

Mississippi's Longleaf Trace

Southern Mississippi

Boosting Economies, Growing Eco-Tourism and Connecting Communities in Mississippi

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Longleaf Trace in Southern Mississippi is not only a stunning ride through the Pine Belt, but an economic and transportation asset for the region. The 42.8-mile trail, which opened in 2000 and traverses three counties—Forrest, Jefferson Davis and Lamar—stretches from Prentiss to Hattiesburg, connecting the towns of Carson, Bassfield and Sumrall along the way.

New projects underway will update older facilities along the trail, add attractions and increase safety for users. A project to impound the 12-acre Denbury Beaver Pond in Hattiesburg will add a riding trail, and the creation of an amphitheater and outdoor learning center will help connect trail users to the region's natural wonders. Additional projects include strengthening intersection safety in high-traffic areas, adding fencing to an equipment storage area and updating eight restroom stations along the Trace.

With an estimated 250,000 trail uses per year, the Longleaf Trace has long served as a boon for economic development, attracting tourists to the area, and contributing to the revitalization of downtown Hattiesburg and the growth of local businesses. A decade after the trail's opening, outdoor recreation merchandise sales had risen by 30 percent, and it is estimated that 10,000 annual restaurant visits can be attributed to trail users.¹ "I see a lot of people come in from out of the area, out of the state," said Mary Scruggs, executive director of the Pearl & Leaf Rivers Rails to Trails Recreational District Board of Directors. "And they come specifically to use the Longleaf Trace."

In addition to spurring economic revitalization, the trail has also improved transportation options for local residents while promoting healthier lifestyles. A recent 2-mile extension now connects students and commuters to downtown Hattiesburg, and 20% of the estimated 40,000 residents living within 3 miles of the Trace have reported increased exercise.² Fitness centers, sports teams and military posts incorporate the trail into their training routines, and doctors prescribe trail use to patients.



The Longleaf Trace | Photo by Mary Scruggs

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

LEAD AUTHORITY:	Pearl & Leaf Rivers Rails to Trails Recreational District
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	\$1,965,345
FUNDING PLEDGED TO DATE:	\$1,033,845
FEDERAL:	\$750,535
STATE:	\$114,540
LOCAL AND PRIVATE:	\$168,770
SHOVEL-READY:	Within 1 year or less
TYPE:	Urban, suburban, rural

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

JOB CREATION

An estimated 33 jobs created directly³

TRANSPORTATION

Connects students, faculty and staff in communities along the trail to the University of Southern Mississippi. Serves as a safe and accessible way for commuters to access downtown Hattiesburg. Project underway to increase intersection safety in high-traffic areas.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The trail has helped to revitalize downtown Hattiesburg and grow local businesses. An estimated 10,000 annual restaurant visits can be attributed to users of the Trace, and in 2010, outdoor recreation merchandise sales had risen by 30 percent since the trail's opening (2000).⁴ Tourists from all 50 states and multiple foreign countries visit the area to use the Trace.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Creates a safe, car-free space to exercise. Prescribed by local doctors, fitness facilities and sports teams. Twenty percent of the estimated 40,000 residents living within 3 miles of the Trace have reported increased exercise.⁵

SOURCES

- ¹ The Longleaf Trace Community Benefits. Herlon Pierce, Former Executive Director of the Pearl & Leaf river Rails to Trails Recreational District.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ Estimated at 17 jobs per \$1 million spent, according to a study commissioned by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) job creation; jobs in terms of full-time equivalents.
- ⁴ The Longleaf Trace Community Benefits. Herlon Pierce, Former Executive Director of the Pearl & Leaf Rivers Rails to Trails Recreational District.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*