

LAND ACQUIRED FOR LODGE AND CONFERENCE CENTER ON LAKE OKHISSA

July 16, 2021

Meadville, MS (Press Release) - Scenic Rivers Development Alliance today announced the acquisition of approximately 150 acres of land along the shoreline of Lake Okhissa in Southwest Mississippi from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

Scenic Rivers Development Alliance is a body politic of the State of Mississippi, which has worked on this rural development project with U.S. Cindy Hyde Smith.

Senator Hyde Smith sponsored a provision in the 2018 Farm Bill allowing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to convey the real USFS property to Scenic Rivers as part of the continued development of Lake Okhissa. Rural economic development has been and continues to be at the top of Senator Hyde Smith's agenda. Plans for the acreage include a 200-room lodge and a 1,000-person conference center.

Scenic Rivers Development Alliance Executive Director, Joseph Parker stated "relationships with the United States Department of Agriculture, the Mississippi Development Authority, the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, Franklin County, the Town of Meadville, along with private companies like C Spire and Franklin Telephone Company have and remain the key to this project."

"There is a shared vision for rural economic development between counties and cities in Southwest Mississippi," stated Parker.

Senator Hyde-Smith and Representative Michael Guest, whose district includes the project, praised the acquisition.

"The U.S. Forest Service land transfer to the Scenic Rivers Development Alliance is absolutely wonderful news and a crucial step for this plan to bring jobs and economic development to southwest Mississippi," Senator Hyde-Smith said. "I've long been invested in this project, and I am eager to see the economic benefits it will bring to this rural region. I am also very grateful to the Forest Service and Secretary Vilsack for following through on this."

"Rural economic development is a key component to Mississippi's overall economic health. The Lake Okhissa project has brought together key players from the public and private sectors in a unified goal to make southwest Mississippi an even better place to live, worship, and raise a family, and it's been an honor to work with them towards this goal," Guest said.

Work on the lodge and conference center, which will house a variety of workforce training platforms, is expected to begin in the fourth quarter of 2021. The proposed lodge will serve as a home base for visitors wishing to enjoy the great outdoors in Southwest Mississippi.

Members of the Scenic Rivers Development Alliance are Pike County, Franklin County, Amite County, Wilkinson County, Walthall County, and the City of McComb. The alliance promotes outdoor recreation and tourism in southwest Mississippi.

“A shared vision among public and private stake holders will allow Scenic Rivers to bring this project to fruition, as originally envisioned by local planners and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service,” explained Franklin County Chamber of Commerce President Brad Jones.

“It is a pleasure to work on a project that enjoys such widespread support - from the Governor’s office to the Mayor’s office,” explained Parker.

Local legislators sponsored bond bills, supported by the Governor Tate Reeves, Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann, and Speaker Phillip Gunn to fund the purchase of the land.

Parker also acknowledged the support of the entire Mississippi Congressional Delegation, including United States Senator Roger Wicker, Representative Steven Palazzo, Representative Trent Kelly, and Representative Bennie Thompson.

In addition to the start of construction, Scenic Rivers Development Alliance will continue its partnership with the USFS to identify existing outdoor recreation activities available on and around national forest land near Lake Okhissa.

Recently appointed USDA officials have assured Senator Hyde Smith of the agencies continued cooperation on this project as part of the Biden administrations outdoor access initiatives.