

Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership

February/March 2008

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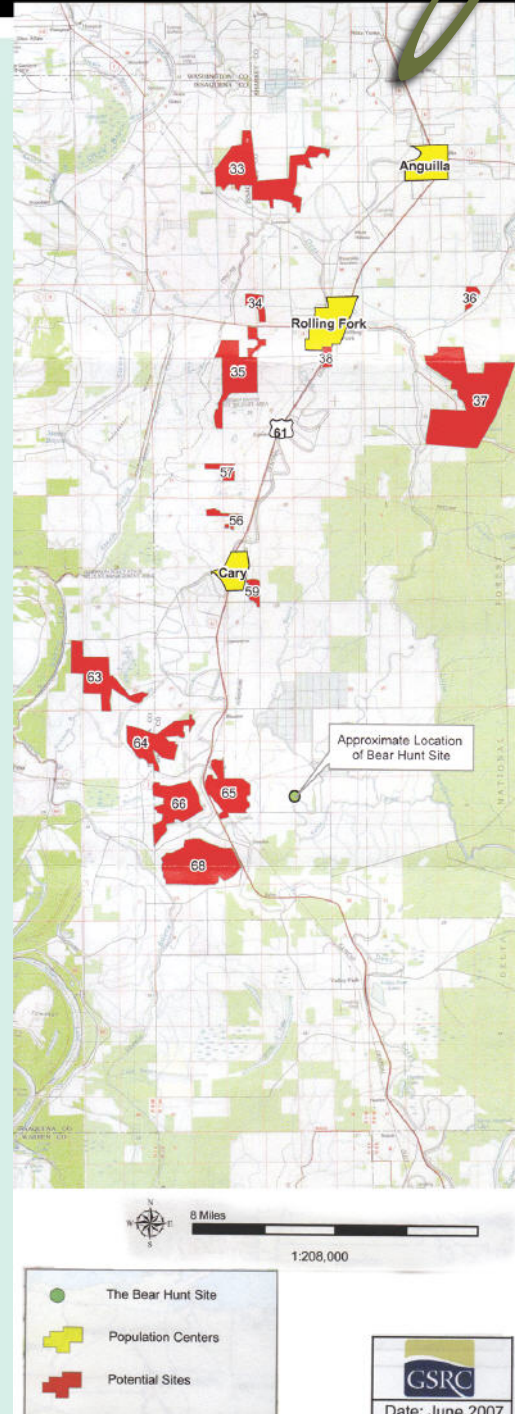
Site Selection Report released on South Delta Interpretive Center - Deer Creek Pilot

The Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has completed its site selection study for the proposed Interpretive and Education Center in the South Delta and a location somewhere in Sharkey County is its overwhelming recommendation. Of the top 15 potential sites investigated in Sharkey, Issaquena, Warren, Washington, Yazoo and Humphreys County, 12 are located in Sharkey, including the top three ranked sites. The other three in the top 15 are Issaquena County sites.

The Corps' report, produced by the Baton Rouge-based Gulf South Research Corporation, indicated that 74 potential sites were originally considered, then narrowed to 38 with the consideration that the center locale "should be within the vicinity of the Holt Collier and Theodore Roosevelt bear hunt site," based on public comments and the intent of the empowering federal legislation.

"Therefore, the top sites are located near the towns of Rolling Fork and Cary," the report reads. The highest rated of all the considered locations is one at the southernmost end of the Rolling Fork city limits, known locally as "the Red Barn" site.

The federal legislation authorizing the interpretive and education center, also referred to as the Holt Collier Center, authorized \$6 million for its construction. However, that funding was not included in this year's federal omnibus spending bill, and a concerted effort has already begun to secure allocation of those funds in next year's federal budget, proponents said.



Our Mission: To promote and enhance the economic and environmental health of Mississippi's Lower Delta

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Padding Down the Sunflower River



John Ruskey, owner and operator of Quapaw Canoe Company, along with friend, Mike Clark from St. Louis, Missouri, stopped for lunch on the banks of the Sunflower River in Anguilla on Feb. 27. This was their fifth day of paddling on the Sunflower River. Ruskey and Clark have made this journey down the Sunflower River during February for the past 4 years. They have been documenting a different section of the river each year, drawing attention to the Sunflower River and the environment in and around its waters.

According to Ruskey, paddling down the Sunflower River makes you see the river in a whole new light. "As Mississippi Deltans our only experience with the Sunflower is what we see from the highway bridge - which isn't much. You've got to get over the muddy banks of the river to view the tranquil muddy waters, the tangled forests and incredible wildlife sightings, and unfortunately the awful trash dumpsites along the Big Sunflower. There is no better way to experience the river than to paddle it. Some choices for paddlers on the Sunflower include: Clarksdale to Hopson, Merigold to Dockery, Sunflower to Indianola, and one of the most beautiful sections, the 14 mile paddle starting at the Hwy. 14 bridge near Anguilla. On this journey, you will start downstream and enter Delta National Forest following the old channel through the deep woods, we take out at the Big Sunflower boat ramp near Holly Bluff. Paddle hard and do it as a daytrip, or make a more adventurous journey and stay overnight with the coyotes, armadillos and bears in the Big Woods!"

Mike Clark teaches middle and elementary school in St. Louis, and while on the River, he stopped to interact with his classes from the river. Mike calls this a virtual learning adventure in which he relates to the students what he has seen. "I collaborate with students from the school at which I teach in St. Louis, St. Ann of Normandy. We do this via the internet where I have set up a wiki website which enables the students and me to communicate and aggregate information. Our three main themes are: Healthy River Ecosystems, Weather, and African American History. Groups of students are building background information on these subjects while I paddle. Each student has developed a guiding question to focus their research and to direct me in the real time collection of information. Twice during the expedition, I connect live with our school's computer lab and conduct a virtual class and discussion. I also post an "Explorer's Journal" every other day and a "Turtle's Tale", which is an account of the journey written in the character of Toby Turtle, a fictional companion of mine (for 1st - 3rd graders). In the end, it is my hope that the work we do together will inspire us to be better students, and more importantly, to be stewards of our precious natural resources and the heritage of our culture."

It was from these adventures on the Sunflower that Ruskey was motivated to start a "Friends of the Sunflower River" group. The goal of this group is stated as being committed to a clean-flowing Sunflower River that provides sustainable habitat for the humans, animals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish that are found native to the Mississippi Delta. The group is open to anyone paying the \$25.00 membership fee.

Ruskey's business, Quapaw Canoe Company, based in Clarksdale, MS offers wilderness expeditions on the Lower Mississippi River, its back waters, bayous, oxbows and tributaries like the White, the Arkansas, the Big Sunflower and the Yazoo Rivers. These trips are by canoe or kayak only,

no motor power. According to Ruskey, "the Lower Mississippi River creates one of America's greatest wildernesses - and wildest - a land subject to chaotic weather and the unpredictable character of Old Man River. It is a landscape of water and sky, broken only by a horizon of willow and mixed deciduous forests. Everything is big about it. Imagine floating a bend of the river that takes twenty miles of delta to complete, skirting around swirling eddies the size of several city blocks, camping on a sand bar that stretches to the horizon, and swimming in pristine blue holes. It is America's major waterfowl flyway, and central artery of barge shipping. Three-screw tugboats pushing tows a half-mile long are common. Deer, coyote, beaver and possum abound, and bears still inhabit the bottomlands. It is the flood plain of the second biggest river in the world, and water levels might fluctuate fifty feet from Spring high to Summer low. As such, each adventure is slightly different, and itinerary is dependent on river conditions and prevailing weather."

Ruskey's Mississippi River expeditions have been very popular with folks wanting to get out on the Mississippi. He runs the Mississippi in big "Voyageur" style canoes that can carry 8-10 people at a time, hand carved in Clarksdale from native floodplain Bald Cypress, Cottonwood, Sycamore and Sweetgum. These canoes come directly from the designs used by the French fur trappers on the Great Lakes, and are very safe and stable. When the Jesuit Priests, Joliette and Marquette, descended the Mississippi in 1673, they paddled canoes similar to what Ruskey uses today.

Anyone interested in paddling the Sunflower or the Mississippi River with John Ruskey can visit his website: www.island63.com for more information, or contact him at john@island63.com. Clients must be willing to paddle and to endure extremes of nature if necessary. Quapaw Canoe Company has a spotless history, not even a single upset canoe. Regardless, clients must be able swimmers.

Information on the "Friends of the Sunflower River" group is also available at this website or you can visit <http://friends-of-the-sunflower-river.blogspot.com/>.



Mike Clark and John Ruskey on the banks of the Sunflower River beside the canoe that served as their river transportation for seven days.

Mississippi Wildlife Federation to sponsor

Outdoor Photography Workshop

March 8-9, 2008



Nationally recognized photographer, Rob Sheppard, will be teaching a two day workshop at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson, MS. Rob is the editor of PCPhoto and Outdoor Photographer magazines, and the author/photographer of over a dozen photo books including *Adobe Camera Raw for Digital Photographers Only*, *the PCPhoto Digital SLR Handbook* and *the Epson Complete Guided to Digital Printing*.

Saturday, March 8, 2008

9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Cost: \$150.00

Whether you use Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, these programs can be challenging for photographers to get the most from them without spending too much time on every photo. Rob Sheppard will show you how to jump into Photoshop and gain the most from its controls without being overwhelmed by them. You will learn the essential controls that you really need for nature photography, including how to deal with tonality and color, sizing and sharpening images.

Sunday, March 9, 2008

1 p.m. - 5 p.m. Cost \$100.00 Cost of Both Workshops: \$230.00

Discover the building blocks of better photography that will help you take your nature photography to a new level, making more people say, "Wow!" when they see your photos. Join Rob Sheppard in this program that will help any photographer get more from his or her equipment. You will learn how exposure can affect image quality, how you can get the most from composition, how dramatic light can be used to make your subject stand out, how to see color in ways that will give life to your photos and much more.

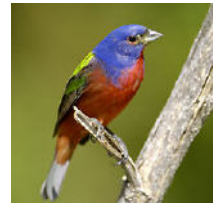
MWF sponsors an Outdoor Photography Contest, the deadline for entries is June 1, 2008.

For more information and a registration form for either of these events visit MWF online at www.mswildlife.org or call 601.206.5703.

Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge Complex to have new Project Leader

James D. (Donny) Browning will begin serving as the new Project Leader for the Theodore Roosevelt NWR Complex in March replacing retired Project Leader, Tim Wilkins. Browning, a 30 year U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee, presently serves as the Project Leader of the South Carolina Lowcountry Refuge Complex, a group of 4 coastal National Wildlife Refuges near Charleston, SC. In the course of his career Browning has served as Refuge Supervisor of the National Wildlife Refuges in Arizona and New Mexico, Project Leader of the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex in Savannah, Georgia, the very first Refuge Manager of the Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina, and Assistant Refuge Manager positions at Cape Romain NWR in South Carolina, Yazoo NWR Complex in Mississippi, Pea Island NWR in North Carolina and D'Arbonne NWR in Louisiana. In addition to these positions, he has also served as the Agency Representative for the Fish and Wildlife Service in recovery response for Hurricane Rita in Southwest Louisiana, and the Service's Oil Spill Response Coordinator in North Carolina.

Throughout his career Browning has been actively involved in making refuges a meaningful part of local communities, and believes in engaging local stakeholders. As a member of the ACE Basin Task Force, he received the Vice President's Hammer Award for work on an innovative partnership approach for landscape scale conservation. He also has been presented with a Conservation Science Award by Ducks Unlimited and the LaBruce Award for Conservation by The Nature Conservancy. He has been married to his wife, Judy, for 31 years. They have one daughter, Rachel. Browning is looking forward to assuming his duties at the Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge Complex.



Calendar Dates

March 26-27, 2008, Adopt A Stream Workshop at Paul B. Johnson State Park near Hattiesburg, MS., sponsored by MWF and MDEQ.

April 5, 2008 - 33rd annual World Catfish Festival, Belzoni, MS

April 26, 2008 - Butterfly Garden Day at Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge

May 3, 2008 - Deep Delta Festival, Rolling Fork, MS www.deepdelta.org

June 14, 2008 - Blue Lake Fishing Rodeo, Delta National Forest

Oct. 25, 2008 - Great Delta Bear Affair, Rolling Fork, MS