

# **The Northeast Louisiana Triparish Area:**

## **An Assessment of Recreation and Tourism Development Opportunities**

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**Louisiana Recreation and  
Tourism Assessment Team**



**LOUISIANA SEA GRANT**  
College Program  
*Louisiana State University*

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**August 1991**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report contains the observations and recommendations of the Louisiana Recreational and Tourism Assessment Team (LRATAT) concerning the development of the recreation and tourism resources of East and West Carroll and Madison parishes in northeast Louisiana. LRATAT was established in 1986 to (1) encourage economic leadership and diversification; (2) build awareness of the potential economic significance of tourism and recreation; and (3) improve the competence of tourism leaders.

The study team was organized by the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program at LSU. Its study approach is an adaptation of rapid rural appraisal and assistance methods developed by British and other international agricultural experts. The approach is based on the premise that in rural development there is rarely sufficient time or resources to deal comprehensively with the problems. Information and assistance are needed quickly and dollars are scarce. For these reasons, short-cut methods to collect and analyze information must be used and the planning and development strategies need to be expedited.

Week-long, rapid appraisal studies were conducted in 1987 and 1988 in three geographically and culturally distinct coastal parishes: Cameron, St. Mary and St. Bernard. In 1990, the approach was extended—by request of state and local officials—to the three Mississippi Delta parishes in the northeastern part of the state. The study took place between August 20 and 25.

The triparish assessment team was comprised of the following individuals:

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Michael Liffmann     | Assistant Director, Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Louisiana State University                                       |
| Steven Henning       | Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, Louisiana State University                    |
| Margaret Moore       | Associate Specialist, Community Resource Development, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Louisiana State University |
| Elizabeth Coleman    | Communications Coordinator, Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Louisiana State University                               |
| Carola Ann Andrepont | Consultant, Office of Tourism, Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism   |
| Elinor Craven        | Outdoor Recreation Coordinator, Office of State Parks, Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism                     |
| Miriam Wyatt         | Research Associate, Small Business Development Center, Northeast Louisiana University                                     |

## II. TOURISM AS AN INDUSTRY IN LOUISIANA AND THE TRIPARISH AREA

### A. Economic Significance

Tourism is a major industry in Louisiana. The U.S. Travel Data Center estimates that domestic travel spending in Louisiana exceeded four billion dollars in 1988 [*Travel Louisiana Journal*, July 1989]. Each of the 64 parishes in Louisiana benefitted from these expenditures through employment and taxes. It is estimated that almost five percent of all nonagricultural employment in the state is travel-related. Travel spending generated over \$804 million in wages and salaries in Louisiana during 1988. Travel expenditures also generated over \$524 million in revenues for federal, state, and local governments.

Much of the economic impact of tourism in Louisiana is captured by the Greater New Orleans area, accounting for 63 percent of all travel expenditures in Louisiana during 1988. In comparison, the Sportsman's Paradise area of the state, which includes all of north Louisiana above Interstate 20 (including East Carroll, Madison, and West Carroll) accounted for around ten percent of all travel expenditures. Estimates of the impact of travel on East Carroll, Madison and West Carroll parishes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Impact of Travel on Selected Louisiana Parishes, 1988.

| Parish      | Total Travel Expenditures<br>(000) | Travel Generated Payroll<br>(000) | Travel Generated Employment<br>(Jobs) | State Tax Receipts<br>(000) | Local Tax Receipts<br>(000) |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| E. Carroll  | 897                                | 150                               | 15                                    | 52                          | 15                          |
| Madison     | 2,984                              | 487                               | 52                                    | 174                         | 71                          |
| W. Carroll  | 365                                | 27                                | 2                                     | 12                          | 3                           |
| State Total | \$4,044,505                        | \$804,204                         | \$72,275                              | \$207,574                   | \$90,426                    |

Source: Office of Tourism, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

### B. Economic Development

Until recently, tourism has not been viewed as a source of economic development outside of New Orleans. However, simple comparison between the degree of tourism development in New Orleans and that in the rural areas of the state supports the notion that tourism has untapped potential to contribute to economic development in rural Louisiana.

The current economy of rural parishes in Louisiana is typically dependent on one or more of three factors: (1) industrial development; (2) commercial agriculture; and (3) commercial fishing and trapping. Industrial development has by far the greatest impact on local economies, employing large numbers of residents, supporting the development of retail sales and services, and providing a local tax base. However, industrial employment in rural parishes tends to be concentrated in a small number of large employers. The stability of these plants is often dependent on forces outside the local community. Competition, technology, and world events can adversely affect the profitability of local plants. Economic conditions that force a reduction in size or the closing of local plants will result in increased unemployment and decreases in the local population, tax base, and public services.

In many rural parishes commercial agriculture or commercial fishing and trapping have traditionally been vital to sustaining the local economy. However, the continual restructuring of commercial agriculture has resulted in fewer, but larger, farms. Absentee ownership of farm land, with fewer economic ties to the community, is also on the increase. The end result is that fewer people are employed in production agriculture and related services and agriculture contributes less to the local economy. In some parishes commercial fishing and trapping are also important. But increasing problems with management of the resource base to sustain the long-term harvest of commercial species will limit future growth potential.

Rural parishes have come to recognize the importance of economic diversification through the establishment and recruitment of smaller businesses and a variety of industries. Diversification would ideally provide insulation from negative forces outside the local economy. However, rural communities have limited resources and often lack amenities that attract a wide variety of businesses. There is also intense competition among communities for new industry. Finally, it may be difficult to recruit a wide variety of industries because of the conflicting needs of the individual firms.

The tourism industry differs from many of the industries that a community might recruit. The basis of the industry is the existence or potential of natural, historical, or cultural attractions within the community. The tourism market in much of rural Louisiana has been largely unexploited, with much potential for growth. The industry takes advantage of the available labor force in the community, requiring a minimum amount of skilled labor outside the community. The industry places a minimum demand on public services and facilities, such as schools and hospitals. And finally, tourism is a clean industry, that can be an asset in recruiting other businesses.

Recreation is also a business. It provides full-time employment, generates taxes, and supports goods and services, all of which positively affect economic growth. It is also a "quality of life" factor, as are cultural opportunities. Thus, recreation and cultural opportunities contribute not only to the health, economy, productivity, and quality of life of citizens and visitors, but also to the tourism industry and to industrial inducement efforts currently being developed and promoted in every area of the state.

Recreation and cultural tourism are growth industries whose demands are becoming stronger with the increased leisure time afforded by shorter work weeks, the phenomenal

growth in public interest in fitness and health, and the growing awareness that recreation positively reduces stress and improves worker productivity on the job. Participation in recreation activities and cultural experiences benefits personal and public health, raises public awareness of the environment, contributes to health and environmental education, and stimulates development of a health and environmental ethic. As with fitness and health, increased public interest and participation in health and the environment enhances appreciation for cultural and recreation opportunities and generates a demand for more.

In considering the recreation values to tourism, one must not only consider what visitors spend when they attend special events in the area, tour historic sites, or participate in recreational activities, but also the new dollars brought into the community through the expenditure of funds on goods and services. New recreation and cultural opportunities create markets for sporting goods, equipment, and supplies. In addition, dollars spent by visitors change hands several times in the local or regional economy.

### C. Components of the Tourism Industry

The tourism industry has three major components: (1) the community; (2) the attractions and special events; and (3) the tourist market [*Tourism USA—Guidelines for Tourism Development*, pp. 14-15]. The community provides leadership, personnel, and volunteers for the organization that coordinates the community effort. The community is also the source of businesses and labor that provide services (eating, lodging, entertainment, shops) to tourists. Public services such as roads, transportation, parking, and safety are essential for tourism development, but also benefit local residents. Most importantly, the community provides the hospitality to visitors that ensures a positive tourism experience.

Attractions and special events are a necessary ingredient for tourism development. Planning, promotion, and marketing are a joint responsibility of the community and tourism businesses.

It is also important to define the tourist market that is being targeted. In other words, who will buy what a community is trying to sell? Information on the geographical location of the market, behavior-income characteristics of potential customers, and what products they are willing to buy must be collected and analyzed. Some factors that determine market potential include:

- the target market (type of visitor) chosen
- proximity to major population areas
- quality of roads and other transportation
- the number of travelers who may want to visit
- the attractions developed
- other facilities (restaurants, lodging, etc.) that support attractions
- promotional methods used
- prices and costs visitors must pay
- competition.

Assessment of community assets is an important first step in determining potential for expanding tourism. Most communities have some natural, cultural, or historical assets that have potential for attracting visitors. However, it is not likely that any one single



attraction will significantly increase tourism. Instead, a combination or package of attractions and events may be the best opportunity for rural parishes, providing visitors with a variety of entertainment options.

#### **D. Costs of Tourism**

The development of a tourism industry does require some basic community support. A fundamental need for successful development is the establishment of a clean environment. This requires a commitment from the public in general, including local government support in terms of ordinances and funding. Funding is also necessary to support the development of tourist information centers, public restrooms, parking, and public safety. The largest percentage of funding is support for the operational costs of promoting the tourism industry in the community, providing personnel, office space, literature, and data collection.

#### **E. Benefits of Tourism**

There are several obvious benefits from tourism development in rural parishes in addition to economic diversification. Direct employment opportunities in the tourism industry, as well as additional employment in support industries, services, and wholesale and retail trade, will occur as the tourism industry grows. Employment will range from part-time and summer jobs to career opportunities. Employment may also be enhanced by expansion of new industry attracted by tourism development.

Expanded tourism will also translate into more income and greater profit for business. Local income generated by tourism will have a multiplier effect—being re-spent for other goods and services in the community.

As the tourism industry develops, the local tax base also expands. Revenue from sales taxes come not only from direct expenditures from visitors, but also from local residents employed by the industry and related services. Once the industry is beyond the infancy stage of development, special taxes can be assessed on lodging and entertainment that offset government expenses. Tax revenues can also be dedicated to restoring attractions such as museums and historical sites.

A less obvious benefit from a growing tourism industry is the positive image that promotional campaigns can cultivate, which benefits the community as a whole. Local residents can also enjoy the same entertainment marketed to visitors, deriving cultural benefits that would otherwise not be available. These benefits can be used to recruit other industries.

#### **F. Tourism Organization in the Triparish Area**

Considerable effort has gone into organizing for regional tourism development in northeast Louisiana. An ad hoc 12-parish group has been organized, as has the triparish area that helped coordinate this assessment report. The study team is of the opinion that these efforts should be followed up with the establishment of tourist commissions in each parish, plus the creation of local committees that can be organized through chambers of commerce or local government entities. You cannot organize too much. Successful

economic development can only take place if the process involves the grass-roots and, therefore, we advocate organization and coordination at all levels.

But this multi-level approach demands that many of the past conflicts be set aside for the sake of community development. Cooperation must replace opposition and unhealthy competition. If partnerships for tourism and economic development are to be forged, all players are going to have to participate.

The tourism industry in the triparish area, and northeast Louisiana for that matter, is in an embryonic stage. Local and regional feuds and personality conflicts must cease if development is to take place. In order to aid in "keeping peace in the family" it might be helpful to think of needing two levels for strategic planning—first, for the entire regional tourism industry effort and second, for individual attractions and complementary attractions.

At this juncture the focus should be on industry and infrastructure development, and training of support personnel. All those involved in individual projects should understand that their efforts should be focused on one collective goal—the development of a viable tourism industry for the region. Certainly, debate is a part of the decision-making process, but like all other healthy discussions, at some point the debate ends, a consensus or general agreement is reached, and the community and its leadership move on to attain the agreed-upon goals. This must happen in the triparish area. As we stressed in our oral briefing at the end of our visit in August, 1990, "...hatchets must be buried...and not in each others' backs!"

### III. STATUS OF THE TRIPARISH HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

As part of the assessment, two team members conducted a cursory inventory of the triparish area's hospitality or visitor services industry. Included in the inventory were motels, campgrounds, bed and breakfast inns (since closed), restaurants and eating establishments in Madison Parish, East Carroll Parish, and West Carroll Parish, as well as Delhi in Richland Parish. Delhi was included because of the significant role it can play in the area's tourism industry. The town is located along I-20, serves as the "Gateway to Poverty Point," and has an annual Poverty Point Festival each fall.

The inventory, along with several observations and recommendations, appears in the following pages.

#### A. East Carroll Parish

##### 1. Motels

###### a. Lakeside Resort

- beach area - boat launch
- offers boat excursion
- needs better signage and literature

- b. Ponderosa Inn
  - needs signage

## 2. Campgrounds

- a. Lakeside Resort
- b. Ponderosa
- c. Ingleside Trailer Park and Campground
  - appears to be closed

## 3. Restaurants and Eating Establishments

### a. Lake Providence

- (1) Old Dutch Bakery
  - can accommodate a tour bus
  - needs better restroom facilities
  - needs signage
  - needs local/area literature
- (2) Sonic Drive Inn
- (3) Exxon Deli - Grab Bag Bar-B-Que
  - employees could not give directions or area information
- (4) Pizza Hut
- (5) Double Dare
- (6) Cajun Burger and Chicken
- (7) Odell's Pawn, Liquor and Bait Store
- (8) Cotton Exchange Restaurant
  - serves dinner only
  - lounge offers live music on Fridays and Saturdays
  - can accommodate a tour bus
- (9) Hugo's Restaurant
  - serves lunch and dinner only
  - live entertainment on Fridays and Saturdays
  - can accommodate a tour bus if given prior notice
- (10) Ingleside Trailer Park, Groceries and Campground
- (11) Chuck Wagon Restaurant
  - lounge - meeting room
  - convenience store

### b. Roosevelt

Farmer's Quick Stop Deli

## B. Madison Parish

### 1. Motels

- a. Southway Inn
  - can accommodate a tour bus

- AARP discounts
- clean and attractive

b. Holiday Capri Inn

NOTE: The Gallery Bed and Breakfast Inn has closed since the assessment was conducted.

**2. Restaurants and Eating Establishments**

a. Tallulah

- (1) Pizza Hut
- (2) Sonic Drive Inn
- (3) Dairy Queen
- (4) McDonald's
- (5) Fina Deli
- (6) Fast Lane Deli
- (7) Louisiana Restaurant
  - truck stop restaurant
  - very clean
  - offers gifts and souvenirs
- (8) Brushy Restaurant
  - truck stop restaurant
- (9) Kentucky Fried Chicken
- (10) Jr. Food Mart - Creole Fried Chicken
- (11) Piggly Wiggly Deli
- (12) Holiday Capri Restaurant

b. Mound

- Winner's Circle Restaurant
- off-track betting parlor
  - offers meals and snacks

**C. West Carroll Parish**

**1. Motels**

- Mike's Catfish House and Motel
- 5-6 rooms only
  - no signage

**2. Campgrounds**

- H. Russell property
- utility and water hook-ups
  - 25 overnight RV or tent campers
  - open only on special occasions

### **3. Restaurants and Eating Establishments:**

#### **a. Epps**

- (1) Chacolli Cafe
- (2) Buddy & Peggy's Place
  - no signage - sign on ground
  - employee knew a lot about the area. Was able to give good directions and information.

#### **b. Oak Grove**

- (1) Pippins Eat-A-Bite Cafe
- (2) Broadway Family Restaurant
  - can accommodate a tour bus
  - needs better signage
- (3) Sonic Drive Inn
- (4) Johnny's Pizza and Old Freight Depot
  - needs better signage
- (5) The Chicken Basket
  - needs signage
  - employee was able to give some directions
- (6) Mike's Catfish House and Motel
  - needs signage

#### **c. Goodwill Grocery**

- serves breakfast and plate lunches

### **D. Richland Parish (Delhi)**

#### **1. Motels**

- a. Hilltop Hotel
  - needs proper signage
- b. Best Western Motel
  - could accommodate a tour bus
  - has restaurant and pool

#### **2. Campgrounds**

- a. Delhi Campgrounds
  - was not visited

#### **3. Restaurants and Eating Establishments**

- (1) Dairy Delight
- (2) The Chicken Basket
- (3) Pizza Hut

- (4) Hanna's Sideboard
  - could accommodate a tour bus
  - needs proper signage
  - needs literature on the area
  - employees were nice but knew nothing about the area
- (5) Moby's Bar-B-Que
  - employees and owner were nice but knew nothing of the area
- (6) Dairy Queen
- (7) Handy House Restaurant
  - near Best Western Motel
- (8) Saljobor Restaurant
  - could accommodate a tour bus
  - very well known area restaurant
- (9) Kwik Pantry - Hot Deli

#### E. General Observations

During the inventory process several establishments were randomly visited by two assessment team members, and owners and employees were asked questions to determine their general knowledge of the area and their overall demeanor toward visitors. The following conclusions can be drawn from this informal survey process.

1. Overall, the attitude of the people working in these establishments is poor. There is a need for educational programs aimed at training the hospitality sector in how to host visitors.
2. The people who live in the area and work in the hospitality industry are not knowledgeable about the area. They know very little, if anything, about the area's attractions, recreation opportunities, and facilities. In the three-parish area and Delhi, most persons could not supply information regarding Poverty Point and could not give directions to the site.

Likewise, very few persons could answer questions pertaining to the Tensas National Wildlife Refuge or give directions on how to find it.

3. When asked about the area, most gave negative responses and said there was not a thing to see or do in that region of the state. Often, bad and derogatory language was used during conversations about the area.
4. Most business establishments did not have proper signage.
5. There is a limited supply, or in most cases no supply, of printed literature on the triparish area, the attractions of the region, or the services available to visitors.
6. Many of the business establishments did not accept credit cards.

In order to begin the educational process, the study team recommends the following actions:

1. Organize a familiarization (FAM) tour of the area for people who work in the hospitality industry, community and area leaders, and other interested citizens. The purpose of this tour is to educate the local citizenry about the area and to visit attractions, activities, and establishments that contribute to the tourism industry of the region. A copy of a proposed FAM tour itinerary appears below.
2. Conduct tourism education workshops and hospitality seminars for area citizens and especially for those who work in the hospitality industry (restaurants and eating establishments, gas stations, convenience stores, motels, campgrounds, gift and souvenir shops, tourist attractions, etc).
3. Since there is a shortage of hotel/motel rooms to accommodate visitors, look into the possibility of developing a homestay program for the area. This will help fill the gap when there are special events in the area such as fairs, festivals and other activities that attract visitors. For economic reasons visitors should be encouraged to remain overnight.
4. Businesses should be encouraged to accept credit cards. Travelers expect to be able to use these cards and in many cases that is how they spend money. Perhaps this topic could be covered in the hospitality seminar.
5. The area needs more camping facilities and motel rooms.
6. The area needs more family restaurants and eating establishments.
7. The entire area needs more signage.
8. The area needs more literature and promotional items.
9. The area has the potential to attract the cultural, historic, recreational and environmental tourist. There are many assets in these categories but they need to be identified, upgraded, improved and developed. A complete tourism inventory should be done and updated each year.
10. Each community should organize a tourist committee and a visitor welcome group. These groups would be able to work on the projects that are being recommended and other projects and activities to increase tourism and travel to the area.

#### **F. A Proposed Familiarization (FAM) Tour of the Triparish Area**

1. The Northeast Louisiana Great River Road Tour departs from the Louisiana Tourist Information Center at Mound, on Interstate-20.
2. Tour makes a brief stop at the Winner's Circle and then drives by the Mound Store and other historic buildings in the area.

3. Tour proceeds to Tallulah, where the group will see the courthouse and other historic buildings of the town. The tour will pick up a step-on guide who is knowledgeable about the city and can tell the group the community's history and give out other information on the area such as the dates and locations of annual events.
4. Tour stops for refreshments at a local establishment or home.
5. Tour stops at the Tensas National Wildlife Refuge. Guide will give information on the refuge and conduct a tour.
6. Tour proceeds to Delhi. Local step-on guide will give the history of the community and talk about the connection to Jesse James, Poverty Point, etc. The bus will drive through the town to see historic sites and other places of interest.
7. Tour proceeds to Epps. Local guide will step on to give community history and point out sites of interest.
8. Tour will stop at Poverty Point for information and a tour of the site.
9. Tour proceeds to Oak Grove where a local guide will step on for a tour of that community. Group will see the old courthouse and the Fiske Theater with a stop at the Gourd Shop.
10. Tour proceeds to Panola Pepper in East Carroll Parish for a late lunch and a tour of the hot sauce plant. (Lunch served on the grounds of Panola.)
11. Tour proceeds to Lake Providence with a stop at the proposed Cotton Museum site where a local guide will step on. Group continues to the Visitor's Center and a tour of the area to include historic buildings such as Arlington and sites such as Grant's Canal. Group will make a stop at the Old Dutch Bakery for a snack.
12. Tour proceeds to Transylvania for a stop at the Transylvania General Store.
13. Tour makes a final stop at Vickery's General Store on U.S. Highway 65 between Transylvania and Tallulah.
14. Tour ends at the Louisiana Tourist Information Center in Mound, on Interstate-20.

#### IV. MAJOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

##### A. Recreational Resources

According to an economic impact study conducted for the Office of State Parks in 1987, state parks generated \$10.7 million in direct park-related expenditures by visitors preparing for, en route to and from, and during their visit to a state park. Out-of-state visitors contributed \$3.1 million. Further, the park-related expenditures made by park visitors have a "turnover" effect within the economy where they are spent. Each dollar spent by



nonresident (persons not living in the parish where the park is located) park visitors is new capital which may be turned over several times within the economy. The 14 parks operated by the Office of State Parks had a total indirect economic impact on local parish economies of \$21.5 million. The seven state commemorative areas (SCAs) surveyed generated \$5.2 million in total expenditures by all SCA visitors, and out-of-state visitors contributed \$3.9 million of that sum, or 74%. The SCAs had a total economic impact of \$11.5 million on the local parish economies.

The combined direct expenditures by visitors to state parks and commemorative areas are approximately \$16 million and the total economic impacts reach \$33.1 million. Out-of-state visitors expend \$7.0 million in the state and have an impact of \$18.4 million on the state economy.

The total SCA visit-related expenditures to Poverty Point State Commemorative Area in West Carroll Parish amounted to \$219,177 in 1987. Out-of-state visitors contributed 40% of these expenditures and visitors from other parishes accounted for the remaining 60% of the expenditures. The total impact on the parish economy generated by a combined total of SCA visit-related expenditures and the Office of State Parks operational expenditures was approximately \$395,000, an amount that includes the SCS's operational expenditures plus the visit-related expenditures and the multiplier effect.

The point of this is to support the need to develop packages that attract visitors to stay overnight rather than make a day trip to the area. An attractive array of activities, whether tours, participant sports or individual attendance at fairs, festivals, jamborees, museums, and the like will induce the visitor to stay a little longer than planned, and thus spend more money in the area.

Everyone must be willing to cooperate, compromise, and enter into long-range planning because in this day and age, the area with no reputation or a negative reputation will lose out in competition for visitors, residents, and business investment. Areas with strong, distinctive identities will be more likely than others to achieve a successful economic redirection in coming years.

In regard to recreation resources, there is much potential to develop activities and facilities that are attractive to tourists and local citizens. All will require study and commitment. The attractions or activities with the greatest potential and highest priority are those that already exist. The high priority rating does not mean that they are the best or most attractive possibilities. It simply means that they are the quickest and most cost effective to promote on a near-term basis. The medium priority possibilities will take time, money, and careful planning to implement. The low priority activities are the long-term, large investment possibilities which will take serious study, commitment, and several years to implement.

But before any of these suggestions can be a success, the whole area needs better signage on the roads and to existing attractions. Roadside and other illegal dumping sites must be cleaned-up; and promotional materials must be produced and distributed.

## **1. High Priority/High Potential**

Several attractions and activities can be promoted immediately because they are already in place and will require a minimal investment. The attractions can readily provide the visibility and name recognition that is vital to establishing the three parishes as places to visit. The following ideas are presented for the triparish group's consideration:

### **TENSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE/POVERTY POINT/ FISKE THEATER/LAKE PROVIDENCE**

There is a logical link between the refuge and Poverty Point for tourists on a day trip. The visitor can visit the refuge and within 30 minutes be at Poverty Point with possible picnicking at either site or a stop at local restaurants in Tallulah, Delhi, or Epps.

There is also the possibility of designing a driving tour which might include the refuge, Poverty Point, and the Old Dutch Bakery. It might end at the Fiske Theater for the monthly jamboree or other cultural event.

The Tensas National Wildlife Refuge offers hunting, fishing, a boardwalk behind the visitor center, and a five-mile hiking trail past two lakes for hikers and bicyclers. There are several ATV trails for enthusiasts. This area needs publicity through state media, brochures available at tourist information centers (local and state), and contacts with schools, birding clubs, scout groups, bicycle groups, and commercial outfitters in Monroe and Vicksburg.

In the study team's opinion, the refuge is grossly undervisited. Refuge officials indicate that only 3,000 persons visited the installations in 1989. Although access to the traveling public from I-20 leaves a lot to be desired (a long, poorly marked gravel road off a state highway), the number of visitors is remarkably low. The Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in Cameron parish was visited by over 150,000 persons during that same year and has many of the same attractions as the Tensas Refuge. The Sabine complex is located approximately 25 miles south of I-10 on state highway 27.

Commercial outfitters, the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, scouts, church groups, schools, and school organizations all need to know that canoeing can be done on the refuge and what equipment is needed. If canoeing is pursued, the other possible canoe sites also need to be promoted such as Bayou Macon. Of course, Bayou Macon needs to be investigated and floated to see if the waterway is navigable, if there are possible stopping points for picnicking and resting, and the possible put-in and take-out points. To vary the length of the trip would make it more attractive than just putting in at Highway 2 near Oak Grove and taking out at or near Poverty Point.

Make sure that local newspapers do features on these areas and associated events occurring there. Monroe TV should be encouraged to attend and do a feature. Examples are Archaeology Week and its associated events, and a general feature on Poverty Point and its available facilities, tours and activities. At the Tensas National Wildlife Refuge, activities for National Wildlife Week, the hunting seasons, youth hunter and safety classes, and bow hunting and its growing popularity are key activities to publicize. Promotion of facilities and activities available to the public now, estimated completion of the black-topped entrance road and, possibly, a history of how the sites came into existence

(recognizing and crediting local leaders as much as possible) are ideas worthy of consideration.

Poverty Point offers tours, a slide show and interpretative center, self-guided tours and special events such as the activities associated with Archaeology Week. Many of the above ideas and contacts apply here.

The Fiske Theater, with its gospel music theme and monthly jamborees, is a cultural attraction. But it also is a part of recreation—in fact, trips to cultural resources are growing significantly as pleasurable, educational and leisure time activities. This possibility is a natural because of the heavy musical and religious influence of the area. With more publicity, support, and talent contributions from the triparish area, the jamboree could become a biweekly, or even weekly event such as the Acadian culture event held weekly at the Liberty Theater in Eunice. In fact, a trip to Eunice to study the do's and don'ts of such an event would be beneficial. A possible tie or link with the Poke Salat and Soul Food and Heritage festivals would benefit both the theater and the festival. Examples could be to include separate events on the same weekend or have entertainment at the festival provided, in part, by the Fiske Theater regulars.

Lake Providence has numerous possibilities for fishing and other water sports. Two-day bass tournaments should be encouraged rather than one-day events to keep the participants and their families in the area for a longer period of time. For most one-day tournaments, participants purchase gas, food, bait, and equipment at home and return home before purchasing more gas, etc. There appear to be adequate motel accommodations and RV hook-ups to accommodate participants to such two-day events. Information on activities of interest to family members could be provided to the bass club tournament participants in advance, in order to encourage family members to attend and visit the attractions of the area.

Publicity must be directed at dispelling the notion that the lake remains polluted. Fishing clinics, hosted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, or area bass and sportsmen's clubs could be scheduled periodically. Feature articles about the fishing opportunities on the lake should also be promoted in area newspapers that provide large regional coverage, particularly those in Monroe, Vicksburg, Alexandria, Jackson, and Baton Rouge.

Although the triathlon is already held in Lake Providence, it should be publicized more widely and area bicycle clubs should be contacted and invited to stage a ride around the lake at Lake Providence or from Lake Providence to various points of interest in the area such as (a) Panola Plantation along the levee road or levee; (b) Rockpile Shoot or Old River at Raglan's landing and (c) along LA 134 to Epps and Poverty Point.

#### **BICYCLE TOURS AND RIDES**

By working with and supporting bicycle clubs in Monroe, Vicksburg and other nearby areas, such groups would be able to design day and/or overnight rides in the area.

Examples include overnight rides in the triparish area that could set up headquarters at Tallulah or Lake Providence. Most riders need simple camping facilities with restrooms

and some prefer hotels. In the town of Elizabeth in Allen Parish, a commercial outfitter promotes a race that attracts 500 riders for the weekend. The riders are content to stay at a primitive, cleared rally area without amenities because they enjoy the ride so much. Among the possible rides that should be investigated are (a) the Wildlife Refuge and Poverty Point; (b) between the town of Forest and Poverty Point; (c) around Lake Providence and out along the levee road to Panola, Raglan's Landing or Rockpile Shoot; (d) along the 602 Farm Route from Mound to Richmond; (e) along 603 Farm Route from Laclede to the levee and (f) along the Macon Front Highway. All are attractive country roads that appeal to cyclists and need to be publicized. Any road that has an old store where cyclists may stop for food, drink or water is even more appealing.

Local groups in the triparish area might consider sponsoring a bike ride to raise funds for a charity or worthy cause. This would help establish closer ties with area cycle clubs and thus help develop and publicize in order to raise money and visibility.

The Mississippi River levee system offers excellent trail opportunities that only a few other states can offer. A cycling trail down the Mississippi River would not necessarily have to be on the levees, but could parallel the rivers along roads where recreation rights-of-way cannot be obtained. It could also be combined with an auto trail that would use roads the entire distance.

The recommendation to explore bicycling opportunities is based on the concept that we are fast becoming a nation involved in healthful pursuits and pursuits which take us out-of-doors. We spend more money participating in sports than in watching. According to *Newsweek*, September 1, 1988, "a bicycle is to biking what feet are to running: necessary, but by no means sufficient. People who wore designer sweat suits to jog around the block won't want to be seen on their Zebrakeenko 12-speed touring bikes except in their aerodynamically streamlined Lycra jerseys with mesh side panels for ventilation. People who gave up serious running because it was ruining their knees are not going to speed down the sides of mountains without encasing their heads in a \$60 Bell V-1 Pro-Helmet." Money is being spent in local businesses for the purchases of these specialty items and when an area attracts new participants in an activity, it has been responsible for economic activity at local stores.

According to *The Economics of Amenity: Community Futures and Quality of Life*, by Robert H. McNulty, "Natural and scenic resources may play several roles in economic development programs. They can generate tourist activity, enhance the value of other investments, strengthen the overall image and attractiveness of the..." area "...as a place to live, and offer specific development opportunities..." which will be attractive to the visitor and compete equitably with or better than nearby attractions. To continue with bicycling, according to a 1985 recreation survey by the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, more than a million and a half Louisianians ride bicycles, slightly over 34 % of the state's population. Cycling in Louisiana is not just for children. Sixty percent of Louisiana riders are over the age of 18. Further, bicycling in Louisiana is a family sport with half of the riders coming from three or four-person households. Cycling is far more popular than football, baseball or basketball. Despite its popularity, a survey of recreation facilities indicated that there were fewer than 30 bicycle-related facilities in the state and that most of these are comprised of short, inner city hiking and biking trails or jogging tracks which allowed children's bicycles. Bicycle touring is part of the new adventure tourism

market and has been growing at a rate of over 10% a year. In 1989, over 1.1 million Americans took bicycle touring vacations. Cyclists spend an average of \$20 to \$60 a day while touring, depending on whether the individual camps or stays in overnight accommodations. Many states are actively trying to attract the touring rider by investing in bicycle coordinators and developing literature. Some 31 states have bicycle maps and 25 have bicycle coordinators. Most of this money is spent in rural areas. State and local governments and adventure tour operators are beginning to vie for this burgeoning market.

In the Baton Rouge area, the Baton Rouge Bicycle Club stages one of the oldest bike rides in Louisiana, the Jambalaya Tour. This attracts two to three hundred riders each year to a three-day ride through the Feliciana parishes. The club collects between \$10-12,000 in registration fees from the bicyclists and disperses most (\$8,500 or more) of that income immediately into the economy. Each participant also spends about \$10 to \$15 daily over his tour fees for incidentals. Many who want to spend a more comfortable night after their cycling day stay in local bed and breakfast facilities and some choose to eat their evening meals in local restaurants rather than the campground with its variety of catered meals. This additional money funneled into the area economy by individuals is about \$5,000. This amount, coupled with the \$8,500+ in registration fees, has a direct economic impact of approximately \$13,500 on the local economy. This ride could just as easily attract over a thousand riders if there were more accommodations in the area.

Bicycle tours associated with charitable purposes are not only fun, but profitable. The MS Tour for Cure is an annual two-day ride from Hammond, Louisiana, to Percy Quinn State Park and return, to benefit the Multiple Sclerosis Society. From 1984, when 62 riders raised \$22,000, the ride has exploded in 1989 to 973 riders who raised \$233,000. This amount is raised over and above what the registrants spent in food, lodging and equipment in the local areas where they traveled.

Many more examples could be cited to promote the bicycling concept as an inexpensive, but positive, clean, healthful sport and tourist industry. However, further information on the profitability of cycling as an industry on roads, on rail trails and on special facilities can be found in the *Report of the Louisiana Advisory Committee on Bicycling*, May 1990, prepared by the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of State Parks. It is sufficient to say that unlike many other sports which occur at specialized facilities, cycle touring most often occurs on rural country roads in areas where economic development is most often needed.

## DRIVING TOURS

There are a variety of attractive driving tours in the triparish area. Development possibilities include: (1) an historical marker tour to draw the Vicksburg visitors to Madison and East Carroll; (2) a tour starting at Mound and continuing along Highway 602 to points of interest in Tallulah or the wildlife refuge, and thence to Lake Providence to the Old Dutch Bakery, Grant's Canal etc. and continuing along Highway 2 to Oak Grove and/or along Highway 134 to Poverty Point.

## FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

Publicize the already successful events to build attendance and popularity. For example, the Soul Food and Heritage, Lakefest, Bayou and Cotton Festivals and the Gospel Music Jamboree.

### 2. Medium Priority/Medium Potential

#### CAMPING

Overnight and multi-night camping possibilities should be explored in an attempt to attract and retain more visitors in the area. Four distinct opportunities were identified by the study team: (1) Harold Russell's property outside of Oak Grove has existing utility and water hook-ups for at least 25 overnight RV or tent campers. The site would need a restroom/shower facility and signage to attract tent campers. The beautiful trees and pond would be a great draw. (2) Ingleside with its existing hook-ups needs more publicity. Several team members are under the impression that it has ceased operations. (3) A third possibility is the reestablishment of the Mississippi River Overlook Park owned by the East Carroll Parish Police Jury. Appropriate security and additional development would be needed. This rehabilitation and development could be undertaken by the Police Jury or by a private concessionaire. Fees to help defray the costs could be charged for overnight camping, picnicking and a boat launch. The site has great day use potential just as an overlook to the Mississippi River. With proper signage and security, this site has great mid-term potential.

A fourth camping development opportunity is along I-20 in Madison Parish, perhaps in the vicinity of Mound. An inventory of camping facilities within a 50-mile radius should be undertaken to explore demand and competitive aspects.

#### FISHING

Lake Providence offers great fishing opportunities as does Old River, the slack water area by the port, and the various borrow pits along the levee. The demand for bank fishing opportunities is growing as rapidly as boat fishing and the borrow pits, fishing piers at Lake Providence and access at Old River could be developed as public or commercial enterprises.

The public boat ramps at the port and in Lake Providence (by the airport) need to be cleaned up and maintained in a manner attractive to the public and appropriately signed. This would provide boating opportunities and would bring the installations into compliance with the requirements of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund which contributed 50% of the construction dollars.

### 3. Low Priority/Low Potential

The following need *careful* study, planning and financing to become a reality. They are, however, good ideas, with good potential.

## **COTTON MUSEUM**

The proposed site should be studied to see if some crops could be grown for the visitors to view or harvest (cotton, soybeans, etc.). A close location would be more appealing than a trip to a distant location to see actual crops for visitors on a tight schedule. A visit to the Burden Rural Life Museum in Baton Rouge for ideas would be beneficial.

## **DAVE L. PEARCE MUSEUM**

The idea and the site are good and this concept would also benefit from a visit to the Burden Plantation and Rural Life Museum. Research into similar museums in other states is a must and an opportunity for a student project by the Northeast Louisiana University programs in business, landscape architecture, etc. A possible mini-farm growing garden crops and cotton for sale or for harvesting by visitors should be considered in association with this museum.

### **B. Agricultural Tourism**

Residents of northeast Louisiana take agriculture for granted. After all, many generations have been deriving a living from it. What they do not realize is that agriculture has a special allure to visitors, and what we take for granted might be of extreme interest to travelers.

In order to capitalize on this opportunity, the regional organization and each tourist commission should arrange a circular driving tour of the area. A map should be developed that includes the historic homes, Poverty Point, the wildlife refuges, etc. Local county agents should be consulted to help identify agricultural points of interest. For instance, cattle grazing between the Mississippi River and the levee; grain transshipment at the Lake Providence and Tallulah ports; the fields of row crops and vegetables; the Panola Pepper plant; crop-dusting operations; cotton gins; crawfish and catfish farms; horse breeding farm, quarter horse ranch, etc. Efforts might even be directed at obtaining permission from the crop owners to erect a visible sign designating the crop.

The brochure might describe the ways that farmers harvest their crops; how they use fertilizers and pesticides, their recycling practices, etc.

### **C. Cultural And Historical Attractions**

There are three major opportunities that we see as high priority for development in the triparish area. Though these projects do not cost a great deal of money or require expensive construction, they do need organization and commitment.

#### **1. Historic Houses and Sites**

Tourists like everything to be easy to find. Though this area has some good attractions for those interested in history, they are somewhat difficult to find and not enough information is given about each one. Attractions must be described so that a tourist will know what he is looking at and what its significance is.

Richmond Plantation near Tallulah is a case in point. There is a historical marker (actually two markers) directly across the road from the plantation house, but it is concerned with a battle and the burning of the village of Richmond and says nothing about the house. One does not know whether the house was there during the Civil War, and, if so, whether its residents had any part to play in the battle that took place there. If the house was there, why was it spared from burning? If the house was not there, when was it built? What are its special architectural features? Who lives there? Is it open for touring at any time?

Richmond is not the only historic house about which information is lacking, or at least not available to the average tourist. Crescent Plantation house is stunning, and an informative plaque at the driveway gives a fascinating account of its narrow escape from burning by Union forces, but there is no other literature available about the house and no indication whether it is ever open for touring.

Also lacking is any kind of coherent driving guide for finding these houses. A Madison Parish map, containing street guides to Tallulah, Mound, Delta, and Richmond, contains photographs of these and other houses and historic sites in the parish but does not tell anyone where these places are or how to get to them. A street map of Lake Providence contains good photos and descriptions of local attractions and locates them by number on the map, but the typeface used for the street map is so tiny that the names of the streets cannot be read without a magnifying glass in strong light. Few tourists would bother with the extra effort needed to find things in these parishes.

Even if separate street maps continue to be maintained for these localities, we recommend one self-guided driving tour of houses and historical sites in both East Carroll and Madison parishes. Identifying type should be large and easy to read. Each house and historic site should be given a number that remains constant. For example, Arlington House in Lake Providence might be #1, the Lake Providence cemetery #2, the Gallery in Tallulah #3, and so on. No matter where a tourist begins his tour—and no matter how many different touring arrangements of attractions are eventually developed—each attraction retains its identifying number.

The map should contain photos or drawings of the attractions and brief descriptions of each one. In addition to showing the numbered location of each attraction, the map should also give its address, even if the address simply says "four miles down Highway 602." Every historic marker should be included and a brief description given of its relation to a house or other nearby structure if there is one.

The owners of the historic houses in the area should be contacted and asked if they would be willing to open their houses for tours by appointment or at special times of the year, such as festival weeks or Christmas. Houses available for touring should be so designated on the map and a phone number given. The appointments should be handled through a central point in each parish.

The Civil War is an especially rich source of opportunities for this area because of all the action that took place here. Most tourists don't require long histories with details, but a brief and coherent discussion of the area's significance during the war should be included on the map along with the descriptions of historical markers. This information should also be produced in brochure form, preferably in color, with the names of prominent



individuals in the area and accounts of their participation in local events, if such information is known. If portraits of these people exist, they should be photographed for the brochure.

The possible participation of black soldiers in local Civil War events should also be researched and included in this brochure. More and more data are coming to light revealing that black people had a very active part in the war, on both sides, and this is a rich source of local cultural history that should not be ignored.

The cost of producing both the map and the brochure could be borne by merchants who wish to advertise in their pages, as well as by civic groups that wish to help in promoting the area for tourism.

## **2. Music, Festivals and Themes**

The triparish area has a rich folk musical heritage which includes blues, gospel, and bluegrass, and promoting it should be a very high priority. It should not be difficult to establish the area as a source of and center for these kinds of music.

The Fiske Theater in Oak Grove is already a major attraction in the area, and concerts there should be very enthusiastically publicized in Madison and East Carroll parishes, as well as in West Carroll. Musically, the thinking has got to be regional rather than simply parish-wide.

We suggest regular weekend music programs in the courthouse squares of both Tallulah and Lake Providence. For example, once a month Tallulah might sponsor "Saturday at the Square," an afternoon or evening of music provided by local volunteer bands or church choirs. Police cooperation should be sought in blocking street traffic around the square; merchants could set up booths to sell refreshments or crafts; and storytellers, clowns, and magicians for the children could also perform. All labor would be volunteer, though the hat could be passed for the musicians. If once a month is too often to begin with, once every two or three months would work, but it must be regular so that people will learn to look forward to it and so that it will attract people from a wide surrounding area. Tallulah and Lake Providence could share the responsibility for these programs—one month it's "Saturday at the Square" in Tallulah, and the next month it's "Music on the Mall" at the courthouse in Lake Providence. It's important, however, for the three communities to work together and to eliminate any sense of competition with these programs. The point is not to compete but to work together to establish a three-parish area as a music center. It is, therefore, vital for each to publicize the other. If Tallulah is having a Saturday on the Square and the following week a concert is scheduled at the Fiske, the Fiske concert should be well publicized at Tallulah's event, with music lovers invited to come to Oak Grove. Thus, a continuity is established and the area gains a reputation as a source of musical activity.

Events like these create a continual festive atmosphere. They bring people into a downtown area and build a significant amount of community spirit and pride that spill over into other kinds of civic improvement projects.

Additional festivals and special events should be considered by the other communities in the area. Visitors can be attracted to events or festivals around the theme of Teddy Roosevelt, Jesse James, Dracula and Transylvania, the Civil War and the like. A Teddy Bear Festival, a Jesse James "Run for Your Life" bike race or ride, and a Civil War reenactment would be appealing. This area is limited only by the imaginations of those involved and by close and better competition.

### **3. Museums and Visitors' Centers**

The two museums now being planned—the Cotton Museum and the Dave Pearce Agricultural Museum—along with the Visitors' Center have great potential and should receive a high priority for development, but they all need careful study and planning—as well as financing—before they can become a reality.

It's important to realize, however, that museums cannot be depended upon to draw tourists. People visit an area in order to see a variety of attractions including museums, but they generally will not get off an interstate highway just to see a museum, no matter how well advertised the museum is along the route. It is, however, important to have museums, not only as important cultural and historical repositories but as a way of providing centers for the emanation of a variety of cultural events that attract local residents and tourists alike. Tourists also tend to associate a museum with a source of information beyond the scope of the museum itself and will often stop even if they are not particularly interested in the kinds of exhibits displayed by a particular museum.

### **4. Cultural Attractions for Long-Term Development**

One simple, though possibly pedestrian, way to share an area's cultural heritage and bring visitors in is to encourage reunions. Family reunions, church reunions, and class reunions are often overlooked as tourism and revenue producers, but these are popular events that can bring hundreds of people to the triparish area, where they will all spend money—in the grocery stores, restaurants, service stations, and motels. School and church groups can be contacted and worked with to encourage these events.

For example, an Episcopal church on the LSU campus recently had a sixtieth anniversary celebration, to which people came from all over the country. The event attracted not only those who had been important in the church's development, but many who simply had fond memories of the role of the church in their lives as students. The impact of such an event in a small community can be economically important.

Civil War reenactments present another opportunity, though the necessity for careful planning and the dependence on outside expert help make these events candidates for long-term development. Planning a reenactment, however, can involve the entire community, black as well as white, and attract large numbers of people. With their participation in the Civil War, especially the events surrounding General Grant's presence in the area, Madison and East Carroll parishes have much to draw on, but we suggest that much research be done and that those involved collaborate closely with the planners of such activities in Vicksburg.

The reenactment of the Battle of New Orleans held in Chalmette every January might serve as a model, though it is important that people who come to the event be encouraged to spend money in the area. An ongoing problem in Chalmette is that visitors immediately leave the parish after viewing the reenactment and therefore don't leave any money behind them. We suggest that reenactment planners in Madison and East Carroll also plan a festival connected with the reenactment. Arts and crafts booths, music, and food will encourage people to stay longer, ideally to spend the night.

#### **D. Community Revitalization**

In the past the downtown part of a small, rural community was the center for activity, commerce and banking and helped define the town's identity. The buildings reflected the pride and aspirations of the community. They were built soundly of quality materials. Now they offer opportunities for reuse and preservation. A competitive and marketable image for downtown can be established by preserving and revitalizing this traditional core.

The following recommendations are made regarding activities that will help revitalize the downtown areas of the major communities in the triparish area. These near-term recommendations are low-cost or no-cost and can be of great benefit to the community. In order to alter the negative image of the community, the merchants, investors, and consumers should combine resources. Examples of activities that should be undertaken are as follows.

- (1) Each Chamber of Commerce Business Committee should set up subcommittees and work in four areas: organization, economic restructuring, design, and promotion.
- (2) The Chamber of Commerce Business Committee's, subcommittee on economic restructuring should initiate a business retention and expansion program in each community.
- (3) The Chamber of Commerce Business Committee's subcommittee on organization, should initiate a Merchants Appreciation Day to be organized semiannually or at least annually. Part of the function would involve providing a nice meal for merchants and their employees.
- (4) An educational seminar should be held, cosponsored with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, on customer relations, retail selling, prevention of shoplifting, etc. Educational seminars may be part of Merchants Appreciation Day or held separately. Seminars for merchants only could include storefront designs, signs, interior design and layout, visual merchandising and leadership development.

Additional seminars may be cosponsored with the Small Business Development Center at NLU, the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism in Baton Rouge, and other educational and informational groups.

- (5) The Chamber of Commerce could sponsor an outshopper survey. Dr. Sanford Dooley, Economist, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, has studies on items purchased out of town by rural consumers.

- (6) In each town, the American Legion, VFW, and the mayor's office should be asked to initiate or expand an American flag display throughout downtown and on major highways. Margaret Moore, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, can give details on low-cost and proven successful projects. Banners can be used but may be much more expensive.
- (7) Every member of the police jury, the Chamber of Commerce, the mayor, downtown merchants, economic development board members and all citizens interested in the improvement of their community should request from the parish's Cooperative Extension Office that their names be placed on the mailing list for the free quarterly "Downtown" newsletter.
- (8) The chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Business Committee, mayor or any interested citizen should contribute town, parish or triparish success stories to Margaret Moore for the "Downtown" newsletter, which is circulated statewide.
- (9) The Chamber of Commerce, along with the mayor, Economic Development Board, and the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, should sponsor a student project to give low-cost ideas for storefront and interior design improvements. The purpose is to motivate local merchants to clean up, fix up, and better utilize existing buildings. There are many assets in buildings in this parish area, and their integrity should not be destroyed with paint. The historic buildings guidelines should be followed with everything done.
- (10) Church groups, school clubs and garden clubs should unite to plan and participate in the Louisiana Trash Bash and enter the Cleanest City Contest. Many areas still need help with removing litter, the removal of old rusty signs, standards, and metal awnings, and their replacement with appropriate fabric or other material. Buildings should be cleaned up properly, particularly those that have masonry.
- (11) The Sheriff and his department should initiate an anti-litter postcard campaign. Any citizen can report a littering offense to the Sheriff's department by postcard. The Sheriff then responds by sending a postcard to the owner of the car. This has been a successful campaign in the Baton Rouge area according to the chairman for this project at the Keep America Beautiful office.
- (12) Every opportunity should be taken to use Frances LeBouf's rendition of the state's official environmental song, "The Gifts of Earth." Ms. LeBouf is a fifth-grade school teacher in Transylvania.
- (13) School clubs, church clubs, and garden clubs should initiate landscaping and wildflower projects.
- (14) Bed and breakfast establishments are an asset but they are not money-making endeavors. Careful planning and thought needs to go into considering such enterprises.

It is important to recognize that downtown revitalization never really ends. The Chamber of Commerce, its business committee and subcommittees, should formulate

annual, three-, five- and ten-year plans. The region has some downtown development opportunities but they require planning and financing. The best examples are the Fiske Theater, old school houses, the Bloom Arcade, and the abandoned Mound Store.

## V. MARKETING THE TRIPARISH AREA

The triparish area has an abundance of natural and historical assets. The potential for the development of a tourism industry exists. Within this area lies the mighty Mississippi River, beautiful Lake Providence, a tremendous wildlife refuge, a major archaeological dig, and some of the most fertile land that can be found anywhere, as well as historic sites, beautifully preserved homes, and a myriad of other attractions.

In order to develop and market the tourism industry in the triparish area a significant amount of research and "getting ready for company" work must be done. First, the individuals who are actively seeking to develop tourism must understand that marketing does not merely mean "let's promote and advertise like crazy." Marketing involves many phases and elements. Initially *marketing research* is the basis for developing the *marketing strategy*. This marketing strategy will give those involved a path to follow and includes *identification of the target market* and developing a *market mix* to satisfy the targeted market.

### A. Research

Some research was done by the assessment team, including the initial identification of existing tourist attractions, sites or projects that have potential for development, and the identification and cursory inventory of the existing infrastructure, i.e., hotels, campgrounds, restaurants, gasoline stations, and information bases.

The assessment team concluded that the triparish area is not ready to aggressively promote tourism. When well over 90% of the support people questioned, that is those who work at restaurants, hotels, and fuel stations, could not tell an outsider how to find any attractions in the area and generally commented that "there ain't nothin' to see or do around here" then there is ground work that must be done before company is invited. This is essential.

Another research conclusion is that area leaders need to consider the types, quality, and quantity of individuals and/or visitor groups that the area can attract and support. For instance, if there were to be a reenactment of the digging of Grant's Canal, would there be sufficient facilities to accommodate the reenactor's camping, parking, and sanitary needs. How would referrals be organized for support people requiring overnight accommodations? Tourism leaders should not sponsor events without thoroughly researching similar efforts in other communities.

A significant amount of time will need to be devoted to researching potentially viable markets. This topic will be addressed in further detail in the target marketing segment of this report.

Research is not a one-time thing and does not have to be very complicated. It is an ongoing process that must be updated, analyzed, and expanded continually. Research must be adapted to meet the needs of the existing base as well as addressing the needs of potential developments. Much of the work can be done by volunteer groups and economic development organizations.

## **B. Marketing Strategy**

Development of the marketing strategy involves several steps and consideration of many variables or factors. There are several variables which currently and for the immediate future are uncontrollable. These include:

1. the cultural and social environment
2. political and legal environment
3. resources and objectives of the group
4. competitive environment
5. economic environment

Because these variables are "in place," the area leaders must consider their effect on the development of the tourism industry. The leaders should take the time to analyze each of these closely; be honest in their assessment of the current situation; and analyze how all the elements of each variable can affect the overall effort.

As an example, consider the existing cultural and social situation as it relates to the development of a tourism industry. In the first place, we have concluded that the general populace's attitude concerning the development of a tourism industry probably ranges from apathy to skepticism to downright belligerence. Leaders, however, are convinced that tourism is a viable concept, and are willing to devote time and effort to its development. They are to be commended for their foresight and hard work.

## **C. Target Marketing**

A marketing strategy focuses on some target customers with a view toward developing a more satisfying and profitable market mix—one that will give the marketers an advantage over their competitors. Target marketing is not limited to small market segments, only to fairly homogeneous ones. To determine markets for the triparish area, tourism leaders should see individuals or segments as different from the all encompassing title of "tourist".

In practical terms, this means that when considering the potential markets that might be attracted to the area, one should research and identify some potentially viable segments or individuals such as those interested in the Civil War, archeology, fishing, or farming, as opposed to tourists in general or "all those people who travel Highway 65 or I-20."

Some other suggestions for target markets might include:

- Retreat groups—many organizations such as Chambers of Commerce and large companies frequently arrange retreats for planning groups. These retreats are usually within a few hours, drive from their locations and out of the way enough that participants won't be distracted.

- International tourists—a package featuring the Mississippi River and farming.
- Birders (bird watchers)
- Wildlife enthusiasts
- Farmers from other parts of the country or even internationally might be interested in exchange programs.
- Water skiers/ski tournaments

Leaders should always research the potential and feasibility of targeting many markets. This rule should also apply when planning fairs, festivals, etc.

#### D. Marketing Mix

Every marketing strategy must incorporate a marketing mix, as well as a target market. In fact, developing a marketing mix should be an integral part of selecting a target market. There are four basic variables to the marketing mix:

- Product
- Place
- Price
- Promotion

Note that the marketing mix is comparable to a cake mix. Such that, if any one of the ingredients or variables are left out or overlooked you run the risk of having a "flop".

In analyzing the marketing mix the *product* variable is always studied first. This is because the way potential customers view the product has a bearing on the rest of the marketing mix. The product area is concerned with developing the right "product" for the target market. The key is to develop something that will satisfy some customers' needs.

The *place* variable is concerned with all the problems, functions and institutions involved in getting the right product to the target market. A product is not much good to a customer if it is not available when and where it is wanted. So, for the place variable we must consider where, when, and by whom the goods and services are to be offered for sale. Also, if there are several different targeted markets, it may very well require several channels of market exposure.

While developing the right product and place mixes, leaders must also decide and/or assist and encourage attraction and business owners to decide on the right *price*—one that will round out the marketing mix and make it as attractive as possible. In setting a price, the nature of competition for the targeted market(s) as well as likely customer reaction to prices must be considered.

In short, price is concerned with determining the "right" price to move the "right" product to the "right" place with the "right" promotion for the target market.

*Promotion* is concerned with any method that communicates to the target market about the product to be sold, its place and price. Promotion includes personal selling, mass selling and sales promotion. A proper blend of these various modes of promotion must be adapted to fit the requirements of a given targeted market.

The needs of a target market virtually determine the nature of an appropriate marketing mix. Therefore, it is necessary for marketers to analyze their potential target markets with great care.

An outline of a potential marketing mix and possible target market application is presented in Table 2.

### **E. Getting Started**

The objective for the marketing segment of this study was to suggest some doable, manageable and financially feasible marketing tools for the triparish group. Initially, the roles to be played by individuals and groups must be defined. As was indicated earlier in the report there should be a tourism industry development "council" or "board" or "advisory group" to deal with the overall concept, concerns and needs involved in developing the area into a tourist-oriented region.

Also, those who are working on specific projects must maintain their eagerness to develop these individual projects because the industry itself will not evolve without specific attractions, nor will the attractions be as successful as they could be without the overall "tourism orientation" of the area. So, right up front everybody must realize that the success or failure of a tourism industry in the area is absolutely dependent on the tourism development group's ability to work with the project group and vice-versa.

Four major points need to be addressed to prepare the proper framework for the development of a tourism industry in the triparish area. Along with marketing strategy development, target market identification and marketing mix development, these four points are:

- Research can be done internally and at a reasonable cost. Examples include:
  - license tag counts
  - talking to visitors
  - research history
  - learning about target markets through
    - the magazines the target markets receive
    - reunions
    - groups meetings
    - educational groups
    - awareness groups
- Business and attraction personnel and owners must be trained.
  - about the area (FAM TOUR)



- through a newsletter to be dispersed to everyone who comes in contact with tourists
  - training employees in courtesy and hygiene
- Individual businesses and attractions must adapt themselves to tourists' needs.
  - credit cards
  - promotional brochures on hand
  - clean facilities (especially restrooms)
- Signage must be in place
  - can it be read?
  - is it understandable?

To become a cohesive group there must be an identifying name and logo. The parishes need to come up with a name which represents the essence of the area. Some suggestions were made for names at the August 1990 debriefing meeting. We will not make any suggestions at this time, as this a project that should be researched, developed, and agreed upon internally.

In conclusion, area tourism leaders must now approach their marketing efforts in an organized and deliberate manner knowing that marketing is not merely advertising. The marketing plans for the triparish area must be methodically planned, implemented, and controlled around the targeted market(s).

Finally, a momentum exists among the leaders now. This momentum must not be allowed to wane. Every effort should be taken to make the tourism industry a reality in the area.

It is further recommended that the advisory group have Dr. Paul Dunn, Northeast Louisiana University Small Business Development Center, present the workshop "Developing the Marketing Strategy." Dr. Dunn would adapt this workshop specifically to the tourism industry in the area.

Table 2

