

PAT HARRISON WATERWAY DISTRICT

5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2024-2028

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). As part of the mission, the district operates and maintains: a) eight (8) multi-purpose/multi-use reservoirs/dams, b) sixty-five (65) flood control structures, c) nine (9) recreational parks 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. With this in mind, the district has three (3) primary priorities for 2024-2028; 1) continue recruiting new county and city members, 2) expand efforts to secure federal funding for single and multi-county projects to leverage district funds; and 3) be flexible in responding to Covid-19 pandemic's

unprecedented demand for safe, outdoor recreation and supplemental funding. First, regarding new members, the district's 2019-2023 5-year Strategic Plan, discussed the district's concerns about counties withdrawing from the district. A concerted effort has been made to quantify the benefits and costs of district membership and educate legislators and current and potential members the costs and benefits. The district anticipates seeing the benefits of those efforts by entering into negotiations with potential new city and county members in FY 2023. The Mississippi Legislature has explicitly authorized new counties to join the district (H. Bill 1661 Sec. 6, 2019 Regular Session, March 3, 2019).

Secondly, the district has and will continue working with the Congressional delegation, the legislature and federal and state agencies to show the benefits of district membership by identifying and pursuing federal and state programmatic funding for important flood control, water management and recreational issues. This continues the district's work on the federal Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, Division AA, Pub. Law. 116-260 (Dec. 27, 2020)) which resulted in Congress authorizing two (2) new Feasibility Studies; 1) Long Beach, Bay St. Louis and Mississippi Sound Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction; 2) Tallahoma and Tallahala Creeks flood risk management in Jones County (Sec. 201(a)(13 and 14). Senator Wicker requested a \$750,000 New Start for the Tallahoma and Tallahala Creeks Study in FY 2023 and \$55,000 to the Natural Resources Conservation Service to conduct a feasibility study for the same area. The district also worked with member counties to get Congress to authorize a broad Pascagoula River Basin Assessment (Sec. 202(c)(3)). The PHWD will work to secure a Congressional appropriation for these studies and to organize the necessary non-federal cost share to start these important flood control and water management efforts. The district worked with the Greene County Board of Supervisors to get Senator Hyde-Smith to include a \$600,000 FY 2023 Community Project request for the Forest Service to add additional amenities to Turkey Fork Lake. 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. In FY 2022, the district has learned that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mobile District has included approximately \$2,500,000 of funding to start the Okatibbee Shoreline Restoration and Protection Project. Senator Hyde-Smith requested \$5,341,000 of funding for this project in FY 2023. Also in June 2022, the district notified the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that it was cancelling the Water Supply Contract from Okatibbee Reservoir, since the contract was signed on April 23, 1965, the district has only requested water once to offset a drought of record on the Pascagoula. There are no known pending customers for industrial or potable water from Okatibbee Reservoir the cancellation of the contract will save the district approximately \$55,000 annually in payments to the Corps of Engineers.

The PHWD's unprecedented 20% (\$564,303) increase in year-to-year visitation and income reported for FY 2021 continued in FY 2022 with an additional 5.1% (\$152,700) increase in income. This shows a significant trend towards increased demand from Mississippi residents and tourists for safe and affordable outdoor recreation. The district is accelerating efforts to upgrade and expand water parks' amenities, facilities and infrastructure to meet this increased demand. In November 2021, the district requested American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration. Specifically, the district requested \$1,625,000 for Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure, \$12,935,000 for Wastewater Collection/Conveyance Infrastructure, and \$2,519,000 for Water Transmission/Distribution Infrastructure. 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 located south of I-20 to the district. The district's private lease to operate the Little Black Creek Park campgrounds increased from generating \$7,000 monthly in net profit in FY 2021 to \$8,500 monthly for FY 2022.

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. Work is on schedule at Flint Creek Park in Stone County to complete the 14-mile equestrian trail and parking areas that the Mississippi Department of Transportation provided grant funds for in 2021.

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) Continued declining county membership would cause loss of 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 2024 through FY 2028:

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 PHWD's unprecedented 20% (\$564,303) increase in year-to-year visitation and income reported for FY 2021 continued in FY 2022 with an additional 5.1% (\$152,700) increase in income. This increase indicates that FY 2021's *spike* maybe a trend for increased demand from Mississippi residents and tourists for safe, affordable, 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)

Efficiency: Funded projects (Average Cost).

Efficiency: Funded Emergency Projects (Average Cost)

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.

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.