

PAT HARRISON WATERWAY DISTRICT

5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2025-2029

1. Comprehensive Mission Statement:

The mission of the Pat Harrison Waterway District, a special fund agency of the State, is to develop and manage the Pascagoula River and its tributaries for; a) flood control, b) water management, and c) recreation for the general welfare of all Mississippi residents. The basin includes more than 15,000 miles of rivers and streams in fifteen (15) counties in Southeast Mississippi from north of I-20 to the Gulf of Mexico. Five (5) counties have or are in the process of withdrawing from the district (Forest, Jasper, Lamar, Jackson, and Perry). However, the Kemper County Board of Supervisors voted to join the district in FY 2023 which added Kemper County Lake as a new district water park and dam. As part of the mission, the district operates and maintains: a) nine (9) multi-purpose/multi-use reservoirs/dams, b) ten (10) recreational parks, c) sixty-five (65) flood control structures and d) provides technical and financial assistance (Works Project grants) to member counties.

2. Agency Philosophy

The Pat Harrison Waterway District, its Board of Directors and staff are committed to sustainably developing and managing the Pascagoula Basin's water and recreational resources. The district's philosophy is to adhere to the highest professional standards, provide outstanding public service and demonstrate the highest respect for individual rights and values.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

The district has three (3) primary programs in the Pascagoula River Basin; 1) Recreation and Tourism, 2) Flood Control, and 3) Water Management. These programs all correspond with the statewide Natural Resources Policy Area which has a goal to, "To ensure that current and future generations have access to the state's abundant natural resources through restorations, protection, conservation and wise development of those resources." The district's goals for each program are repeated in section 6 in connection with their individual objectives, strategies, and measures. The district's benchmarks for each program are:

GOAL #1 Recreation and Tourism: Meet or exceed Mississippi resident and tourist expectations for outdoor recreation at the district's parks.

Benchmarks #1: Recreation and Tourism

- 1) Number of visitors on district Facebook site and promotional events.
- 2) Number of visitors and income at district parks
- 3) Number of new district amenities for water dependent/enhanced recreation (e.g., trails, boat ramps, fishing piers, etc.).
- 4) Number of new or rehabilitated district water dependent/enhanced recreational facilities (e.g., cabins, RV-sites, camp sites, bath houses, etc.).
- 5) Number of rehabilitated or extended basic district infrastructure to meet public or community demands (e.g., roads, utilities, water/wastewater, etc.).

GOAL #2 Flood Control: Maintain and improve flood protection/drainage in the Pascagoula River Basin from more frequent and severe hurricanes and storms.

Benchmarks #2: Flood Control

- 1) Annual frequency and severity of floods in PHWD member counties.
- 2) Number and extent of injury/death and property damage per flood.
- 3) Number of district high hazard dams being rehabilitated.
- 4) Number and average budget of district sponsored Natural Resources Conservation Service Emergency Watershed Protection Program grants per member county.
- 5) Number of completed Works Projects, drainage/erosion control projects in member counties.

GOAL #3 Water Management: Implement water management programs/agreements to minimize drought impacts and protect water quality in the Pascagoula River and tributaries to benefit the State of Mississippi and member counties and communities.

Benchmarks #3: Water Management

- 1) Measure water quality of discharges from district wastewater systems.
- 2) Number of long-term, severe droughts/low flow events on the Pascagoula River and tributaries.
- 3) Number of member counties seeking assistance to build dry fire hydrant systems to lower rural insurance rates.

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

The Pat Harrison Waterway District must continue demonstrating that it is accomplishing its broad mission in a responsible, efficient manner and continuing to provide services that counties and the state will support. The district realizes that it must continue being proactive to identify and provide services that are important to State and Local elected officials, regulatory entities, current and potential member counties and cities, and Mississippi

residents and tourists. Furthermore, the District recognizes the need to integrate several new statutory provisions that were enacted during the Mississippi Legislature's 2023 Regular Session into its annual and strategic plans.

- a) District's FY 2024 Appropriations Bill (House Bill No. 1630) appropriated \$700,000 to prioritize the cost to repair park facilities including bath houses and cabins but excluding any Flint Creek Horse Trail repairs (Sec. 4). House Bill No. 1630 also appropriated \$480,000 to prioritize the cost of repairing Little Black Creek Dam. The Bill also requires the district to; 1) provide a report with pictures to the legislature, including the Joint Legislative Budget Committee on completed park facility repairs by Dec. 1, 2023 (Sec. 8); and 2) an annual five-year plan with a prioritized list detailing the purposes, goals, and projected costs of projects it is or intends to implement by July 15, 2023 (Sec. 9 and House Bill No. 538 Sec. 2(2));
- b) House Bill No. 538 specifies that the close of the relevant fiscal year will be the effective date of any member county's decision to withdraw from the district (Sec. 1); and,
- c) Senate Bill No. 2526 allows municipalities to join the district.

With this in mind, the district also has three (3) primary priorities for 2025-2029; 1) continue recruiting new county and municipal members, 2) expand efforts to secure federal funding for single and multi-county projects to leverage district funds; and, 3) repair and refurbish existing facilities including but not limited to bath houses, cabins, lodge halls, and pavilions to respond to the unprecedented increase in demand for safe, outdoor recreation and supplemental funding. The district continues efforts to quantify the benefits and costs of district membership and educate legislators and current and potential county and municipal members on the costs and benefits. The Kemper County Board of Supervisors joined the district in FY 2023 as the district also assumed responsibility for the Kemper County Lake. The district plans to continue discussions with potential new county and municipal members in FY 2024.

Secondly, the district has and will continue working with the Congressional delegation, the legislature, and federal and state agencies to identify and pursue federal and state programmatic funding for important flood control, water management and recreational projects. In FY 2023, these efforts resulted in the Mobile District of the Corps of Engineers allocating over \$2,000,000 for shoreline protection and restoration at the district's Okatibbee Reservoir leased area. The district has requested an additional \$2,000,000 of federal funds for FY 2024. The district has also requested a \$750,000 New Start for a Corps of Engineers Tallahoma and Tallahala Creeks Feasibility Study in FY 2024. In late FY 2023, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) began a Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Report (PIFR) for small watershed flood prevention project on Tallahoma and Tallahala Creeks in Jones County. In anticipation of a

positive feasibility report, the district and the Jones County Board of Supervisors have requested \$2,000,000 for planning and permitting for the proposed project in FY 2024. The George County Board of Supervisors have also requested a \$55,000 NRCS small watershed flood prevention project in George County to reconsider the proposed Lake George project. The district will continue participating in the Pascagoula River Species Stewardship Program on a monitoring and planning program to increase and maintain habitat for the Pascagoula Basin's native species.

Regarding water supply, in June 2022, the district notified the Mobile District of the Corps of Engineers that it was cancelling its Water Supply Contract on Okatibbee Reservoir. Since the contract was signed on April 23, 1965, the district has paid 5.042% of the Corps' annual ordinary operation and maintenance costs for Okatibbee Reservoir. This annual cost has grown dramatically since 1965 and being subject to annual fluctuations in FY 2017 it exceeded \$44,000. Despite paying this annual fee, the district only requested water once to offset a drought of record on the Pascagoula River to ensure that downstream water users were able to continue their permitted withdrawals. However, in January 2023, the engineer for a potential major new industry notified the district and the Corps in writing of a potential large new industrial development in Lauderdale County that would require water from Okatibbee. Neither the district nor the Corps have heard anything about the potential project since January. Still, based on the potential role of water supply in recruiting major industrial development, the district and the Corps are now evaluating alternatives to renegotiate the water storage contract to significantly lower the district's annual costs and how to handle the district's outstanding water storage invoices. Hopefully the water storage contract will be resolved in FY 2024. If the district defaults or cancels this contract, an act of Congress would be needed to authorize a new water supply contract from Okatibbee.

The district's year-to-year visitation and revenue fell approximately 5% in FS 2023 after two successive years of dramatic increases (20% in FY 2021 and 5.1% in FY 2022). The district will continue to carefully track changes in year-to-year visitation and revenue to evaluate changing demands and expectations from Mississippi residents and tourists for outdoor recreation. The district is continuing efforts to repair, upgrade and expand water parks' amenities, facilities, and infrastructure through both external contractors and its own work crews. In November 2021, the district. In FY 2024, the district anticipates a decision on their application for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration for; \$1,625,000 for Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure, \$12,935,000 for Wastewater Collection/Conveyance Infrastructure, and \$2,519,000 for Water Transmission/Distribution Infrastructure at each park. Given its experience in sustainably operating parks without an appropriation, the district intends to continue discussions with the Legislature's leadership about transferring selected Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks parks to the district.

The district's private lease to operate the Little Black Creek Park campgrounds continues to generate a \$8,500 monthly net profit for FY 2024.

The district continues building new and improved camp sites and recreational amenities as the budget allows. The district also applies for funding from other agencies whenever possible. The Mississippi Department of Transportation provided grant funding for the 14-mile equestrian trail and parking area at Flint Creek Park in Stone County which was completed in FY 2023.

The district has a proactive approach to managing its lands and providing technical assistance to the basin's private landowners. Forest lands account for approximately seventy-nine percent (79%) of the basin's land cover. The district's forest management is greatly assisted by Gerald Moore, a Governor appointed Director, with several years of forestry consulting experience. Director Moore helps guide the district's sustainable forest harvesting and re-planting program. The district also participates in the Pascagoula River Basin Program to restore pine and hardwood and provide technical on-the-ground restoration assistance to family forest landowners interested in managing or restoring private pine and hardwood forests.

5. External/Internal Assessment

- 1) Changing priorities and funding levels for federal flood control, water management and recreation grants.
- 2) Frequency, severity, and duration of floods/storms could cause loss of park facilities.
- 3) Increases or decreases in county membership would impact annual revenue.
- 4) Federal/State and private Covid-19 responses and funding.
- 5) Inflation rate related to operation and maintenance costs and budgeting.
- 6) Internal program to inspect district dams, outfall structures and spillways.
- 7) Internal Audit Committee meets with external accounting firm during the district's annual financial audit before audit is presented to the entire Board for approval.

The district has monthly committee and Board meetings. Committees meet at the district office in Hattiesburg. Board meetings usually rotate between district parks. Member boards of supervisors and legislators are invited to all board meetings. Management policies in place to quickly identify and correct any administrative, fiscal or personnel deficiencies.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program for FY 2025 through FY 2029:

Program 1: Recreation and Tourism

GOAL A: Meet or exceed Mississippi resident and tourist expectations for outdoor recreation at the district's parks.

OBJECTIVE A.1. Increase number of visitors and park income.

Outcome: Park visitors

Outcome: Park income

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Increase number of visitors and park income.

Efficiency: Personnel cost per visitor

Efficiency: Other cost per visitor

Outcomes: Increase (Decrease) in park visitors

Outcomes: Increase (Decrease) in park income

Explanatory: The district's year-to-year visitation and revenue fell approximately 5% in FY 2023 after two successive years of dramatic increases (20% in FY 2021 and 5.1% in FY 2022). The district will carefully track changes in year-to-year visitation and revenue to evaluate changing demands and expectations from Mississippi residents and tourists for outdoor recreation.

Program 2: Flood Control

GOAL A: Maintain and improve flood protection/drainage in the Pascagoula River Basin from more frequent and severe hurricanes and storms.

OBJECTIVE A.1. Leverage district technical expertise with federal and state flood control/drainage grants.

Outcome: Projects completed (grants)

Outcome: Projects completed Emergency Works Projects (grants)

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Partner with willing member counties as the applicant for federal and state flood control/drainage grants.

Output: Funded projects (Grants)

Output: Funded Emergency Works Projects (Grants)

Output: Funded Corps of Engineers Planning and Continuing Authority Program (Grants)

Efficiency: Funded projects (Average Cost).

Efficiency: Funded Emergency Projects (Average Cost)

Efficiency: Corps of Engineers pilot program for economically disadvantaged communities at 100% federal funding (Average Total Grant)

Explanatory: Cost to fund our Works Projects Grants is based on a percentage of membership cost received from member counties, thereby giving this money back to the county in flood control/drainage grants. Eligibility for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection Program grants depends on the number, severity, and location of eligible storms/floods. In May 2023, the Corps of Engineers announced two (2) pilot programs for economically disadvantaged communities at 100% federal funding; 1) Planning Assistance to the States and; 2) Multiple Continuing Authorities Programs including Sec. 205 Flood Control. Funding decisions should be made in FY 2024.

Program 3: Water Management

GOAL A: Implement water management programs/agreements to minimize drought impacts and protect water quality in the Pascagoula River and tributaries to benefit the State of Mississippi and member counties and communities.

OBJECTIVE A.1. Water management to protect water quality and mitigate droughts in the Pascagoula River and tributaries.

Outcome: Low flow Pascagoula & drought management water release program

Outcome: Water quality sampling

A.1.1. STRATEGY: Maintain the Pascagoula River and tributaries' water quality and provide drought management.

Output: Low flow Pascagoula River & drought management agreements-Notified Corps of Engineers of cancelling Okatibbee Reservoir Water Supply Contract-

Output: Water sampling

Efficiency: No past, current or foreseeable demand for supplemental water to protect flows on the Pascagoula River for drought management.

Efficiency: Water quality sampling

Explanatory: Okatibbee water was only released once for drought mitigation since 1965. There is no current or foreseeable drought management demand from Okatibbee.

Explanatory: The district has a licensed and certified employee who monitors, samples, and tests the parks' wastewater systems and discharges and is available to rapidly respond to any wastewater emergency in a cost-effective manner.