

# NATURAL RESOURCES

*I was raised in Mississippi, so heat and humidity is my bread and butter. It keeps me going. I can't stand cold weather.*

— MORGAN FREEMAN —



# Natural Resources



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## MISSISSIPPI'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Mississippi can be divided into five broad geographical regions: the Delta region in northwest Mississippi, the Hills region in north Mississippi, the Pines region in east-central Mississippi, the Capital/River region from Jackson to Vicksburg to Natchez, and the Coastal region in south Mississippi along the Gulf Coast. The state's physiographic divisions include 10 distinct landform regions: the Tombigbee Hills, the Black Prairie, the Pontotoc Ridge, the Flatwoods, the North Central Hills, the Loess Hills, the Yazoo Basin, the Jackson Prairie, the Pine Hills, and the Coastal Meadows.

The state has 119 public lakes, 123,000 stream miles, and 225,000 freshwater acres. Additionally, the state has 16 major aquifers supplying over 90 percent of Mississippi's drinking water. Mississippi has six major reservoirs: Pickwick Lake on the Tennessee River, Arkabutla Lake near Coldwater, Sardis Lake near Oxford, Enid Lake in Yalobusha County, Grenada Lake near Grenada, and the Ross Barnett Reservoir to the northeast of Jackson.

More than 19.8 million acres of forestland cover almost 65 percent of the state, of which almost 80 percent is privately owned. The remainder is public land including a network of state parks, state wildlife management areas, and six national forests – Bienville, DeSoto, Homochitto, Delta, Holly Springs, and Tombigbee. This public land represents 1.2 million acres dedicated to recreation and wilderness protection.

The forestry industry is a national model of sustainable forest management. Mississippi was the first state in the nation to establish a reforestation tax credit to encourage landowners to replant after harvest, and was also the first to create a statewide forest inventory using remote-sensing satellite imagery to calculate the size and diversity of forestlands.

The state's namesake, the Mississippi River, runs along the western boundaries of Mississippi. The river and its tributaries continually deposit rich alluvial soil throughout the Mississippi Delta, resulting in agricultural industry that contributes to Mississippi's economy.

Mississippi's white-sand beaches along the Gulf Coast draw millions of visitors annually, in addition to the state-conserved Coastal tidelands and barrier islands.

There are more than one million acres of public hunting lands in Mississippi, including 14 National Wildlife Refuges and more than 50 state wildlife management areas representing a wide variety of habitats.

## MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, AND PARKS

1505 Eastover Dr., Jackson 39211

601-432-2400

[www.mdwfp.com](http://www.mdwfp.com)

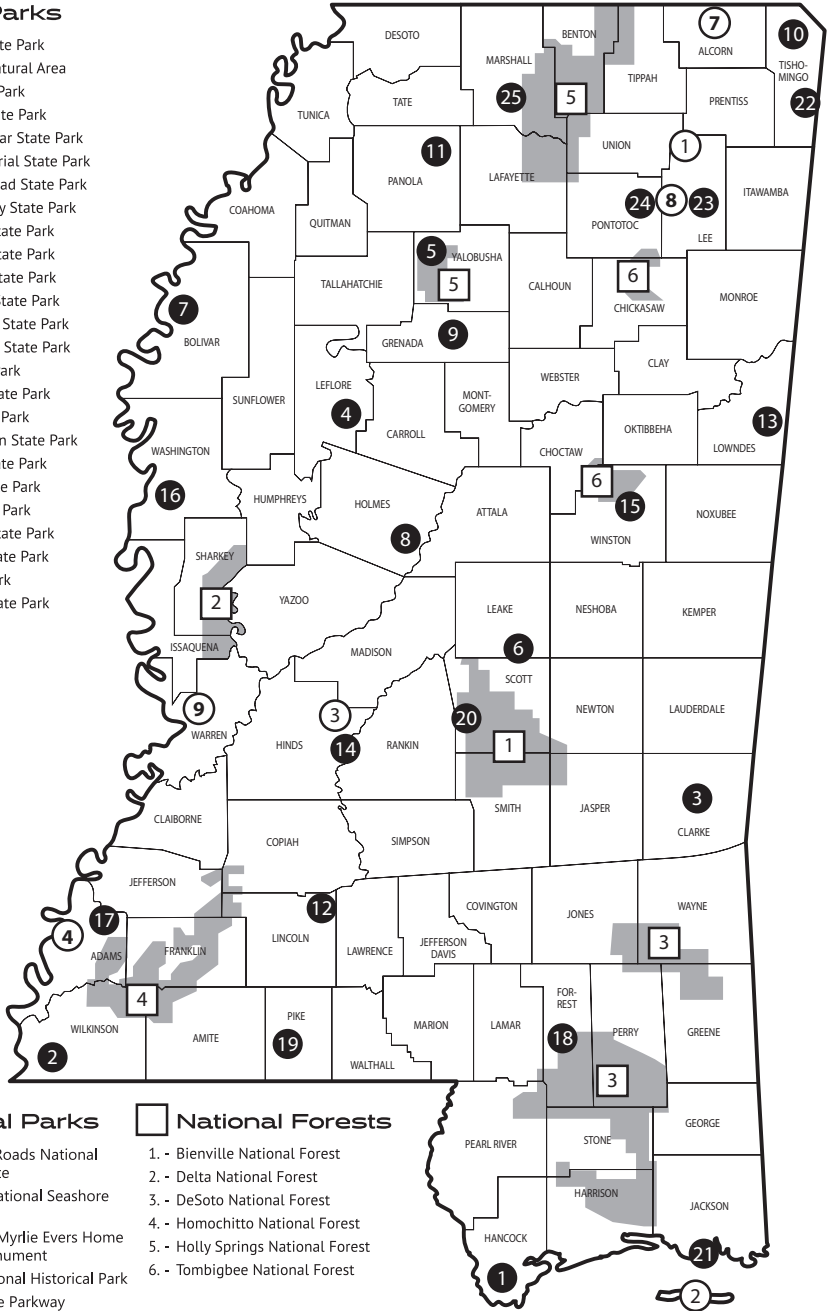
The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks oversees all Mississippi state parks, which offer amenities including fishing, camping, hiking, recreational facilities, and fully furnished cabin rentals. The 25 state parks stretch from the Tennessee border to the Gulf of Mexico. The MDWFP also is responsible for programs that protect Mississippi fish and wildlife resources and their habitats.

The Agency issues hunting and fishing licenses, advises on habitat protection and sponsors public education programs. The Department is also responsible for the enforcement of Mississippi's fish and game laws.

# STATE PARKS, NATIONAL PARKS, AND NATIONAL FORESTS

## State Parks

1. - Buccaneer State Park
2. - Clark Creek Natural Area
3. - Clarkco State Park
4. - Florewood State Park
5. - George P. Cossar State Park
6. - Golden Memorial State Park
7. - Great River Road State Park
8. - Holmes County State Park
9. - Hugh White State Park
10. - J.P. Coleman State Park
11. - John W. Kyle State Park
12. - Lake Lincoln State Park
13. - Lake Lowndes State Park
14. - LeFleur's Bluff State Park
15. - Legion State Park
16. - Leroy Percy State Park
17. - Natchez State Park
18. - Paul B. Johnson State Park
19. - Percy Quin State Park
20. - Roosevelt State Park
21. - Shepard State Park
22. - Tishomingo State Park
23. - Tombigbee State Park
24. - Trace State Park
25. - Wall Doxey State Park



## National Parks

1. - Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site
2. - Gulf Island National Seashore (also Florida)
3. - Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument
4. - Natchez National Historical Park
5. - Natchez Trace Parkway (also Alabama, Tennessee)
6. - Natchez Trace National Trail (also Alabama, Tennessee)
7. - Shiloh Military Park (also Tennessee)
8. - Tupelo National Battlefield
9. - Vicksburg National Military Park (also Louisiana)

## National Forests

1. - Bienville National Forest
2. - Delta National Forest
3. - DeSoto National Forest
4. - Homochitto National Forest
5. - Holly Springs National Forest
6. - Tombigbee National Forest

# MISSISSIPPI STATE PARKS

## **Buccaneer State Park**

1150 S. Beach Blvd., Waveland 39576  
228-467-3822

buccaneerstatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Do not follow GPS; Call office for directions

Area: Park 72 acres

Located on the beach in Waveland, Buccaneer is situated in a lush natural setting of moss-draped oaks, marshlands, and the Gulf of Mexico. There are 206 premium campsites and 44 newly developed campsites overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. From Buccaneer Bay, a 4.5-acre waterpark, to a nature trail, disc golf course, and scenic campsites with extensive amenities, there's something for everyone at Buccaneer State Park.

## **Clark Creek Natural Area**

366 Ft. Adams Rd., Woodville 39669  
601-432-2400

Location: 13 miles west of Woodville off Hwy. 24 at the Pond Community

Area: Park 700 acres

Clark Creek Natural Area is one of Mississippi's most beautiful outdoor areas. A nature trail with some 50 waterfalls is available for hiking, bird-watching, etc. Since the terrain is physically demanding, no camping, facilities or other amenities are available.

## **Clarkco State Park**

386 Clarkco Rd., Quitman 39355  
601-776-6651

clarkcostatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Five miles north of Quitman on U.S. Hwy. 145

Area: Park 815 acres/Lake 65 acres

Clarkco State Park is situated on 815 acres of gently rolling woodlands and offers marked nature trails, lighted tennis courts, large picnic pavilions, a visitor's center with meeting rooms, and much more. Clarkco has 43 developed camping sites, 15 primitive tent

camping sites, 20 vacation cabins, and one vacation cottage.

## **Florewood State Park**

1999 CR 145, Greenwood 38930  
662-455-3904

Area: Park 104 acres

Operated by Leflore County Board of Supervisors, Florewood State Park is located off U.S. Highway 82 on the western edge of Greenwood. It is only open on Saturdays for fishing.

## **George P. Cossar State Park**

165 CR 170, Oakland 38948  
662-623-7356

cossarstatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Eight miles east of Oakland off Mississippi Hwy. 32

Area: Park 836 acres

Located in the rolling hills of northern Mississippi, Cossar State Park is situated on the shores of Enid Lake. Cossar has 15 air-conditioned cabins and 76 developed campsites, as well as a disc golf and miniature golf course, nature trail, playground, picnic area, pavilions, banquet room, and an outdoor amphitheater.

## **Golden Memorial State Park**

2104 Damascus Rd., Walnut Grove 39180  
601-732-6316

Location: On Mississippi Hwy. 492, five miles east of Walnut Grove off Mississippi Hwy. 35

Area: Park 120 acres/Lake 15 acres

Golden Memorial is managed as a day use only park. It has picnic tables, grills, two picnic pavilions, nature trails and a 15-acre spring-fed lake stocked with bass and bream. The Loblolly Trail houses the second largest loblolly pine tree in Mississippi.

DAY USE ONLY

**Great River Road State Park**

101 State Park Rd., Rosedale 38769  
 662-588-2158  
 Location: In Rosedale off Mississippi Hwy. 1,  
 35 miles north of Greenville  
 Area: Park 398 acres/Lake 25 acres

Located on the Mississippi River, Great River Road State Park is managed as a day use only park and operated by the City of Rosedale. A new playground area is available, as well as a boat launch for fishing.

DAY USE ONLY

**Holmes County State Park**

5369 State Park Rd., Durant 39063  
 662-653-3351  
 holmescounty@mdwfp.state.ms.us  
 Location: Four miles south of Durant off I-55, Exit  
 150  
 Area: Park 490 acres/Lake 88 acres

The most centrally located of the state parks, Holmes County has two fishing lakes, a nature trail, an amphitheater, a skating rink, an archery range, and group camping with meeting room. The park offers tent camping, 12 cabin units and 28 camping pads.

**Hugh White State Park**

3170 State Park Rd., Grenada 38902  
 662-226-4934  
 hughwhitestatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
 Location: 10 mile east of Grenada off Mississippi  
 Hwy. 8  
 Area: Park 1,321 acres/Lake 64,000 acres

Located on Grenada Lake, Hugh White State Park has 128 developed camping sites and 12 duplex cabins. Available amenities include a golf course, playground, picnic area and activity building. There is also boating, skiing, and fishing on Grenada Lake.

**J.P. Coleman State Park**

613 CR 321, Iuka 38852  
 662-423-6515  
 jpcolemanstatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
 Location: Four miles north of Iuka, turn off Hwy.  
 25 onto CR 989  
 Area: Park 1,468 acres/Lake 47,500 acres

J.P. Coleman offers many water sports, since it is located on a rocky bluff that overlooks the Tennessee River. The park offers 69 RV campsites, nine primitive campsites, 20 cabins, three cottages, 16 motel rooms and three townhouses. Amenities include a conference center, picnic area, playground, miniature golf course, and swimming pool. Fishing, boating, and water skiing on Pickwick Lake is also available.

**John W. Kyle State Park**

4235 State Park Rd., Sardis 38666  
 662-487-1345  
 johnkylestatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
 Location: Eight mile east of Sardis on Mississippi  
 Hwy. 315, I-55 Exit 252 at Sardis  
 Area: Park 650 acres

Located on scenic Sardis Reservoir, John W. Kyle State Park offers 100 developed camping sites, 18 cabins and two golf villas. Amenities include the award-winning 18-hole Mallard Pointe Golf Course, as well as fishing and boating on Sardis Lake. The lodge offers a large ballroom and a dining room that will accommodate 75 people, making it perfect for family reunions or banquets.

**Lake Lincoln State Park**

2573 Sunset Rd., Wesson 39191  
 601-643-9044  
 lakelincolnstatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
 Location: 4.5 mile east of Hwy. 51 near Wesson  
 Area: Park 884 acres/Lake 550 acres

Lake Lincoln is nestled in the shade of towering hardwood trees and offers 71 RV campsites, one cabin and three cottages. The park has a disc golf course, nature trail, picnic area, playground, volleyball court and non-denominational Sunday worship services during the summer. The lake offers fishing, jet or water skiing and a 1.5 acre sand beach.

**Lake Lowndes State Park**

3319 Lake Lowndes Rd., Columbus 39702  
 662-328-2110  
 lakelowndestatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Eight miles southeast of Columbus off Mississippi Hwy. 69

Area: Park 670 acres/Lake 150 acres

Lake Lowndes State Park provides a complete recreational facility for all to enjoy. A scenic, wooded tent camping area, 50 developed camping sites, six vacation cabins and two vacation cottages are available for use. Amenities include a disc golf course, gym, picnic area, playground, playing fields, tennis complex and activity building. Water activities include fishing, kayak rentals, and water sports.

### **LeFleur's Bluff State Park**

3315 Lakeland Terrace, Jackson 39216 (Campground)

1205 Lakeland Dr., Jackson 39216 (Golf Course)  
601-987-3923

lefleurbuffstatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Exit 98B off I-55

Area: Park 278 acres/Lake 50 acres

LeFleur's Bluff provides a lush green spot in the heart of urban Jackson. Located on Mayes Lake, the campground has 28 developed camping sites, 30 shaded tent sites and a bathhouse equipped with hot showers. Amenities include a playground, nature trail, picnic area and disc golf course, as well as fishing.

### **Legion State Park**

635 Legion State Park Rd., Louisville 39339  
662-773-8323

legionstatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Two miles north of Louisville on N. Columbus Ave.

Area: Park 431 acres/Lakes 12 acres and 4 acres

Legion State Park, hidden in the red-hill country of Mississippi, offers 15 RV sites, two tent camping sites, and five air-conditioned cabins. One of the park's unique features is the Legion Lodge, a hand-hewn log structure that has remained unaltered since its construction in the 1930s. Two fishing lakes are available, as well as a nature trail, picnic area, activity building, and a playground.

### **Leroy Percy State Park**

Leroy Percy State Park

1400 Hwy. 12 W., Hollandale 38748  
662-827-5436

leroypercystatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: Five miles west of Hollandale off Mississippi Hwy. 12

Area: Park 1,744 acres/Lake 60 acres

Leroy Percy is the oldest of the Mississippi's State Parks and encompasses a wildlife management area for deer, squirrel, duck and dove hunting. The park has 16 developed camping sites, three scenic wooded tent camping sites, eight vacation cabin units, and a group camp that can accommodate up to 44 people. Amenities include disc golf, picnic areas/pavilions, nature trail, playgrounds, freshwater fishing, a boat launch, and seasonal hunting.

### **(Bob M. Dearing) Natchez State Park**

230-B Wickliff Rd., Natchez 39120  
601-442-2658

natchezstatepark@wfp.ms.gov

Location: 10 miles north of Natchez off U.S. 61 at Stanton

Area: Park 3,402 acres/Lake 230 acres

Bob M. Dearing Natchez State Park offers excellent fishing, boasting the state's record largemouth bass (18.15 pounds). It also offers 50 developed camping sites, eight tent camping sites, 10 newly renovated lakeside vacation cabin units and a laundry facility. Amenities include a disc golf course, nature trail, picnic area, playground and hunting area.

### **Paul B. Johnson State Park**

319 Geiger Lake Rd., Hattiesburg 39401  
601-582-7721

paulbjohnson@wfp.ms.gov

Location: 12 miles south of Hattiesburg off U.S. Hwy. 49

Area: Park 1,015 acres/Lake 225 acres

Located in the heart of Mississippi's pine belt region, Paul B. Johnson State Park has many overnight options, such as 125 RV campsites, 25 primitive tent campsites, 12 cabins, two duplexes, three cottages, and a

group camp facility. There are a variety of activities and amenities available, including a visitor center, game room, picnic area, playground, splash pad, disc golf course, swimming and nature trails. Fishing, boating and water skiing are available on the lake. Some campsites closed for renovation.

**Percy Quin State Park**

2036 Percy Quin Dr., McComb 39648  
601-684-3938  
percyquinstatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
Location: Six miles south of McComb, exit 13 off I-55  
Area: Park 1,491 acres/Lake 490 acres

Percy Quin State Park is an enjoyable blend of old and new amongst loblolly pines and stately magnolia trees. There are many overnight options, including 102 RV campsites, 27 cabins, four cottages, two golf villas, nine motel rooms, 50 primitive camping sites, and a group camp facility. Amenities include picnic tables and grills, picnic pavilions, playgrounds, swimming pool, tennis courts, game room, conference center, chapel, marina, and an 18-hole golf course. Boating and fishing are available on Lake Tangipahoa.

**Roosevelt State Park**

2149 Hwy. 13 S., Morton 39117  
601-732-6316  
rooseveltstatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
Location: Exit 77 off I-20  
Area: Park 651 acres/Lake 150 acres

Roosevelt State Park’s scenic overlook provides a panoramic view of the Bienville National Forest. The park offers 110 RV campsites, 15 vacation cabins, a primitive camping area, a motel, and a group camp facility. Roosevelt State Park offers a variety of recreational activities and facilities, including a visitor center, banquet hall, meeting rooms, performing arts and media center, picnic area, picnic pavilions, playgrounds, disc golf, softball field, Shadow Lake Splash Zone—a seasonal swimming pool and water slide—tennis courts, nature trails, mountain biking trails, kayak rentals, and a camp store. Also, fishing,

boating, and water skiing are available on Shadow Lake.

**Shepard State Park**

1034 Graveline Rd., Gautier 39553  
228-497-2244  
Location: 3 miles west of Pascagoula, south of U.S. Hwy. 90 at Gautier  
Area: Park 412 acres

Shepard State Park is nestled in the heart of Singing River (Pascagoula River) country and has 28 developed camping sites, a bathhouse, and primitive campsites. Amenities include a nature trail, picnic area, archery, dog park, playground, soccer field and a 18-hole disc golf course. A boat ramp for small watercraft is available and provides access to the mouth of the Singing River by way of St. Pierre Bayou. Operated by the City of Gautier.

**Tishomingo State Park**

105 CR 90, Tishomingo 38873  
662-438-6914  
tishomingostatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
Location: Two miles south of Tishomingo off Mississippi Hwy. 25; mile post 304 off Natchez Trace Parkway  
Area: Park 1,524 acres/Lake 45 acres

Tishomingo State Park is steeped in history and scenic beauty with its unique landscape of massive rock formations and fern-filled crevices found nowhere else in Mississippi. The park offers 61 RV campsites, 14 primitive campsite area, six cabins, one cottage and a group camp facility. Amenities include a picnic area with tables and grills, picnic pavilions, lodge facility, disc golf courses, hiking trails, swinging bridge, playgrounds, multi-use field, volleyball court and swimming pool. Rock climbing, canoes, and fishing are also available.

**Tombigbee State Park**

264 Cabin Dr., Tupelo 38804  
662-842-7669  
tombigbeestatepark@wfp.ms.gov  
Location: Six miles southeast of Tupelo off Mississippi Hwy. 6  
Area: Park 459 acres/Lake 120 acres



Tombigbee State Park offers the finest in outdoor recreation opportunities which include a picnic area with tables and grills, picnic pavilions, meeting room and banquet facilities, children's playground, multi-use field, volley ball, disc golf, nature trail, 11 mile mountain bike trail and fishing on Lake Lee. There are several options for staying overnight, including 20 developed campsites for RVs or tents, a primitive camping area, seven cabins, one cottage, and a group camp facility.

### **Trace State Park**

2139 Faulkner Rd., Belden 38826

662-489-2958

[tracestatepark@wfp.ms.gov](mailto:tracestatepark@wfp.ms.gov)

Location: 10 miles east of Pontotoc off Mississippi Hwy. 6

Area: Park 2,405 acres/Lake 565 acres

Trace State Park offers a quiet, natural retreat with a variety of recreational activities and facilities. The park has 76 full hookup RV camping sites, 16 tent sites, five cabins, and three cottages. Amenities include two playground areas, picnic sites, a large picnic pavilion, disc golf, non-motorized and

motorized trails, kayak rentals, and access to a neighboring 18-hole golf course. Also, Trace Lake offers 565-acres of fresh water for fishing and water sports.

### **Wall Doxey State Park**

3946 Hwy. 7 S., Holly Springs 38635

662-252-4231

[walldoxeystatepark@wfp.ms.gov](mailto:walldoxeystatepark@wfp.ms.gov)

Location: Seven miles south of Holly Springs off Mississippi Hwy. 7

Area: Park 790 acres/Lake 60 acres

Wall Doxey State Park offers abundant outdoor recreation opportunities in a setting rich in natural beauty. Activities at the park include visitor/activity building, picnic sites/pavilions, playground, nature trail, disc golf, and fishing. The park offers 64 developed camp sites, 17 wooded primitive campsites, one designated scout area, nine cabins, and a group camp facility that can accommodate up to 90 campers.



## PAT HARRISON WATERWAY DISTRICT WATER PARKS

### **Archusa Creek Water Park**

540 CR 110, Quitman 39355  
601-776-6956

### **Big Creek Water Park**

2 Big Creek Water Park, Soso 39480  
601-763-8555

### **Dry Creek Water Park**

14 Dry Creek Park Dr., Mt. Olive 39119  
601-797-4619

### **Dunn's Falls Water Park**

6890 Dunn's Falls Rd., Enterprise 39330  
601-655-8550

### **Flint Creek Water Park**

1216 Parkway Dr., Wiggins 39577  
601-928-3051

### **Maynor Creek Water Park**

1351 Reservoir Rd., Waynesboro 39367  
601-735-4365

### **Okatibbee Creek Water Park**

9283 Pine Springs Rd., Meridian 39305  
601-737-2370

### **Turkey Creek Water Park**

142 Parkway Dr., Decatur 39327  
601-635-3314

## ROSS BARNETT RESERVOIR

Pearl River Valley Water Supply District Office  
115 Madison Landing Cir., Ridgeland 39157  
601-856-6574  
[comments@therez.ms](mailto:comments@therez.ms)

The Ross Barnett Reservoir was completed in 1965 and was created by impounding the Pearl River between Madison and Rankin Counties. It is named after the 52<sup>nd</sup> governor of the state Mississippi. It is bounded by the Natchez Trace Parkway and has 105 miles of shoreline. The lake is about 45 miles long and 3.5 miles wide in some places. The average depth is 12 feet and there is approximately 33,000 acres of surface area.

The Pearl River Valley Water Supply District is the state agency that was created to manage the lake and its surrounding area. The district provides a water supply for the city of Jackson. It also maintains the reservoir's dam and monitors water quality in cooperation with the Mississippi

Department of Health and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality.

Each year over two million people visit the Ross Barnett Reservoir for outdoor recreation. The available facilities include five campgrounds, 16 parks, 22 boat launches, three handicapped-accessible trails, two multi-purpose trails and a mountain bike trail. Each campground has a police manager permanently deployed. The District also developed six marinas, four baseball/soccer complexes and two golf courses. Almost 20 miles of paved trails for walking, jogging, bicycling, and sightseeing connect the reservoir to surrounding neighborhoods and shopping areas.

## NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY

2680 Natchez Trace Pkwy., Tupelo 38804  
800-305-7417

The historic Natchez Trace Parkway is a 444 mile long path that connects Natchez to Nashville. The Parkway was created and used for centuries by Native Americans, and was later used by early European and American explorers, traders, and emigrants in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Trace is open year-round to motorists, hikers, and bikers. It gives visitors the chance to take a leisurely trip through

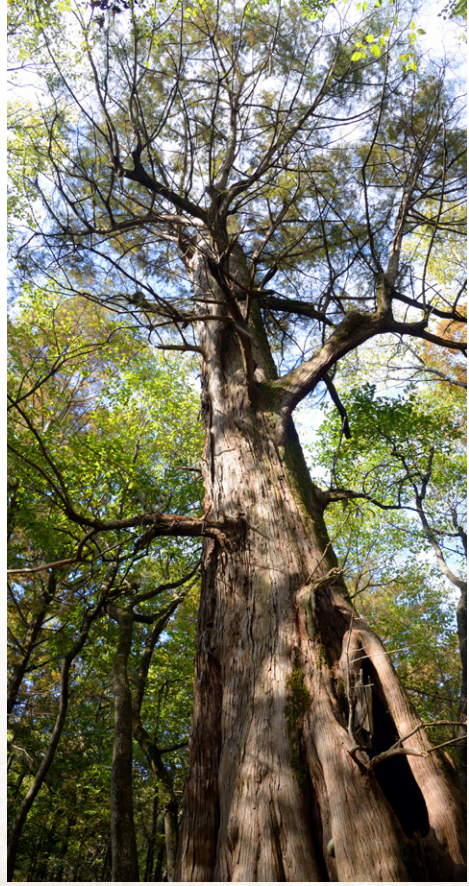
time. The Parkway is headquartered in Tupelo and is maintained and administered by the National Park Service.

Visitors can discover scenic areas, numerous hiking trails, picnic sites, campgrounds and water recreation areas. Almost 30 hiking and self-guiding trails cover 60 miles of the Natchez Trace. Besides cars, motorcycles, bicycles and RVs are popular ways visitors travel the Trace.

## U.S. NATIONAL PARKS

1. Brices Cross Roads National Battlefield Site
2. Gulf Island National Seashore (also Florida)
3. Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument
4. Natchez National Historical Park
5. Natchez Trace Parkway (also Alabama, Tennessee)
6. Natchez Trace National Trail (also Alabama, Tennessee)
7. Shiloh Military Park (also Tennessee)
8. Tupelo National Battlefield
9. Vicksburg National Military Park (also Louisiana)

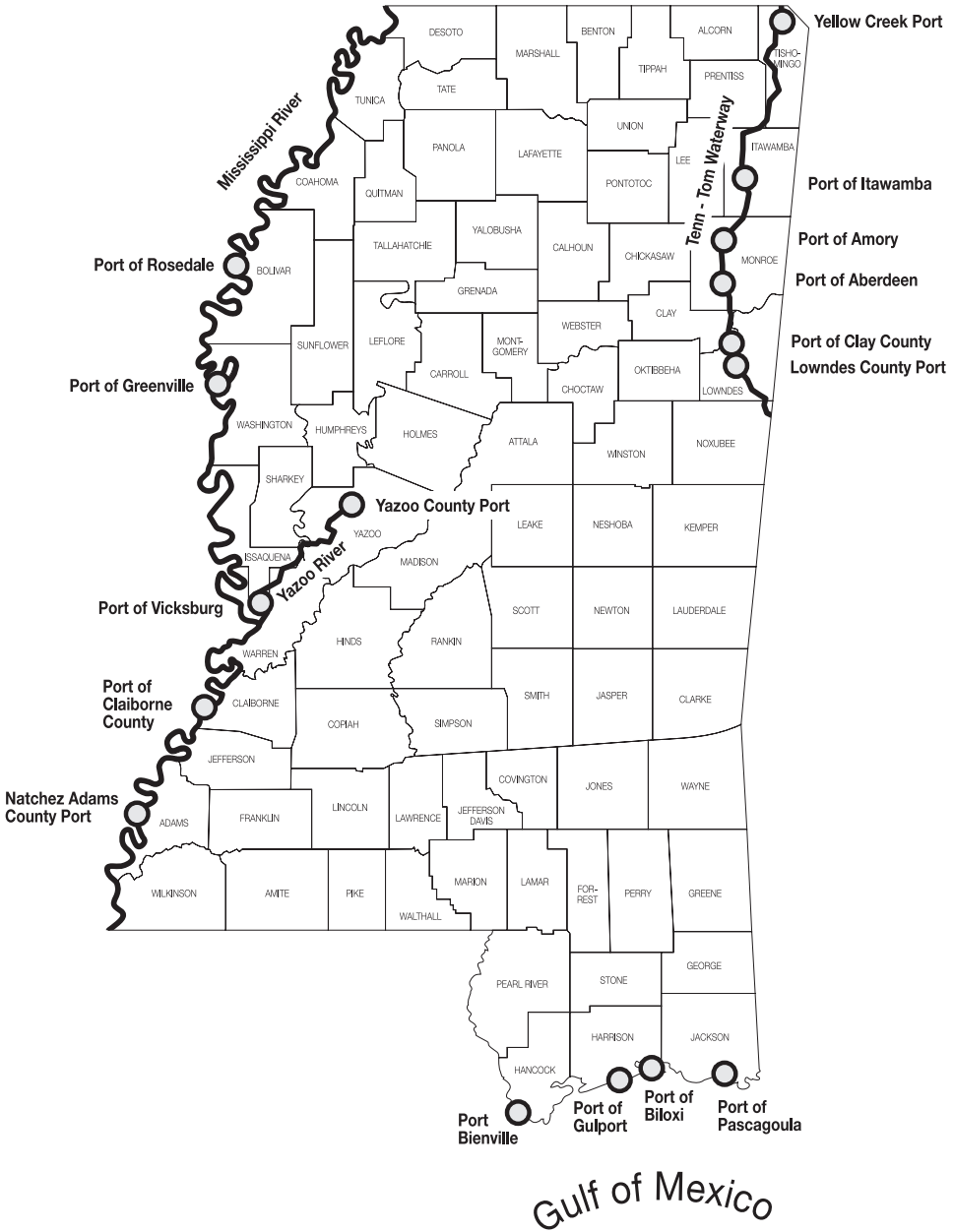




# MAJOR LAKES AND RIVERS



# PORTS IN MISSISSIPPI



## PUBLIC TRUST LANDS

The Mississippi Secretary of State has the constitutional and statutory authority to protect Mississippi's public trust lands to preserve the state's resources for future generations. These responsibilities include enforcing the 16<sup>th</sup> Section Public School Trust Lands and Lieu Lands laws, developing and implementing the Public Trust Tidelands Management Programs, overseeing the sale of lands forfeited to the State for non-payment of ad valorem taxes, maintaining an inventory of State agency lands, and providing services to the public and governmental subdivisions relating to sales, acquisitions, leasing, and title of the State's real property assets.

### 16<sup>TH</sup> SECTION PUBLIC SCHOOL TRUST LANDS

Mississippi is the only state east of the Mississippi River that substantially retains and utilizes its school trust lands for the benefit of local school districts. The designated lands, including 642,000 surface acres and 674,000 mineral acres, have generated millions of dollars in revenue used to fund public schools for nearly two centuries. Upon statehood in 1817, Mississippi received one section containing approximately 640 acres out of every six-square-mile-township. These designated lands were set aside to support the specific public school that fell within each district. All revenues generated by 16<sup>th</sup> Section Public Trust Land goes directly to the local school district. Approximately 99 school districts manage the trust lands within their boundaries.

The Mississippi Secretary of State is the statutorily mandated supervisory trustee of 16<sup>th</sup> Section Public Trust Lands. The Secretary of State reviews and signs all leases to guarantee that the school trust receives fair market value and utilizes the land in the best way possible.

In an effort to increase transparency, the Secretary of State's Office now posts all leases online at [www.sos.ms.gov](http://www.sos.ms.gov). This website also posts notices for bids to be accepted for hunting, agriculture, and mineral leases. In order to assist the schools in managing the lands in their districts, the agency provides fillable lease forms,

annual report forms and change forms. Y'all Business is another tool found online at [www.yallbusiness.ms](http://www.yallbusiness.ms). There is a section for leased lands where the public can see the actual parcels of trust lands by county. The parcel information is from tax assessors' offices and is tied with the state lease number.

These are just a few of the tools that are currently offered by the Secretary of State's Office. The agency wants to provide excellent service to the public and give school districts the tools they need to make the management of trust lands easier and more efficient. This has led to a steady increase in revenues, more efficient management of lands, and a greater involvement between schools and the public, as well as a partnership with the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

The partnership with the Mississippi Forestry Commission has resulted in the certification of 480,000 acres of 16<sup>th</sup> Section timber by the American Tree Farm System – all in an effort to produce better harvests and greater revenue over time. Roughly 70% of Mississippi's State Trust Lands are managed for timber.

Since the implementation of the lease review process, revenues have increased to exceed over \$100 million for several years. Even with market fluctuations that affect mineral, timber, and agriculture, the overall revenues have greatly improved.

In 2023, oil and gas revenues from 16<sup>th</sup> Section Lands were \$6.2 million. Timber

revenues were \$13.4 million and surface leasing increased modestly to \$25.4 million.

### **A HISTORY OF 16<sup>TH</sup> SECTION LANDS**

The origin of 16<sup>th</sup> Section Public School Trust Lands in America can be traced to the British and Colonial tradition of reserving land for the support of public schools. After the formation of the Union, Thomas Jefferson incorporated the practice into the Land Ordinance of 1785.

Designed to encourage westward expansion, the Ordinance adopted a six-square-mile township as its basic unit of measure and "... reserved the lot no. 16, of every township, for the maintenance of public schools within said township ...". The reservation of land for public schools was further confirmed in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Later, in 1798, when Congress established the Mississippi Territory, it provided a government initially based on the Northwest Ordinance model.

With division of the Mississippi Territory in 1817 to form the State of Mississippi and the Territory of Alabama, Congress called for a survey of land in the new state. Again, 16<sup>th</sup> Section land was reserved in each township.

### **THE TREATIES**

At the time of statehood, Native Americans inhabited Mississippi. The Choctaw Nation occupied the area south and west of a line extending southeasterly from the Coahoma and Tunica County boundary to a point on the old Natchez Trace in Webster County and then across Clay County in a generally southeasterly direction to a point on the Tombigbee River. The Chickasaw Nation inhabited the area north and east of that line.

In September 1830, the United States and the Choctaws signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. In accordance with the treaty, 16<sup>th</sup> Sections were reserved from government land sales. The territorial claims of the Chickasaws were resolved

with their removal under the Treaty of Pontotoc in 1832. Although these lands were to be sold by the government to private parties "... in the same manner ..." they were, in fact, sold with no 16<sup>th</sup> Section reservations.

Today, 15 counties lie entirely north of the Choctaw-Chickasaw Boundary and have no reserved 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands. The counties are Tishomingo, Alcorn, Tippah, Benton, Marshall, DeSoto, Tunica, Tate, Lafayette, Union, Prentiss, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, and Chickasaw. Another seven, Quitman, Panola, Yalobusha, Calhoun, Webster, Clay, and Monroe, are bisected by the Choctaw-Chickasaw Boundary and have no 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands in the portions of those counties lying north of the boundary. Although the boundary passes through Tallahatchie County, there are no 16<sup>th</sup> Sections lying north of the boundary in that county.

### **CHICKASAW CESSION LANDS**

To compensate for this failure, in 1836 Congress granted the State of Mississippi 174,555 acres of unsold public land in Bolivar, Coahoma, Tallahatchie, Quitman, Panola, and Leake counties. In the 1850s, Congress and the State of Mississippi allowed this lieu land to be sold. Mississippi invested the \$1,047,330 realized from the sale in eight percent interest loans to railroad companies in the state. The principal was lost with the destruction of the railroads during the Civil War.

Thereafter, the Mississippi Legislature began making annual appropriations to school districts in the Chickasaw Cession equal to the eight percent interest on the lost principal. The interest amount was reduced from eight to six percent by the Constitution of 1890. For decades, annual appropriations totaling approximately \$62,000 were made to the school districts in the Chickasaw Cession. But by the 1980s, the estimated annual appropriation amounted to only \$0.63 per pupil in the Chickasaw Cession



school districts, while the estimated average income per pupil from 16<sup>th</sup> Section land in the Choctaw Cession counties was \$75.34.

In 1981, Chickasaw Cession school districts successfully challenged the disparity as a violation of the United States Constitution's equal protection clause. As a result, the Chickasaw Cession school districts now receive a payment per teacher unit based on the average annual expendable 16<sup>th</sup> Section revenue per teacher unit received by the Choctaw Cession school districts, less the amount of the annual interest appropriation.

### **COURT RULINGS**

In 1890, the United States Supreme Court declared the early laws reserving land in each township for the support of public education to be a "binding and perpetual obligation." In 1895, the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled that 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands are held by the State in trust for public schools. In 1906, Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice A.H. Whitfield opined: "Sixteenth sections are set apart as a sacred trust. No greater trust can be committed to any state than that of the education of the children within its borders ... And, if one such trust can be more sacred than another, it is that trust designed to bring home to the doors of the poor children of the commonwealth the means of acquiring a good education."

Despite Congressional and federal and state judicial endorsements, management of the 16<sup>th</sup> Section land, with few exceptions, ranged from indifferent to abusive. Disregarding the Mississippi Constitution's prohibition against donation of public lands, many 99-year leases of 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands were given for one-time payments. Through generations, leaseholders mistakenly came to view themselves as the actual owners of the 16<sup>th</sup> Sections.

This perception began to change in the early 1970s when Smith County

Superintendent of Education Joe Tally refused to sign inadequately compensated leases. Litigation resulted in a Mississippi Supreme Court decision holding that 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands must be leased for fair market value. The 1974 Legislature gave local school boards veto power in leasing 16<sup>th</sup> Section land.

### **16<sup>TH</sup> SECTION LAND REFORM ACT**

In 1978, 16<sup>th</sup> Section and Lieu Land Act was passed by the Legislature, with Lieutenant Governor Evelyn Gandy casting the tie-breaking vote in the Senate. It provides that 16<sup>th</sup> Section school lands and lieu lands are held in trust for the benefit of the public schools; it transfers control of public school trust lands from the Boards of Supervisors to the Boards of Education, under the general supervision of the Secretary of State.

Since the passage of the 1978 16<sup>th</sup> Section and Lieu Land Act, 16<sup>th</sup> Section land leases are based on a classification system. The nine classifications include: Forest Land, Agricultural Land, Industrial Land, Commercial Land, Residential Land, Farm Residential Land, Recreational Land, Other Land, and Catfish Farming Land. Classification is determined by a finding of the highest and best use of the land for producing the maximum revenue.

All timber on 16<sup>th</sup> Section land is under the general supervision and management of the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

### **LEASING AND COMPETITIVE BIDDING**

Based on statutory requirements, local Boards of Education offer three classifications of land for competitive bid. Those classifications include: Agriculture, Forestry (hunting and fishing), and Mineral lands. Agriculture leases are awarded to the highest bidder, while forestry leases allow the existing leaseholder the right to renew their lease by matching the highest acceptable bid received. Mineral leases are awarded to the highest bidder with

the caveat that the bid includes royalty payments and a bonus. Agriculture leases do not exceed five-year terms, unless the land is used for cultivation of rice or for pasture land. In those cases, the term may not exceed 10 years. Forest leases for hunting usually have terms that do not exceed five years.

All 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands, regardless of classification, may be leased for the exploration, development, mining, and production of oil, gas, and minerals including: carbon dioxide and other gaseous substances; metals, compounds of metals, metal-bearing ores; coal, lignite, sulfur, salt, sand, gravel, fill dirt, and clay.

### **LEASING BY APPLICATION AND APPRAISAL**

Lands not offered by competitive bid are leased based on an appraised value. The appraisal is fee simple and values the land without improvements. At the discretion of the local school board, a rate of return of the appraised value is used to determine the rent. For leases of industrial land and commercial land, the annual rental may not be set at less than five percent of the current market value, exclusive of buildings or improvements not owned by the school district.

The maximum lease term for all land classifications leased upon application is 40 years, and rent adjustment clauses are mandatory, except in leases of residential and farm residential land. Rent adjustment clauses are optional, but recommended, in residential and farm residential leases.

Application to lease properties is submitted to the Superintendent of Education and the Board of Education for approval. Once the property has been appraised and the lease has been drafted, the terms and rent of each lease must be approved.

The holder of a lease granted upon application has a prior right to re-lease or extend an existing lease on terms as may be agreed upon the Board of Education, but

subject to the classification of the land. Assignments of leases of 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands are allowed only if the lease contract so provides, or at the discretion of the Board of Education, provided that it may not arbitrarily withhold permission for assignment.

### **REVENUES – EXPENDABLE AND NON-EXPENDABLE FUNDS**

Revenues collected from the following sources are deemed expendable funds: lease bonuses and annual delay rentals collected under oil, gas and mineral leases; annual rents collected under leases covering all 16<sup>th</sup> Section land classifications; interest received upon loans or investments of the principal fund; and proceeds from the sale of timber. Generally, expendable funds may be used for all the same purposes as other available school funds in operating and maintaining the schools of the district.

The principal fund is a permanent fund consisting of revenue received from the following sources: easements and rights-of-way; sales of lieu land; permanent damages to school trust land; sales of nonrenewable resources including, but not limited to, the sale of sand, gravel, dirt, clays, and royalties received from the sale of mineral ores, coal, oil, and gas; sales of buildings on 16<sup>th</sup> Section lands, and sales of timber. Except for income from timber sales, funds required to be deposited into the principal fund are not expendable. However, if a district desires to spend income from timber sales, it must maintain a separate principal fund account for timber income.

Districts are authorized to borrow principal funds at a rate of interest of not less than four percent per annum for a term of not more than 20 years for the erection, equipment, or repair of school buildings, improvement of timber stands, and to provide funds for any building project approved by the State Board of Education. Additionally, districts may

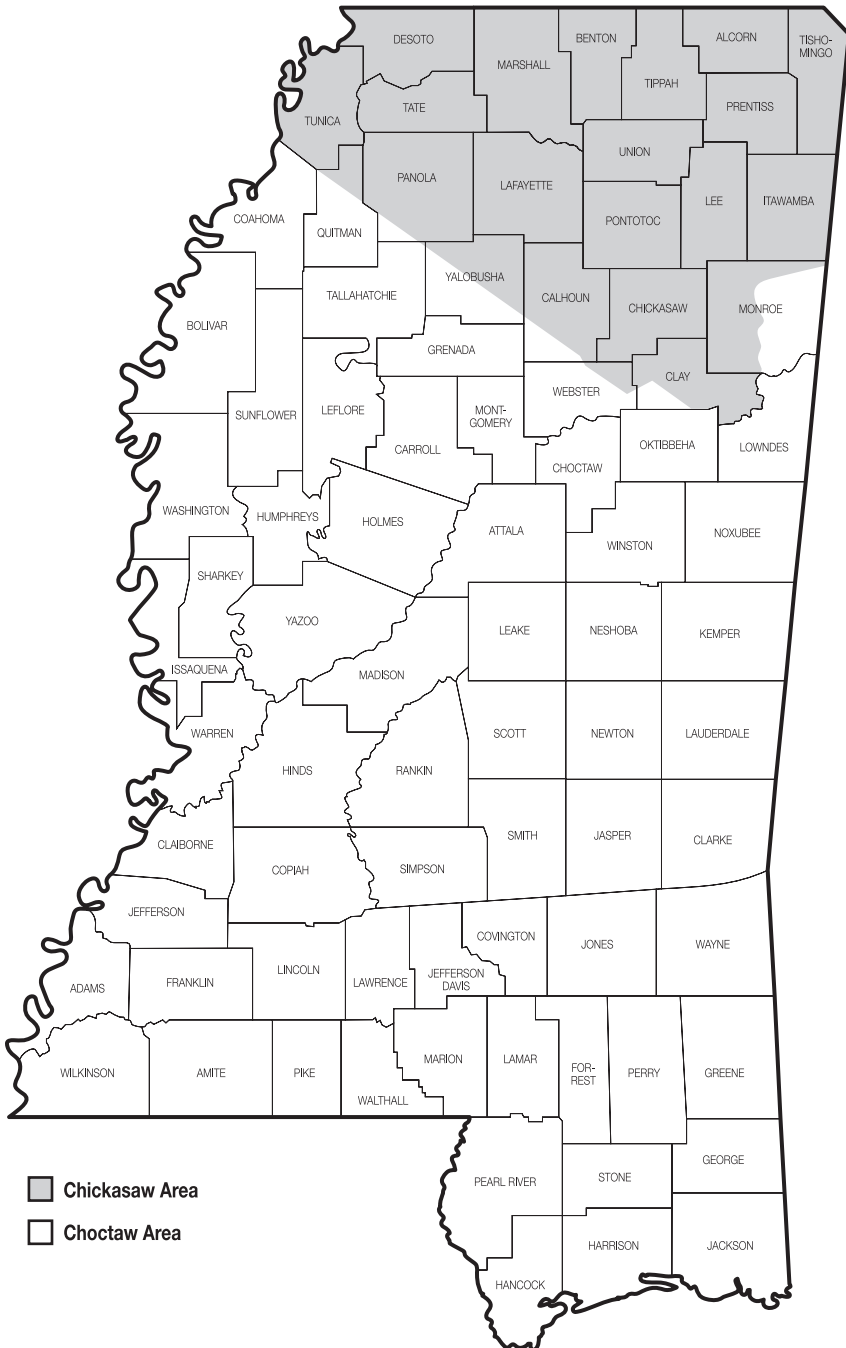
borrow funds, at the same interest rate, for a term not exceeding 10 years for the purchase of school buses. It is the duty of the Board of Education to keep the principal fund invested.

### **BUILDING ON REFORM**

The passage of the 1978 16<sup>th</sup> Section and Lieu Land Act made tremendous strides in instituting sound management practices of our School Trust Lands. Secretary of State Michael Watson strives to build upon the 16<sup>th</sup> Section Reform Act and the work of prior Secretaries of State by allowing for more open transparency in the way Mississippi regulates 16<sup>th</sup> Section land.



# SCHOOL TRUSTS LANDS



# TIDELANDS

## OUR TIDELANDS POLICY

It is the policy of the State of Mississippi to favor the preservation of the natural state of the public trust tidelands and their ecosystems and to prevent the despoliation and destruction of them, except where a specific alteration would serve a higher public interest in compliance with the public purposes of the trust. Public Trust Tidelands are managed with a view towards preservation and conservation.

Mississippi's Public Tidelands Trust includes all lands beneath waters that are naturally subject to tidal influence. In general, the inland boundary of the trust is the line of mean high tide of the Gulf of Mexico and the bays, rivers and bayous that flow into it. The outer boundary is the state's seaward boundary, three miles south of the barrier islands. The mean high tide is an arithmetic average of ordinary high tides over a 19-year tidal epoch. As such, the boundary line between public trust tidelands and privately owned lands is not a fixed, stationary line. It ambulates with changes in the mean high tide over the years. Accretion and reliction may increase the upland private estate; while erosion, subsidence and rising sea levels may move the boundary inland and increase the area held as public tidelands and submerged lands. Artificial changes to a shoreline, such as filling or dredging, do not change the public trust tidelands boundary.

## THE PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE – IN HISTORY AND AS APPLIED IN MISSISSIPPI

The Public Trust Doctrine, the historical legal authority upon which these lands are administered, is of ancient origin. The concept of common ownership of the sea and the seashore is based on the second century work of the Roman jurist Gaius. The doctrine was later codified by Justinian, the emperor who ruled the Roman Empire from Constantinople in the

Sixth Century: "... Let us proceed to the law of Things. Of these, some admit of private ownership, while others ... are by natural law common to all ... The following things are by natural law common to all – the air, running water, the sea, and consequently the seashore."

Roman civil law shaped not only the civil law of Continental Europe, but also the common law of England, where the tidelands were protected by the King for all his subjects, and subsequently the law of the United States.

The original colonies withheld their tidelands from the United States when they adopted the Constitution and entered the Union. Subsequently admitted states entered the union on an equal footing with the original thirteen, with the United States creating similar trusts for each new state.

Mississippi's Public Tidelands Trust was funded at the time of statehood in 1817. In 1857, the Mississippi Supreme Court recognized in *Martin v. O'Brien*, 34 Miss. 21, that "the shores of the sea below high-water mark belong to the state as trustee for the public ..." and there followed a long and unbroken line of cases recognizing the State's ownership of lands overflowed by the tide. The issue attracted new interest in the mid-1980s when a dispute arose between the State and private owners over the right to lease oil, gas, and mineral interests. In the 1986 Mississippi Supreme Court decision in *Cinque Bambini Partnership v. State*, 491 So.2d 508, Justice James Robertson, writing for a unanimous court, declared that "title to all lands naturally subject to tidal influence, inland to today's mean high-water mark, is held by the State of Mississippi in trust ..." Justice Robertson noted in the *Cinque Bambini* ruling that, "The public purposes to which these lands and waters placed in the public trust may be devoted are not static." They include navigation and transportation; commerce; fishing;

bathing, swimming, and other recreational activities; development of mineral resources; environmental protection and preservation; the enhancement of aquatic, avarian and marine life, sea agriculture “and no doubt others.”

In February 1988, the United States Supreme Court affirmed the *Cinque Bambini* decision in *Phillips Petroleum Company v. Mississippi*, 484 U.S. 108, 108 S.Ct. 791, 98 L.Ed. 277.

Following the state and federal Supreme Court decisions, the Mississippi Legislature in 1989 adopted the Public Trust Tidelands Act, which is codified primarily in Chapter 15 of Title 29 of the Mississippi Code. The Legislature, mindful of the many and sometimes conflicting public purposes of the trust, declared it “to be the public policy of this State to favor the preservation of the natural state of the public trust tidelands and their ecosystems and to prevent the despoliation and destruction of them, except where a specific alteration of specific public trust tidelands would serve a higher public interest in compliance with the public purposes of the public trust in which such tidelands are held.” MCA §29-15-3(1). And while the law provides that tidelands and submerged lands are held by the State in trust for use of all the people, it also recognizes the State’s responsibilities as trustee extend to littoral and riparian property owners as well as to other members of the public. MCA §29-15-5.

The constitutionality of the 1989 Public Trust Tidelands Act was upheld by the Mississippi Supreme Court in *Secretary of State v. Wiesenberg*, 633 So.2d 983 (Miss. 1994).

## TIDELANDS MAPS

In the preamble to the Public Trust Tidelands Act, the Legislature found that certainty and stability of the land titles of riparian and littoral property owners along the shores of tidally affected waters of the state are essential to the economic welfare

of the state and to the peace, tranquility, and financial security of the citizens of the State of Mississippi. A crucial part of this act directed the Secretary of State to publish maps depicting the boundary of the public trust tidelands. MCA § 29-15-7. Pursuant to this directive, final maps were adopted and certified on December 5, 1994. These maps provide the basis for determining the boundary between private upland and Public Trust Tidelands by showing areas where the shoreline is natural and where the shoreline has been artificially altered by excavation and filling. Official copies of these maps are available in the Secretary of State offices in Jackson and Biloxi, as well as in the offices of the Chancery Clerks of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties.

## TIDELANDS LEASING

Under MCA §29-1-107, the Secretary of State is authorized to “rent or lease surface lands, tidelands or submerged lands owned or controlled by the State of Mississippi lying in or adjacent to the Mississippi Sound or Gulf of Mexico or streams emptying therein ...” The Secretary of State may decide a particular proposed alteration of public trust tidelands does not serve a higher public interest in compliance with the purposes of the trust and decline to lease tidelands to a lease applicant. The discretionary nature of the tidelands leasing authority was upheld by the Mississippi Supreme Court in *Columbia Land Development LLC v. Secretary of State Eric Clark*, 868 So.2d 1006 (Miss. 2004).

Pursuant to this statutory and judicial authority, the Secretary of State publishes Rules, Regulations and Procedures for the Administration, Control and Leasing of Public Trust Tidelands and Submerged Lands. Because the Mississippi Constitution in Section 95 prohibits the donation of lands belonging to the State to individuals or private corporations, these rules generally require that, when an

activity on public trust tidelands requires a lease, the lease rental must be fair market value. In 2012, the Legislature exempted littoral and riparian owners' residential piers from the leasing requirements.

In all cases where a lease is required, the Secretary of State establishes the initial rent. In most cases the initial rent is based on an appraisal prepared by a qualified appraiser selected by the Secretary of State. The prospective lessee is free to provide the State's appraiser with any information he believes is relevant. The law requires rent review and adjustment at each fifth anniversary of the lease. The rent adjustment is tied either to the All-Urban Consumer Price Index – All Items (CPI) or to an appraisal that deducts the value of the lessee's improvements. Casino leases are generally adjusted annually by the CPI index.

The Secretary of State's administrative rules consider the special status of riparian and littoral owners. In the riparian or littoral area, the rules provide that only the riparian or littoral owner or someone who stands in his shoes can lease the adjoining tidelands for private use. Nevertheless, the State may impose additional public uses in a littoral or riparian area provided such uses serve a higher public purpose approved by the legislature.

### **THE PUBLIC TRUST TIDELANDS FUND / THE PUBLIC TRUST ASSESSMENT FUND**

The rents which the State collects from tidelands leases are deposited in the Public Trust Tidelands Fund. Each year the Secretary of State disburses the Tidelands Funds to the Department of Marine Resources.

After Hurricane Katrina, the Legislature took action to allow casinos to operate on shore, generally within 800 feet of the water's edge. Casinos on shore pay a statutory assessment in lieu of a tidelands lease rent. The amount of the statutory assessment is based on the capital

investment in the part of the structure in which licensed gaming activities are conducted. The statutory assessments are deposited in the Public Trust Assessment Fund. Each year the Secretary of State disburses the Assessment Funds to the Department of Marine Resources.

Revenues deposited in the Tidelands Fund or the Assessment Fund and disbursed to the Department of Marine Resources are allocated by the State Legislature programs and projects relating to tidelands management, such as conservation, reclamation, preservation, acquisition, education, or the enhancement of public access to the public trust tidelands or public improvement projects as they relate to such lands." MCA §29-15-9 and MCA §29-15-10.

Since 1997, the Secretary of State has turned back more than \$209.9 million from tidelands leases and assessments to the Department of Marine Resources for disbursement by the Mississippi legislature. That money is spent in the three coastal counties to build public piers and boat launches; to improve and build municipal and county marinas and harbors; to establish and monitor fishing reefs in the Mississippi Sound; to acquire environmentally important habitat for Mississippi's Coastal Preserve System; and to conduct important scientific research on subjects like fisheries stocks, red tide and submerged sea grasses, and other subjects essential to the protection and preservation of the public trust tidelands and their ecosystems.

## PROVIDING PUBLIC ACCESS AND PROTECTING PUBLIC TRUST TIDELANDS THROUGH PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Secretary of State, as Trustee of Mississippi's Public Trust Tidelands, has also worked to acquire properties adjacent to the Tidelands to enhance the public's access and protection of these areas. Most of the properties acquired over the past 26 years were planned for and are managed with the help of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources under the Mississippi Coastal Preserves System. Secretary of State Michael Watson participates as part of the property acquisition team using BP-Deepwater Horizon litigation settlement funds ensuring the State of Mississippi acquires good and clear title to purchased property and is in the position to serve as good stewards of lands acquired. Significant acquisitions recently accomplished through this funding source are in the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, approximately 1,500 acres, and the northern portion of Round Island, approximately 17 acres, both in Jackson County. Other acquisitions of note are the Baldwin Family property in Hancock County marshes, approximately 2,500 acres acquired in 2013 and two areas of Cat Island in Harrison County, including approximately 217 acres acquired from private owners in 2013 and approximately 492 acres acquired in 2016 through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Mississippi Coastal Improvement Program. An additional 40 acres of Cat Island's east beach were renourished under the program and added to the State's holdings. These properties will be managed by the State for the benefit and use of its citizens.

