



Chapter 3:

INVENTORY OF LOUISIANA'S OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDERS

A. RECREATION PROVIDERS OVERVIEW

The State of Louisiana's residents and visitors have numerous recreational opportunities to choose from, provided by the local, state, and federal governments, as well as the private sector. This chapter focuses on each of the agencies that supply and promote recreational opportunities, providing brief descriptions of each service.

B. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The majority of land reserved for recreation within the state is owned and controlled by the federal government. These lands are comprised of Military Installations, National Wildlife Refuges, and National Parks and Forests. The federal lands serve many recreational purposes, including conservation, hunting, and camping. Although the federal entities hold the majority of recreation areas, actual recreational opportunities are limited when compared to local and private recreation providers. As of August 2014, the federal government offers 159 recreational areas within the state, according to www.recreation.gov.

Agencies that have jurisdiction over the federally controlled recreational land within the state include the Military Installation Commands, the National Park Service, the United States Forest Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Military Installations

Recreational opportunities provided by the Department of Defense (DoD) can be found on three military installations within the state – the Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, Barksdale Air Force Base, and Fort Polk. Together, these three installations support approximately 37,000 enlisted and civilian personnel, including countless additional military retirees and DoD family members. Typically, these installations provide fitness centers, trails, social hubs, bowling alleys, sport fields and courts, and outdoor recreational equipment rental through their internal department of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR). Additionally, there are six off base recreational areas that offer camping, outdoor recreational equipment rental and water related recreation (www.militarycampgrounds.us/louisiana). Although these facilities are reserved for DoD use, there are limited instances in which these facilities have been opened for use through memorandums of understanding and other joint use arrangements.

National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) is an agency within the Department of the Interior whose prime responsibilities include the care and management of the national parks, national monuments, and other nationally historic properties. Its mission is to preserve, unimpaired, the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this, and future, generations. Within Louisiana, the NPS manages five national parks, over 1,300 National Register of Historic Places listings, two National Heritage Areas, and over 50 National Historic Landmarks. The agency is also responsible for coordinating and distributing community grants for the establishment and preservation of historic places, parks and recreation facilities, conservation areas, and trails and greenways. For additional information about the NPS within the State of Louisiana, please visit: www.nps.gov/state/la.

United States Forest Service

National resource management in the country is lead by the United States Forest Service (USFS), an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture. The Kisatchie National Forest is the second largest recreational area by acreage within the state, containing approximately 604,000 acres. The forest consists of five ranger districts across seven parishes. The majority of the forest is open for public recreational use, including hunting, camping, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle riding, bicycling, and canoeing/kayaking. The forest has more than 100 miles of trails and over 40 developed recreation sites. Additional information related to the USFS and Kisatchie National Forest can be found at: www.fs.usda.gov/kisatchie.

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United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Like the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is an agency within the Department of the Interior dedicated to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. In the state, there are 23 national wildlife refuges totaling over 567,000 acres as of July 2014. Several of the wildlife refuges are in a land acquisition phase as a result of previous congressional authorizations. The USFWS also administers the National Fish Hatchery in Natchitoches. Federal law restricts recreational uses to those that are compatible with the refuge – mostly wildlife and wild land-oriented activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, observation, paddling, education, and photography. Additional information on the USFWS and National Wildlife Refuges can be found at www.fws.gov.

United States Army Corps of Engineers

Much of the State of Louisiana's waterways and coastlines are managed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), an agency within the Department of Defense. Its primary responsibilities include the planning, designing, building, and operating of locks and dams, flood control and protection, beach nourishment projects and dredging of waterways for commerce navigation. The agency is also responsible for military facility construction and ecosystem restoration projects. The majority of the state falls within two ACOE districts: the New Orleans District and the Vicksburg District. A very small portion of the state falls within the Galveston District in Texas.

Although older ACOE projects authorized by congress were limited to flood damage reduction purposes only, newer projects include natural resource management, environmental stewardship, and recreation. In many cases, the public is allowed in these areas for recreational purposes, provided that their activities do not interfere with the operation and maintenance of the ACOE facilities.

The New Orleans District has jurisdiction over coastal Louisiana and manages three recreational areas: the Atchafalaya Basin Floodway, Bonnet Carré Spillway, and the Louisiana Old River Control Area. The Atchafalaya Basin is the largest wetland and swamp in the U.S., spanning 140 miles through 14 parishes. A full map of the area can be found in Appendix L. The Vicksburg District manages several recreational sites in northern Louisiana, including Bayou Bodcau, Caddo Lake, Wallace Lake, J Bennet Johnston Waterway, and the Ouachita-Black River. Caddo Lake is the largest natural freshwater lake in the south and the largest cypress forest in the world.

These lands and waters provide opportunities for fishing, paddling, crawfishing, hunting, horseback riding, picnicking, dog training, hiking, ATV and motorcycle riding, camping, wildlife watching, and model airplane flying competitions. For more information, visit www.mvn.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation.aspx.

C. STATE GOVERNMENT

Similar to the federal government, the state has several agencies that provide recreational facilities and opportunities, including state parks and an arboretum totaling over 30,200 acres, state historic sites, Wildlife Management Areas, Wildlife Refuges, and Conservation Areas totaling over 1.5 million acres (source: www.crt.state.la.us/louisiana-state-parks).

State agencies with jurisdiction over the state controlled recreational land include the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the Louisiana Office of State Parks, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Sabine River Authority and Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Louisiana Office of State Parks

The Louisiana Office of State Parks manages one golf course, 22 unique parks with varying amenities and recreational activities, as well as the State Arboretum, all open for public use. Its mission is to “serve the citizens of Louisiana and visitors by preserving and interpreting natural areas of unique or exceptional scenic value, planning, developing and

operating sites that provide outdoor recreation opportunities in natural surroundings, preserving and interpreting historical and scientific sites of statewide importance and administering intergovernmental programs related to outdoor recreation and trails.”

The parks offer overnight facilities including cabins, lodges, group camps and large dormitories, and primitive, improved and premium camping. Recreation facilities include: boat/canoe launches and rentals, concessions/gift shops, pavilions, laundry and meeting facilities, outdoor classrooms, picnic areas, visitor/nature centers, fishing piers, playgrounds, sport areas, swimming, and trails for hiking, biking, off-highway vehicles and horseback riding. The State Arboretum, established in 1961, is the oldest state-supported arboretum in the country. It is approximately 600 acres in size with miles of hiking trails through dramatic topography, and is home to over 150 species of plants that are native to Louisiana. The J.D. “Prof” LaFleur Nature Center opened in 2009 features exhibits of woodlands and plant and animal habitats of Louisiana. The state park system includes the following parks: Bayou Segnette, Bogue Chitto, Chemin-A-Haut, Chicot, the Arboretum, Cypremort Point, Fairview-Riverside, Fontainebleau, Grand Isle, Hodges Gardens, Jimmie Davis, Lake Bistineau, Lake Bruin, Lake Claiborne, Lake D’Arbonne, Lake Fausse Pointe, North Toledo Bend, Palmetto Island, Poverty Point Reservoir, St. Bernard, Sam Houston Jones, South Toledo Bend, and Tickfaw.

The Office of State Parks also manages 19 State Historic Sites accessible to the public with a variety of amenities such as walking trails and picnic areas. State Historic Sites include the Audubon, Centenary, Fort Jesup, Fort Pike, Fort Saint Jean Baptiste, Forts Randolph and Buhlow, Kent Plantation House, Locust Grove, Longfellow-Evangeline, Los Adaes, Mansfield, Marksville, Plaquemine Lock, Port Hudson, Poverty Point, Rebel, Rosedown Plantation, and Winter Quarters.

Black Bear Golf Course, launched in 2006 as The Office of State Park’s only golf course, is a part of Louisiana’s Audubon Golf Trail. This championship course, clubhouse and 17-room lodge offers public golf opportunities adjacent to Poverty Point State Park’s 3,000 acre man-made lake.

A listing of the amenities and activities offered at each state park and historic site can be found in the appendix. Additional information on the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism can be found at www.crt.state.la.us.

Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) operate several recreation areas found in the state, but primarily for hunting and fishing. Its mission is to promote, protect, and advance agriculture, forestry, soil and water resources within the state.

The department manages the 8,000 acre Alexander State Forest, which is home to the Indian Creek Recreation Area. Seventy-five percent of the forest is managed for hunting and other recreational activities, such as camping, swimming, boating, picnicking, hiking and fishing. Additional information about the LDAF can be found at www.ldaf.state.la.us.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

All of the state Wildlife Management Areas and Wildlife Refuge Areas are managed by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). The LDWF protects, conserves, and replenishes the natural resources, wildlife and aquatic life of the state. In 1970, the Louisiana Legislature created the Louisiana Natural and Scenic Rivers System. The System was developed for the purpose of preserving, protecting, developing, reclaiming, and enhancing the wilderness qualities, scenic beauties, and ecological regimes of certain free-flowing Louisiana streams. LDWF manages approximately 3,000 miles of Louisiana designated Natural and Scenic Rivers. Recreational opportunities within Wildlife Management Areas include hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, camping, wildlife observation and nature photography.”

The Office of Wildlife is split into two divisions: the Wildlife Division and the Coastal and Non-game Resources Division. The Wildlife Division of the LDWF is responsible for the conservation program and biological data gathering for the

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state, managing approximately 1.1 million acres as part of the West Gulf Coast Plain WMAs, East Gulf Coast Plain WMAs, Mississippi Alluvial Valley North WMAs, and Mississippi Alluvial Valley South WMAs.

The Coastal and Non-game Resources Division's responsibilities include the conservation of coastal wildlife species and their marsh habitats through management of the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge, the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area, Atchafalaya Delta WMA, Biloxi WMA, Isle Dernieres Refuge, Lake Boeuf WMA, Marsh Island Refuge, Pass-a-Loutre WMA, Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA, Salvador WMA, State Wildlife Refuge, Saint Tammany Refuge, and the Timken WMA.

Additional information regarding the LDWF can be found in the appendix, or by visiting www.wlf.louisiana.gov.

Sabine River Authority

The 510 mile-long Sabine River forms the boundary between the states of Louisiana and Texas in its lower course. To facilitate the management of the river and its basin, the Sabine River Authority (SRA) was formed. The SRA's mission is to "provide for economic utilization and preservation of the waters of the Sabine River and its tributaries by promoting economic development, irrigation, navigation, improved water supply, drainage, public recreation, and hydroelectric power for the citizens of Louisiana." (srala-toledo.com).

Recreation facilities that the Authority manage include San Patricio and Clyde's Crossing roadside recreational areas, Oak Ridge Park, San Miguel Park, Cypress Bend Park, and Pleasure Point Park, and the Cow Bayou Wilderness Park, Converse Bay, Blue Lake, and Pendleton Bride Park day-use areas.

D. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Municipalities and Parish Governments

Because of the quantity of municipal governments throughout the state, the greatest number of recreational facilities is provided to the public at this level. Although local governments provide the greatest number of recreational facilities, they do so using the least amount of land. Local government park and recreational offices primarily account for the majority of active recreation such as baseball, football, and soccer fields, running tracks, basketball and tennis courts, swimming pools, fitness facilities, and playgrounds.

Although school facilities are not included in the SCORP inventory, they are an important resource for recreational activity at the local level, and are distributed throughout the state, reaching the greatest number of citizens. A positive trend over the past several decades are public school boards forming partnerships with other local agencies for the shared use of recreational facilities. These cooperative agreements benefit both groups, allowing for school facilities to be used by the community, and community facilities to be used by the school system. The community benefits by having after school programs and activities made available to residents and the school systems benefit by reduced maintenance responsibilities and availability of public parks and other public facilities for the students to use. In February 2014, the State of Louisiana listed over 715,000 students enrolled in 1,300+ public and charter schools. As recommended in the previous 2009-2013 SCORP, a detailed evaluation and inventory should be completed to record locations and conditions of all existing public school recreational facilities in order to identify recreation opportunity gaps within the system.

E. PRIVATE COMMERCIAL AND NON-PROFIT

The private sector provides a substantial amount of the total number of recreational facilities available for public use through semi-public open spaces, commercial fitness centers, private golf courses, tennis and hunting clubs, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Club, and church/youth camps, to name a few. Because these recreational opportunities are privately owned, it would be difficult to get a complete picture of the types and locations of the facilities, as well as the sizes and quantities of the facilities. Another large source of private recreation is hunting on commercial forest lands. Millions

of acres of land in Louisiana are classified as commercial forests, and a large portion of these commercial forests have, historically, been leased for hunting sports.

F. CONCLUSION

There are numerous providers of a multitude of recreational amenities and activities throughout the State of Louisiana. The five federal agencies listed in this chapter offer the most recreational areas by acre, but the least amount of recreational activities when compared to other levels of providers. This includes national forests and parks, facilities associated on military installations, wildlife refuges, and Corps of Engineering projects. These areas are typically associated with isolated, non-group recreation such as hunting and fishing. The second largest supplier of recreational amenities by size is the State of Louisiana agencies, such as the Office of State Parks within the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Sabine River Authority. Like the federal recreation providers, the number of recreational activities provided by the state is small in comparison to the local and private providers, and generally include activities such as hiking and camping.

Local governments and private groups provide the majority of recreation activities in the state. The facilities provided tend to also be more evenly distributed, by population densities, when compared to federal and state provided amenities. Local level recreational opportunities are usually more organized than state or federal levels, and typically include group activities such as team field sports, sport courts, swimming, and fitness centers.

The trend for all levels of government is that levels of funding are decreasing while use of the recreational facilities is increasing, leading to deteriorated and overcrowded amenities and placing further strain on already thin government budgets. Citizens young and old value their recreational opportunities, often time citing these amenities when it comes to selecting where to live, work, and play. It will be critical to sustain, enhance, and increase recreational opportunities at all levels of government, as well as the private sector, to keep up with this growing demand for quality recreation opportunities.



Bike race on Tammany Trace Trail (Image courtesy of the St. Tammany Parish Government)



Farr Horse Park (Image courtesy of the Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission (BREC))