

Pat Harrison Waterway District

1. Agency Mission Statement

The Pat Harrison Waterway District (PHWD) is a special fund agency of the State with the statutory missions of flood control, water management and recreation within the Pascagoula River Basin; this basin covers fifteen counties in Southeast Mississippi, from north of I-20 to the Gulf of Mexico; the region includes more than 15,000 miles of rivers and streams. We own and manage nine recreational parks and eight reservoirs. Our parks attract more than 650,000 visitors per year for camping, fishing, hiking and outdoor activities. Pat Harrison Waterway also operates and maintains 65 additional water retarding structures which work in conjunction with our dams to provide flood protection. In times of severe drought, Pat Harrison Waterway District releases reservoir waters to restore operational water levels benefitting the Jackson County Port, Chevron, and Mississippi Power. Our mission is to provide grants and technical assistance to member counties to assist with local water control, water supply and drainage projects for the benefit of all Mississippi citizens and for public health.

2. Agency Philosophy

The Pat Harrison Waterway District is dedicated to managing eight reservoirs/dams providing flood control throughout the Pascagoula River Basin – protecting property, in East Central and Southeastern Mississippi as well as providing outstanding recreational opportunities for guests seeking to experience Mississippi’s magnificent outdoor environment.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

Statewide Goal #1: Flood Control

Relevant Benchmarks #1.:

- By using the authority of the PHWD to develop watershed management plans, the upper basins that drain in the highly bio-diverse Pascagoula River can be properly maintained and monitored.

- To provide grants for drainage improvements and erosion control projects throughout our member counties.

Relevant Benchmarks #2.: Water Management

- Identify ecological stressors including habitat fragmentation and destruction, human induced changes in hydrology, altered sediment loading, and future barriers on the mainstream and tributaries. The watershed approach would break down the hydrologic and hydraulic study of these systems by watershed. The focus will establish a baseline of river health.
- Develop management guidelines for our watershed by focusing on the baseline values and developing a way to maintain or improve the health of the basin. Some key areas of focus include; water quality, sediment transportation, and debris removal. Best management practices will be implemented in restoring the biological integrity of the watersheds and ensuring all systems achieve the MDEQ attaining aquatic life use support designation.
- Provide grants to member counties for dry fire hydrant construction throughout Southeastern Mississippi and Coastal Plains Resource Conservation & Development Council Districts to help aid in fire protection.

Relevant Benchmarks #3.: Recreation and Tourism

- Rehabilitating and expanding the necessary infrastructure while providing affordable quality cabins, campsites and pavilions to the public. In the next year we will upgrade our boat ramps, and add watercraft rentals to our district parks. Other infrastructure types could include recreational greenways, educational boardwalks, elevated roadways, and other basic infrastructure rehabilitation to meet the needs of the community.
- Increase visitors to our District parks through in-state and out-of-state advertising programs such as trade shows, and welcome centers.

4. Overview of the Agency 5-year Strategic Plan:

Within the next year Pat Harrison Waterway District must stabilize the organization and ensure that member counties remain committed to the District. The District is now appraised of 10 member counties. We are targeting the possibility of Pearl River County

and Harrison County joining our district which would be beneficial to us since we do not receive any funding from the state. Currently, we are leasing the Little Black Creek campgrounds and revenue from this endeavor is now averaging \$7,000.00 per month net profit. We have also leased the waterslide area at Flint Creek Water Park, and by doing so we will receive \$20,000.00 plus a percentage of admission and monies to be collected for the waterslides and expanded activities in the next 2 years. Because we have leased this area, we no longer must incur the cost of maintaining it as well as the expense to hire the lifeguards or operating costs. We have cleared an area of Maynor Creek Waterpark for the development of an ATV trail. The Wayne County Board of Supervisors has been in support of this project to provide for a safe place for ATV enthusiast to ride instead of along the sides of roadways. We have also begun the task of creating a 13-mile equestrian trail at our Turkey Creek Water park in Newton County and in 2020 we hope to develop equestrian trails throughout the district to entice visitors to use the trail and experience all that our parks have to offer. With a resolution from the George, Greene, Jackson, and Stone County Board of Supervisors we are acting as a conduit for over \$1million in bond money from the state to conduct a feasibility study that should be completed in the next two years. Lake George could be as large as 3,500-plus acres at an estimated cost of \$50 million. The resolution from George, Greene, Jackson, and Stone counties asks Gov. Phil Bryant to transfer \$5 million of Hurricane Katrina economic development funds to the Pat Harrison Waterway District to meet National Environmental Policy Act mandates, begin conceptual design and begin land acquisition. This reservoir would help to support the flow of water to Jackson County industries, particularly during drought conditions.

We have obligated \$50,000.00 in a works project grant to the Smith County Board of Supervisors towards feasibility study for a new 3500-plus acre lake in Smith County. In the next five years this study should be completed and we should be ready to take the next step to complete this new reservoir project. More federal, state and local coordination is needed to move forward on projects to enhance water supplies to meet demands of the future.

Of the counties within the Pat Harrison Waterway District, an average of seventy-nine percent of the ground coverage is forestland. In order to preserve and maintain both pine and hardwood in the region, over the next five years the Pascagoula River Basin Program will restore pine and hardwood and provide technical and on-the-ground restoration assistance to family forest landowners interested in managing or restoring the pine and hardwood on their lands.

With the assistance of Gerald Moore, who is one of our Directors appointed by the Governor, who has experience in forestry consulting for several years, we have harvested trees from Flint Creek, and Maynor Creek, and re-planted for new growth. In 2019, under his guidance it our intention to do the same at Big Creek Water Park and in 2020 Turkey Creek's trees will be ready for harvest management.

The Pascagoula River Species Stewardship Program will seek to establish a monitoring and planning program that will increase and maintain the habitat of species native to the Pascagoula River and its tributaries through stewardship activities. The goal over the next five years is to restore and protect the Pascagoula River species population, reduce identified stressors and disturbances, and restore habitat to allow higher rates of survival.

Despite a legacy rich in history and purpose, a lack of understanding of Pat Harrison's positive impacts provided to the region – perhaps even bolstered by a sense of security enabled by Pat Harrison's flooding alleviation – has led to a somewhat declining interest in the organization's mission and accomplishments. Over several decades while citizens, leaders, and tourists have long-recognized and appreciated Pat Harrison's incredible recreational assets, the importance of Pat Harrison's ongoing role in water management and flood control are, too often forgotten. To some degree, this declining interest has resulted in the membership withdrawal of several counties in the District – Forrest, Lamar, Jasper and as of FY18 Perry and Jackson Counties have chosen not to be a part of our district. If additional counties withdraw causing further decline in financial support, Pat Harrison Waterway District may be unable to sustain adequate flood control programs in the region – to include adequate maintenance and operation of its dams, reservoirs, and recreational assets such as boat ramps. Pat Harrison Waterway District must enhance its existing course – and perhaps chart a new course – grounded in the original intent of its statutory creation. The enhanced purpose and mission must provide services attractive to state regulatory entities, state elected officials, member counties and prospective members – and it must present a focus predicated on a basis of responsible, efficient governance and service. In essence, Pat Harrison Waterway District must prove it provides services that counties and the state are willing to support. In today's environment of declining government budgets, this case must be made.

5. External/Internal Assessment

- a. Availability of federal funds for flood control and water management.
- b. Natural disasters that may cause loss of facilities.
- c. Withdrawal of member counties would cause loss of special funding.

- d. State of the economy.
- e. Preventive maintenance program in place to inspect dams, outfall structures and spillways in-house.
- f. District Deputy Engineer, Bureau Director tour Corps of Engineers' projects for compliance and maintenance.
- g. A "Parks Review Committee" comprised of several directors, the Executive Director, The Bureau Director, and the District Maintenance Director tour each park together annually to monitor the improvements and/or deficiencies to be addressed.
- h. An Audit Committee comprised of several directors meets with an outside accounting firm during the production of a yearly financial audit prior to the audits' approval by the entire Board.
- i. A Timber Management Committee comprised of several directors will continue to oversee the Districts' timber resources.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program for FY 2019 through FY 2023:

Program: 6.1 Recreation and Tourism Description

Pat Harrison's enabling statute authorizes it to establish, operate, and maintain public parks and recreational facilities (Miss. Code Ann. 51-15-123). Pat Harrison currently operates eight recreational facilities, focused primarily on water-based recreational opportunities ancillary to the water control structures operated by the District. Additional reservoirs are being studied for development in George County and Smith County. Throughout the jurisdiction of Pat Harrison, the recreational facilities include lakes, primitive campsites, RV campsites, one motel, waterslide and boat ramps. Though Lamar County has withdrawn from the District, by statute PHWD retains ownership of Little Black Creek (in Lamar County) and has authority to operate the facility that is currently leased to a private investor.

The boat ramps which are in counties that have withdrawn from the district will be closed or sold to the county or municipality where it is located.

Recreation Goals: Through interaction with visitors we are aware of what the public wants their camping experience to include, and therefore we need to do everything possible to exceed their expectations.

Outcome: Economic Development

Outcome: Increase number of individuals to our parks

Outcome: Safe environment for Mississippians and out-of state visitors to enjoy the outdoors

Strategy: Upgrade infrastructure such as electrical, sewer, and water at each park. Add activities to entice new visitors and families to our parks.

Output: New wider campsites makes easier access with new motor homes and campers that now are being manufactured with slide-outs.

Output: New playground equipment and splash pads as well as horse trails, and bird watching trails, make our parks more inviting to guests year-round.

Efficiency: Cost for splash pad kits, then our own maintenance crew will make all necessary upgrades.

Explanatory: Old electrical boxes do not meet the needs of more modern RV's. Old water lines continue to leak causing high water bills. Adding new pull through sites make for easy access to larger motor homes. Some examples of groups who will frequent our parks are: Wildlife Festival, Civil War Reenactment, Fishing Tournaments, Medieval Reenactment, Fireworks Show, Relay for Life, Car Shows, Haunted Forrest and PX3 events. With the help of the Audubon Society we are able to create a bird watching trail which attracts bird lovers from around the country. Our maintenance crew plans to develop horse trails at all our parks. We will consider the possibility of promoting concerts and special events at our parks during the off season.

Program 6.2: Flood Control Description

The purpose of the program is to plan, develop, construct, and operate flood prevention projects and measures, in cooperation with the State of Mississippi, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and ten-member counties.

Flood Control Goals

The goal of this program is to provide assistance in the planning and development of flood control measures along rivers and streams of the Pascagoula River Basin and Districts' twelve member counties.

Outcome: Reduced flooding

Outcome: Safer roads and bridges

Outcome: Stronger relationship with member counties

Strategy: \$400,000.00 in grants for FY2019 and beyond based on millage received from member counties. This money is given back to our member counties and entities therein who request our assistance for erosion control and drainage improvement projects.

Output: Grant projects approved cost share through NRCS and Emergency Watershed projects.

Output: Dry Fire Hydrants through cooperation with RC&D.

Efficiency: Cost to fund our Works Projects Grants is based on a percentage received from our member counties, thereby giving this money back to the county in flood control and drainage improvements.

Explanatory: Our District Engineer, Danny Nelson reviews each project for qualification, and then our Board of Directors for the PHWD approves the County Board of Supervisors' request, and obligates fifty percent of the final construction cost of the project not to exceed \$25,000.00. PHWD pays up to \$200.00, towards a dry fire hydrant kit when purchased through RC&D to aid in prevention of forest fires and public safety.

6.3 Water Management Description:

The purpose of this program is to assist with the planning, management, and operation of improvements for the purpose of water quality and water supply sources within the District.

Water Management Goals: The goal is to assist the State of Mississippi and the Districts' member counties and communities in the development and protection of potable water supply, both surface and subsurface. The District also engages in long-

range planning and studies to assure adequate levels of quality water resources for the economic and social well-being of the region.

Outcome: Economic Growth

Outcome: Number of jobs

Outcome: Distribution of water for beneficial use

Outcome: Maintain flow of rivers and streams of the Pascagoula river basin.

Outcome: Water Quality

Strategy: Develop additional reservoirs in the district to ensure water for domestic, municipal, commercial, industrial, agricultural and manufacturing purposes, for recreational uses, for flood control, timber development, irrigation, and pollution abatement as necessary for the general welfare of the entire people of the state.

Output: With the help of coordinator Jeff Wilson with the Pascagoula River Basin Alliance we will be able to remove 150 tons of debris from our rivers and streams, and thereby reducing flooding and maintaining aquatic life use support designation.

Output: Opened and staffed our own laboratory with equipment donated by USM to check our own waste water and waste treatment plants required by DEQ.

Efficiency: Only cost is to send one employee to waste water training to be certified in this field.

We have a licensed employee on staff to check our waste water as well as our own lab for testing. We also have designated employees who have been trained and are licensed to repair most electrical and plumbing problems which has cut down on the amount of outside vendor cost.