

## **Tunica Hills State Preservation Area Summary**

### **Description**

The Tunica Hills State Preservation Area is a state owned site of approximately 700 acres in West Feliciana Parish. This spectacular site is adjacent to the Mississippi River with a 170 foot Bluff overlooking the river. The project will include a state of the art Interpretive Center consisting of several different units elevated 50-90 feet above the ravines and used to interpret the uniqueness of this diverse Tunica ecosystem. This "Park" will become Louisiana's most unique tourist destination and a must see for eco tourists. The site will be accessed by hiking trails, a tram system, amphitheater and river overlook. Overnight primitive camping sites will be developed.

### **Project Funding**

In 2002, \$700,000 was provided by the State for planning and design. This was completed and presented to the West Feliciana Parish community in 2003. In July, 2012 the Governor's Office presented and received approval from the State Bond Commission a non-cash line of credit for \$2,995,000 for Phase 1 construction. This gives the State authority to enter into a contract prior to July 1, 2013 and to spend the funds after this date.

### **Phase 1 Construction: \$3 million**

Phase 1 construction will include the following: site access; entrance road; tram trail (including 2 timber bridges and an LPG fueling station) and the purchase of 2 trams; bridges; water well; electrical power; preparation for an entrance station; 5 miles of hiking trails; fencing; and 3100 feet of board walks.

### **Phase 2 and beyond: \$10 plus million**

Interpretative Center and observation deck on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River; entrance station and managers residence.

### **What is a State Preservation Area (SPA)?**

The purpose of a State Preservation Area by mission is to preserve and interpret natural areas in Louisiana. Therefore, great care has been taken to produce a master plan that does just that. The reason for the buildings is to provide environmental education about the natural systems of our region and the site specifically. Those educational and interpretative lessons are in concert with the mission of the park and the facility is designed to create a low impact on the surroundings. Actually they are designed around the trees and require the removal of very little natural vegetation. While this type of construction may be a bit more costly it is needed to create the needed educational and interpretive center. This site master plan is largely about environmental education which will foster an appreciation for our natural environment and teach sustainable concepts. In order to provide these programs to all, young, old and disabled, this center is designed to be dynamic and usable by all and achieves the goal of the SPA.

The standard for design used brings the visitor to the best parts of the site with the lowest possible impact. As much as possible, existing and abandoned logging roads and natural ridges of the entrance roads and trails were used. Additionally, designs and plans for contractors that limit where they can clear, store materials and how they can access the site will be imposed. The entrance road will limit vehicular traffic to one route and will use alternative fuel vehicles to transport the visitor to the highest part of the site and then allow trail system to provide an on the ground experience once the visitor has been oriented and educated about the site and the natural systems. This controls the impact as best possible and is a standard in many of our state and national natural areas. The buildings and bridges that comprise the Interpretive Center are totally sustainable in design. All materials are galvanized or natural requiring very little maintenance. No exterior finishes are painted. They will be fabricated and prepared offsite and assembled in place. Once the visitor has the interpretive experience at the center then they can explore the site on the trail system. The plan calls for over 5 miles of hiking trails that are designed to give the hiker a varied experience in terms of hiking difficulty and experience. Again the plan uses the logging roads, stream beds and natural cleared areas as the base and is designed to bring the visitor to key areas. Public safety is a concern so trails need to be marked and certain vertical transitions need to be constructed to obtain this level of safety for the public. Additionally, where possible the surface will be natural ground with minor clearing only when needed creating the lowest impact possible. Having a trail system also allows for placement of trash receptacles, additional interpretive exhibits and rest areas. These amenities will enhance the experience and, because they serve to control the route, will lessen the overall impact to the natural resource.

### **Next steps**

Continue to work with our Legislative delegation and Governor's Office to obtain already appropriated funding and to gain additional funding for future development.