

**MISSISSIPPI'S COASTAL RESOURCES: A SURVEY TO  
DETERMINE ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS OF LOCAL CITIZENS**

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by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium

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## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- A majority of the people who responded to this survey consider the coastal area of Mississippi to include Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, and Pearl River Counties.
- More than 90 per cent of the respondents feel that the swamps and marshlands are valuable to Mississippi.
- Fishing, industry, and tourism are considered to be the most important activities on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
- The responses of most citizens indicate that the climate is what they enjoy about living in the coastal area.
- Almost 90 per cent of the respondents agree that some areas of the coast are better suited for certain purposes than are other areas.
- The vast majority of Gulf Coast citizens feel their area is very important to the rest of the state.
- An overwhelming number of citizens feel there is a need for planning for the use of coastal resources.
- Most people feel there should be a coordination of effort among all three levels of government — local, state, and Federal — involved in planning for the use of coastal resources.
- More than half of the respondents have heard about coastal zone management, but fewer than 5 per cent have attended any coastal zone management meetings.
- More than two-thirds of the respondents agree there is a need for legislation to aid in managing coastal resources.

## BACKGROUND

The coastal zone is rich in a variety of resources—natural, commercial, recreational, industrial, and esthetic. Increasing pressures brought by population growth and development have resulted in the loss of some of these resources. To deal with these pressures, the National Coastal Zone Management Act, passed and signed into law in 1972, gives each coastal state the opportunity to manage its own coastal resources. This Act provides funds on a four-to-one basis to assist states in developing their own coastal zone programs. In addition, the Act provides grants to implement these plans when they are completed.

Mississippi has no coastal zone management plan at this time. However, in 1973 the Mississippi Legislature passed the Coastal Wetlands Protection Act to help preserve Mississippi's coastal wetlands, except where their alteration would serve a higher public interest. Included in the provisions of this Act is a mandate for the Mississippi Marine Resources Council to coordinate the development of a comprehensive coastal zone management plan for Mississippi. To this end, the Council has endeavored to obtain a clear understanding of the conditions in the coastal zone which would affect a plan of this type. Opportunities, as well as problems, are being examined in depth to determine if existing regulatory programs are adequate for the maximum beneficial use, protection, and development of Mississippi's coastal resources.

Over the past few years the citizens of coastal Mississippi have been provided numerous opportunities to become involved in coastal zone planning. Nine public meetings and three conferences have been held to provide a forum for citizens to express their feelings and opinions and to receive information necessary to make intelligent decisions concerning the future of Mississippi's coastal area. This public opinion survey provides another opportunity for the Council to obtain information concerning the ideas, opinions, and attitudes of local citizens about the area in which they live. No plan for managing Mississippi's coastal resources could ever become a reality without public awareness, public participation, and public support.

When Mississippi's coastal zone management plan is completed, it will provide for: (1) Development and management of coastal resources, (2) environmental protection, (3) balancing competing uses within the coastal zone, (4) coordination of the agencies involved in coastal zone activities, and (5) focusing research on problems and opportunities in the coastal zone.

**Table 3: Occupation of Respondents**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Professional, technical and related Managers, administrators	545	16.7
Sales, clerical	331	10.1
Craftsmen and related	315	9.6
Service Workers	801	24.5
Military	134	4.1
Government employees	240	7.3
Fishing and farm related	186	5.7
Other	44	1.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4: Length of Residence of Respondent on Mississippi Coast**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Less than 3 years	153	3.9
3 to 5 years	297	7.7
5 years or more	3,425	88.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,875</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**SUMMARY OF RESPONSES**

**What Do Coastal Residents Consider to be the Coastal Area of Mississippi?**

The respondents perceive Mississippi's coastal zone to include at least three counties — Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson. Although the survey was mailed only to residents of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties, two-thirds of all respondents agree that Pearl River County should be considered a part of the coastal zone (Table 5).

**Table 5: Citizens' Perception of What is Mississippi's Coastal Area**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>	<b>Hancock County</b>	<b>Harrison County</b>	<b>Jackson County</b>
Area Below Interstate 10	15	0.4	0.8	0.3	0.4
Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties	927	23.8	30.8	21.5	26.1
Hancock, Harrison, Jackson and Pearl River Counties	2,526	64.5	63.3	66.4	61.9
George, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearl River, and Stone Counties	443	11.3	5.0	11.8	11.5

The findings indicate that place of residence, age, occupation, and length of residence on the coast have no significant effect on what a respondent considers to be Mississippi's coastal area.

**How Do Coastal Citizens View the Value of Mississippi's Swamps and Marshlands?**

Almost two-thirds of the respondents indicate the swamps and marshlands are very valuable. Another 26 per cent feel the wetlands are somewhat valuable, and only 9 per cent feel they are not very valuable. This conclusion is consistent among respondents regardless of their place of residence.

The age of the respondent, however, does appear to have some effect on his perception of the value of the swamps and marshlands. Respondents under the age of 25 assign a lower value to the wetlands than any other age group (Table 6).

**Table 6: Citizens' Perception of the Value of Swamps and Marshlands to Mississippi**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses	Under Age 25	Ages 25-34	Ages 35-44	Ages 45-54	Ages 55-64	Age 65 and Over
Very Valuable	1,904	64.3	46.6	63.4	65.8	63.8	66.7	63.9
Somewhat Valuable	765	26.3	35.6	27.7	27.6	25.8	22.8	27.0
Not Very Valuable	278	9.4	17.8	8.9	6.6	10.4	10.5	9.1

The length of residence on the coast did not greatly affect the respondents' view of the value of the swamps and marshlands. Although there was some variation according to occupation, these differences were small.

### What Do Coastal Citizens Perceive to be the Most Important Activity in Coastal Mississippi?

The greatest majority of coastal citizens believe fishing, industry, and tourism are the three most important activities in Mississippi's coastal area. Fishing was rated the most important activity by 32 per cent of the respondents, and another 32 per cent feel industry is the most important. Tourism was considered the most important activity by almost 26 per cent. Therefore, only 10 per cent consider energy related activities or some other activity to be most important.

These findings are interesting when considering the major activities in each of the coastal counties. In Hancock County, the most rural of the three counties, 42 per cent of the respondents believe fishing is the most important activity. In tourist oriented Harrison County, 33 per cent consider tourism to be most important. However, another 33 per cent of Harrison County citizens feel fishing is the most important activity. In highly industrialized Jackson County, almost half of the citizens feel that industry is the most important activity in coastal Mississippi (Table 7).

**Table 7: Citizens' Perception of the Most Important Activity in the Coastal Area of Mississippi**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses	Hancock County	Harrison County	Jackson County
Fishing	1,123	32.1	42.2	33.0	28.9
Industry	1,110	31.7	14.7	22.7	48.8
Tourism	900	25.8	31.6	33.5	12.7
Energy Production	149	4.3	6.2	4.1	4.2
Other	213	6.1	5.3	6.7	5.3

### What Do Coastal Citizens Like Most About Living in the Coastal Area?

Most people from Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties indicate that the climate is what they enjoy most about living in the coastal area of Mississippi. Climate is followed closely by a three-way tie between job opportunities, recreation, and the friendliness of the people. However, there is some variation in the responses from these three counties (Table 8).

**Table 8: Citizens' Perception of What They Like Most About Living in the Coastal Area**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses	Hancock County	Harrison County	Jackson County
Job Opportunities	602	16.8	4.0	11.4	26.9
Recreation	704	19.8	24.6	18.7	20.5
Climate	1,254	35.2	31.7	39.9	28.7
Friendliness of People	690	19.3	29.5	20.7	15.4
Other	320	9.0	10.3	9.2	8.5

No significant differences appear between citizens' ideas of what they like most about living in the coastal area. This is true whether classified according to age, occupation, or length of residence on the coast.

**Do Citizens Believe Certain Areas of the Coast Are Better Suited for Some Purpose Than Other Areas?**

No matter whether those responding are classified according to place of residence, length of residence on the coast, age, or occupation, the responses remain constant. All overwhelmingly agree that certain areas of the coast are better suited for some particular purpose, such as recreation, industry, or nature area (Table 9).

**Table 9: Citizens' Perception of Whether Some Areas Are Better Suited for a Particular Purpose than Other Areas**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Yes	2,556	87.7
No	144	4.9
Undecided	213	7.3

**Do Citizens of Coastal Mississippi Believe Their Area Is Important to the Rest of the State?**

Almost 99 per cent of those who responded to this survey feel the coastal area of Mississippi is important to the rest of the state. Only 1 per cent feel that the coastal area is not very important (Table 10).

**Table 10: Citizens' Perception of the Value of Coastal Mississippi to the Rest of the State**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Very Important	2,722	93.0
Somewhat Important	167	5.7
Not Very Important	39	1.3

**Is There a Need for Planning for the Use of Coastal Resources, and Who Should be Responsible for this Planning?**

Almost 95 per cent of the coastal citizens surveyed indicate they feel there is a definite need for planning for the use of coastal resources (Table 11).

**Table 11: Citizens' Perception of the Need for Planning for the Use of Coastal Resources**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Yes	2,759	94.5
No	65	2.2
Undecided	96	3.3

According to this survey 60 per cent feel that the state and local governments together could best plan for the use of coastal resources. The next most popular response for planning responsibilities is a combination of local and Federal government (Table 12). Although not included as a choice on the questionnaire, some respondents indicate a combination of all three levels of government — local, state, and Federal — should be responsible for planning for the use of coastal resources.

**Table 12: Citizens' Perception of Who Should be Responsible for Planning for the Use of Coastal Resources**

	Number of Responses	% of Total Responses
Local Government Only	305	10.4
State Government Only	84	2.9
Local and State Governments	1,751	59.9
Local and Federal Governments	781	26.7

**Are Local Citizens Aware of a Coastal Zone Management Program in Mississippi?**

About half of the people who responded to this survey indicate they have heard about coastal zone management in Mississippi. However, only 5 per cent of the total respondents indicate they have attended any coastal zone management meetings. Since the Mississippi Marine Resources Council began coastal zone management activities, at least three conferences and nine public meetings have been held to encourage participation by the citizens of coastal Mississippi.

**Is There a Need for Legislation to Aid in Managing Coastal Resources?**

The results of this survey indicate that coastal citizens overwhelmingly agree there is a definite need for legislation to aid in managing coastal resources. Only 9 per cent of the people who have returned their questionnaire indicate there is no need for any legislation at all (Table 13).

**Table 13: Citizens' Perception of the Need for Legislation to Aid in Managing Coastal Resources**

	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>% of Total Responses</b>
Yes	1,993	68.8
No	269	9.3
Undecided	633	21.9

**CONCLUSIONS**

The primary objective of this survey was to determine the feelings and concerns of the citizens of the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, those who will be most affected by coastal zone management. This survey will provide guidance to enable the Council to plan a coastal zone management program for Mississippi that includes the thoughts, wishes, and concerns of the people who live in the coastal area.

According to the results of this survey, the citizens of coastal Mississippi specify that industry, tourism, and fishing are the most important activities, and certain areas are better suited for some purposes than other areas. An overwhelming majority indicate that a coordination of effort between all levels of government — local, state, and Federal — is essential for planning for the beneficial use of coastal resources. A significant point of these findings is that the responses indicate that legislation is needed to aid in managing these coastal resources. The results of this survey indicate that citizens of coastal Mississippi do not feel the development of coastal resources should be left to chance.

Although there are slight variations, the findings of this survey indicate that regardless of how coastal citizens are grouped — place of residence, age, occupation, or length of residence on the coast — there are no significant differences in their attitudes, opinions, and ideas about the area in which they live.



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