

NEWS RELEASE

MS Dept. of Marine Resources
1141 Bayview Ave., Biloxi 39530



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nov. 27, 2017

Contact: Melissa Scallan
Phone: 228-523-4124

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Gulf Coast Heritage Area to hold business summit Wednesday, Nov. 29

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area will hold a business summit for nature-based tourism business owners and operators on Wednesday, Nov. 29.

During the summit, they will learn how their business can be recognized as a Gulf Coast Outpost, a voluntary program that begins in January 2018.

This program will recognize those businesses that are knowledgeable about the Coast's natural environment and take steps to protect that environment by fostering environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

The summit will prepare business owners and operators to complete a checklist that will focus on training, sustainability and stewardship. The program is aimed at those companies whose primary business is dependent on the natural environment in Mississippi's six coastal counties. This includes eco tours, locally owned outfitters, charter boat operators, tour guides, eco-lodges and agritourism entities.

The Gulf Coast Outpost business recognition program is part of the 2016 Nature-Based Tourism Plan for Coastal Mississippi. It was developed for the Heritage Area by stakeholders in the industry.

The Heritage Area is a program managed by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources.

Nature-based tourism is an important component of the Heritage Area's mission, Director Rhonda Price said.

"The Gulf Coast Heritage Area is dedicated to balancing economic development and conservation through the Gulf Coast Outpost program," she said. "We invite those

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businesses interested in being a part of this voluntary recognition program to join us at the summit.”

The summit will be held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the West Side Community Center, 4006 8th Street, Gulfport. The event is free, but registration is required by going to [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).

For more information, contact Bridgette Varone at Bridgette.varone@dmr.ms.gov or by calling 228-523-4075.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at dmr.ms.gov.

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GULF COAST OUTPOST



NATURE-BASED TOURISM
VOLUNTARY BUSINESS RECOGNITION PROGRAM
BUSINESS SUMMIT

November 29, 2017

West Side Community Center
4006 8th St., Gulfport



INTRODUCTION

Does your business make every effort to celebrate the Coast's natural resources with visitors while protecting clean water, reducing litter and providing a safe experience? Would you like to be a Recognized Nature Based Tourism Business? If so, GULF COAST OUTPOST may be for you!

Goal: Recognition will be awarded to ecologically sustainable Nature Based Tourism Businesses that foster "environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and conservation."

Target Businesses: The target audience for nature based business recognition includes businesses whose primary purpose is contributing to the enjoyment of South Mississippi's natural heritage, including among others, tour guides, charter boat operators, eco-fitness guides, outfitters, eco-lodges, agri-tourism, and other businesses where nature-based activities are 50% or more of the primary business line.

Upon successful completion of this checklist, your business will be recognized as a "Gulf Coast Outpost." You'll receive window clings for your doors and windows, and you'll be recognized on the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area website as a premier nature tourism business.

To be recognized as a Mississippi Gulf Coast Outpost, please complete the pledge card in the back of your program to set up a time to complete the checklist required for recognition.



For more details on the Gulf Coast Outpost program, contact the
Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area
1141 Bayview Ave., Biloxi, MS 39530
(228) 523-4075
msgulfcoasteritage@ms.gov
heritage@dmr.ms.gov

The Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area is managed by the
MS Department of Marine Resources

AGENDA

8:00 REGISTRATION

8:30 INTRO TO GULF COAST OUTPOST

Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area (MGCNHA) Director, Rhonda Price

9:00 Y'ALL BUSINESS

Assistant Secretary of State for External Marketing, Sherri Bevis

9:25 MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST BUSINESS RESOURCES

MS Coast Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Officer, Adele Lyons

9:50 DEVELOPING A NATURAL RESOURCE FOCUSED BUSINESS & OPERATING PLAN

MSU Extension Wildlife Professor, Daryl Jones

10:25 CLIMB CDC WORKFORCE TRAINING - CONSERVATION TRAINING

Program Coordinator, Darryl Bush and Conservation and Environmental Manager, Peter Hoar

10:50 NETWORKING BREAK

11:20 MS GULF COAST NATURAL RESOURCE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Grand Bay NERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator, Margo Posten

11:45 STAFF TRAINING ON WATERSHED AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Margo Posten and MSU Extension Professor, Eric Sparks

12:15 LUNCH: MARKETING THE COAST - COAST CHAMPIONS

Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast Marketing Director, Karen Conner

1:25 OUTREACH & VISITOR EDUCATION

The Crosby Arboretum Executive Director, Pat Drackett

1:50 TOURISM RESILIENCE INDEX

Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Nature Tourism Specialist, Chandra Wright

2:20 NATURE BASED TOURISM BUSINESS PANEL DISCUSSION

Shroomdom: Leilani Rosenbaum; Eco-tours of South Mississippi: Captain Kathy Wilkinson; Wut Sup Paddleboards: Dan Wittmann; Moderator: Chandra Wright

3:00 GULF COAST OUTPOST CHECKLIST AND CLOSING REMARKS

MGCNHA Director, Rhonda Price

3:30 FINAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITY

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



Rhonda Price is the director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area. She is Deputy Director for the Office of Restoration and Resiliency for the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, and also serves as Coastal Community Resilience Team Lead for the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. In this role, Rhonda is working to coordinate and enhance the efforts of local, state, federal, business and non-profit partners to assist coastal communities and ecosystems in the Gulf of Mexico region in becoming more resilient in structure and function. Goals of the Resilience Team include increasing the Gulf Region's understanding of localized risks associated with sea level rise, storm surge subsidence, storm vulnerability and other threats; developing regional

management tools to enhance resiliency through improved data, models and methodologies; and implementing workshops to increase awareness of responsibilities of individuals involved in emergency response at all levels.



Sherri Carr Bevis was born in Greenwood but has spent most of her life on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. She received her Bachelor's degree in Communications from Mississippi State University. Upon graduation, she worked for the university as an Admissions Counselor before moving to Washington to work for Senator Trent Lott as his Deputy Press Secretary. After working on Capitol Hill, she attended George Washington University and earned her Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration.

After living in our nation's capital, Sherri decided to move home to raise her family. She is a former elementary educator and has always been an active community leader. She presently serves as the Program Chair for Leadership Gulf Coast and on the local board for the American Red Cross. She is a graduate of Leadership Hancock, Leadership Gulf Coast, and Leadership Mississippi. In 2011, she served as Deputy Campaign Manager for Billy Hewes in his campaign for Lieutenant Governor before joining the staff of Secretary of State, Delbert Hosemann. In March of 2016, Sherri was promoted to Assistant Secretary of State for External Marketing.

Sherri is also an active MSU alumna. She served as president for the Hancock County Chapter and received the Distinguished Service Award in 2013. Sherri serves on the Alumni Association's National Board of Directors and was recently elected as their National Vice President. She is a proud mother to Nolan and Nicholas who both attend MSU.



Adele Lyons serves as the CEO of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce, Inc. She took on this role in early December 2017. Previously, Lyons served as the Director of Development and Communication for Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and was the Program Director for the Mississippi Gulf Coast for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Lyons also served as the Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Business Technology Center and the Greater Biloxi Economic Development Foundation from 1991 to 2006.

Lyons has been actively involved in civic work, serving in leadership roles for many organizations including the University of Southern Mississippi Foundation, Biloxi Chamber of Commerce, Mississippi Center for Nonprofits, Leadership Gulf Coast and the Ohr – O'Keefe Museum.

Lyons holds a masters degree and a bachelor of science degree in business administration from the University of Southern Mississippi.



Daryl Jones, Ph.D., is the Coordinator of the Natural Resource Enterprises (NRE) Program and a Wildlife Extension Professor in the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture at Mississippi State University. The NRE Program provides information to landowners on sustainable natural resource enterprises (fee hunting and angling, wildlife watching, agritourism, nature-based tourism) and habitat management on working lands through workshops, field days, and web-based training.

Daryl received his doctorate degree in public policy and resource economics and a Master of Business Administration from Mississippi State University and an M.S. degree in biological oceanography from Old Dominion University in Virginia. His primary research interests include fee-based wildlife and fisheries enterprise development and revenue production on private lands along with watershed and wetlands conservation management.

He has published manuscripts and papers in diverse resource management journals and publications. Daryl has held administrative appointments with the US Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C. and in Mississippi as the state's coastal zone manager and Director of Coastal Ecology with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Also, he was employed by Deposit Guaranty National Bank in Mississippi as a commercial lender, branch manager, and regional marketing administrator. Daryl enjoys pheasant and turkey hunting, bird dog training, fly fishing, cycling, and playing guitar and singing.



Darryl Bush is the program manager for CLIMB CDC Workforce Training Institute. Prior to joining CLIMB, he worked as the program director for several community based youth workforce training programs located in the Chicago metropolitan area. Most recently, he managed one of the sites for the One Summer Chicago Youth Employment Program. In the past, he has facilitated workshops for public agencies and corporations on mentoring youth workers. His work experience also includes developing and directing comprehensive programs for young non-custodial fathers and their families.



Peter Hoar is the CLIMB Conservation and Environmental Manager for Climb Workforce Training Institute in Gulfport, Mississippi. Mr. Hoar came to Climb CDC with over 30 years of experience in deep-water oceanography, marine fisheries science and management, and coastal science and management. His experience includes 20 years of coastal science and management projects in the Gulf Coast region. In addition, Mr. Hoar has 4 years of experience in workforce training for opportunity and at-risk youth.



Margo Posten is currently the Coastal Training Program (CTP) Coordinator for the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), an arm of the MS Department of Marine Resources. She has a graduate degree in Marine Policy from the University of Washington and a Marine Biology degree from the University of West Florida.

Prior to working for the NERR, she worked as a CPT Specialist at the Apalachicola NERR in Florida. She is a Certified Floodplain Manager and is currently focusing on community resilience issues.



Dr. Eric Sparks is an Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University and serves dually as the Extension Program Leader and Coastal Ecology Specialist for the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium. His research and extension efforts broadly focus on estuarine and marine ecology, coastal wetlands, coastal restoration, environmental stewardship, citizen science, and marine debris.

Eric leads Mississippi State University's Coastal Environmental Extension, Master Naturalist, Living Shorelines, and Coastal Cleanup Programs. Eric received his Ph.D. in Marine Sciences from the University of South Alabama and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and a B.S. in Marine Biology from Troy University.



Karen Conner is the Director of Marketing for Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast. Conner joined the organization that is charged with leading the regional tourism effort in January 2015.

Throughout her career, she has held various positions within the tourism industry. Prior to joining Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast, Karen spent 13 years as the Director of Sales and Marketing for USS ALABAMA Battleship Memorial Park, where she was responsible for all aspects of the organizations marketing and sales programs.

Mrs. Conner is a graduate of Leadership Jackson County, has served on the Nature-Based Tourism Task Force for Coastal Mississippi, Board of Directors for the Alabama Travel Council, Secretary of the Mobile Area Museum Association, and President of the Mobile Attractions Association. She has also served on numerous tourism committees within the Mobile area as well as the entire state of Alabama.

Karen holds a BS in Tourism and Commercial Recreation from the University of South Alabama and is a certified Tourism Marketing Professional. She resides in Ocean Springs with her husband, Bill and their three children.



Pat Drackett is the Director of Mississippi State University's Crosby Arboretum, located in Picayune, Mississippi, and an assistant Extension professor of landscape architecture. Holding degrees in botany and landscape architecture, Pat practiced for twenty years as a landscape designer and garden consultant before joining the Arboretum in 2007.

Home to the Mississippi Landmark Pinecote Pavilion, the Crosby Arboretum is the recipient of the national Garden Excellence Award in 2016 from the American Public Gardens Association, and draws visitors from around the world. Operated by the MSU Extension Service, the Arboretum's mission is to preserve, protect and display the flora native to the Pearl River Drainage Basin of Mississippi and Louisiana.



Chandra Wright provides technical training to help nature-based tourism businesses improve management practices and increase profits while also being responsible stewards of our natural resources. She conducts training and certification programs, presentations, workshops and face-to-face consultations with people interested in developing or expanding nature tourism operations in such areas as sustainable charter fishing and dolphin and nature tours.

Chandra joined MASGC and GSOBT in January 2013. She holds a Juris Doctor from the University of Alabama School of Law and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Alabama. She previously practiced civil law.



Leilani S Rosenbaum was born on the Island of Oahu. Being her father was in the United States Navy, she has lived in several States across our Nation. Leilani has owned her own house cleaning business, as well as a small logging business. After Hurricane Katrina she became certified in heavy equipment. She has wanted to be a farmer since the age of 4 while living in Rural Pennsylvania.

Along with her husband, Tony, she owns and operates Shroomdom, Inc., a "field to forest" farm in Pearl River County. They are also bee keepers in Slovenian AZ hives. Leilani and Tony practice conservation & stewardship in their land management practice, and are proud to be a part of Mississippi's Agritourism. Leilani is a Mississippi certified volunteer firefighter and first responder. She is a wife, mother of four and grandmother, "Mia," to two girls. In her free time, Leilani enjoys running, taking pictures of nature and the people she loves most! She is a certified diver, Nitrox and advanced, and rides her MX bike for fun. She describes her picture here as her first attempt at field farming. Leilani says, "My husband told me, 'If you can get the strawberry patch back up and going, we will begin to plant.' So, I called his mom who gave me great advice, and I haven't looked back."



Captain Kathryn S. Wilkinson is owner, operator and tour guide of Eco-Tours of South Mississippi. Established in 2006, this nature-based tourism business provides interpretive motorboat and kayak tours of the Pascagoula River marsh and swamp, and the barrier islands of the Gulf Islands National Seashore to eco-tourists from all over the world.

She is a Leave No Trace instructor, a Master Naturalist, and was a member of the Governor's Commission GoCoast 2020. In addition, Captain Kathy has devoted many hours to public speaking in lecturing various groups such as garden clubs, Boy and Girl Scout troops, volunteers and the like, about tourism and conservation. Much of her "free time" is spent leading river clean-ups and practicing environmental stewardship through the non-profit founded by her husband, Jeff.

Captain Kathy is a member of the Mississippi Charter Boat Captains Association and the Mississippi Gulf Coast Attractions Association.



Dan Wittmann is a life-long resident of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Along with his wife of 22 years, Jessica, they own Wut Sup Paddleboards. They have two sons, Reese, 12, and Parker, 5. Wut Sup Paddle Boards began in 2010 as a truck-based business. Since 2013, Wut Paddle Boards shop has operated on Seaway road, right on Gulfport Lake.

Dan was appointed to the Board of Directors for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Attractions Association in 2016. He was appointed as a commissioner to the regional destination marketing organization, Visit Mississippi Gulf Coast in May 2017. Dan says, "I love showing locals and tourists the true beauty of the Mississippi Gulf Coast from a different perspective, 'a standup paddle board!'" He is an avid fisherman and waterman. His hobbies include paddle boarding, paddle board racing, surfing and riding dirt bikes with his sons.

About the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area

The mission of the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area (MGCNHA) is to promote understanding of and to conserve and enhance the heritage resources of the six counties of the Mississippi Gulf Coast by telling the area's nationally significant story to residents and visitors through activities and partnerships that celebrate the area's unique history, people, traditions, and landscapes. It also provides connectivity among the Mississippi Gulf Coast's many heritage resources and serves as a source of pride and identity for residents who are stakeholders in this conservation effort. These resources provide heritage tourists with authentic experiences reflective of the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area. The residents benefit from increased awareness and appreciation of their environment, history, culture, traditions, and lifestyles. The economic effects of heritage tourism benefit the entire region, and support the long-term enhancement and conservation of those qualities that make the Mississippi Gulf Coast unique.

Implementing the *Nature-based Tourism Plan for Coastal Mississippi, 2016*, in the six coastal counties is a priority of the management plan for the MGCNHA. The Gulf Coast Outpost recognition program is a recommendation from the *Plan* by stakeholders in the industry. The *Plan* is a direct result from the Governor's *GoCoast 2020*.

The goal of the Gulf Coast Outpost is to balance economic development with conservation of our area's natural resources. Recognition will be awarded to ecologically sustainable nature-based tourism businesses that foster "environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation, and conservation."



If you're interested in becoming a Gulf Coast Outpost, fill out and return the Pledge Card today!

