Strategic Plan for a New Day, New Way

May 26, 2004

Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Introduction

Working within the framework of the mission of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division (PRHSD) began 2003 with a commitment to create a clear, purposeful and highly focused direction for its future. The division collaborated with the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government to produce this Strategic Plan for a New Day, New Way. It encompasses many recommendations, concepts and strategies developed by a diverse group of division and department associates, stakeholders and customers. We are indebted to all who contributed to this effort.

Through a systematic and participative consensus building process, the division’s Strategic Plan for a New Day, New Way sets a bold new course for:

- Sustainable stewardship of Georgia’s precious natural and cultural resources
- Affirmation of our role in building a conservation ethic in our state
- Recommitment to organizational excellence in all that we do

It is a living planning guide that begins the process of using our system’s diversity and our associates’ commitment to excellence to make the PRHSD a model for quality service, resource protection, outdoor recreational opportunities, eco-system management and interpretation of our heritage.

The values, mission, vision, and strategic action recommendations outlined in this plan reflect the division’s renewed commitment to strategic planning and continuous quality improvement planning. This Strategic Plan for a New Day, New Way represents the first step in a continuing process of looking beyond planning to emphasize strategic management as a guide to future actions. From this point forward, we will use this benchmark plan as a guidebook against which future actions can be evaluated, adjusted and added.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resource’s Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division has come of age, but we recognize that fulfilling our mission and pursuing our vision presents formidable challenges. We are confident that this strategic plan, founded on effective communication and a cooperative spirit, will continue to guide the division toward common goals, quality management and continuous improvement of resources, services, and facilities.
Strategic Planning Process

In January 2003, the PRHSD of DNR began a 15-month process to develop a strategic planning initiative. It was guided through the process by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG).

The division’s Executive Team began the initial development of the plan. After a few months, they involved 31 other division associates from around the state. These new strategic planning team members reflected a cross-section of the division, as they came from various parks and historic sites and organizational units.

Over the next few months, the strategic planning team participated in exercises facilitated by the CVIOG that helped identify the division’s core values. This led to the development of a written statement of the division’s vision and mission. With these ideals to guide them, the team began to discuss and prioritize the important issues facing the division.

Many processes were used to gather data for the discussions. The planning team completed a self-assessment of the division’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It also had the results of a statewide user survey and other materials at its disposal. From its deliberations, the planning team identified a number of issues that needed to be addressed. Recognizing that the division needed to focus its efforts on the most important challenges first, the team prioritized these issues and selected the eight most significant ones. Teams were created to concentrate on each of the eight issues and identify action strategies to address them.

During the following months, the Executive Team worked with the CVIOG to refine the strategies and consolidated the original eight issues into six action strategies.

Finally, in March of 2004, the strategic planning team reconvened to review and adopt the new action strategies. During this last session, members were divided into strategic action teams to suggest refinements and select an action strategy on which to concentrate. Going forward, the division intends to recruit new members to each of the strategic action teams who will bring fresh insights and enthusiasm so the strategic planning effort will carry its energy across the state and into the organization.
Core Values, Mission & Vision

Who we are… What we believe … What we hope to achieve in the future…

We believe that:

• Stewardship of our state’s natural, cultural and recreational resources is fundamental to the understanding of our past and the well being of our future.

• Protection of the integrity of each site’s unique resources dictates the level of public use.

• Engaging our visitors in meaningful educational and outdoor recreational programs is vital to their appreciation of the resources we are entrusted to protect.

• Our customers deserve affordable, quality services and facilities in a safe, positive environment.

• Significant and positive connections exist between our state’s natural, cultural and recreational sites and the local communities around them.

• As public servants and caretakers of the public’s funds, we must apply best business practices to all operational activities.

Our primary purpose is to:

• Preserve, conserve, protect, manage and enhance the natural, cultural and recreational resources within the parks and historic sites system for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

• Operate balanced interpretation, educational and outdoor recreational programs to expand knowledge and understanding of Georgia’s natural, cultural and recreational resources in a manner consistent with protection of the resource.

• Develop and implement long-range plans for identifying, acquiring, developing and properly managing lands and facilities containing unique natural, cultural or recreational resources.
Core Values, Mission & Vision

Who we are… What we believe … What we hope to achieve in the future…

Our mission is to:
• Protect our state’s natural beauty and historic integrity while providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education.

It is our vision that:
• Using our system’s diversity and a commitment to excellence as our strengths, we will be a national model for quality service, resource protection, recreational opportunities, eco-systems management, and interpretation of our natural resources and heritage.

• We will provide an excellent work environment for our employees through effective leadership, proper training, challenging opportunities, progressive compensation and a guarantee of fair treatment.

Three priorities guide our pursuit of this vision:
• Protect and properly manage our existing resources.

• Energize our division by applying best business and management practices.

• Grow the system when funds and/or supporting partnerships are in place.
Strategic Action Recommendations

To realize the new vision for the PRHSD, we have developed six action strategies that will guide future decisions and management and help measure our progress toward achieving our goals. In essence, these strategic action plans will help us move from the planning stage to implementation.

The following action strategies support and advance the key working goals of DNR: Sustainable Resource Stewardship, Building a Conservation Ethic and Organizational Excellence.

DNR Goal: Sustainable Resource Stewardship

PRIHSD Action Strategy #1: Resource Stewardship
Preserve, conserve, protect and manage the natural, cultural and recreational resources within the parks and historic sites system for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

PRIHSD Action Strategy #2: Looking Forward
Develop and implement long-range plans for identifying, acquiring, developing and properly managing lands and facilities containing unique natural, cultural or recreational resources.

DNR Goal: Building a Conservation Ethic

PRIHSD Action Strategy #3: Balanced Service Delivery
Operate balanced interpretation, education and outdoor recreation programs to expand the knowledge and appreciation of Georgia’s natural, cultural and recreational resources in a manner consistent with the protection of its resources.

PRIHSD Action Strategy #4: Public Participation & Support
Increase public awareness, support and participation by enhancing the image of Georgia’s state parks and historic sites.

DNR Goal: Organizational Excellence

PRIHSD Action Strategy #5: Guest Services
Create an environment where every customer receives a consistently positive and high quality experience.

PRIHSD Action Strategy #6: Retool and Energize
Create an organizational structure and culture that supports and advances the strategic plan.
Strategic Action Recommendations

These action strategies will help the division focus on a number of core programs and business processes that are most important to our department and our citizens, concentrating our resources and energy on the areas which we will strive to achieve with excellence:

- Resource conservation and best management practices
- Acquisition and conservation of natural and cultural resources of statewide significance
- Environmental and cultural education programs and service
- Outdoor recreational programs and opportunities
- Revenue generation and reinvestment
- Organizational and financial efficiencies
- Public awareness and support
- Leveraging available resources with internal and external partnerships
- Customer and guest services
- Sustainable design and development

To transition the six action strategies into implementable work elements, specific steps and tasks to achieve each action strategy are as follows.
Action Strategy #1: Resource Stewardship

Preserve, conserve, protect and manage the natural, cultural and recreational (NCR) resources within the parks and historic sites system for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

**Goal:** We will create resource management and operations plans to conserve and protect Georgia’s rich biodiversity, maintain the optimum range of natural, cultural and recreational sites of statewide significance and provide outdoor recreation opportunities for the enjoyment of citizens and the promotion of Georgia as a quality place to visit, live and work.

Create a comprehensive Resource Management Plan for each PRHSD property

- Create a resource management template, division timeline and priority listing for our resource planning efforts
- Complete training recommendation guidelines for all levels of division staff in the area of NCR management
- Develop a strategy for partnering with top resource management agencies to establish an NCR team that will participate in our resource planning and implementation efforts
- Identify the necessary internal and external personnel to assist in completion of the management plan

Create a Business Plan for each PRHSD property that applies best business practices and supports its Resource Management Plans and Development Plan

- Create a template for developing site-specific business plans which maximizes revenue potential without jeopardizing the resource and effectively manages expenses to achieve the maximum benefit from all available funding

Create a Development Plan for each PRHSD property based on the recommendations of the site’s Resource Management, Business, Recreation and Land Acquisition Plans

- Develop and use templates to evaluate existing PRHSD facilities to establish priorities for renovations and capital improvements
- Recommend capital improvement funding priorities, strategies and schedules
Action Strategy #2: Looking Forward

Develop and implement long-range plans for identifying, acquiring, developing and properly managing lands and facilities containing unique natural, cultural or recreational resources.

**Goal:** We will position the division to better respond to the dynamic challenges facing our state and our parks and historic sites system by charting a course that addresses trends, demand and opportunities for land conservation/acquisition, management and proper development. We will create and sustain important internal and external partnerships and alliances to minimize tax support for our operations.

**Develop a Comprehensive Land Acquisition Plan for the PRHSD**
- Establish park standards based on preservation of resources of statewide significance, equity of access, optimal level of service and cost effectiveness, and a positive and inviting image
- Ensure that the division’s land holdings provide a balance of cultural and natural resources to provide interpretation and protection of Georgia’s diverse resources
- Work with the Governor’s Land Conservation Partnership, other DNR divisions and other stakeholders to inventory the existing PRHSD system and outline a prioritized acquisition plan to grow the system
- Develop an interim management plan template for new properties coming into the system, including assets management, security, site improvements, operations, maintenance and communications

**Develop a Capital Improvement Program to update existing facilities**
- Assess existing facilities and develop a priority list of improvements
- Ensure that all improvements protect the resource and enhance the overall visitor experience

**Develop a Capital Outlay Program to grow the PRHSD system**
- Establish a General Development Plan for each site that includes a recreation evaluation
- Ensure that all new facilities are constructed to minimize impacts to the resource

**Create partnerships to help develop park amenities, provide services and maintain facilities**
- Work with the Friends of Georgia State Parks, Inc., to pursue all levels of partnerships
- Create a staff position to seek and manage grants, alliances and partnership opportunities
Action Strategy #3: Balanced Service Delivery

Operate balanced interpretation, education and outdoor recreation programs to expand the knowledge and appreciation of Georgia’s natural, cultural and recreational resources in a manner consistent with the protection of its resources.

Goal: We will enhance visitor experiences, maximize capacity and increase sustainability while acting with care, focus and commitment to protect and conserve Georgia’s parks and historic sites.

Develop an Interpretive Plan for the PRHSD
- Establish interpretive standards for all sites/parks
- Review current policies and resources to establish new protocols, funding and capital improvement expectations and opportunities for program expansions
- Develop an interpretive training program that is embraced statewide and referred to by interpretive programming professionals nationwide
- Develop a marketing campaign that will promote PRHSD’s educational programming to the broadest population possible

Provide viable and beneficial recreational opportunities as appropriate to co-exist with PRHSD’s natural and cultural resources
- Work with Strategic Action Team #2 to establish a Recreation Evaluation and Development Plan which outlines model facility criteria and templates for site-specific applications
- Create a staff committee to address costs/benefits, resource capability and compatibility, safety and liability, partnerships and survey tools
- Create a permanent Recreation Advisory Council to participate in the review and update of all recreation and development plans

Maximize the use of existing resources according to established standards and guidelines
- Update all general development plans to ensure that they address adequate resource protection and respond to current and future needs and trends
- Establish cost-benefit plans to achieve maximum use of existing properties and facilities
- Create partnerships to help develop park amenities, provide service delivery and maintain parks and historic sites
Action Strategy #4: Public Participation & Support

Increase public awareness, support and participation by enhancing the image of Georgia’s state parks and historic sites.

**Goal:** Working with internal and external partners, we will aggressively market our state’s natural, cultural and recreational resources to gain public participation and support, increase volunteerism, tourism and economic development opportunities, and generate the greatest possible revenue return.

**Redefine the roles of the PRHSD’s Marketing Unit and the parks and historic sites in supporting marketing efforts**
- Develop a Marketing, Sales & Public Relations (MSPR) committee to research and define roles between the Marketing Unit and the sites
- Develop a training program to orient the field staff to the new roles and to improve two-way communications

**Develop an ongoing marketing/public relations/sales program**
- Conduct marketing research to differentiate between users and non-users among target customers, identify barriers to use, provide data to track marketing effectiveness, gauge customer satisfaction and support standards for site carrying capacity
- Develop site-specific marketing/public relations/sales plans to promote facilities and programs

**Mobilize a comprehensive and flexible volunteer program and Friends of Georgia State Parks organization**
- Review current program structure to incorporate varying levels of volunteer and Friends commitment
- Review demographics for potential new volunteers and Friends
- Develop collateral and communication tools to support the volunteer program and Friends organization
- Create volunteer and Friends recruitment opportunities
- Work through community volunteer programs and Friends to identify and seek corporate sponsors to help market and/or underwrite events, programs and facilities

**Measure and promote the benefits of PRHSD properties, including impacts on tourism and economic development**
- Develop an economic impact model for the PRHSD
Action Strategy #5: Guest Services

Create an environment where every customer receives a consistently positive and high quality experience.

**Goal:** We will find ways to improve our customer service and satisfaction, be more proactive in our abilities to anticipate and respond to the needs of our guests, and apply best business practices to all operational activities.

**Develop consistent division-wide standards for service, safety, amenity procedures and facility maintenance**
- Review current operational procedures and set minimum performance standards
- Outline an implementation schedule
- Establish safety standards for all properties and programs with a scheduled inspection program
- Establish a safety improvement budget program
- Improve levels of landscaping at entries, along park frontages and at parking lots to produce a high quality image and safe conditions

**Develop a standardized customer service training program for all associates**
- Establish and prioritize specific training needs per division unit
- Develop a strategy for meeting training needs
- Develop training manuals per division unit

**Develop a measurable customer satisfaction program**
- Consolidate the Customer Comment Card programs
- Implement a resolution program for ongoing, reoccurring issues that impact customer service/satisfaction
- Continuously analyze customer needs and trends
Action Strategy #6: Retool and Energize

Create an organizational structure and culture that supports and advances the strategic plan.

Goal: We will ensure a high-performance, principle-centered work force capable of implementing the recommendations of our strategic plan. We will begin by reorganizing our division structure, improving communications, establishing an employee development program, and applying best business and management practices to all operations. Through the continued commitment of our great team of associates, we will become a model for quality service, resource protection, outdoor recreational opportunities, eco-system management and interpretation of our heritage.

Reorganize the division as needed to implement the recommendations of the strategic plan
  • Reorganize the Atlanta headquarters office
  • Reorganize the region offices

Enhance employee efficiency and job satisfaction by improving communications within the PRHSD
  • Establish clear guidelines and lines of communications
  • Break down communication barriers through an improved organizational structure
  • Evaluate current means of communications to determine opportunities for improvement
  • Create a work environment where all associates are encouraged to submit suggestions, ideas, comments and concerns to improve the division’s operation
  • Develop divisional and site-specific means of sharing information

Develop an Employee Development Plan that recruits, trains and retains a high-performance workforce
  • Create a formal recruitment program
  • Explore personnel/human resource management issues and recommend a program which addresses competitive and equitable compensation, benefits options, and necessary training for specialized skills or mandatory certifications
  • Evaluate current hiring standards, minimum qualifications and position requirements

(continued)
Action Strategy #6: Retool and Energize (cont.)

- Develop a timeline for the hiring process
- Implement a program for orientation, training and continuing education for PRHSD employees
- Develop a plan for reducing employee workload due to extended and multiple vacancies
- Investigate the means to create more mobility within the workforce at the management level
- Develop training in natural and cultural resource management techniques that are critical to the effective implementation of our management plans

Develop a work environment that applies best business practices to maximize revenue and effectively manage expenses

- Create a business plan rolling up from the site level to region level to section level to division level
- Maximize the benefit from all available funding/partnerships for capital outlay, personnel services, equipment, vehicles, and operating expenses
- Research all areas of potential revenue generation and enact policies to generate maximum revenue without jeopardizing the resource
- Evaluate the organizational structure and workforce levels throughout the PRHSD system to ensure appropriate staffing levels for financial stability and resource protection
It is important to recognize that this *Strategic Plan for a New Day, New Way* is a living document that represents the first step in a continuous process, both within the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division and the Department of Natural Resources. Our new direction will directly support and advance the goals and objectives of the department and maximize coordination and collaboration opportunities with our sister DNR divisions.

The findings and recommendations presented within this document reflect a 2004 “snapshot” of the division and the culmination of more than a year’s effort involving all levels of division staff, numerous stakeholders and our guests. From this point forward, our new charge will be to use these findings and recommendations as a foundation upon which future actions can be evaluated and new strategies added.

We recognize that strategic planning and quality improvement planning are one integrated, continuous process requiring evaluation, feedback and periodic adjustments. Successfully implementing the recommendations in the *Strategic Plan for a New Day, New Way* requires the involvement and full commitment of every associate within the division.

To achieve our vision and implement the actions outlined in our strategic plan, six “Strategic Action Teams” (SATs) comprised of divisional and departmental staff have been created and charged with the responsibility of guiding the implementation of their respective action strategy. To accomplish this, they will work with division management to further refine and prioritize their strategic action tasks, develop clear performance measures and timelines and create “scorecards” by which we can evaluate and celebrate our strategic plan advancements. They will also provide an important conduit by which all associates can be directly engaged in plan implementation.

As we move into the implementation phase of our efforts, we will encounter internal and external forces that will affect our ability to achieve goals. Our success will be dependent not only upon our ability to re-tool our processes, but also our attitudes and ourselves; success will also be contingent upon essential financial and human resources, elimination of bureaucratic barriers and broad support for a new way of doing business. Success depends on our ability to be creative and flexible as we move forward with our action strategies while steadfastly maintaining a commitment to our vision and mission.

Achieving a more promising future for the Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites Division depends on our ability to set a clear course and then follow through. We will be constantly monitoring our progress as we proceed with implementation and we will plan to formally evaluate our mission, vision and tactical action plan every 3-5 years.
Supporting Materials

The division has assimilated the following strategic planning documents that are on file in the Director’s Office:

- Stakeholder and staff survey results
- Patron survey results
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis
- Strategic Planning Team Retreat outcome reports
- William Bridges’ Organization Lifecycle information
- Task Force reports and recommendations
- Miscellaneous work products and process flowcharts