

Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Strategic Plan 2003–2006

March 25, 2003

Mission

The mission of the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve is to increase our understanding of coastal resources through long-term research and monitoring and to transfer this knowledge using education and interpretation programs to foster informed decision-making and resource management of our coastal landscape.

Core Values

The Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) was established in 1999 after 5 years of coordinated efforts by a wide variety of interested agencies and organizations. The reserve, as established by cooperative Memorandum of Understanding is administered by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Estuarine Research Reserve System. The administrative framework of the Grand Bay NERR includes a Management Board consisting of representatives of the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Mississippi State University, University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and the chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee. The Management Board provides overall program guidance to the reserve and directs key decisions. The Citizens Advisory Committee, Research Advisory Committee, Education Advisory Committee and the Stewardship Advisory Committees provide support and advice regarding the specific focus areas of the reserve. Core staff at the reserve includes reserve manager and education, research and stewardship coordinators. Other staff will be hired as required by program needs and the availability of funds.

The core values of the Reserve include those used in establishing the reserve, including:

- Partnership
- Acquisition of property from willing sellers
- Leading by example
- Open and honest communication
- Striving for excellence in all that we do

Goals

- Establish conditions for a successful research program including: monitoring program, site characterization, Research Advisory Committee, and research cooperatives.
- Establish a sense of place among targeted audiences by interpreting the relevance of research results and resource management through the development and implementation of experiential (hands-on) programs and exhibitry.
- Acquire all available lands within the NERR boundary; keep them open to public use and manage them with partners according to best management practices to address natural fire, hydrologic regime and native species, etc.
- Fully implement the research, education and resource management components of the Grand Bay NERR, through appropriate and effective staffing, funding, facilities and operational independence.

Goals and Objectives

Establish conditions for a successful research program including: monitoring program, site characterization, Research Advisory Committee, and research cooperatives.

- Develop PowerPoint presentation to promote research opportunities (e.g. universities)
- Implement various monitoring programs
- Support site characterization inventories
- Develop cooperative agreements with research institutions
- Develop a researcher packet
- Utilize expertise of Research Advisory Committee
- Develop research cooperatives with interested organizations and agencies

Establish a sense of place among targeted audiences by interpreting the relevance of research results and resource management through the development and implementation of experiential (hands-on) programs and exhibitry.

- Conduct needs assessments and market analyses to identify target audiences and issues
- Develop educational programs, exhibitry and trails
- Utilize existing /develop high-quality curricular materials
- Develop and implement evaluation and assessment instruments for content, attitudes and perceptions
- Establish focus groups within the Education Advisory Committee to specifically address:
 - Pre-K-12/professional teacher development
 - Coastal Training Program
 - Coastal residents
- Assist with a Grand Bay NERR friends group

Acquire all available lands within the NERR boundary; keep them open to public use and manage them with partners according to best management practices to address natural fire, hydrologic regime and native species, etc.

- Continue partnerships already in place for land acquisition
- Participate in development and promotion of Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) public use plan
- Write communication plan with NWR to promote public use of the property by August, 2003
- Work in conjunction with all landowners within and adjacent to the NERR boundaries to implement a fire management plan and to formulate similar plans for other management activities including protection of cultural resources
- Coordinate with state and federal agencies to enforce public use and other regulations within NERR boundaries

Fully implement the research, education and resource management components of the Grand Bay NERR, through appropriate and effective staffing, funding, facilities and operational independence.

- Maintain adequate levels of funding support in conjunction with partners
- Design and construct facilities according to 2002 Facilities Master Plan
- Recruit and retain appropriate staff
- Tie staff annual performance objectives to the NERR strategic plan
- Streamline administrative processes with DMR

Vision of Success

By 2006, we envision the Grand Bay NERR as a focal site for extensive terrestrial and aquatic research designed to gain a better understanding of the ecology of the reserve. Educators will transfer technical information and research data to coast decision-makers for them to make well informed choices. The NERR will be a center for coastal resource management, with adequate funding and staff to support a wide array of programs. Broad expanses of wet pine savanna, coastal marsh, grassland prairies and clean coastal waters will extend as far the eye can see, with natural processes functioning across the landscape including new oyster reefs open to harvest as a result of improved water quality.

Reputation of the NERR

The Grand Bay NERR will be nationally known as an estuarine research and education center in conjunction with other facilities on the coast. It will be the envy of similar institutions, setting a high standard in all areas of its endeavors. The reserve will be warmly regarded in the local community. Citizens' behavior will reflect that pride in their natural heritage and will be proud that the reserve is part of their community . Everyone from six-year-olds to county supervisors know what an estuary is and why it's important.

Role of the Management Board

- Establishes strategic direction through National Estuarine Research Reserve System and state guidance
- Develops a plan to pursue the strategic direction
- Sees that the strategic plan is implemented
- Brings partnership resources to the table
- Helps coordinate efforts, shares learning and works cooperatively across agencies
- Assists with the hiring of core staff by serving on the hiring committee for manager position and with the manager for three coordinator positions and making recommendations to the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources or other hiring entity
- Establishes special management board committees or task forces to handle special projects as needed (e.g. facilities committee)

Role of the Advisory Committees

- Provide advice to staff
- Provide support for program development
- Review activities
- Provide strong network/link to the coastal community