



Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund
Approves \$9.8M in Funding for 21 Projects Statewide

JACKSON, Miss. – Governor Tate Reeves today announced that during its most recent public meeting, the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund Board of Trustees (MOSTF) approved its first selection of grants totaling \$9.8 million for 21 conservation and outdoor recreation projects. This initial allocation of funding will be matched by more than \$31.4 million from other sources.

“I was proud to sign legislation that created the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund,” said Governor Tate Reeves. “The Fund is already paying dividends to communities all over Mississippi. These grants will be critical to preserving Mississippi’s natural beauty so that future generations can enjoy it.”

The competitive grants chosen include a diversity of projects that meet the goals of improving state parks and outdoor recreation trails, improving access to public waters and lands, and preserving, enhancing, and restoring our native wildlife and fish resources and their critical habitats across Mississippi. This investment will strengthen communities around the state, enhance the state’s \$8 billion outdoor recreation economy, and support more than 79,000 jobs.

The MOSTF was created and funded by the Legislature and later signed into law by Governor Reeves in 2022. During the 2023 legislative session, through strong bi-partisan support, the program received an additional \$15 million in funding. The Board of Trustees, comprised of geographically diverse appointments from the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, oversees project selection and disbursement of funding.

MOSTF Chair, Van Ray of Yazoo City, said, “We were pleased to receive over 100 project applications in our first round. There was no shortage of excellent projects, but limited funding made it very competitive. The Board worked very hard to determine which projects would receive funding based on a comprehensive set of criteria.”

MOSTF Vice-Chair, Denny Terrell of Kosciusko added, “Since there was so much interest in the program from communities and partners around our state, we are thankful the Legislature increased the funding level to \$15 million. These funds will become available July 1, 2023, and provide more opportunities for funding other conservation and outdoor recreation projects in the future.”

The full list of projects can be found below:

Pearl River Source Water Protection and Recreation Project, Phase 1 (\$2,696,471) – Allows Wildlife Mississippi to leverage more than \$16 million in federal and private funding already committed to the Fannye Cook Natural Area near Flowood. This project will place 4,630 acres in permanent conservation easement and place 800 acres in a 30-year conservation agreement with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Enhancements include, native longleaf pine habitat restoration, establishing permanent wildlife openings, construction of a new boat ramp on the upper Pearl River in Leake County, construction of 7.1 miles of roads, 24 miles of nature trails, bridge construction, and adding benches, trail markers, and parking areas. A maintenance facility and a Conservation Education Complex will be constructed. Protection of this property will provide and protect crucial flood storage capacity below the Ross Barnett Reservoir spillway. The Fannye Cook Natural Area is the largest protected natural area in the Jackson Metropolitan Area.

Renasant Park Enhancements for Natural Resource-Based Outdoor Recreation, Environmental Education, Eco-Tourism and Sustainability (\$1,737,060) – Provides enhancements for Renasant Park in Hernando for natural resource-based recreation, environmental education, eco-tourism and sustainability by funding multi-use trails, natural spaces, disc golf, a 2,000 square foot open air pavilion with event area, 3.5 acre native grass/wildflower meadow, restrooms, native tree planting, removal of invasive species, and lighting and parking. The City of Hernando is providing \$763,180 in matching funds for this project.

Freedom Ridge and Purple Creek Basin Improvements (\$1,000,000) – Assists the City of Ridgeland to expand outdoor recreational opportunities at Freedom Ridge Park and improve the hydraulic capacity of the Purple Creek basin, which will resolve major flooding, reduce erosion and siltation, preserve the streambank in the immediate area, as well as areas of Ridgeland, Madison County, Jackson, and Hinds County. The project will expand outdoor recreational opportunities at the park by adding fishing areas, wildlife observation and bird watching, wildlife and habitat education, and hiking/walking trails with observation decks, benches, and educational signage along the trails. \$2 million in matching federal funds has been secured for this project.

Mississippi Delta Wetlands Enhancement Projects (\$1,000,000) – In collaboration with Ducks Unlimited, this project will restore and enhance important wetland habitats in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley with a focus on 4,200 acres of public lands within the Mahannah and Howard Miller Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). This project will renovate existing waterfowl impoundment levees, replace water control structures, improve drainage, convert water well structures, and provide gravel road and levee access. Ducks Unlimited has secured over \$1 million in matching funds.

Richardson Sportsplex and Outdoor Recreation Park (\$996,300) – This project will enhance existing park construction by funding a 1-mile walking trail and an outdoor archery facility within the 42-acre Richardson Sportsplex and Outdoor Recreation Center in the Town of

Walnut. There are over \$3 million in matching funds assisting this project from the Town of Walnut.

Improving Wildlife Habitats Statewide Collaborative Conservation Partnerships (\$570,000) –

This statewide project of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) will enhance over 100,000 acres of wetlands, prairies, uplands, and piney woods that are essential for dozens of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), while simultaneously bolstering populations of game animals cherished and shared by hundreds of thousands of Mississippians. The project will provide cost-share reimbursement for private landowners conducting prescribed fire, controlling undesirable invasive plants or woody brush, and establishing hydrology conducive to shallow-water management. Further, the project will increase public awareness of prescribed fire and invasive species management through educational workshops, trainings for professional fire practitioners, and by supporting existing projects intended to create landowner led prescribed burn associations.

Sims Road River Access and Eco-Tourism (\$480,000) – Establishes new public waterway access and a 9.6-mile boating route on the Leaf River in Hattiesburg by constructing a new boat ramp. This project will enhance outdoor activities in the area such as freshwater fishing, wildlife viewing, bird watching, kayaking, and canoeing. This project is assisted by \$225,000 in matching city tourism and revenue tax funds.

Stewardship Agreements on National Forests to Improve Forest Health-MS (\$327,870) –

Provides funding for The Nature Conservancy to assist the Stewardship Partnership on Mississippi National Forests to protect both public and private forest lands and water, to improve forest health, to protect critical Red-cockaded woodpecker habitats, and ensure an improved outdoor recreational experience for National Forest visitors in Mississippi. Partnership activities include, timber harvests, timber releases, reforestation, timber thinning, site preparation, treatment of invasive terrestrial and aquatic species, liming and fertilization. Over \$655,000 in matching funds are provided through the US Forest Service, Entergy, and The Nature Conservancy.

Noma Drive Boat Ramp Improvements (\$250,000) – Constructs a boardwalk at Noma Drive in Diamondhead to protect and preserve the marshland shoreline and reduce erosion while providing low-impact foot access for hiking, walking, fishing, bird watching, and other activities. This project will include a 1,350-foot boardwalk and three double-decker nature observatories to enhance access to the 11-mile Rotten Bayou Blueway. There are over \$1.2 million in matching Tideland Grant funds associated with this project.

Forest Management on State-Owned WMAs (\$175,000) – This statewide project will fund a forest habitat inventory analysis and database on 140,000 acres of state-owned WMAs for the MDWFP. The inventory will be used to prioritize areas on WMAs in greatest need of management, to improve forest health and habitat for wildlife, and identify locations of invasive plant and tree species. There are \$4.5 million in federal matching funds applicable to this project.

Kamassa Lakeside Fish and Fellowship with Accessible Piers (\$150,000) – Improves recreation and fishing opportunity access for handicapped children and adults of Mississippi at Camp Kamassa in Crystal Springs. Camp Kamassa is a facility operated by Mississippi’s Toughest Kids Foundation for the purpose of providing recreational and educational outdoor opportunities for children and adults with special needs. The project will construct special fishing access piers and a canoe dock specially designed for handicapped and special needs children and adults. Camp Kamassa hosts over 2,500 guests annually. Additional matching funding of \$100,000 is provided for this project by the Kelly Gene Cook Foundation.

Highway 57 Sports Complex Walking and Birding Trail (\$126,326) – Constructs a walking path through a unique pine savannah wetland habitat critical to many wildlife species, including the endangered Mississippi Sandhill Crane on an 80-acre site in Ocean Springs owned and protected by the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain. The site is surrounded by the Hwy 57 Sports Complex which also serves as the trailhead in accordance with the Jackson County Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trails Master Plan. This project is matched with \$114,654 in funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Coastal Programs Grant.

Trail Improvements Tishomingo State Park (\$102,800) – Assists the Friends of Tishomingo State Park, in restoring and improving 13 miles of existing nature trails on Tishomingo State Park. The Friends of Tishomingo Park are committing in-kind services and labor to complete the renovations and repairs that will enhance hiking, bird watching, fishing, nature studies, rock climbing, canoeing, and nature photography at Tishomingo State Park.

Youth Environmental Stewardship Program (YES Program) (\$90,000) – Assists the Mississippi Delta Nature and Learning Center (MDNLC) to fund the construction of a 1-mile nature walking trail within the 14-acre MDNLC Outdoor Children’s Garden in Leland. This project funds training for 19 AmeriCorps members who will receive training in environmental stewardship by providing creative, educational outdoor spaces for children and their families, job training for youth and adults, and community recreation for people living in and visiting the Mississippi Delta by focusing on regenerative practices. There are \$386,837 in matching source funds associated with this project.

Invest in the Present to Improve the Future (\$34,500) – Assists the Clinton Community Nature Center (CCNC) to conduct a natural resources assessment in the effort to secure a conservation easement for the 32-acre nature education center. Additionally, funding will provide repairs to the center’s water well source and pump. The CCNC will utilize over \$11,000 in in-kind funds to complete this project.

Turcotte Shooting Facility Skeet House Construction (\$31,750) – Provides restoration and enhancement of the existing skeet shooting house at the Turcotte Shooting Facility operated by the MDWFP in Madison County. Over 7,300 shooting enthusiasts visit the facility annually and it is used to host dozens of shooting events, hunter education classes, and statewide youth

shooting sports tournaments. Over \$95,000 in federal USFWS Sport Fish Restoration Funds will assist this project.

Horseshoe Lake Restoration Project (\$26,250) – Assists the MDWFP in restoring public access and recreation opportunities at the 800-acre Horseshoe Lake in Holmes County by controlling more than 500 acres of invasive nonnative aquatic plants (Water hyacinth) with application of approved herbicides. Over \$78,000 in federal USFWS Sport Fish Restoration Funds will assist this project.

Swamp Access & Interpretation Project at Lee Tartt Nature Preserve (\$21,450) – Funds construction of a boardwalk leading to an existing observation deck overlooking a cypress lake at Lee Tartt Nature Preserve in Grenada County. Additionally, it will replace and construct a new observation deck and provide new educational signage for the nature preserve. Chakchiuma Swamp is a protected natural area, wildlife corridor, and outdoor classroom accessible to everyone. The area is visited by over 2,500 visitors per year, primarily as an outdoor classroom. The Friends of Chakchiuma Swamp organization are providing over \$7,000 in matching funds to complete the project.

North MS Fish Hatchery Visitor Education Center Event Pond Improvements (\$13,750) – Provides construction of new facilities at the North Mississippi Fish Hatchery Visitor Education Center in Sardis that will provide access for handicap and special needs participants at the special events fishing pond. Funding will also provide improved erosion control along the shoreline. Over \$41,000 in federal USFWS Sport Fish Restoration Funds will assist this project.

Lake Columbia Kayak Launch (\$8,700) – Assists the MDWFP in constructing a floating kayak launching area at Lake Columbia in Marion County. Over \$26,000 in federal USFWS Sport Fish Restoration Funds will assist this project.

Holmes County State Park Kayak Launch (\$8,700) – This project will assist the MDWFP in constructing a floating kayak launching area at Holmes County State Park in Holmes County. Over \$26,000 in federal USFWS Sport Fish Restoration Funds will assist this project.