



CHAPTER 9 – CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a digest version of a Natural Resource, Cultural and Historical Document authored by BREC Staff over the last several years. The full report is included in this Strategic Master Plan in its appendices.

In this digest version, the consultant has listed the key findings and recommendations which will direct decision-makers at BREC over the next several years as they work to implement the Plan.

Key Findings which have been identified through research, citizen input and observations from professionally trained staff:

- BREC has worked to provide opportunities for citizens to voice their opinion about natural resource, cultural and historical resources through a Needs Assessment Survey and participation in the Horizon Plan;
- citizens are supportive of conserving natural resources.
- development of land is negatively impacting vegetative and animal habitats.
- the Parish has many outstanding natural features which are scenic and reservoirs for natural wildlife.
- areas of archaeological significance are endangered by lack of conservation.
- the Parish has great ecological diversity, historically having three vegetation communities whereas, most Parishes in the State only have one or two.
- habitat loss is the most significant cause of loss of species diversity;
- there are approximately 130 documented archaeological and cultural sites in the Parish, some of which are on BREC property.



Recommendations which have been designed to address the key findings have been identified. To accomplish the recommendations, BREC should:

- protect, or cause to be protected, unique and historically representative habitats.
- implement or facilitate programs that reduce loss of species diversity.
- promote recreational/educational activities focusing on appreciation and understanding of the natural environment.
- Acquire 2,300 acres of conservation land as soon as possible to protect species and habitats which have been identified and acquire additional land as the population increases;
- Study existing sites and new sites to be acquired for their ability to serve as educational opportunities for citizens while protecting the cultural, historical and natural resources within the Parish.
- Work with conservation groups, other governmental agencies and interested citizens to encourage recreation, conservation efforts and implement the relative elements of the Horizon Plan.
- Develop plans for satellite “Nature Center” facilities in ecologically and environmentally important areas throughout the Parish.

Findings and Recommendations which support BREC’s leadership role as a provider of recreation, education and protector of the cultural, historical and natural resources within the Parish.

Finding (s)

The 2003 BREC *Community Assessment Study* and 2004 *Community Attitude and Interest Survey* results show strong citizen support for the conservation of natural resources.

Research into the natural habitats of East Baton Rouge Parish indicates that large amounts of habitat, including vegetative and animal habitats are being lost due to land development; areas of archaeological significance are endangered by lack of conservation; and, East Baton Rouge Parish has many outstanding natural features which are not only scenic but are great reservoirs for natural wildlife such as: bayous, wetlands, the Mississippi River, the Comite River and the Amite River.



The Horizon Plan, a 20-Year blueprint for land use and development, calls for several goals that will increase the quality and standard of living that citizens enjoy in the Parish. Many of these goals deal with land use and site development standards that affect the sensory quality of the Parish. Other goals deal with the protection of natural and cultural resources.

BREC developed a *Natural Resource Management Plan* in 1995 (updated in 2003) that outlines efforts at conservation and preservation of the natural environment and its wildlife habitats. A Conservation Area is defined as a planned land area dedicated to the purpose of permanently protecting managed natural and/or cultural resources.

Recommendation (s)

BREC should promote recreational/educational activities focusing on appreciation and understanding of the natural environment.

BREC should protect, or cause to be protected, unique and historically representative habitats.

BREC should implement or facilitate programs that reduce loss of species diversity.

Findings and Recommendations which support BREC’s leadership role as a provider and partner with others to acquire, develop and connect areas of cultural, historic and natural resource significance.

Finding (s)

As the Parish grows, natural habitat is being lost and the many social and environmental benefits of natural areas are being reduced. Cropland and pasture land, which together accounted for 28% of land use in the Parish in 1987, is dwindling. The number of farms in the Parish has been declining, from 1,704 in 1954 to 582 in 1987, while farm size has remained approximately the same (*Horizon Plan*).

Table 9.1: – Then and Now

| | |
|------|---------------------------|
| 1954 | 1,704 farms in the Parish |
| 1987 | 582 farms in the Parish |

Generally the larger the conservation site the more valuable the conservation area. Animals have territory requirements - some will require extremely large areas and others will need only small areas. The size of habitat area was the best predictor of the number of species of land



vertebrates as a whole and of birds and amphibians separately (Vizyova 1986). Larger areas are more resilient to environmental and anthropogenic stresses. Sites that are directly adjacent to and share other sizable habitat areas are better than isolated sites.

Greenways or wooded corridors that connect patches of habitat also increase the value and stability of a conservation area. Greenways provide wildlife habitat and many ecological, economic and social benefits to humans.

East Baton Rouge Parish contains several areas that are identified with outstanding natural features. Many of these sites are centered around areas where changes in elevation are occurring. Most of the Parish is very flat, but in some areas, such as Scott’s Bluff, visitors can see the Eastern edge of the Mississippi River’s flood plain. Highland Road follows the southern part of this edge and is a favorite drive for local residents. Additionally, City Park is located on the Baton Rouge Fault, which provides for a softly rolling landscape. The Mississippi River is the most significant natural feature of the Parish.

Recommendation (s)

Continue to evaluate potential sites for developing satellite interpretive areas.

Study the Greenwood Park site, develop a preliminary master plan and work with local community groups to identify their needs for a nature trail on the site.

Consult with local experts in wildlife management, forestry and natural science on evaluation of suitable sites for habitat protection.

Strengthen quality of wildlife habitat at existing BREC parks, golf courses and Magnolia Cemetery by planting indigenous trees, shrubs and vines that are high in wildlife food value.

Study Nunnally Farms site for development of a working historical farm and conservation and interpretation of natural resources.

Study Greenwell Springs site for development and interpretation of historical resources.

Continue to develop Bluebonnet Swamp facility as BREC’s premier “Nature Center,” with the addition of land and an education/meeting building.



Develop plans for satellite “Nature Center” facilities in ecologically and environmentally important areas throughout the Parish.

Develop liaisons with other conservation groups to plan special education activities (i.e., “Wetlands Wednesday”, etc.).

Work closely with the City-Parish government in achieving the Land Resources and Intergovernmental Coordination Goals of the *Horizon Plan*.

Encourage other recreation and conservation efforts through affiliations with other conservation groups, City-Parish and state governmental agencies.

Acquire park land to provide citizens with a variety of recreation opportunities through conservation areas, nature centers, parkways, greenways, historic sites and special use parks.

Explore grant opportunities to fund programs focusing on appreciating and understanding the natural environment ecosystem for its unique and historically representative habitats.

Acquire a conservation area that has rich wildlife and plant habitat value along the Comite River in the portion that is classified as Scenic River above Zachery-Deerford Road.

Acquire approximately three conservation areas that have wildlife and plant habitat value along the Amite River.

Develop conservation parks that serve as a Birding Park(s).

Develop part of T.D. Bickham and Doyle's Bayou as a Conservation area.

Consider development of Bayou Duplantier as a bikeway and conservation area.

Develop Kendalwood Park and Comite River Park as conservation areas.

Develop Flonacher Road Park as a high use conservation area to include mountain bike and horse trails and as a site for area high school cross country races.

The Commission should establish a citizen advisory subcommittee to coordinate conservation efforts and strategies. This advisory committee will serve as a subcommittee to the Areas and Facilities Committee.



BREC should adopt a New Land Acquisition Standard. A national standard proposed by the study *Happiness is a Green Place* suggests 30 acres of parkland for every 1000 people. Recommended adjustments to the BREC land acreage to population standards are as follows:

Table 9.2: – Recommended Park Acreages

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Neighborhood and Mini Parks | 6 acres per 1,000 population |
| Community A-B Parks | 6 acres per 1,000 population |
| Community C Parks | 10 acres per 1,000 population |
| Conservation parks | 9 acres per 1,000 population |
| TOTAL | 31 acres per 1,000 population |

Table 9.3: – Recommended Base Figure for Conservation Land Acquisition

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Cultural landscapes | 50 acres |
| Cypress Typelo Swamp | 200 acres |
| Bottom Land Hardwoods | 500 acres |
| Upland Hardwoods | 200 acres |
| Sandy Riverine Areas | 200 acres |
| Longleaf Pine | 150 acres |
| Lake and River Areas | 500 acres |
| Buffer Areas | 500 acres |
| TOTAL | 2,300 acres |

Note: In addition to this figure of 2,300 acres, additional land will be needed to offset the increase in Parish population.

Findings and Recommendations which define the uniqueness of the Parish of East Baton Rouge for vegetation zones and the need to preserve and enhance them.

Finding (s)

Louisiana has six distinct vegetation zones or communities (C. Brown). Most of the Parishes in the state host one or two vegetation communities. Historically, East Baton Rouge Parish had three main vegetation communities: a) the longleaf pine community; b) the upland hardwoods; and, c) the bottomland hardwoods/cypress communities (C. Brown).

Habitat loss is the most significant cause of loss of species diversity. Loss of habitat from development has caused a reduction in the diversity and density of animals in the Parish. In East Baton Rouge Parish, loss of longleaf pine habitat has resulted in hundreds of species of



plants and animals becoming extinct in the Parish which affects, for example, bird watching, which is a major public hobby.

Recommendation (s)

Large forested areas must be strategically placed around the Parish to provide wildlife habitats for many of the endangered animal species.

Natural areas, such as swamps and marsh lands, must be preserved to provide the necessary acreage for the diverse animal species which use them.

Findings and Recommendations which document the existence of archaeological sites in the Parish.

Finding (s)

East Baton Rouge Parish has around 130 documented archaeological and cultural sites. Most of these sites are related to the many Indian cultures that lived in the area. Sites from recent European influence are evident in sites of plantation homes and old mills. Quite a few sites were used for military purposes during the Civil War. Many sites can be found along the drainage ways of the Parish and linear parks may encounter these or new sites. Some potential conservation areas have documented sites within their borders. These sites may be worthy of interpretive development and inclusion in conservation areas. It should be noted that many sites have not been documented or discovered.

Recommendation (s)

Explore possible donation/purchase of archaeologically significant areas. Report any undocumented or newly discovered sites to the State Archaeology Office.

Continue to work with the State Archaeologist to document and discover anything of archaeological or cultural significance located on BREC property.

It is recommended that the 2003 *Natural Resources Management Plan*, its updates and future revisions be included in this report by reference and that regular reviews of the goals and objectives be made to provide the Parish with the most thoughtful and contemporary approach to resource management possible. The recommendations included herein reflect just the high level elements of the Plan.