Bay St. Louis
Sales/Rentals/Tours	Biloxi Beach Jet Ski Rentals, LLC	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/biloxi-beach-jet-ski-rentals-llc/5043/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/biloxi-beach-jet-ski-rentals-llc/5043/</a>	228-297-5647	Biloxi
Sales/Rentals/Tours	Paddles Up!	<a href="http://paddlesupms.com/">http://paddlesupms.com/</a>	228-282-9533	Ocean Springs
Sales/Rentals/Tours	Adventure Locators	<a href="http://www.adventurelocators.com/">http://www.adventurelocators.com/</a>	228-392-7830	D'Iberville

Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Wut Sup Paddleboards & Rentals	<a href="http://wutsuprentals.com/">http://wutsuprentals.com/</a>	228-669-1802	Gulfport
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Pass Christian Beach Company	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/beach-company-of-pass-christian/6796/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/beach-company-of-pass-christian/6796/</a>	901-493-7277	Pass Christian
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Solar Boat Tours	<a href="http://solarboattours.com/">http://solarboattours.com/</a>	228-363-2529	Bay St. Louis
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Whipasnapa Sightseeing Trips	<a href="http://www.whipasnapacharters.com/">http://www.whipasnapacharters.com/</a>	228-229-6978	D'Iberville
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Biloxi Bay Kayak Rentals	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/biloxi-bay-kayak-rentals/6739/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/biloxi-bay-kayak-rentals/6739/</a>	228-243-0410	D'Iberville
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Big Creek Wildlife	<a href="http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/big-creek-wildlife-23430">http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/big-creek-wildlife-23430</a>	601-271-2888	Hattiesburg
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Dawn's Angel Kayaking Trips	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/dawn%E2%80%99s-angel-kayaking-trips/4953/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/dawn%E2%80%99s-angel-kayaking-trips/4953/</a>	228-313-6633	Pass Christian
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Get Wet Beach Rentals	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/get-wet-beach-rentals/2398/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/get-wet-beach-rentals/2398/</a>	228-806-4372	Biloxi
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Institute for Disability Studies Gulf Park	<a href="https://www.usm.edu/gulfcoast/ids">https://www.usm.edu/gulfcoast/ids</a>	228-214-3400, 888-671-0051	Long Beach
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Jet Blast Beach Rentals	<a href="http://www.jetblastrentals.com/">http://www.jetblastrentals.com/</a>	228-323-1512	Gulfport
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Life's a Beach Rental	<a href="http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/lifes-a-beach-rental/221/">http://www.gulfcoast.org/listings/lifes-a-beach-rental/221/</a>	228-697-5176	Gulfport & Biloxi
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Parasail Adventures	<a href="http://www.parasailbiloxi.com/">http://www.parasailbiloxi.com/</a>	985-201-5002	Biloxi
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	South Mississippi Canoe Rental	<a href="http://www.southmscanoe.com/">http://www.southmscanoe.com/</a>	601-544-4207	Brooklyn
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Black Creek Canoe Rental	<a href="http://www.blackcreekcanoe.com/">http://www.blackcreekcanoe.com/</a>	601-582-8817	Brooklyn
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Zip N Fun	<a href="http://zipnfun.com/">http://zipnfun.com/</a>	228-324-5199	Gulfport
Sales/Rentals/ Tours	Buccaneer State Park	<a href="http://mdwfp.com/parks-destinations/ms-state-parks/buccaneer">http://mdwfp.com/parks-destinations/ms-state-parks/buccaneer</a>	228-467-3822	Waveland

# APPENDIX B: NBT SURVEY REPORT

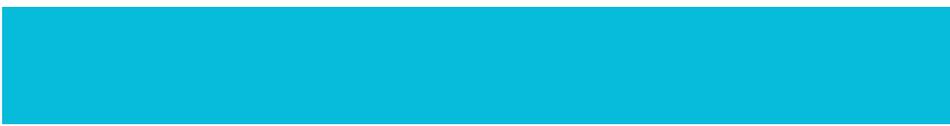
# APPENDIX C: WORKSHOP SUMMARY

# APPENDIX D: RECOMMENDED NBT PLAN STRATEGIES

ACTION ITEMS	GoCOAST 2020	NATURE TOURISM WHITE PAPER	VISIT MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST 2015-16	NATURE BASED TOURISM MANAGEMENT PLAN
<b>EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>				
Better Engage Local , County and State Elected Officials	X	X		X
Better Training of NBT Staff by Promoting Existing Training Opportunities	X	X		X
Create a One-Stop Website to Host Nature Based Tourism	X	X	X	X
Develop Common Tourism Metrics to Track Program Success	X	X	X	X
Improve Signage to Educate Visitors	X	X	X	X
Promote Environmental Stewardship	X	X		X
<b>PUBLIC OUTREACH &amp; MARKETING</b>				
Develop a Cross Promotion Plan for Nature Tourism Opportunities	X	X	X	X
Develop a Long-Term Advertising Strategy	X	X	X	X
Improve Image through Consistent Branding, Story, and Messaging	X	X	X	X
Provide and Promote Diverse, Year-Round Activities		X		X
<b>TRAILS AND BLUEWAYS</b>				
Complete Heritage Trails Network	X	X		X
Invest in Existing Blueways with Amenities, Signage, Publicity	X	X		X
<b>SMALL BUSINESS &amp; WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT</b>				
Dedicated Funding Stream for Nature Based Tourism	X	X	X	X
Improve Amenities and Signage	X	X	X	X
Promote Small Business Growth and Development through Partnerships with Chambers of Commerce & Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast			X	X

<b>ACTION ITEMS</b>	<b>GoCOAST 2020</b>	<b>NATURE TOURISM WHITE PAPER</b>	<b>VISIT MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST 2015-16</b>	<b>NATURE BASED TOURISM MANAGEMENT PLAN</b>
Coordinate Nature Based Tourism Open House with Signature Coastal Event				X
Enhance Workforce Training Network for Continuing Education and Certificate Programs	X	X		X
Provide Workforce Training and Opportunity through Gulf Coast Restoration Corps				X
Train Businesses in Better Social Media Marketing				X
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT</b>				
Build Additional Boat Launches, Docks and Piers	X	X	X	X
Connect Destinations through Improved Transportation Infrastructure	X	X	X	X
Extend Scenic Byways Program from Hancock Co. Across the Coast				X
Ferry Service to Barrier Islands	X	X		X
Improve Camping, Comfort Stations Facilities on Pascagoula and Other Area Rivers	X	X		X
Increase Public Access To Parks, Islands, Preserves, Trails, Waterways, and Special Public Places	X	X	X	X
Inventory NBT Destinations, Public Access Points and Businesses and Build Interactive Online Map to Market Priority NBT Destination	X	X	X	X

# APPENDIX E: RECOMMENDED COLOR SCHEME AND IMAGES FOR SIGNAGE

		
<b>BIRDING</b>	<b>PICNIC</b>	
		
<b>CRABBING</b>	<b>PADDLING</b>	
		
<b>FISHING</b>	<b>HIKING</b>	
		
<b>FARM</b>	<b>TOUR</b>	

# APPENDIX F: NBT EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

## CONTENTS

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# APPENDIX F-1: ACTIVITY PACKAGE - WORD SEARCH & WORD SCRAMBLE



# Nature Based Tourism in Coastal Mississippi Word Search

P S U N X S D N U O S F M V M  
M W T K V E R O L P X E N W L  
A U R P C V H E R I T A G E B  
W N A J U R G E R F C S S I H  
S B I V K E J I U E Y R R I B  
G J L A A S V F B A U D K R C  
Z N S E E E J H W O I I F G F  
C Y I C R R P E T N N C I N E  
M A T T U P U A G G D R S I R  
X I N I A L P T D X S P H P R  
U K W O B O T G A D F F I M Y  
L L S S E M B U N N L C N A M  
G N I K I B T A R D U I G C B  
I S L A N D S A X E G K N F V  
D H F C P C O A S T Z Z L G W

BIKING  
BOATING  
COAST  
FERRY  
HERITAGE  
NATURE  
RIVER  
SUN  
TOURS

BIRDING  
CAMPING  
CULTURE  
FISHING  
HIKING  
PADDLING  
SAND  
SWAMP  
TRAILS

BLUEWAYS  
CANOE  
EXPLORE  
GULF  
ISLANDS  
PRESERVES  
SOUND  
SWIM



# Nature Based Tourism in Coastal Mississippi Word Search

1. danllss

---

2. minSiwgm

---

3. erresvPes

---

4. ilaTrs

---

5. girBind

---

6. ceOan

---

7. iHnigk

---

8. ipnamgC

---

9. mpwaS usorT

---

10. dSan

---

11. aiPgdnaorelbdd

---

12. hsigniF

---

13. Htreiega

---

14. ulwyesaB

---

# APPENDIX F-2: ACTIVITY PACKAGE - PASSPORT

# APPENDIX F-3: ACTIVITY PACKAGE - FACT SHEETS



## Coastal Mississippi... the natural choice for your Observation Excursions

*"Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher."* - William Wordsworth

Are you needing an escape from busy schedules, pressing deadlines, and congested traffic? If so, come recharge on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and reconnect to nature. There are simple yet engaging natural observation excursions that can sharpen your senses and relax your soul. To slow down and be present in nature and treasure the moment, there are many options to suit each person.



## What to Do?

- Pearl River Wetlands and Inlets
- Hancock County Marsh Preserves
- Pascagoula River Audubon Society
- Sandhill Crane Refuge
- National and State Parks
- Barrier Islands Excursions
- Grand Bay NERR



## Coastal Mississippi... the natural choice for your Nature-Based Retreats

*"I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in."* - John Muir

Get away from the everyday stresses and get into nature. A natural escape on the Mississippi Gulf Coast offers the opportunity to appreciate a slower pace and retreat to a natural state. Explore the coastal campgrounds, walk through the coastal preserves, tour a swamp, or visit an island.....your choices are limitless.



## What to Do?

- Coastal Camping
- Barrier Island Excursions
- Nature Refuges
- State Parks / National Parks
- Grand Bay NERR
- Coastal Preserves
- Marsh Tours



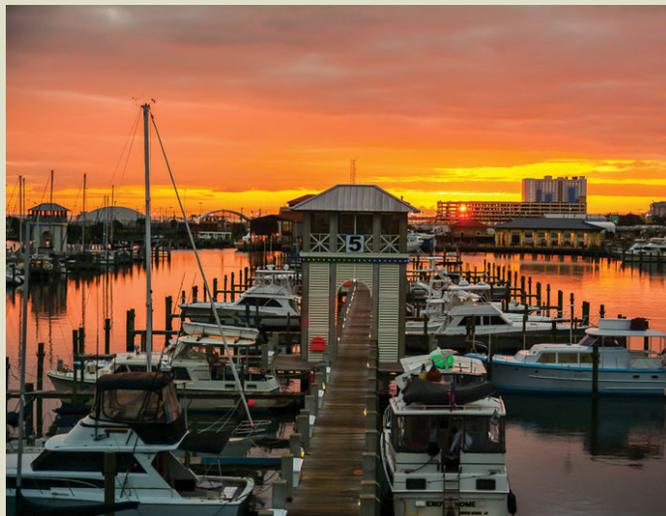
# EXPLORE

## the Mississippi Gulf Coast

Coastal Mississippi... the natural choice for your  
**Aquatic Adventures**

*"The cure for anything is salt water - sweat, tears, or the sea." - Isak Dinesen*

The Mississippi Gulf Coast provides aquatic activities from border to border across all six coastal counties - Pearl River, Stone, George, Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson. Join in aquatic adventures and get caught up in the fun - choose your water-based activity and rehydrate your spirit.



## What to Do?

- Paddle the Blueways
- Take a Swamp Tour
- Charter Fishing Trips
- Learn to Paddleboard
- Scuba Diving
- Explore the Barrier Islands
- Swim in the Sound
- Shrimping Excursions

For more information, please visit Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Program  
1141 Bayview Ave, Biloxi, MS 39530 / (228) 374-5000  
<http://www.dmr.ms.gov/>



# EXPLORE

## the Mississippi Gulf Coast

### Coastal Mississippi... the natural choice for your Coastal Connections

*"We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep."* - William Jones

The Mississippi Gulf Coast offers many opportunities to strengthen the community's connection to nature. Through a bike ride along a scenic highway or a walk along a heritage trail, one can find an activity to suit specific desires. From border to border, nature-based destinations are an adventure away.



### What to Do?

- Heritage Trails
- Blueways
- Scenic Byways
- Bike Paths
- Nature Walks

# APPENDIX F-4: GENERAL NBT FACT SHEET



# EXPLORE the Mississippi Gulf Coast

## Nature Based Tourism

Picture the perfect getaway..... sweeping views of the Gulf of Mexico; the meandering path of the Pascagoula River; wind whistling through the Wet Pine Savannahs; and vibrant sunrises over the barrier islands.

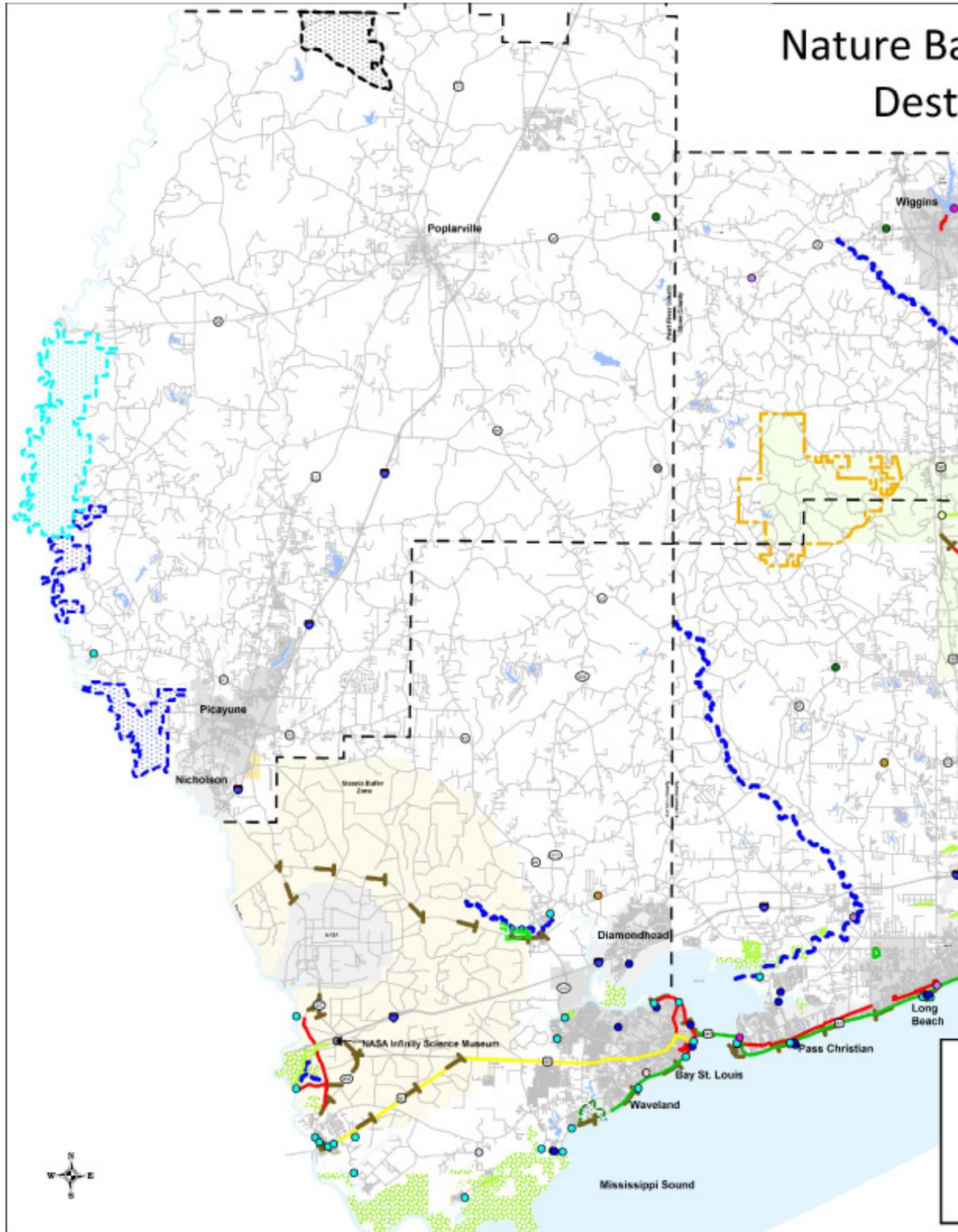
The rivers, bays, bayous, and gulf shape a diverse world of natural experiences and provide many nature-based adventures for travelers to South Mississippi. Whether paddling, hiking, biking or just leisurely exploring the area's many natural and cultural resources, visitors to coastal Mississippi in addition to locals residing in the six counties of South Mississippi will find a wealth of opportunities to reconnect with nature and recharge their spirits.



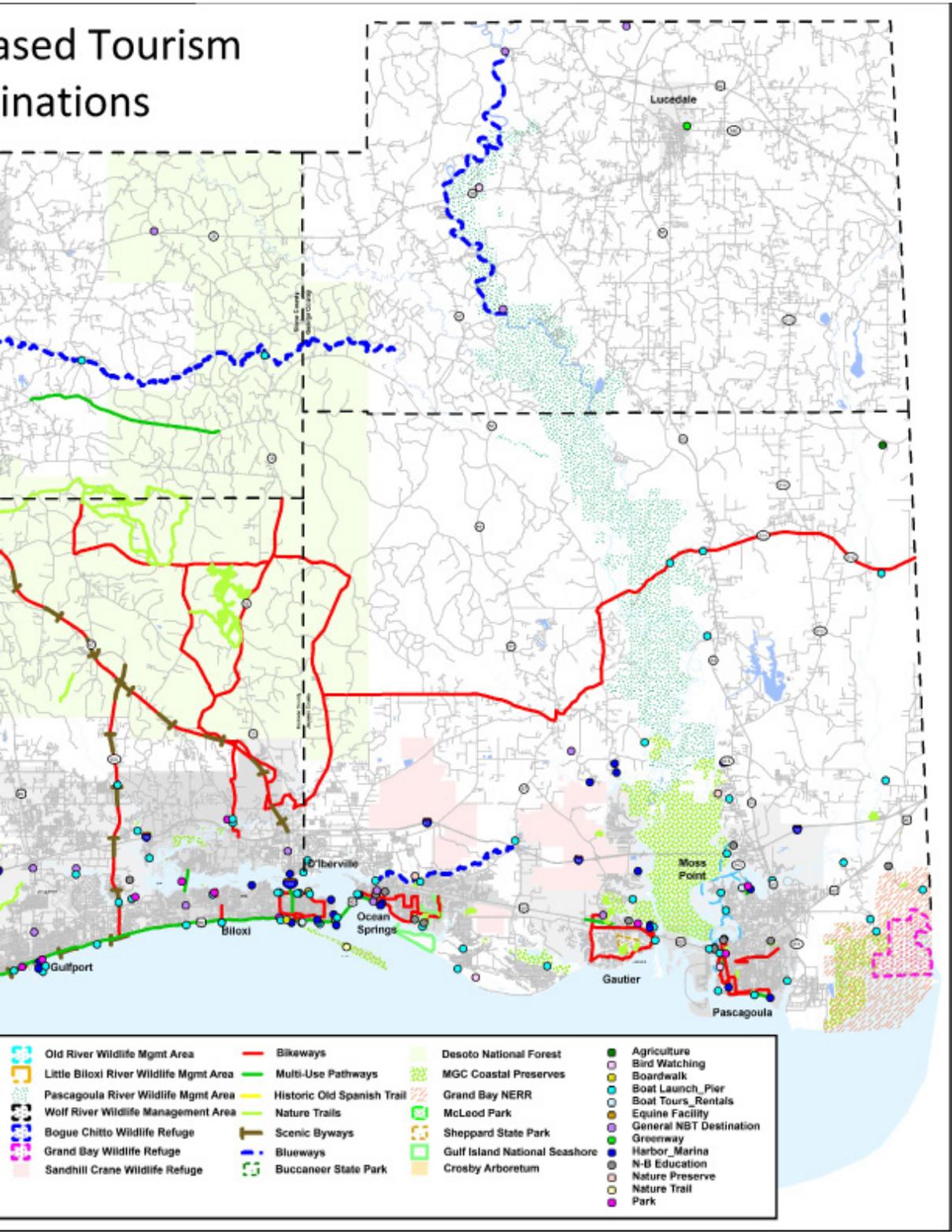
## What to Do?

- Paddle the Blueways
- Take a Swamp Tour
- Track Migrating Birds
- Learn to Paddleboard
- Fish for Speckled Trout
- Explore the Barrier Islands
- Swim in the Sound

# APPENDIX F-5: ACTIVITY PACKAGE - MAP WITH NBT DESTINATIONS



# Based Tourism inations



# APPENDIX G: PROPOSED TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

# APPENDIX H: NBT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

	Curriculum	Audience	Contact Information
<b>NATURE EDUCATION</b>			
<b>Department of Marine Resources</b>	Habitat Stewards	Nature Enthusiasts	<a href="http://www.dmr.ms.gov/index.php/wildlife-a-plants/coastal-preserves/187-habitat-stewards-of-coastal-mississippi">http://www.dmr.ms.gov/index.php/wildlife-a-plants/coastal-preserves/187-habitat-stewards-of-coastal-mississippi</a>
<b>Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve</b>	Coastal Science Workshops	Diverse audience, including land managers, restoration specialists, educators	<a href="http://grandbaynerr.org/">http://grandbaynerr.org/</a>
<b>Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve</b>	Leave No Trace; Master Naturalist; Student Field Experiences; Community workshops	Nature Enthusiasts; K-12 Education	<a href="http://www.dmr.ms.gov/index.php/programs/grand-bay-nerr">http://www.dmr.ms.gov/index.php/programs/grand-bay-nerr</a>
<b>Gulf Coast Research Lab Marine Education Center</b>	Multiple educational opportunities to study aquatic life and habitats	Academic researchers; nature enthusiasts; fishing classes; K-12 education	<a href="http://gcr.usm.edu/">http://gcr.usm.edu/</a>
<b>Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain</b>	Adopt-A-Stream; Replant South Mississippi	Landowners, Nature enthusiasts	<a href="http://ltmcp.org/">http://ltmcp.org/</a>
<b>Mississippi State Extension Service</b>	Master Naturalist	Nature Enthusiasts	<a href="http://extension.msstate.edu/about-extension/research-and-extension-centers">http://extension.msstate.edu/about-extension/research-and-extension-centers</a>
<b>Mississippi Wildlife Federation</b>	Habitat Stewards; Adopt-a-Stream	Nature Enthusiasts	<a href="http://mswildlife.org/about-us/">http://mswildlife.org/about-us/</a>
<b>Pascagoula River Audubon Center</b>	Master Naturalist; All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory	Nature Enthusiasts	<a href="http://pascagoula.river.audubon.org/">http://pascagoula.river.audubon.org/</a> 228-475-0825
<b>The Crosby Arboretum</b>	Native habitats education	Nature enthusiasts; School children	<a href="http://crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/events">http://crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu/events</a>

	Curriculum	Audience	Contact Information
<b>WORKFORCE TRAINING</b>			
<b>Certified Interpretive Guides</b>	Focus on Environmental Education and Interpretive Guides	Individual members who work at parks, museums, nature centers, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, historical and cultural sites, commercial tour companies	<a href="https://www.interpnet.com/nai/Certification/nai/_certification/NAI_Certification.aspx?hkey=0c08ac07-c574-4560-940f-82fba3a22be9">https://www.interpnet.com/nai/Certification/nai/_certification/NAI_Certification.aspx?hkey=0c08ac07-c574-4560-940f-82fba3a22be9</a>
<b>Conservation Corps</b>	Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative	Young adults and veterans	<a href="http://www.corpsnetwork.org/gulf-coast-restoration-corps">http://www.corpsnetwork.org/gulf-coast-restoration-corps</a>
<b>MS Gulf Coast Community College (Jackson County Campus, Jefferson Davis Campus)</b>	Estuarine Education & Leadership Development Center (Assoc. Pgm in Outdoor Recreation Leadership - Jackson Co); Hospitality and Resort Management Center (JD Campus)	Degree program & continuing education students	<a href="http://www.mgccc.edu/estuarine-education-center/">http://www.mgccc.edu/estuarine-education-center/</a> <a href="http://www.mgccc.edu/hospitality-and-resort-management-center/">http://www.mgccc.edu/hospitality-and-resort-management-center/</a>
<b>University of Southern MS</b>	Disability Studies	Nature-based Adventure Therapy sessions; advising on ADA-friendly recreational opportunities	<a href="https://www.usm.edu/disability-studies/gulf-park-campus-overview">https://www.usm.edu/disability-studies/gulf-park-campus-overview</a>
<b>Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast</b>	Visitor Touch Point Training	Front-line tourism employees	Karen Conner
<b>SAFETY TRAINING</b>			
<b>Department of Marine Resources</b>	Boater Education	Recreational boaters	<a href="http://www.dmr.ms.gov/images/publications/2015%20Boaters%20Guide.pdf">http://www.dmr.ms.gov/images/publications/2015%20Boaters%20Guide.pdf</a> (228) 523-4134
<b>MGCCC</b>	CPR & Safety	Employees at child care centers, pools, and non-healthcare employers	<a href="http://catalog.mgccc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=8&amp;poid=621">http://catalog.mgccc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=8&amp;poid=621</a>
<b>Red Cross</b>	Health & Safety; Disaster Training	Courses available for a wide variety of purposes	<a href="http://www.redcross.org/local/mississippi/take-a-class">http://www.redcross.org/local/mississippi/take-a-class</a>

	Curriculum	Audience	Contact Information
<b>BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT</b>			
<b>Chambers of Commerce</b>	Multiple training opportunities	Business owners	Varies across the coast
<b>MS State University</b>	Natural Resources Enterprises	Landowners; Small businesses	<a href="http://www.naturalresources.msstate.edu/">http://www.naturalresources.msstate.edu/</a>
<b>Wildlife Mississippi/ Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation</b>	Conservation Finance	Landowners	<a href="http://www.wildlifemiss.org/Education/CFC.aspx">http://www.wildlifemiss.org/Education/CFC.aspx</a> (662) 686-3375
<b>HUNTING &amp; FISHING</b>			
<b>Coastal Conservation Association</b>	Fishing Seminars	Sport fisheries	<a href="https://www.cca.ms/about-cca/">https://www.cca.ms/about-cca/</a>
<b>MGCCC</b>	CPR & Safety	Students, general public, and non-healthcare providers	<a href="http://catalog.mgccc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=8&amp;poid=621">http://catalog.mgccc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=8&amp;poid=621</a>
<b>MS Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks</b>	“GO WILD” Classroom Programs; Fishing education	School children	<a href="http://www.mdwfp.com/learn-teach/statewide-outreach.aspx">http://www.mdwfp.com/learn-teach/statewide-outreach.aspx</a>
<b>Red Cross</b>	CPR & Safety	Students, general public, volunteers, and professionals	<a href="http://www.redcross.org/local/mississippi/take-a-class">http://www.redcross.org/local/mississippi/take-a-class</a>

# APPENDIX I: RECOMMENDED NBT RECOGNITION PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND CHECKLIST



# GULF COAST OUTPOST

Does your business make every effort to celebrate the Coast's natural resources with visitors while protecting clean water, reducing litter and providing a safe experience? Would you like to be a Recognized Nature Based Tourism Business? If so, GULF COAST OUTPOST may be for you!

Goal: Recognition will be awarded to ecologically sustainable Nature Based Tourism Businesses that foster "environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and conservation."

Target Businesses: The target audience for nature based business recognition includes businesses whose primary purpose is contributing to the enjoyment of South Mississippi's Natural Heritage, including among others, tour guides, charter boat operators, eco-fitness guides, outfitters, eco-lodges, agri-tourism, and other businesses where nature based activities are 50% or more of the primary business line.

## I.0 CHECKLIST

To receive your "Green Card" and certificate as a recognized Mississippi Gulf Coast Green Guide, please complete the checklist to determine if you are eligible to be recognized as a Mississippi Gulf Coast Green Guide. 80 points or greater will be required for recognition.

### 1.1 HOW "GREEN" IS YOUR BUSINESS? YES IS REQUIRED

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does 50% or more of your primary business line focus on Nature Based activities?

If **Yes**, provide the name of your business and continue to next section:

---

If **No**, your business is not defined as a Nature Based Tourism Business and cannot be "recognized" as a Mississippi Gulf Coast Green Guide. **STOP HERE**

### 1.2 IS YOUR BUSINESS LEGALLY OPERATING AND INSURED? YES IS REQUIRED

Yes [ ] No [ ] Has your business obtained all required licenses, registrations, insurances, and permits and is legally operating in Mississippi?

If **Yes**, continue to the next section.

If **No**, your business must obtain all licenses and permits before being considered for Recognition as a Mississippi Gulf Coast Green Guide. **STOP HERE**

*Once checklist is completed, please submit to Rhonda Price (rhonda.price@dmr.ms.gov) for issuance of green card and certificate.*

# Recognition Program Checklist

## Nature Based Tourism Voluntary Recognition Program Checklist

### 1.3 DEVELOPMENT OF KEY PLANS FOR SUSTAINABLE GREEN BUSINESS - 10 POINTS (5 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Has your business developed a business plan with emphasis on sustainable and responsible operations and growth management?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Has your business developed an environmental management plan or natural resources stewardship plan?

### 1.4 OWNER/OPERATOR PARTICIPATION IN TRAINING FOR SUSTAINABILITY - 20 POINTS

Yes [ ] No [ ] Provide the names and dates of relevant training completed. There is a minimum of four training programs required in the following areas (The following programs will count as two training programs each: master naturalists training, leave no trace training or habitat stewardship training) Introduction to Nature Based Tourism, South Mississippi Natural Habitats, Environmental Stewardship, and Health & Safety (List of training opportunities provided on last page):

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1.5 STAFF CONDUCT AND SAFETY TRAINING - 3 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide staff training regarding professional conduct?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide staff training regarding natural hazard preparation and evacuation?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide staff to be trained regarding safety and CPR?

### 1.6 STAFF WATERSHED AND STEWARDSHIP TRAINING - 3 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide staff training regarding watershed connectivity?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide staff training regarding environmental stewardship?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide staff training on heritage and cultural aspects of the Mississippi Gulf Coast?



# GULF COAST OUTPOST

## 1.7 TELLING MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST'S STORY - 3 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business tell an accurate story of the Mississippi Gulf Coast?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business tell the truth in advertisements, signs and other communications?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business seek opportunities to market the Mississippi Gulf Coast and other nature-based tourism opportunities?

## 1.8 NATURE BASED TOURISM BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES - 15 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use natural pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use proper spill prevention controls, countermeasure practices, and proper disposal practices for paints, oils, gasoline, grease, chemicals, etc.?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business ensure no illicit cross connections exist?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business properly maintain septic system, if used, and ensure no sanitary sewage enters waterbodies?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business ensure no direct discharges of contaminated materials enter nearby waterbodies?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use recycled materials where possible?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use biodegradable materials where possible?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business reduce the amount of imperviousness on site?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business utilize sediment and erosion controls on site (If applicable)?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business utilize green infrastructure on site for stormwater runoff management?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business control litter on site?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have composting toilets?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use solar panels?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have pet waste stations?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business properly dispose of wildlife, fish, or bait carcasses?

## 1.9 NBT BUSINESS OPERATIONS CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 5 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business maintain its property using Best Management Practices (BMPs)?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business practice water conservation (i.e. permeable pavement, water conservation, use recycled materials)?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use upland areas for storage & maintenance?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have a vegetated area or conservation easement on your property?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business avoid toxic lawn & garden chemicals to the greatest extent possible?

## Recognition Program Checklist

# Nature Based Tourism Voluntary Recognition Program Checklist

### 1.10 NBT BUSINESS OPERATIONS CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 9 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have a dock anchoring system that is designed to resist storm surge, high winds, floating debris?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have docks and piers that can bear the load of daily traffic as well as the increased stress of storm surge, high winds and floating debris?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have buildings constructed to withstand hurricane force winds?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business minimize paved surfaces for parking?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business ensure safe pedestrian access?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide for emergency access?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business building(s) meet accessibility standards?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have sanitary systems designed to withstand hurricanes and tropical storms?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have fueling systems designed to withstand hurricane and tropical storms?

### 1.11 NBT BUSINESS MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 8 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business conduct employee training on your Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and Spill Prevention and Countermeasure Plan (SPCC)?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business train employees to use equipment & chemicals according to established standards?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business regularly review emergency response procedures with staff?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business train employees to watch for inappropriate discharges?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have a predetermined procedure for handling pollutants?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business maintain up-to-date training records?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business distribute environmental education materials to patrons?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business encourage and recognize visitors who try to prevent pollution?

### 1.12 EMERGENCY PLANNING CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 4 POINTS (1 EACH)

- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) plan?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have regular emergency training and drills for staff?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business store oil spill response equipment in a convenient, readily accessible location?
- Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have an evacuation plan that is clearly communicated to staff?



# GULF COAST OUTPOST

## 1.13 EVACUATION PROCEDURE CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 1 POINT

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have an active evacuation plan for hurricanes or other disasters?

## 1.14 WASTE CONTAINMENT & DISPOSAL CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 11 POINTS (1 EACH)

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business store, use, and dispose hazardous waste, including solvents, in accordance with federal & state regulations?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business reduce waste in your daily operations?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide trash cans, bins, dumpsters, etc. that are covered, well-marked and convenient?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide or promote solid waste (oil, solvents, etc.) recycling?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide or promote liquid waste recycling?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business minimize use of hazardous products?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business follow recommended waste disposal methods?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business track pollution incidents?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business provide materials needed for spill-proof oil changes?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business organize litter cleanups along nearby surface water bodies?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business train staff in proper waste management?

## 1.15 STORMWATER MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 4 POINTS (1 EACH)

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business have a current Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP)?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business cultivate vegetated areas?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business limit the paved surfaces at the marina?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business practice good housekeeping methods to reduce stormwater pollution?

## 1.16 OUTREACH & VISITOR EDUCATION CHECKLIST QUESTIONS - 4 POINTS (1 EACH)

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business post educational environmental information in clearly marked places (bulletin board)?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business encourage and recognize visitors who try to prevent pollution?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business distribute environmental education materials to patrons?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Does your business use social media to communicate NBT practices with visitors?

## Nature Based Tourism Voluntary Recognition Program Checklist

### 1.17 EXAMPLE TRAINING PROGRAMS ARE PROVIDED IN THE TABLE BELOW:

PROVIDER	TRAINING PROGRAMS
Chambers of Commerce	Multiple training opportunities
Coastal Conservation Association	Fishing Seminars
Conservation Corps	Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative
Department of Marine Resources	Boater Education
Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve	Leave No Trace; Master Naturalist; Student Field Experiences; Community Workshops
Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve	Coastal Science Workshops
Gulf Coast Research Lab Marine Education Center	Multiple educational opportunities to study aquatic life and habitats
Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain	Adopt-A-Stream; Replant South Mississippi
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources	Habitat Stewards
Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks	“GO WILD” Classroom Programs; Fishing education
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (Jackson County Campus, Jefferson-Davis Campus)	Estuarine Education & Leadership Development Center (Associated Program in Outdoor Recreation Leadership - Jackson County); Hospitality and Resort Management Center (Jefferson-Davis Campus)
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College	CPR & Safety
Mississippi State University	Natural Resources Enterprises
Mississippi Wildlife Federation	Habitat Stewards; Adopt-a-Stream
MSU Extension Service	Master Naturalist
Pascagoula River Audubon Center	Master Naturalist; All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory
Red Cross	Health & Safety; Disaster Training
The Crosby Arboretum	Native habitats education
University of Southern Mississippi	Institute for Disability Studies
Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast	Visitor Touch Point Training
Wildlife Mississippi/ Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation	Conservation Finance

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT**

<http://www.dmr.ms.gov>

## APPENDIX J: EXISTING PUBLIC ACCESS LOCATIONS

HANCOCK COUNTY		
NAME	CITY	TYPE
Bayou Caddy Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Washington Street Pier and Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch Pier
Bay St. Louis-Waveland Yacht Club Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Jim Rutherford Pier	*	Pier
Dunbar Avenue Pier	*	Pier
Cedar Point Pier and Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch Pier
Diamondhead Marina and Boat Launch	Diamondhead	Harbor Marina
Curtis Johnson Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch Pier
Pearlington Boat Launch and Pier	Pearlington	Boat Launch Pier
Log Town Boat Launch	Log Town	Boat Launch
Bayou LaCroix Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Bordages Brothers Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Bay St. Louis Municipal Harbor	*	Harbor Marina
Bay Marina and RV Park	*	Harbor Marina
McLeod Park	*	Park
Bayou Phillip Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Garfield Ladner Memorial Pier	Waveland	Pier
Turtle Landing Fish Camp	*	Pier
Clermont Harbor Pier	*	Pier
Bayou Caddy Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Islander Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Roy Baxter Marina	*	Boat Launch
Bayou Talla Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Hollywood Casino Marina	Bay St. Louis	Harbor Marina
LaFrance Fish Camp	*	Boat Launch
Port Bienville Industrial Park Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Whites Bayou RV Park	*	Boat Launch
Oak Harbor Marina	*	Harbor Marina

<b>HARRISON COUNTY</b>		
<b>NAME</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>TYPE</b>
Hiller Park Boat Launch	Biloxi	Boat Launch
Biloxi Schooners and Pier	Biloxi	Pier
Henderson Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Merlin Necaise Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Gulfport Lake Boat Launch	Gulfport	Boat Launch
Pass Christian Harbor	Pass Christian	Harbor Marina
Bayou Portage Marina	Pass Christian	Harbor Marina
Long Beach Small Craft Harbor	Long Beach	Harbor Marina
Gulfport Small Craft Harbor	Gulfport	Harbor Marina
Keesler Outdoor Recreation and Marina	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Biloxi Boardwalk Marina	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Point Cadet Marina	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Biloxi Small Craft Harbor	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Cedar Lake Boat Launch	Biloxi	Boat Launch
Biloxi River Boat Launch	Biloxi	Boat Launch
Eagle Point Boat Launch	Biloxi	Boat Launch
M & M Boat Launch	Gulfport	Boat Launch
Discovery Bay Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Westside Pier	Gulfport	Pier
Ken Combs Pier	Gulfport	Pier
Coast Coliseum Pier	Biloxi	Pier
Veterans Avenue Pier	Biloxi	Pier
Lighthouse Pier	Biloxi	Pier
I-110 Ramp Walk	Biloxi	Boardwalk
Beau Rivage Marina	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Kuhn Street Pier and Boat Launch	Biloxi	Boat Launch Pier
Lee Street Boat Launch	Biloxi	Boat Launch
Palace Casino Marina	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Old Ice Wharf Pier	Biloxi	Pier
Lighthouse Fishing Docks	Biloxi	Pier
Parker Street Pier	Biloxi	Pier
Porter Avenue North Pier	Biloxi	Pier
Forest Avenue Boat Launch and Pier	Biloxi	Boat Launch Pier

D'Iberville Marina	D'Iberville	Harbor Marina
Fountain Street Pier	D'Iberville	Pier
Handsboro Boat Launch	Gulfport	Boat Launch
Kremers Landing	Gulfport	Boat Launch
Urie Pier	Gulfport	Pier
Moses Pier	Gulfport	Pier
Long Beach Fishing Pier 1	Long Beach	Pier
Long Beach Fishing Pier 2	Long Beach	Pier
Jim Simpson Sr. Fishing Pier	Long Beach	Pier
Long Beach Yacht Club	Long Beach	Harbor Marina
Pass Christian Yacht Club	Pass Christian	Harbor Marina
Pass Christian Boat Launch	Pass Christian	Boat Launch
Pelican Cove Marina	Pass Christian	Harbor Marina
Gulfport Yacht Club	Gulfport	Harbor Marina
Biloxi Yacht Club	Biloxi	Harbor Marina
Your Mama'z House Fish Camp	Biloxi	Boat Launch
Biloxi Fishing Pier	Biloxi	Pier
<b>JACKSON COUNTY</b>		
<b>NAME</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>TYPE</b>
Gulf Island National Seashore (GINS)	*	National Park
Pascagoula River Wildlife Management Area	*	WMA
Shepard State Park	*	State Park
Graveline Road Boat Launch and Pier	Gautier	Boat Launch Pier
Simmons Bayou Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
River Park Boat launch and Pier	Pascagoula	Boat Launch
Lighthouse Park Boat Launch and Pier	Pascagoula	Boat Launch Pier
Point Park Boat Launch and Pier	Pascagoula	Boat Launch Pier
Beach Promenade Pier	*	Pier
Ladner Avenue Boat Launch	Pascagoula	Boat Launch
Pascagoula Inner Harbor	Pascagoula	Harbor Marina
Magnolia Birding Pier	Pascagoula	Bird Watching
The Shed Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Davis Bayou Boat Launch (GINS)	*	Boat Launch
Escatawpa River Presley Outing RV Camp Site and Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Escatawpa River Shingle Mill Road Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch

Bayou Heron Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Middle Bay Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Pascagoula River Blueways	*	Blueways
Indian Point RV Resort	*	Boat Launch
Ocean Springs Harbor	Ocean Springs	Harbor Marina
River City Harbor Marina	Moss Point	Harbor Marina
Little River Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Santa Maria Rv Resort Marina	Gautier	Harbor Marina
Tucei's Fish Camp	Gautier	Boat Launch
Mary Walker Marina	Gautier	Harbor Marina
Brittany Avenue Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Old Fort Bayou Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Harbor Landing Yacht Club/Marina	Ocean Springs	Harbor Marina
Percy Miller Marine Education Park	Ocean Springs	Boat Launch
Lake Mars Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Graveline Bay Boat Launch (Webb's Landing)	*	Boat Launch
Johns Bayou Marina	*	Boat Launch
San Juan Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Paige Bayou Marina	*	Harbor Marina
Poticaw Fishing Camp and Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Four Mile Creek Boat Ramp	*	Boat Launch
I-10 Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Bellview Street Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
McInnis Bayou Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Old Spanish Fort Boat Launch	Pascagoula	Boat Launch
Singing River Yacht Club	Pascagoula	Harbor Marina
Bayou Cumbest Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Point of Pines Fish Camp and Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Highway 63 Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Cumbest Bluff Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Lower Pascagoula River Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Roy Cumbest Boat Ramp	*	Boat Launch
Dog River Boat Ramp	*	Boat Launch
Jaycee Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
Tiki Marina	*	Harbor Marina

Gautier City Park	*	Park
Ocean Springs Yacht Club	*	Harbor Marina
Ocean Springs Fishing Pier	Ocean Springs	Pier
<b>GEORGE COUNTY</b>		
<b>NAME</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>TYPE</b>
Pascagoula River George County Blueway	*	Blueway
Josephine Sandbar	*	General NBT Destination
Merrill Bridge	*	General NBT Destination
Jackson Sandhill Preserve	*	Preserve
Depot Creek Greenway	*	Greenway
<b>PEARL RIVER COUNTY</b>		
<b>NAME</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>TYPE</b>
Walkiah Bluff Wildlife Management Area	*	WMA
Pearl River Wildlife Management Area	*	WMA
Bogue Chitto Wildlife Refuge	*	Wildlife Refuge
Walkiah Bluff Road Boat Launch	*	Boat Launch
<b>STONE COUNTY</b>		
<b>NAME</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>TYPE</b>
Red Creek Blueway	*	Blueway
Red Creek Wildlife Management Area	*	WMA



MISSISSIPPI SANDHILL CRANE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE - PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY USFWS

