

NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES / 5

5.1/OVERVIEW

Environmental resources, in particular waterways, played a central role in the development of Biloxi and remain at the core of the City's sense of place, culture, heritage, and economy. Biloxi's major waterways (i.e., the Mississippi Sound, the Back Bay, the Tchoutacabouffa River, and the Biloxi River) form the City's boundaries and have supported its development and growth in fishing, trading, shipbuilding, and tourism. Biloxi's scenic and natural resources and mild climate continue to attract residents and visitors and help support the City's economy. Throughout the planning process, participants emphasized the importance of preserving and enhancing Biloxi's valuable natural assets – its waterways, wetlands, beaches, vegetation, and wildlife habitat.

In addition to their importance to quality of life and the economy, natural resources are critical to Biloxi's ability to both resist and recover from natural disasters. Sensitive environmental areas include wetlands, steep slopes, hydric soils, and waterways (Figure 5.1). The City's waterways and wetlands are illustrated on Figure 5.2. The velocity, 100-year, and 500-year flood boundaries are particularly relevant in Biloxi and are illustrated in Figure 5.1 and described in Table 5.1 below. Widely recognized as the most costly and destructive storm in U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina's devastation extended beyond the 100-year to the 500-year floodplain boundary. The storm is estimated to have caused approximately \$125 billion in damages to the Mississippi coastline and the New Orleans metro area.¹ In May 2009, Biloxi adopted the revised FEMA Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map (DFIRM) and has updated its Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. The Ordinance requires that residential buildings in the A-zones be elevated to meet the

¹ City of Biloxi Hazard Mitigation/Floodplain Management Plan, 2007

FEMA base flood elevations (BFEs). Nonresidential buildings located in A-zones must be elevated or may be floodproofed (i.e., "watertight with walls substantially impermeable to the passage of water") in lieu of being elevated.

TABLE 5.1/FLOODZONES DEFINED

Special Flood Hazard Area	Any portion of the floodplain subject to inundation by the base flood and/or flood-related erosion related hazards. Includes A and V Zones.
Zone V (Velocity)	The portion of the Special Flood Hazard Area that extends from offshore to the inland limit of the frontal dune along an open coast, and any other area subject to high-velocity wave action from storms.
Coastal A Zone	100-year flood zone landward of a Velocity zone, in which the principal source of flooding is astronomical tides, storm surges, etc. Coastal A Zones may be subject to wave effects, velocity flows, or erosion and are treated as Velocity Zones.
Zone A	100-year flood zone. Includes portions of the Special Flood Hazard Area in which the principal source of flooding is runoff from rainfall. Floodwaters may move slowly or rapidly, but waves are usually not a significant threat to buildings.
Zones B and X (shaded)	500-year flood zone and areas subject to the 100-year flood with average depths of less than one foot and areas protected by levees from the base flood.
Base Flood Elevation (BFE)	The elevation shown on the flood insurance rate map for zones A and V that indicates the surface water elevation resulting from a 100-year flood in any given year.

Source: City of Biloxi Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, Chapter 8

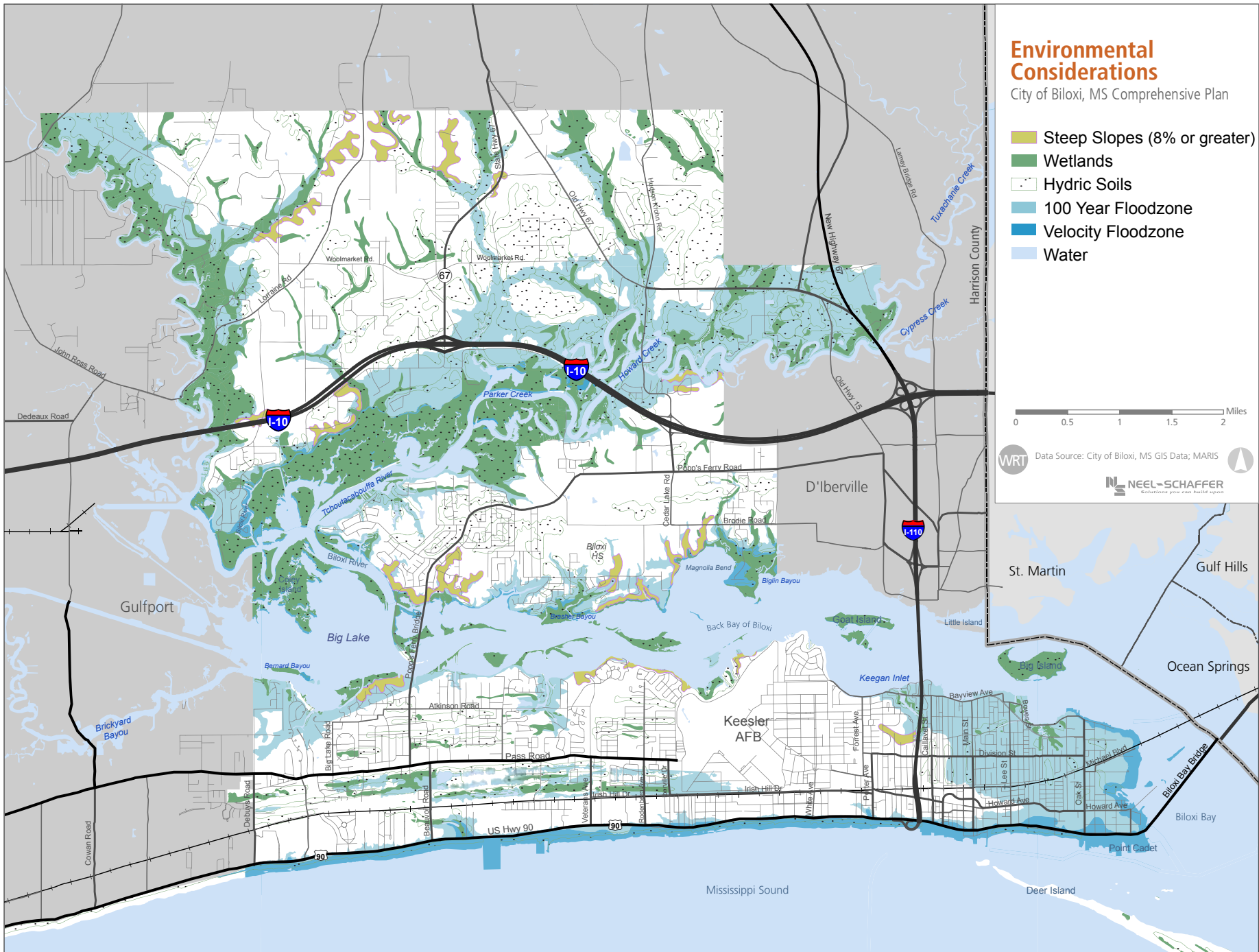


FIGURE 5.1/ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

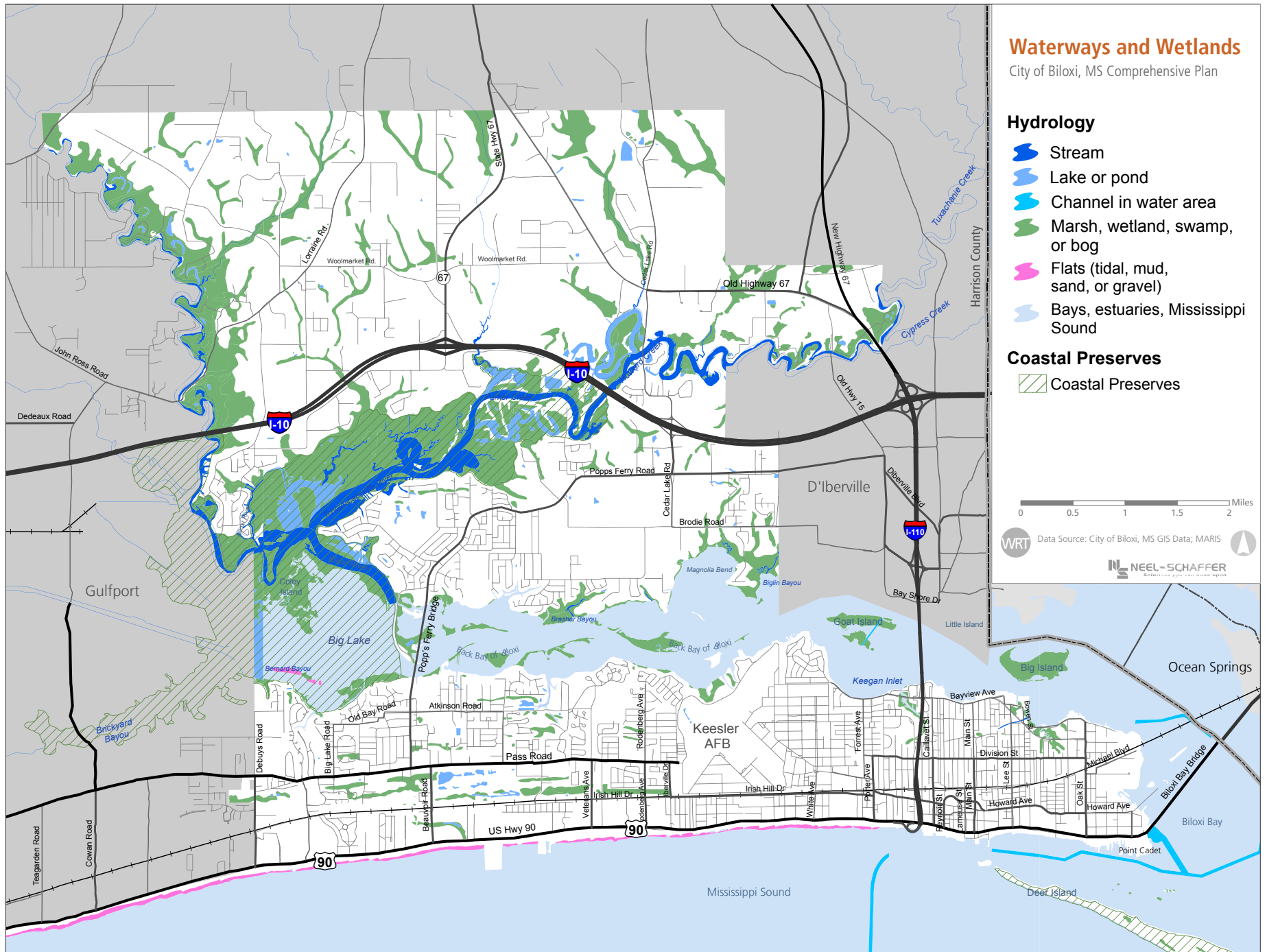


FIGURE 5.2/WATERWAYS AND WETLANDS

Biloxi's waterways and the diverse inhabitants utilizing them have shaped the City's heritage and cultural traditions. Today Biloxi is a multi-ethnic mix of people of Native American, European, African, and Asian descent. The City's cultural and historic resources are evident in its architecture, historic districts and sites, traditions, and festivals. Annual festivals and traditions typically focus on Biloxi's water resources, boating, and fishing (e.g., Blessing of the Fleet and Shrimp Festival, Biloxi Seafood Festival, Great Biloxi Schooner Races, Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo, Smoking the Sound, etc.).

The City's cultural and historic heritage is also central to its sense of place. While Hurricane Katrina destroyed approximately one-third of the City's landmark designated sites and buildings, there are many important sites that have been restored or are currently being renovated, including Beauvoir (Jefferson Davis House), the Bond-Grant House, the Brunet-Fourchey House (Mary Mahoney's Old French House Restaurant), City Hall, the Biloxi Lighthouse, the Saenger Theater, and the Old Brick House. Since Katrina, the City and its residents have utilized funds available from FEMA and other sources to replace and renovate many damaged buildings, in an effort to preserve Biloxi's unique architectural heritage.

Biloxi's heritage is multi-faceted, encompassing the City's architectural style and historic landmark properties, ship building and fishing traditions, diverse population, and relationship with its surrounding waterways. Since the City was known as the "Seafood Capital of the World" in the early 20th century, Biloxi has remained a tourist destination, defined by its beaches, local seafood industry, fishing opportunities, and more recently its gaming and entertainment facilities. The Mississippi Gaming Commission reports that over 3.5 million

people visited casinos in the state's coastal region during the 4th quarter of 2008. Throughout the comprehensive planning process, residents and other stakeholders emphasized the need to highlight and retain Biloxi's history, heritage, and culture as the City redevelops and grows.

Key Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resource Issues

- Biloxi's natural and historic resources, heritage, and arts and culture provide opportunities to expand the City's tourist draw, attract new residents, strengthen the economy, and improve quality of life.
- Biloxi is rich in natural resources, in particular water resources. However, the City's low-lying areas and location along the Gulf Coast mean that neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions are vulnerable to storm threats. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed or damaged over 20% of the City's building stock and entire neighborhoods in East Biloxi. Since then, many former residents and property owners have neither rebuilt nor sold their now vacant parcels.
- Environmental issues are extremely relevant along the Gulf Coast and many cities are anticipating the impacts of climate change over the next 50 to 100 years. The scientific community, including local and regional experts, agrees that the Gulf Coastal Region will be affected by climate change. Potential effects in the Coastal Region include higher temperatures, decreased rainfall, a sea level rise of 15 inches during this century, and more intense hurricanes (wind speeds, rainfall totals).² The effects of climate change on Biloxi could be disastrous without protection and restoration of wetlands and other sensitive environmental

² Confronting Climate Change in the Gulf Coast Region, The Union of Concerned Scientists and The Ecological Society of America, October 2001.

resources. Restored wetlands can offer significant protection by absorbing and holding stormwater. Within flood prone areas, open space can help filter stormwater runoff, provide detention, and increase storm resiliency.

- The entire Biloxi Peninsula, in particular Downtown, is rich in historic and cultural resources. Biloxi's historic neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions are vulnerable to natural disasters, storm threats, deterioration/demolition by neglect, and loss of their unique character as redevelopment occurs.

- Storm damage from Hurricane Katrina left many empty lots and vacant businesses on the Biloxi Peninsula. However, much of the City's tree canopy, including magnificent live oaks, survived the storm. The City's trees help cool buildings, provide shade, prevent erosion, and lessen flooding. Continued protection and enhancement of the Biloxi's tree canopy is needed.

- The City's remaining historic resources need to be protected and preserved to retain Biloxi's heritage, unique character, and sense of place. Even more important, adaptive reuse of historic buildings is vital for the community and economy.

- Biloxi's Town Green is an example of a successful community gathering place that holds festivals and activities nearly every weekend of the year. The City lacks other smaller activity centers that are walkable and accessible to their surrounding neighborhoods.

- Biloxi's waterfront and Sand Beach are tremendous assets for the City's residents and visitors. Open views, access to the water and beach, and recreational opportunities may be threatened by inappropriate redevelopment along Highway 90 and the Back Bay.



5.2/LONG-RANGE GOAL, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTIONS

Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources Goal

Protect and restore natural, cultural, and historic resources and maximize the benefits they provide for the economy, environment, and community.

The natural, historic, and cultural resources goal and supporting objectives and actions are designed to guide the City in making regulatory, investment, and other decisions related to these critical resources. These objectives and actions will help to achieve the future vision of a healthy environment that supports quality of life, sustains the economy, and protects against storm damage and flooding. They address Biloxi's economy (Objectives 5-1, 5-2), its natural environment (Objectives 5-3, 5-4, 5-5, 5-6), and its community (Objectives 5-7, 5-8, 5-9).



Economy

Objective 5-1 Promote heritage, arts and culture, and eco-based tourism.

- Action 5-1-1 Grow the tourism industry by showcasing the City’s unique character (e.g., arts and culture, history, and the seafood industry) through diverse activities and national image branding.
- Action 5-1-2 Target future eco-tourism based sites for priority preservation and restoration of natural resources and habitat.
- Action 5-1-3 Encourage continued development and expansion of the Museum District in East Biloxi (Ohr-O’Keefe Museum of Art, Maritime and Seafood Museum, the Hurricane Katrina Museum, and the Mardi Gras Museum).
- Action 5-1-4 Support performing arts venues and other attractions throughout the City that reflect Biloxi’s rich cultural heritage as draws for both residents and visitors.

Biloxi is known for its entertainment and recreation options, such as casinos, golf courses, water-based recreation, and the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center. However, there are opportunities to further capitalize on its rich natural, cultural, and historic resources to:

- Attract heritage and eco-tourists, who studies show tend to stay longer and spend more dollars in the local community than the average visitor; and
- Promote local pride and awareness of Biloxi’s heritage and improve quality of life for residents.

Located near the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center, Beauvoir is the City’s best known historic site and visitor attraction. The developing museum cluster along Beach Boulevard in East Biloxi (Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, Katrina Museum, Ohr-O’Keefe Museum, and Mardi Gras Museum) is another key resource that will enhance the City’s arts and cultural offerings for residents and visitors when fully developed. Downtown Biloxi has much to offer in terms of historic buildings and pedestrian character and has potential to expand its offerings (Section 9.5, Downtown Improvement Strategy).

Eco-tourism typically attracts visitors to undisturbed natural areas of high scenic quality and/or plant and animal biodiversity while minimizing ecological impacts. First widely known in developing places such as Costa Rica and South America, eco-tourism is growing in the U.S., including Gulf Coast communities, as interest and concern for the environment and local economies increase. Examples of eco-tourism activities include bird-watching, fishing, kayaking tours, waterway trails, and environmental educational programs.

Biloxi's Downtown Saenger Theater, constructed in 1929, has been restored to its original condition. The theater is home to the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra, local theater companies, and dance troupes. Another cultural resource, Biloxi's Little Theater is celebrating over 60 years of community theater in East Biloxi. In addition, Biloxi retains a small but growing artist community. Recently an art co-op that showcases regional artists opened in a historic Downtown building. Additional establishments of this type should be encouraged to increase the Downtown's attractiveness to tourists and residents.

Objective 5-2 Build on Biloxi's past as a seafood and tourism destination of the Gulf Coast.

Action 5-2-1 Develop public waterfront uses on the Peninsula (e.g., expanded marina, family-based recreation) to attract residents and visitors.

Action 5-2-2 Retain and strengthen the commercial seafood industry as part of Biloxi's heritage and economy, including development of the proposed "Seafood Village" on the Back Bay. [Economic Development Objective 8-4]

Action 5-2-3 Continue to support the expansion of the Convention Center and development of additional hotel rooms to support Biloxi's visitor industry. [Economic Development Action 8-2-2]

Action 5-2-4 Pursue long-term multi-modal transit service per the Coast Transit Authority's 2007 *Gulf Coast Transit Development Plan* as part of a strategy to support development of Biloxi's tourism industry. [Transportation Action 4-1-2]

Throughout the planning process, residents and other stakeholders expressed the desire to preserve and enhance Biloxi's image as a community whose culture and economy developed

Gulf Coast Heritage Trail & Sarasota Bay Program, Pascagoula River Nature Festival

The Gulf Coast Heritage Trail begins in Sarasota Bay, designated an estuary of national significance in 1989, in southwest coastal Florida. The multi-use trail links more than 150 natural, cultural, and historic resources and offers visitors a variety of recreational opportunities such as kayaking and canoeing. Ecologically focused

points of interest along the route include nature preserves, beaches, fishing piers, boardwalks, gardens, an environmental center, and a working educational farm. Historic and cultural sites include multiple museums, theaters, and performing arts venues. The Gulf Coast Heritage Trail also includes a scenic auto route, with designated parking areas where visitors can park their cars and rent bicycles or continue to explore the Trail on foot. Tourism is an important economic sector

in Florida and the state ranks 2nd behind California in the number of people visiting an area to participate in wildlife and recreation related activities. In 2006, retail sales related to wildlife viewing in Florida were estimated at 3.1 billion are expected to continue to increase in this expanding tourism niche.



around the waterfront and seafood industry. Biloxi’s popular charter boats and shrimping excursions operate from Point Cadet and the Small Craft Harbor. The capacity for boats and tours will expand as repairs to the marinas are completed. In addition, plans are underway to establish the Maritime and Seafood Industry, Mardi Gras, and Katrina Museums on land adjacent to the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum at the former site of the Tullis-Toldedano Manor.

The development of a mixed-use public marina at Point Cadet would satisfy multiple needs expressed by residents (e.g., more marina space, enhanced recreational activities, pedestrian amenities and gathering space, and access to the waterfront). The site could be designed to include additional marina slips and boat launches, a pedestrian boardwalk, meeting space, an observation area, outdoor space for entertainment and festivals, a restaurant or lounge, small shops, and greater capacity for boating and fishing events and competitions (e.g., the Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo and the MS Gulf Coast Billfish Classic).

In addition to supporting seafood related tourism and recreation, the continued viability of Biloxi’s fishing industry is key to sustaining the City’s economy, culture, and heritage. The proposed Seafood Village on the Back Bay, a concept that was developed as part of the Reviving the Renaissance Plan (2006), would provide dedicated berthing space for the commercial fishing fleet and processing facilities while also serving as a tourist attraction and destination with a seafood market, restaurants, retail space, and a public gathering area.

Environment

Objective 5-3 Protect and restore sensitive environmental resources.

- Action 5-3-1 Revise the LDO to include an Environmental Protection section that incorporates existing wetlands standards and adds new requirements to protect water resources.
- Action 5-3-2 Incorporate regulations and incentives into the LDO to encourage maintenance of sensitive environmental resources as open space (e.g., conservation subdivision design and open space set-aside standards). (*See also Land Use Objective 3-10-1*).
- Action 5-3-3 Preserve environmentally sensitive lands through fee simple acquisition or acquisition of development rights (*See also Natural, Cultural, and Historic Objective 5-5*).
- Action 5-3-4 Seek opportunities to actively restore wetlands, native habitats, and other natural resources.

Many communities in the U.S. require an added level of protection for local environmental resources such as steep slopes, woodlands, and waterways. With the exception of the City’s Flood Prevention Ordinance and existing wetlands standards in Section 23-14-5, the LDO lacks provisions to protect sensitive environmental features. While Biloxi lacks natural features found in other parts of the country, such as extensive steep slope areas and mature forests, water resources and their functions (flood control, fisheries, filtration of sediments

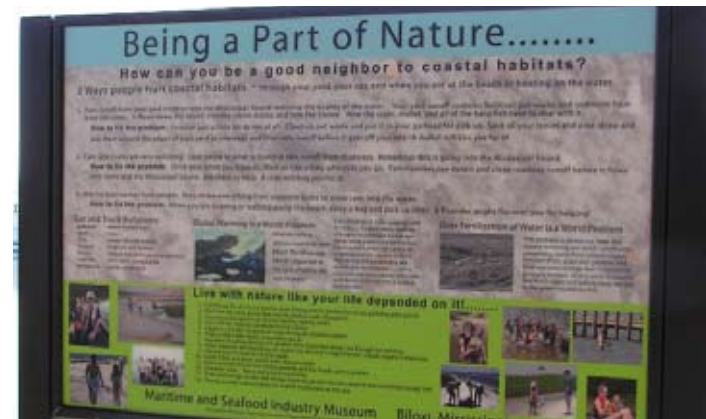


and pollutants, recreation and support for tourism, etc.) are especially important. Adding a new Environmental Resource section to the LDO would help protect water resources through requirements such as riparian buffers and setbacks adjacent to waterways, limits on disturbance of natural vegetation and wildlife habitat, and planting of native plant species.

Revisions can also be made to the LDO to promote dedication of environmentally sensitive areas within new developments as open space. Possible approaches include conservation cluster subdivision design and open space set-aside standards. Conservation cluster subdivisions maintain the overall zoning density limits while reducing lot sizes and dimensional requirements in order to achieve benefits such as increased open space, maintenance of natural floodplain capacity, and provision of protective buffers along floodplains and wetlands. Incentives could be provided for site plans that preserve sensitive environmental areas and establish open space buffers next to these resources. Set-aside standards require a percentage of the site area of a new development to be dedicated as open space. These approaches are described in more detail in Chapter 3 (Land Use Objective 3-10).

The most direct way to protect environmentally sensitive resources is to permanently preserve the land through outright acquisition or negotiation of a conservation easement with the landowner, either by the City or a private, nonprofit land trust. These approaches are more fully discussed under Objective 5-5 below in the context of maintaining flood prone areas as open space.

Environmental resources, particularly water-related ones, are key to Biloxi's identity, quality of life, and economy. Moreover, features such as wetlands, barrier islands, dunes, trees, and other native vegetation have enormous protective value, providing a form of "green infrastructure" (see page __ that enhances the ability to resist storm damage and adapt to the long-term effects of climate change. However, these resources have been extensively altered and degraded by human activities and the quality of Biloxi's coastal waters continues to be impacted by stormwater and sanitary sewer runoff. The City is actively working to reduce the impacts of utility infrastructure on water resources through its Phase II Stormwater Program and Infrastructure Repair Program (see Community Facilities and Services Objective 6-9). Opportunities should also be sought to restore existing ecosystems such as wetlands and dunes (e.g., by replanting native grasses along Sand Beach) and to "recreate" such systems in appropriate areas (e.g., wetlands in low-lying areas to provide stormwater retention).



Objective 5-4 Preserve Biloxi’s tree canopy, including its magnificent live oaks, and encourage planting of native species.

Action 5-4-1 Update and enhance the LDO’s tree protection regulations to preserve and enhance Biloxi’s physical and aesthetic environment.

Action 5-4-2 Revise LDO landscaping standards to require use of native plants, increase landscape diversity, and require street trees in site development.

Action 5-4-3 Continue to partner with organizations such as the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain to educate landowners about benefits of open space preservation and native landscaping. [Community Facilities and Services Action 6-4-2]

Biloxi residents and other stakeholders have identified the City’s tree canopy, in particular its many live oaks, as a valuable asset in need of protection. Biloxi’s live oaks and other native trees add tremendous scenic value along Highway 90 and throughout the City’s neighborhoods and parks. They also provide other benefits such as reducing stormwater runoff, limiting soil erosion, providing shade and protection from severe weather, increasing property values, etc. Revisions to the landscaping and tree protection standards of the LDO should consider:

- Planting standards to promote diversity and native plants and minimize irrigation needs
- Flexible riparian buffers requirements along water bodies

- Revised tree cover standards and incentives to retain existing trees

Many coastal communities, including Harrison County, are developing revised tree preservation regulations to limit invasive species and improve the existing tree canopy. The Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain (Land Trust) and Replant Mississippi are two organizations working to improve tree health and increase the tree canopy in the Gulf Coast region.

Objective 5-5 Maintain flood prone areas as open space to maintain sensitive environmental features and increase resiliency. [Land Use Objective 3-11]

Action 5-5-1 Investigate developing a program to support public buyout of properties in flood prone areas where owners are not interested in rebuilding.

Action 5-5-2 Explore other options to preserve floodplain and other environmentally sensitive areas as open space.

Much of Biloxi is low-lying land within the 100-year floodplain. Properties in East Biloxi and other areas scattered throughout the City have remained vacant since Hurricane Katrina. One approach to improving storm resiliency is to maintain these sensitive environmental areas as open space that can serve a variety of productive uses, such as urban agriculture (e.g., community gardens and specialty crops), wetland restoration, eco-tourism, venues for community events, and park and recreation space.

As previously noted, wetland restoration can offer significant protection by absorbing and detaining storm and flood waters, as can open space preservation in flood prone areas. Land used for urban agriculture or recreation would directly benefit the health and welfare of the community. A public land ownership program could be managed by the City's Parks Department or a new organization/partnership formed for this purpose.

TDR Opportunities in the Region

In conjunction with Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain is developing a program called Smart Conservation: A Strategy for Incorporating Green Infrastructure into Hurricane Recovery and Renewal. The intent of this program is to identify a potential conservation network for Southern Mississippi that is focused on environmentally sensitive land and to pursue implementation at the state and local levels. Another potential outcome of the project is a framework at the state and local levels for implementing a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.

Private nonprofit organizations or land trusts such as the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain can also preserve open space via donations or purchase. Such organizations can own the land outright, acquire the development rights on the land in the form of a conservation easement, and/or take responsibility for maintaining the land in the form of a conservation easement.

Another approach, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) has proved successful in many states and sensitive environmental regions of the U.S. (e.g., Montgomery County, Maryland, the New Jersey Pinelands, and Boulder, Colorado). A TDR program allows property owners in designated sending area (e.g., floodplains, wetlands, or valuable agricultural land) to transfer development potential to parcels in designated receiving areas (e.g., centers designated on the Future Land Use Map). Typically, owners purchasing the development rights are allowed to develop at a higher residential density in receiving areas than otherwise would be permitted under existing zoning. The highest quality natural resources lands are often designated as sending areas. Where there is state enabling legislation, TDR programs can be established at the municipal, county or state level. Currently there is no legislation authorizing TDR in Mississippi; however, there is interest at both the statewide and Gulf coast level. An open space program that begins with acquisition of land and easements might evolve in the future into a TDR program.

Community

Objective 5-6 Preserve, restore, and adaptively reuse historic resources.

- Action 5-6-1 Continue to interpret and promote the City's historic resources through activities and special events (e.g., historic walking and driving tours, Mardi Gras celebrations, cemetery tours, etc.).
- Action 5-6-2 Develop architectural and streetscape design guidelines for Downtown to encourage new development that complements Biloxi's historic character.
- Action 5-6-3 Continue to work with Main Street Biloxi and support redevelopment of key Downtown historic resources (e.g., properties along Vieux Marche and Rue Magnolia) through incentives and matching grants.
- Action 5-6-4 Enforce and enhance the Architectural/Historic Overlay (AHO) District and the Architectural and Historical Review Commission (AHRC) Design Review Guidelines to protect significant historic resources and to promote new development that complements Biloxi's historic character.
- Action 5-6-5 Encourage adaptive reuse of existing structures with historic character. [Housing Action 7-5-4]



- Action 5-6-6 Implement a facade improvement grant program to encourage restoration of historic building facades in Downtown and other areas of the City.
- Action 5-6-7 Maintain the integrity of historic neighborhoods and reduce storm vulnerability by placing utilities underground.

Throughout the development of this plan, residents expressed the desire to preserve and protect the historic resources that remain in Biloxi. Hurricane Katrina destroyed over 250 National Register properties and damaged or severely damaged over 5,000 properties in Mississippi's coastal counties, including much of Biloxi's architectural heritage. This heritage will disappear if action is not taken to restore and preserve existing historic resources and to replicate the City's unique architectural styles in future construction.

The *Reviving the Renaissance Plan* (2006) made a comprehensive set of recommendations to restore or rebuild and protect Biloxi's historic sites and neighborhoods following the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina. Much progress has been made in implementing the plan's recommendations, including restoration or reuse of numerous important historic sites. Moving forward, a range of strategies should continue to be employed to sustain the City's historic heritage, including stabilization and restoration of endangered properties such as the Old Brick House, enforcement and enhancement of existing regulations, adaptive reuse of buildings that no longer serve their original purpose, and promotion of historic resources through festivals and special events. New buildings (e.g., the City's planned visitors center on Highway 90 and new library/civic center on Howard Street) should be designed to complement Biloxi's unique architectural style.

Revisions and enhancements to the AHO District and supporting materials can assist the AHRC in protecting significant historic properties and maintaining historic character in Biloxi. Such revisions include:

- Enhancing the City's existing design review guidelines and strengthening their connection to the District regulations
- Applying the AHO District to landmarks located outside designated historic districts
- Improving documentation of the AHO Historic Districts, Landmarks, and Sites by incorporating additional detail (e.g., date constructed, architect, historic significance, photographs, etc)
- Simplifying procedural requirements and coordinating them with the remainder of the development review process

Adaptive reuse is the process of converting an existing structure to a use other than the one for which it was originally intended. In many places, vacant schools, post offices, warehouses, and other buildings that have outlived their original functions have been adapted and reused for housing, commercial, and/or other uses. More and more frequently, adaptive reuse is preferred by communities as an alternative to new "greenfield" development in order to protect historic resources from demolition, promote revitalization, and encourage efficient and environmentally responsible development. The many benefits provided by adaptive reuse include preserving community history and neighborhood character, helping to reverse economic decline, increasing property values, and reducing construction costs, waste, and energy consumption through use of existing rather than new building materials.

A façade improvement grant program is an excellent way to promote renovation of buildings in a historic business district such as Biloxi's Downtown. A funding source such as the Mississippi Development Authority's Community Development Block Grant Program can be used to realize façade improvements at little or no cost to the building owner or tenant. The City of Gulfport's Façade Master Plan Grant Program is a good model (see Chapter 10, Downtown Revitalization Strategy, Strategy 3).

Objective 5-7 Encourage community gathering spaces and activity centers throughout Biloxi.

- Action 5-7-1 Continue to support year round events and activities at Town Green and enhance the park with additional pedestrian features (e.g., seating, paths, landscaping).
- Action 5-7-2 Develop Point Cadet with pedestrian, bicyclist, and visitor amenities and gathering spaces.
- Action 5-7-3 Promote community gardens and urban agriculture as sources of local food production and vehicles for community building.
- Action 5-7-4 Develop LDO incentives to encourage pedestrian plazas, pocket parks, informal gathering spaces, and public art as prominent features in mixed-use centers throughout the City.

Many participants in this planning process identified the need for additional community and activity centers in neighborhoods and within commercial areas. Biloxi Town Green currently functions as the City's major community activity center. This function should be supported and enhanced, for example by adding an outdoor amphitheater. Other potential activity centers are identified in the Neighborhood Improvement Strategies (see Chapter 9), including Point Cadet and Seafood Village in East Biloxi, the Convention Center District in West Biloxi, North Biloxi, and Woolmarket.

Other types of community gathering spaces (e.g., plazas, public parks, community centers, libraries, etc.) are needed throughout Biloxi as the City redevelops and grows. These gathering spaces should incorporate pedestrian and bicycle amenities and be easily accessible to their surrounding communities. Depending on the size and need of the center, characteristics will differ. For example, pocket parks can make walking and biking attractive to residents and include amenities such as playground equipment, public art, seating, etc. Neighborhood parks are larger, typically accommodating a mix of passive and active recreational activities (e.g., playgrounds, trails, recreational fields, small festivals and community events, etc). In commercial and mixed-use areas, informal gathering areas and pocket parks can provide a break from a busy commercial environment, display public art (e.g., Katrina sculptures), and serve as a place for people to meet or relax. Community gardens making use of available open space in East Biloxi and elsewhere are another means of promoting shared community activity that can also contribute to local food production.

