

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATION DEVELOPMENTS  
IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN MISSISSIPPI

by

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INTRODUCTION

Opportunities for the development of significant outdoor recreation areas in the private sector are numerous in Mississippi. These opportunities are significant and substantial in both quantity and quality - in short, they are real.

Perhaps you have heard this sort of statement before, or one very much like it, by individuals extolling the virtues of a particular area or the entire recreation field. So have I. But the ones I have heard have usually been broad statements, generalizations. In contrast, I believe I can document my statement to an extent sufficient to convince you there are a large number and variety of specific opportunities.

I assume by the title of this conference and the identification of the principal sponsor, you are primarily interested in the relation of water areas to recreation development. However, while most outdoor recreation areas in Mississippi are water-dependent or water-enhanced, there are also some important activities which are not and I will include these in my remarks.

Appraisal of Outdoor Recreation Potentials

Early in 1966 the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts adopted a nation-wide objective of systematically evaluating certain specific untapped potentials for outdoor recreation areas. This objective was recommended to the individual state organizations and the Mississippi Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts promptly endorsed it. At the same time, the Soil Conservation Service was called on and agreed to assist.

The results of this activity in Mississippi are the basis for my comments today.

Mississippi was the first state in the nation to initiate this effort, sponsored by the State Association and the individual Soil Conservation Districts on the local level, with coordinating and recording functions being carried out by the Soil Conservation Service. This was an activity of teamwork, with virtually every major federal and state agency concerned with land and water resources and future recreational aspects of our state making substantial contributions.

Many states, in organizing for this activity, elected to conduct this study in a small number of counties (from 12-20). In Mississippi, however, we selected 60 counties in the beginning and this number was later increased to include all counties in the state. However, in the interest of economy we selected 31 counties for various reasons which were studied following the full procedures. The remaining 51 were studied in less detail and in relation to one of the 31 "key" counties.

We also determined in the beginning that we would conduct these studies by major river basins, to be timed to agree with the schedules for river basin studies. This approach was followed and upon completion the results published in six reports, conforming generally to the major basin areas.

#### Appraisal Procedure

The procedural guidelines suggested that a working committee of lay and professional people who were well-informed about their county be called together for the recreation appraisals in each county. We were to then inventory with this group all the following sorts of resources possible:

1. Existing Lakes, Ponds, Reservoirs and Streams
2. Potential Impoundment Sites
3. Natural Areas
4. Scenic Areas
5. Historic Areas

Using information from these inventories, selected census data (population, income, climatic, land use, roads, etc.) and a pre-tested rating system, we asked the local group to evaluate or appraise the entire county's potentials for each of eleven (11) major types of outdoor recreation activities. This appraisal is expressed as points or a score, and also as an adjective rating.

As the final item, we asked the local people to estimate for the appraisal how many areas of each of the eleven (11) major categories would be developed by 1980, and how many new water areas would likely be built for recreation purposes by 1980.

Throughout this appraisal effort, we attempted to collect the same data and estimates in comparable detail on a county basis in each county. However, in the 51 associated counties we asked the local group to arrive at a generalized adjective rating of their county's potentials in relation to the results of the particular key county with which it was grouped. We used the full system of weighted values, census data, etc., to develop a numerical rating only in the 31 key counties.

Up to this point, I have only described this activity - what we were trying to do and how we went about it. What I think is most

important of all and perhaps what you will be most interested in are the results.

#### Existing Water Areas

As to the existing water areas, including natural lakes, man-made ponds and reservoirs, we tabulated a total of 123,399 areas of all sizes totaling as estimated 371,584 acres (TABLE I). And although there are many natural public lakes in this total, practically all of them have private land holdings bordering them and the vast majority are altogether on private ownerships.

Furthermore, while probably more than 90% of the man-made ponds and reservoirs are stocked with fish for sport fishing, this practice alone without any other development does not necessarily make a pond a recreation area. As a matter of fact, only a very small percentage of these areas have had improvements added specifically for recreation use.

Table I is a state summary of the inventories of existing water areas, by major river basins. However, it does not include perennial streams with a significant potential for recreation use. Data on this resource is included in each report.

#### Potential Impoundment Sites

An indication of the considerable potential for additional water areas is equally interesting. During the appraisal effort we listed a total of 123,314 sites with definite possibilities for impounding an estimated 508,376 acres of water (TABLE II). While engineering investigations were not available on all these sites, most were listed by state and federal agencies and knowledgeable local individuals.

In comparison with the item on existing water areas, an even larger percentage of these sites are on private land. And, although many may be bought and developed with public funds, we don't know how many or which ones. At this time these areas are privately-owned and constitute an opportunity in the private sector.

#### Natural, Scenic and Historic Areas

A third area of importance as revealed by the appraisals of potentials is in the group of natural, scenic and historic areas (TABLE III). The inventories revealed a total of 76,141 and 248 sites, respectively. These areas are, by and large, unique, outstanding or significant in some other respect.

Although we list these areas together and sometimes as a group, and they are sometimes thought of as having duplicating characteristics, each has a distinctive character of its own and a distinctive value as a recreation site.

Here again, a great majority of these sites are in private ownership today although perhaps the percentage is not as high as for undeveloped reservoir sites. Some, such as Indian mounds, are under the pro-

tection of Mississippi law even on private land and no doubt more will be purchased by the state in the future.

On the other hand, I personally feel that these sites will become much more important in the near future as attractions and as central features of recreation complexes. Increasing interest in them is apparent now and is expected to continue to grow. Such areas encompass a large portion of the basic urges that draw us to an outdoor experience in the first place - to go into the countryside and woods, to study nature or enjoy its beauty and quiet, to learn and understand more about men and events of the past.

These type developments can strongly complement water-based or other recreation activities and I am confident will increase. They afford many opportunities to the private developer and I feel there are many more of them than our inventory showed.

#### Development by 1980

Now, let's look briefly at the summaries of the estimates made by the 82 groups in 82 counties in Mississippi as to what is predicted to take place by 1980. In all cases, we stressed to the groups not to estimate what they thought could be done or should be done or ought to be done, but what they reasonably expected would take place. Even so, they were frequently optimistic, in my opinion, but these are composites of their judgments. (TABLES IV and V).

Furthermore, although you and I might agree that one or two of these items are apparently too generous, we found in checking back in the individual counties that it was difficult to show that such development could not happen. So we agreed the local people knew more about this than we, and if we weren't going to use their judgments we should not have asked for them.

On the other hand, these kinds of estimates are an indication of the interest prevalent throughout the state and an indication of the degree of opportunity. Even if we assume they are somewhat liberal, they are judgments of knowledge people based on local activity. In this light, they merit attention as an indicator of the degree of local interest and acceptance, and as indicators of coming trends.

Fundamentally, this is how I would characterize this study: An indicator of present potentials and future trends. We recognize this effort was not programmed nor carried out with the precise control or statistical accuracy of a research project, yet we felt such an effort would be worthwhile and events have proven this to be true.

In the first place, this was the first effort of its kind in Mississippi and it has assembled information which was unavailable anywhere. It has since stimulated other, more thorough studies.

It has also stimulated increased attention and interest on a local and multicounty level in the possibilities for recreation development by private and public groups.



The basic data has also been used as the basis for thoughtful planning in several areas.

Up to now, I've been talking about opportunities very broadly, in terms of statistics of five- and six-digit figures. The statistics I have used are valuable and constitute real potentials in the private sector. Hundreds of these areas will be and are being developed for recreation purposes, either for personal use or as a business open to the public for a fee. Either will relieve to a degree demand on public areas, although some private developments can provide some kinds of recreation experiences better than public areas.

But as regards real opportunity and for fear you will go away remembering only that I produced a mass of figures, I want to get a little more down-to-earth with you before I close.

### Kinds of Opportunities

What types of opportunity are we thinking about here? As I see it, there are three major types involved: (1) the opportunity for the development of recreation resources on private lands which will furnish a significant portion of the total demand; (2) the opportunity to preserve certain resources which are valuable because of their historical, scenic, natural, aesthetic or other characteristics, and (3) the opportunity to make a contribution to the economy.

Which of these is the most important? I think we would all agree that the first is certainly important; and perhaps we would agree the second is also important, although I believe it warrants a great deal more emphasis and attention. However, I consider the last the most important of all.

### Impact on the Economy

Within this item of the impact of recreation areas on the economy, there are two types of benefits. Indirect benefits include those resulting from the sale of land, the construction of reservoirs, roads, water and sewage systems, camping grounds, picnic areas, cottages and the purchase of furniture and appliances for them, boats, trailers, water skis and other items all the way to gasoline and suntan lotion bought in town by visitors. I consider these indirect benefits from recreation because they do not accrue to the recreation entrepreneur.

Yet these benefits can be tremendous, even before you count the 6 or 7 times this money is said to turn over before it leaves the community.

Do you have any idea? For example, let's assume just 25% of the new recreation water areas (TABLE IV) will be developed for one vacation cottage on a 20-acre lake. This is about 1125 areas. Using very conservative figures of \$6000 for 30 acres of land, \$2000 for the dam, \$5000 for the cottage, \$1000 to furnish it, \$1000 for water and sewage disposal, and \$5000 for one-half mile of gravel road we have a total estimate of \$20,000. Or a one-time, shot-in-the-arm to the economy of \$22,500,000 total indirect benefits.

This kind of economic benefits are worth our notice, and particularly when we consider all types of recreation developments and other indirect benefits which will be realized when an area is put into operation.

#### Benefits to the Recreation Operator

The other type of benefit to the economy is direct benefits, or those collected by the recreation operator and from which he profits. These are largely rents, use fees and admission charges for fishing, swimming, camping or others; and food, bait, supplies and anything else he has to sell.

This concern, above all others, is the most critical one in regard to this whole subject - opportunities for recreation development in the private sector - and must be given increased attention and support.

There is little question about the demand for more areas, or whether there is a plentiful supply of suitable sites, or their distribution or their variety. The answer to all of these is "Yes."

The crucial question is: "Will a private recreation area continue to operate if it is losing money?" The answer is "No." And I don't believe there is any question about it.

What can be done about it? An important part of this answer lies with those agencies, state and federal, who participate in developing public recreation areas or who have contacts with private landowners. We have an opportunity to encourage private interests to open recreation areas for a fee to take advantage of public areas nearby, as complementary attractions. And we have the opportunity and sometimes the responsibility to encourage and help them to do a good job in development, to set reasonable fees to take advantage of public demand, and to base it all on thorough, thoughtful planning.

However, perhaps the most important part of the answer to what can be done rests with you and me individually. We must be willing to pay reasonable fees for services rendered, and pay them, and encourage others to pay them. We must be willing to grant to the developer a reasonable return on his investment, and recognize that if he doesn't get it he won't be open next year and our favorite camping or hunting or fishing spot won't be available to us.

We must return to honoring private property and accept the fact that those woods are not anybody's to camp in or that fish anybody's to catch or that game anybody's to shoot, if by doing so we burn the woods or damage the fences or shoot a cow.

Yet we might be able to do any of these things and support recreation development by paying a small fee and in turn benefit the owner-operator, the local economy and Mississippi.

TABLE I. Existing Water Areas. Mississippi. (1)  
(Lakes, Ponds and Reservoirs)

	<u>0 - 5 Acres</u>		<u>5 - 20 Acres</u>		<u>Over 20 Acres</u>	
	No.	Acres	No.	Acres	No.	Acres
Northwest (Yazoo)	15,091	17,329	706	6,981	334	108,011
Northeast (Tombigbee)	26,676	27,281	1,142	8,619	135	21,754
Central (Big Black)	23,817	28,325	395	4,312	153	19,962
South Central (Pearl)	30,099	28,682	1,237	8,874	143	30,695
Southwest & Coastal (Ind. Tribs.)	7,824	5,760	75	725	32	19,044
Southeast (Pascagoula)	14,508	16,401	896	7,917	136	10,912
	<u>118,015</u>	<u>123,778</u>	<u>4,451</u>	<u>37,428</u>	<u>933</u>	<u>210,378</u>

TABLE II. Potential Water Areas. Mississippi. (1)

	<u>0 - 5 Acres</u>		<u>5 - 20 Acres</u>		<u>Over 20 Acres</u>	
	No.	Acres	No.	Acres	No.	Acres
Northwest (Yazoo)	12,950	14,450	3,505	22,506	1,109	33,479
Northeast (Tombigbee)	15,025	23,470	3,088	24,108	638	33,389
Central (Big Black)	12,550	14,750	2,809	19,025	634	25,327
South Central (Pearl)	23,500	22,700	4,670	33,787	1,287	83,023
Southwest & Coastal (Ind. Tribs.)	17,000	14,055	1,780	12,260	389	40,848
Southeast (Pascagoula)	17,950	16,220	3,215	26,505	1,215	48,474
	<u>98,975</u>	<u>105,645</u>	<u>19,067</u>	<u>138,191</u>	<u>5,272</u>	<u>264,540</u>

TABLE III. Other Potential Outdoor Recreation Areas. Mississippi.(1)

	<u>Natural</u>	<u>Scenic</u>	<u>Historic</u>
Northwest (Yazoo)	16	30	49
Northeast (Tombigbee)	24	23	77
Central (Big Black)	8	14	34
South Central (Pearl)	7	32	32
Southwest & Coastal (Ind. Tribs.)	10	21	23
Southeast (Pascagoula)	11	21	33
	<u>76</u>	<u>141</u>	<u>248</u>

TABLE IV. New Water Areas Expected to be Built for Recreation Purposes by 1980. Mississippi. (1)

	<u>No.</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Northwest (Yazoo)	844	10,140
Northeast (Tombigbee)	1,287	9,215
Central (Big Black)	1,027	10,000
South Central (Pearl)	578	9,265
Southwest & Coastal (Ind. Tribs.)	133	1,946
Southeast (Pascagoula)	636	8,722
	<u>4,505</u>	<u>49,288</u>



TABLE V. New Recreation Developments Established by 1980. Mississippi. (1)

	<u>Vacation Cabins</u>	<u>Camping Grounds</u>	<u>Picnic &amp; Field Sports</u>	<u>Fishing Waters</u>	<u>Golf Courses</u>
Northwest (Yazoo)	353	70	131	410	36
Northeast (Tombigbee)	2,020	84	268	2,353	34
Central (Big Black)	448	74	264	3,075	36
South Central (Pearl)	247	139	278	1,000	27
Southwest & Coastal (Ind. Tribs.)	97	48	90	277	13
Southeast (Pascagoula)	132	122	250	877	38
	<u>3,297</u>	<u>537</u>	<u>1,281</u>	<u>7,992</u>	<u>184</u>

  

	<u>Hunting Areas</u>	<u>Natural, Scenic &amp; Historic</u>	<u>Riding Stables</u>	<u>Shooting Preserves</u>	<u>Vaca- tion Farms</u>	<u>Water Sports</u>
Northwest (Yazoo)	348	21	29	13	4	68
Northeast (Tombigbee)	586	65	73	31	19	166
Central (Big Black)	640	29	66	23	25	126
South Central (Pearl)	413	44	90	26	10	162
Southwest & Coastal (Ind. Tribs.)	176	25	22	8	7	33
Southeast (Pascagoula)	260	34	76	30	15	96
	<u>2,423</u>	<u>218</u>	<u>356</u>	<u>131</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>651</u>

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References

1. "An Appraisal of Potentials for Outdoor Recreation Developments in Mississippi." (Six reports: Northwest, Northeast, Central, South Central, Southwest and Coastal, and Southeast Mississippi) Mississippi Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. 1966-1969.