

DeSoto County Greenways continued...

With the support of the DeSoto County Board of Supervisors, the DeSoto County greenways program began in earnest following the Mississippi River and Greenways Symposium on June 12, which the Community Foundation hosted along with other groups. The Community Foundation of Northwest MS established the greenways as a priority four years ago as a means to provide unique recreational and educational opportunities for the people of Desoto County. We are fortunate that the Desoto County Board of Supervisors had the foresight to initiate funding for the DeSoto County Greenways effort. This will help us to connect Greenways projects which are already in place with those which are planned for future expansion.

The North Mississippi Land Trust (NMLT) is close to being an official organization with the selection of a Board of Directors and officers, and adoption of By-Laws and Land Trust Standards and Practices. The purpose of the North Mississippi Land Trust is to conserve, promote and protect open spaces. One way of doing this is through the conservation easement. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and another party (often a Land Trust) that restrict the development of a tract of land. Non profit status is important because if the easement is permanent, is held by a qualified easement holder and is for valid conservation purposes, the conservation easement is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service, and the landowner may qualify for certain tax incentives. The Land Trust will hold conservation easements and land acquired from landowners that will enable us to expand the greenways program in Desoto County. This is a critical element for the greenways program since most of the land in Desoto County is privately owned.

The NMLT board met on Friday, October 10, 2008 to adopt bylaws and elect officers. Board Members of the land trust are: Shelly Johnstone, President, Deputy Director of Planning for Hernando; Mickey Davis, Vice-President, a principal in PMC Real Estate; Anita Rainey, Secretary, Director of Planning for Horn Lake; Becky Beard, Treasurer, partner in the firm of Williams, Pitts and Beard; Joy Anderson, Area Horticultural Agent; Tom Pittman, Director of the Community Foundation for Northwest Mississippi; Scott Griffith, District Conservationist for Natural Resources Conservation Service; Leslie Ballard, accountant with Dixon Hughes; Billy Myers, attorney; Butch Rice, landowner; Sturgis Monteith, educator; Michael Hatcher, owner of Michael Hatcher and Associates and Chairman of the Greenways Committee; Larry Jarrett, DeSoto County Greenways Coordinator; Henry Ware, Southaven Buick, Pontiac, GMC; and Clarence Sparks, landowner and conservationist. The NMLT also adopted the Land Trust Standards and Practices as recommended by the National Land Trust Alliance.

The proposed Johnson Creek Trail is getting closer to becoming a reality now that we have landowners who seem willing to donate conservation easements that will run for a several miles from Highway 61 along Johnson Creek eastward toward Horn Lake. Once the Johnson Creek easements are obtained, we can then move ahead with proposals for construction of a short section of trail which will probably run alongside Entergy's east-west transmission line corridor, which is nearing completion. Also, the Desoto County Regional Utility Authority (DCRUA) is also following this same basic route along the North side of Johnson Creek for their east-west interceptor line. This section of trail could also connect to the new schools in that area. There is also a great opportunity to include a wildlife viewing area along the wetlands on US Highway 61 that could include a boardwalk and signage with web site and links to MDA tourism/Desoto Tourism.

The Alcoa Foundation recently presented the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi a \$45,000 grant over a three-year period to assist with the on-going greenways project in DeSoto County. Many thanks to Peggy Linton for helping to write the grant in short notice.

Also, we have received a US Forest Service Green Infrastructure Training Grant that will be utilized in Desoto County for a training program geared toward developers and elected/governmental officials in early March, 2009. This grant was received by the Natural Resources Initiative, the North Central Rural Conservation & Development District and the Nature Conservancy early this year and they have agreed that we can utilize the funds to host the Green Infrastructure training early next year in Desoto County. This program will help us to begin developing a training program that would help our communities and their partners make green infrastructure an integral part of local and regional plans and community decisions by utilizing GIS layers that will help us plot existing and future green space within a community.

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