

THE RELATION OF WATER RESOURCES TO THE RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST*

by

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Introduction

My purpose this morning is to present to you one section of a study entitled: THE RELATION OF WATER RESOURCES TO THE INDUSTRIAL AND RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST. I am prepared to report in brief form my findings concerned with the relation of water resources to the recreational potential of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. My presentation is divided into five parts. First, is the National Demand for Recreation in which I will discuss national trends. Second, is the "Assets" of the Mississippi Coast, i.e., what I consider to be the main assets. Third, I will present the plans I have discovered that exist for the islands and the present status of these plans. Fourth, I shall relate to you other plans that exist for the tri-county study area. And last, I will discuss my own personal evaluation of the coast.

National Demand for Recreation

In general, recreation is becoming more important to the American family. The principle factors that have caused this interest are, (1) growing urbanization, (2) increased mobility of the labor force, (3) more leisure time, (4) increased demand for a greater variety of recreation activities, and (5) rising incomes.

By the year 2000, approximately seventy-three per cent of the country's inhabitants, or 250 million people will live in metropolitan areas. In 1960, sixty-three per cent, or 113 million people lived in metropolitan areas. With these urban parks and recreational areas overcrowded, this

*This study area includes Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson counties.

increased growth in urban centers will create a tremendous demand to non-urban areas within travel distance from large cities.

The number of automobiles on the nation's highways in 1960, was fifty-nine million. In 1980, this figure is estimated to reach 120 million, and by the year 2000, the number of automobiles on the nation's highways should increase to 244 million.

The number of households in 1960 was approximately fifty-three million. By the year 2000, this figure is expected to reach ninety-nine million. In this same forty year period, per capita purchases will more than double, going from \$1,800 to \$4,000. Personal consumption spending will increase to \$1.3 trillion from \$329 billion. These increases in the number of households, amount of purchases and consumption expenditures should result in equally high increases in future travel and recreation expenditures of all types.

Furthermore, the number of occurrences of outdoor recreation activity is expected to increase by more than fifty per cent by 1975. By the year 2000 the number of occurrences could triple. Of further significance, future demand will be greatest in the following activities: swimming, outdoor games, and sports; sightseeing; boating, camping, and picnicking.¹

All of the above national trends are of great importance to the Mississippi coast. Knowledge of these trends are significant in planning future recreational facilities.

Another interesting fact is that only seven per cent of the shoreline of the United States is in public ownership.² Of this seven per cent not all falls in the most desirable category of beach. Some shoreline is classified as marsh and bluff and therefore is of lesser value.

"Assets" of the Mississippi Coast

In light of these national trends and limited beach areas, it would appear that the Mississippi coast is in a very good position to attract more than its share of potential visitors.

¹"Tourist and Recreation Potential: St. Clair County, Alabama," Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, June, 1963, pp. 26-27.

²Report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission to the President and the Congress, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1962, Report No. 4.

The greatest single undeveloped attraction of the Mississippi coast is the offshore islands. Because of marine vegetation, the Mississippi Sound has a murky appearance. Visitors who prefer clear blue water (well over a majority) would seek recreation in Florida because of its reputation. However, the beaches on the islands and the water around the islands have similar characteristics to those of Florida and, therefore, development of these islands would attract many visitors that would normally seek recreation elsewhere.

Easy access to an area may be considered to be of grave significance in inducing persons to visit a region. With the completion of the proposed Interstate 10, the Mississippi coast will be easily accessible from east and west.

Presently, Southern Airways is the only airlines that is serving the Gulf coast. However, in January (1968), Mr. Hurley Clark, Gulfport Municipal Airport manager, reported negotiation with another air lines in order to increase geographic coverage.³

Having presented the national trends in recreation and the assets on the coast, a review of plans for the offshore islands and Mississippi coast is in order before potential may be discussed.

Island Development

The only islands that were found to have development plans were Deer and Cat. De Laoreal Engineers, Inc., of New Orleans, have prepared an extensive plan layout of Deer Island. Some plans have been prepared for Cat Island, and the owner Mr. Nathan Boddie has completed some construction.

Deer Island

The Deer Island study proposed a thirty year development project containing 3, 578 acres with an estimated cost of \$43.3 million. The island will provide room for a substantial increase in the resident population for the city of Biloxi, as well as, areas for the development of a retirement community and "second homes" for those attracted to the

³Telephone interview with Mr. Hurley Clark, January 31, 1968.

gulf coast. Some 1,620 acres will be available for public or semi-public recreational uses.⁵

The Mississippi State Supreme Court has given permission for the development project. However, because of the high interest on bonds, and the state of the current money market, construction has been postponed.⁶

Cat Island

Mr. Nathan Boddie, owner of Cat Island, has recently completed dredging a channel in order to facilitate access to the island. The 5,700 foot channel is sixty feet wide and eight feet deep. Most of this channel (approximately 3,000 feet) extends inside the island perimeter while approximately 2,700 feet extend in the general direction of the Mississippi coast.

Before any of the islands can be developed the mosquito problem must be solved. The Gulf Coast Mosquito Control Commission is presently assisting Mr. Boddie in combating the problem. Last November (1967), Mr. Boddie felt they were making great strides. He did not specify a date for development of the islands but was hopeful that construction could begin in the relatively near future.⁷

Coastal Development

Interviews with individuals on the coast and secondary research of Mississippi Newspapers and magazines produced the plans discussed in this next section.

Details were kept to a minimum for purposes of this paper.

Harrison County Recreation Area

The Harrison County Development Commission has submitted to the State Park Commission and Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, a plan

⁵Personal Interview with Mr. Al Duckett, President of the Biloxi Bridge and Park Commission, September 30, 1967.

⁶"Duckett, Mayor Tells of Deer Island Status," The Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald, December 29, 1967, p. 8.

⁷Personal interview with Mr. Nathan V. Boddie, November 11, 1967.

proposal for a civic and convention center, and a recreation area. The convention center will have a 10,000 seat capacity and the recreation area will contain ninety acres south of Highway 90 between Gulfport and Biloxi.

The recreation area will consist of a large amusement park, a deep water fishing pier, a small craft harbor, bath houses, and over 5,000 feet of new sand swimming beach.⁸

Pearl River Development

Work is scheduled to begin sometime this year (1968) in opening remote wilderness areas along the Pearl River from Nanih Waiya to the Gulf coast. A new water route will be created beginning at the origin of the Pearl River and extending to NASA, New Orleans, and ending on the coast.

A team of experts from the Conservation Foundation in Washington, D.C., stated that the river could become a national scenic boatway attracting tourists from the gulf coast and New Orleans. According to the report, 50,000 pleasure boats are based in New Orleans.⁹

Harrison County Long-Range Surface Water Development Plan

A long-range surface water development plan for Harrison County has been prepared by an engineering consulting firm for the Harrison County Development Commission. The \$17 million plan calls for construction of five reservoirs in Harrison County.¹⁰ Even though the primary purpose of the plan is to supply water to industry and municipalities, these reservoirs could be used for recreational purposes.

⁸"Proposed Harrison County Recreation Area on Beach Front," Down South, May-June, 1967, p. 22.

⁹"From Nanih Waiya to NASA," Mississippi Game and Fish, (November-December, 1967), pp. 16-18.

¹⁰Telephone interview with Mr. W. Lee Wood, Vice President of Mississippi Power Company, March 14, 1968.

Second Home and Retirement Projects

Other than the Deer Island plan, three additional projects were found that offer an opportunity for second homes and retirement communities. Briefly they are Eagle Point, Lake Villa and Hickory Hill Estates.

Eagle Point

Eagle Point is located at the junction of the Biloxi and Tchouta-cabouffa Rivers in Harrison County. It consists of eighty-eight waterfront homesites on the Biloxi River at Back Bay. Lots are selling for \$5,500 each, with the water and sewage systems being furnished by the city.¹¹

Lake Villa

Another new subdivision recently annexed to Biloxi is Lake Villa. Located on Back Bay, it consists of eighty-eight lots ranging in price from \$8,000 to \$15,000. The \$15,000 lots are all waterfront sites while the lower priced lots have indirect access to the bay by a boat launch ramp. According to Mr. J.C. Ellis, Realtor, the construction costs of the homes are expected to range from \$30,000 to \$50,000 each.¹²

Hickory Hill Estates

Located just north of Interstate 10 on the Pascagoula River is another subdivision that affords the opportunity for second homes and a retirement community. Hickory Hill Estates presently contains 1,000 lots but will ultimately expand to over 1,400.

Currently there are 280 lots for second homes but will later be increased to approximately 430. The second home lots range in price from \$995 to \$1,495, depending upon size. The smallest lot (50' X 120') is sized for parking a trailer. Two other sizes (60' X 120' and 70' X 120') are laid out for construction of small houses. In the past seven months, 238 of the second home lots have been sold.

¹¹Eagle Point. Johnson Homes, 124 Markham Drive, Long Beach, Mississippi.

¹²Telephone interview with Mr. J.C. Ellis, March 28, 1968.

Certain requirements have been placed on construction costs of homes for all lots. The subdivision has been categorized into seven plats. The construction costs for plats one through six, range from \$12,500 to \$30,000. Construction costs for plat number seven has not been set.¹³

Expansion of Marina Facilities

The remaining plans for the coast deal with the marinas that are located in the three counties. All marinas were contacted and all but two were very helpful in discussing future plans.

The two largest expansion plans were discovered in interviews with Mr. John Martiniere, Director of the Biloxi Port Commission, and Mr. A.E. Kremer, Owner of Kremer Marine Works.

The Biloxi Marina and Park Facility

Mr. John Martiniere reported Plans for increasing the number of berths in the Biloxi Small Craft Harbor from forty-six to 160. A park will also be included in the \$1,137,000 project with picnic tables, barbecue pits, and other outing accessories being provided.¹⁴

Kremer Marina

Mr. A.E. Kremer has plans for constructing a marina next to his marine works in Handsboro. Phase I plans call for a 250 boat marina that will accommodate boats up to sixty feet long. Also included are a marine supply store and restaurant.¹⁵

Other plans on the coast include a unique boat motel with twenty-four units and several improvements of marina facilities in order to accommodate more boats of a larger size.

¹³Telephone interview with Mr. Dewey Lindsay, Manager of Hickory Hill Estates, April 1, 1968.

¹⁴Telephone interview with Mr. John Martiniere, March 14, 1968.

¹⁵Telephone interview with Mr. A.E. Kremer, March 14, 1968.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the potential of the Mississippi Gulf coast is partially exemplified by the plans presented in this paper. However, the greatest potential is found in development of the offshore islands. It is believed that this development would attract many visitors and permanent residents (retired people) that under previous conditions would not have come. New demand would become evident for retirement homes and therefore, more construction would be required. As a result economic activity would be greatly increased.

It must be emphasized that complete control by the Federal Government may not be altogether favorable. By encouraging private interest a wider variety of recreational facilities would be provided. Some of the visitors, who would normally travel to Florida and neighboring recreational areas, would visit the Mississippi coast.

Of further significance to the recreational potential is the origin and expenditures of visitors to the coast. If a study of this nature was prepared, this information would be invaluable to owners of businesses in giving insight as to what geographical area advertising should be increased or begun.

It appears feasible that a study to determine the "best" mode of transporting visitors to the islands should be prepared. The objective of the study would be threefold. First, investigate the psychological effect of remaining on an island without immediate access to the mainland--as would be the case without a bridge or causeway. Second, determine if any, the loss of the island effect should a bridge or causeway be constructed to provide transportation to the islands. And last, but by no means least, would be to combine the information found in meeting the previous objectives with cost estimates of all alternative methods. Then a recommendation should be made by the researcher based on his findings.

If these two studies are prepared, and private involvement in the island development is encouraged, the recreational revenue generated from activities of visitors will be much more than twice its present level.