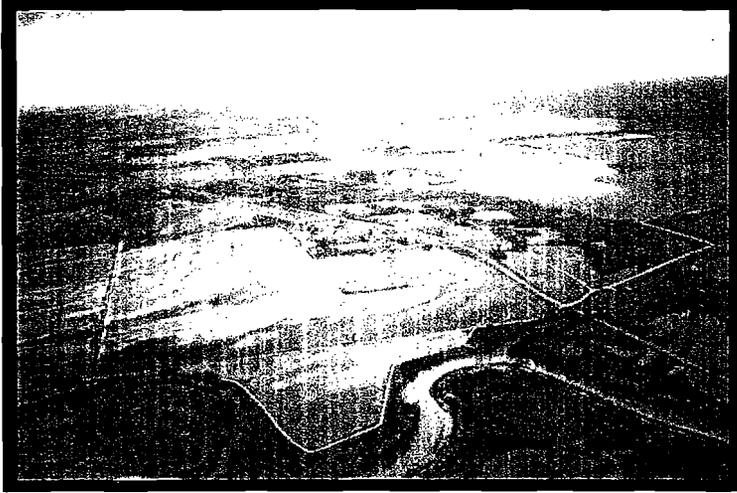


LOWER YAZOO RIVER BASIN ECONOMIC
AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION
INITIAVTIVE (EERI)



Lower Yazoo River Basin
*Economic
and Environmental Restoration
Initiative*

Introduction:

The *Lower Yazoo River Basin Economic and Environmental Restoration Initiative* outlines a strategy for public investments to be used in accomplishing some of the goals and recommendations established by an interagency task force and broad group of stakeholders in the report *Delta Vision, Delta Voices: The Mississippi Delta Beyond 2000*. This Initiative includes new approaches for environmental restoration, as well as approaches for strengthening the economy through expanding markets, such as commercial forestry and outdoor recreation businesses. This strategy for the Lower Yazoo River Basin combines components for public health and safety, floodplain reforestation and community economic development.

Goals of the Economic and Environmental Restoration Initiative:

- To direct federal investments in the Lower Yazoo Basin toward a broad range of Delta and Mississippi residents;
- To accomplish greater public health protections for all residents of the Basin;
- To achieve greater public safety through sustainable floodplain management;
- To achieve a greater balance between the environment and the economy, both more sustainable and more diversified;
- To provide educational and recreational opportunities to Mississippi residents and to visitors to the region.

Benefits:

Implementing this strategy for the Lower Yazoo Basin will be a critical step toward ensuring the protection of public health and providing opportunities for cleaner, safer, and more economically viable communities. Steps in ecosystem restoration to be taken will provide improvements to water quality in the area, as well as downstream areas and the Gulf of Mexico. The Initiative promotes a balanced, sustainable means for floodplain management. Economic opportunities created by the reestablishment of some portions of bottomland hardwood forest in this and other Delta areas will include the expanding markets for wood products, and the revenues generated from hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation in the Delta's forests and water bodies.

Benefits of the Economic and Environmental Restoration Initiative:

- Includes investments for programs and on-the-ground projects that will bring greater economic and environmental balance to the region;
- Will provide flood protection for structures and roads in the region;
- Will lessen the amount of nutrients, sediments and pesticides entering the waterways within the Yazoo Basin, downstream areas and the Gulf of Mexico, bringing improvements to impaired waterways and the Gulf hypoxic zone;
- Will build upon other important programs, including nonpoint source pollution abatement, habitat restoration, and landowner assistance programs;
- Will help restore habitat for a wide variety of water- and land-dwelling wildlife;
- Will raise the awareness of and protections for community environmental health.

The Initiative:

The following is an outline for an economic and environmental restoration initiative for the Lower Yazoo River Basin, a proposed alternative to the Yazoo Backwater Pumping Plant project.

Priority One: Public Safety and Public Health

-Flood protection of structures - houses/businesses/roads

-Funding and oversight through FEMA

-Implementation/construction by Corps of Engineers

-Flood protection efforts for roads

Component Cost: \$20 million

- Sewer and water infrastructure improvements
 - highest priority for disadvantaged communities

- USDA Rural Development targeted initiative; to include assessment of critical water and sewer infrastructure needs in the Lower Yazoo; provide assistance to communities, operators, water board members for obtaining needed technical support and funds; funds implementation through grants.
 - In coordination with Environmental Protection Agency State Revolving Fund.

Component Cost: \$20 million

-Environmental health

- Improving awareness and education about water quality
 - Funding and oversight through U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
 - In coordination with the local and state health agencies, University of Mississippi, and Americorps.

Component Cost: \$ 1 million

- Expanded National Water Quality Assessment Program monitoring targeted for the Lower Yazoo.

- Funding and oversight through U.S. Geological Survey in Pearl, MS.

Component Cost: \$ 6 million

- Funding for Children's Health initiative; including prenatal outreach, parental training, children's education regarding environmental health issues. Funding for the Federal/State Children's Health Insurance Program. To be implemented by the state and local departments of health.

Component Cost: \$ 8 million

Priority One Costs: \$55 million

Priority Two: Floodplain Protection and Restoration and Community Economic Development

- Conservation Easements from willing sellers on 50,000-80,000 acres on the most frequently-flooded lands through specially targeted Emergency Wetland Reserve Program (NRCS)/Section 319 (EPA) initiative. This targeted program would by-pass the existing structure, process, restrictions of WRP and establish a special working group to determine site selection, with co-equal membership including NRCS, EPA, FWS, and USGS. The USGS restoration prioritization model developed for the Lower Yazoo would be used for site ranking and selection.

Component Cost: \$42 million

- Creation of a new National Wildlife Refuge to include a 20,000 acre bottomland hardwood wetland and deep-water swamp wetland restoration initiative; this project is to assist in meeting objectives of Hypoxia Task Force Plan; approximately 20,000 acres of the most frequently flooded tributary riparian area lands will be targeted for fee-title acquisition. These restorations would maximize wetland plant species diversity, using species endemic to the historical Lower MS Valley BLH/swamps, and restore wetland hydrology. Costs to include: long-term management by third party land conservation organization or Dept. of Interior. Restoration to be implemented by Corps of Engineers, in cooperation with EPA, USGS (Pearl, MS), FWS.

Component Cost: \$20 million

- Landowner assistance, education/technology transfer on sustainable forestry operations and economic development implemented by U.S. Forest Service, private industry, non-government organizations.

Component Cost: \$ 5 million

- Assistance to landowners for best management practice installation on agricultural lands; to be conducted through USDA, EQIP programs.

Component Cost: \$ 5 million

- Development of a model carbon sequestration trading program specific to the Yazoo River Basin; model development coordinated by TVA and/or Dept. of Energy, private, and non-government organizations.

Component Cost: \$ 1 million

Priority Two Costs: \$73 million

Priority Three: Economic Development through Nature-Based Tourism

-Establish a National Recreation Area to include the existing complex of refuge and national forest land, and the proposed new National Wildlife Refuge.

-Establish a Delta Interpretative Center - within Delta National Forest or other existing public lands (e.g. National Wildlife Refuge lands). Center would include elevated boardwalks, trail systems, nature center, gift shop, and wide range of interpretative activities and research programs.

-Develop integrated promotional materials, programs, and activities, such as a bird watching trail system, in the following areas - Delta National Forest; Panther Swamp National Wildlife Refuge; Mahannah, Twin Oaks, Lake George, Anderson Tully, and Shipland Wildlife Management Areas.

-In coordination with Department of Interior and National Forest Service; other public

and private entities. This center could be co-managed by a third party, such as Audubon Society; patterned after other Audubon Sanctuaries, such as Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Florida, or Francis Biedler Sanctuary in South Carolina.

-Community Watershed Assistance Office, within the Interpretative Center; this office to be staffed by individuals from these organizations/agencies: EPA, non-government organization and/or land trust, MS Museum of Natural Sciences, MS DEQ or others.

-Ecotourism Development Office, also within the Interpretative Center, with the mission of creating and expanding ecotourism opportunities in the Yazoo Delta; to include non-government organization, and MS Division of Tourism positions.

Component Cost: \$40 million
to include cost of center, positions.

-Technical assistance to private landowners for establishing hunting and recreation opportunities; implemented by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, private or non-government organizations.

Component Cost: \$ 1 million

-Funding for job training in the fields of forest and fish and wildlife management, and ecotourism development and business management.

Component Cost \$ 1 million

Priority Three Costs: \$42 million

Grand Total of \$170 million



Delta National Forest