



Land Between the Lakes: Forward to the Future

STRATEGY INPUT

Comments Due: January 30, 2020

Introduction

Forward to the Future is an ongoing strategic planning initiative which focuses on the future of recreation and environmental education at Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area. The purpose of this effort is to develop the organization's first *Strategic Sustainability Plan for the Future of Recreation and Environmental Education at Land Between the Lakes*. The Plan will identify:

1. Key strategic plan components (vision, priority areas of focus, and set of goals and objectives) that will guide management of recreation and environmental education programs for the next 10-15 years;
2. Strategies which will help Land Between the Lakes, as an organization, to be more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable; and
3. Ways in which Land Between the Lakes can help to cultivate regional sustainability through collaboration and partnership.

Your Input

Land Between the Lakes seeks **your input by January 30, 2020**, on proposed strategies and action items to meet the objectives. Comments can be submitted through the MindMixer website: landbetweenthelakes.mindmixer.com, or by sending them directly to Jeff Laird, Customer Service Manager at jeffrey.laird@usda.gov. If you have any questions they can also be addressed to Jeff Laird at jeffrey.laird@usda.gov.

Strategy Questions

Please answer the following questions related to the Objectives to help focus your input. **The Vision, Goals and Objectives are shown on pages 3-5 of this document.**

1. Describe the ideal mix of dispersed and developed recreation and environmental education opportunities.
2. What ideas/strategies do you have to reduce costs?
3. What new revenue sources can you help identify?
4. Would you or your organization/group be willing to partner with the Forest Service to maintain or enhance some aspect of recreation and EE? If so, what specifically would you be willing to do?
5. What strategies might be employed to reduce deferred maintenance?
6. What strategies can be used to create efficiencies?
7. What are the most important long term maintenance and infrastructure needs?

8. What percent of the budget should be saved each year for unforeseen expenses and for long term maintenance and infrastructure needs?
9. What strategies can be used to fulfill each objective?
10. What can you or your organization/group do to assist with meeting the objectives or carrying out strategies that you have proposed?
11. If a facility or program needed to be closed, reduced, or restricted in any way due to budgetary issues, what facility or program do you think could be closed, reduced or restricted?

Next Steps

Your input will help determine which strategies will be chosen to meet the objectives of the plan. The next step will be to review all public comments and select strategies based upon what we have heard. Our goal is to identify and move towards a desired future that represents both the priorities of Land Between the Lakes and its surrounding communities. Once these strategies have been finalized, Land Between the Lakes will begin to implement the plan.

Public Engagement

Public engagement is an essential piece to the development of the ***Strategic Sustainability Plan for the Future of Recreation and Environmental Education at Land Between the Lakes***. As part of this process there have been and continue to be several opportunities for public input, comment and dialogue. These opportunities correspond to the three phases of the strategic planning process: Assessment, Visioning, and Strategic Development.



To date, public input has been collected from approximately 1200 participants as part of the Assessment and Visioning phases via one of the following methods: through an online engagement platform (landbetweenthelakes.mindmixer.com), two open house sessions, facility open houses, a community visioning session, and three outdoor community forums. The Vision, Goals and Objectives have been finalized and now additional input is being sought for strategies and action items that will help the Forest Service to meet the objectives. Following are the Vision, Goals and Objectives. If you would like to know more about the methods and results of these public engagement opportunities, which serve as the foundation for the vision, goals and objectives, please visit landbetweenthelakes.mindmixer.com/about-this-site or visit <https://www.landbetweenthelakes.us/> and scroll to the Sustainable Recreation Planning section near the bottom of the webpage.

Final Vision and Goals

VISION		
Working together with visitors and local communities to bring positive, sustainable change through exceptional nature-based experiences that reach all generations.		
STRATEGIC GOALS - AREAS OF FOCUS		
Be Responsive to Change	Sustain Thriving Habitats	Inspire Youth
GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3
Anticipate changing recreation needs, demonstrate innovative management practices, and sustainably transform to meet 21 st century expectations.	Restore and sustain healthy habitats to be a destination for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing of abundant and diverse species.	Inspire youth in neighboring counties and states to connect with their natural lands and cultural heritage.
MANAGEMENT GOAL - AREA OF FOCUS		
Create a Culture of Innovation		
GOAL 4		
Respect the past and innovate for the future.		

Final Objectives

STRATEGIC GOAL #1 - Anticipate changing recreation needs, demonstrate innovative management practices, and sustainably transform to meet 21st century expectations

Objectives:

1. Implement a Recreation/Environmental Education program operations budget, on an annual basis, no greater than the average of the past 3 Fiscal Years, focusing on:
 - a) providing a variety of dispersed and developed recreation opportunities,
 - b) reducing costs,
 - c) identifying new revenue sources and new partnerships,
 - d) reducing deferred maintenance,
 - e) creating efficiencies, and
 - f) planning for long term maintenance and infrastructure needs.

Note: this operating budget will consist of appropriated funds and revenue generated by the recreation and environmental education programs. Other funding (not included in this operating budget), including grants, one-time award of funds, donations, sponsorships, or other funding mechanisms will be used for special projects to reduce deferred

maintenance, to strengthen infrastructure, or to accomplish a specific project for which the funding was requested. A portion of Strategic Goal #2, Objective 1 and all of Strategic Goal #2, Objective 2 are supported by a separate budget in the Environmental Stewardship Department.

2. Complete visitor services facility review (Golden Pond Visitor Center, South Welcome Station, and North Welcome Station) within 2 years. Review will include:
 - a) tracking existing uses,
 - b) tracking how many people services are provided to,
 - c) analyzing the needed workforce to complete the work at these facilities,
 - d) determining how these facilities should promote recreation/environmental education opportunities,
 - e) determining if there is a better way to provide services or if service is needed,
 - f) determining how any proposed changes might impact other facilities,
 - g) hold listening sessions with local Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Associations to assess regional needs, to ask how the FS can better support the local communities, how to better integrate the greater tourism agenda and how to better serve visitors.
3. Support regional cell connectivity, including Land Between the Lakes, by facilitating agreements with cell providers, as permitted by the Area Plan.
4. Provide public Wi-Fi within 5 years inside Piney Campground, Hillman Campground, Wranglers Campground, Energy Lake Campground, Woodlands Nature Station, Brandon Spring Group Camp, Homeplace 1850s Farm, Golden Pond Visitor Center, North Welcome Station, and South Welcome Center.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2 – Restore and sustain healthy habitats and scenic landscapes to be a destination for hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing of abundant and diverse species and to provide locations for a wide variety of dispersed recreation opportunities.

Objectives:

1. Increase presence on traditional (includes outreach) and social media beyond a 40 mile radius (geo-extended population) and increase postings on social media by 20% to educate and inform the public and stakeholders on the why, what, when, and where of habitat management and environmental education within 5 years.
2. Use active habitat management, with collaboration, to provide dispersed recreation and environmental education opportunities, a diversity of habitats, vigorous forests that are resistant to insects and disease, and functioning watersheds within 10 years, by
 - a) creating and maintaining 550 acres of Shortleaf pine forest,
 - b) creating and maintaining 3000 acres of mature open oak forest,
 - c) creating and maintaining 3500 acres of woodland structure, and
 - d) regenerating 1500 acres of forest habitat.

STRATEGIC GOAL #3 – Inspire youth in neighboring counties and states to connect with their natural lands and cultural heritage.

Objectives:

1. Update Environmental Education Master Plan in 2021.
2. Promote a community approach to education by establishing partnerships to identify practical ways to incorporate cultural heritage and environmental education in the school curriculum, within 3 years.
3. Expand community engagement by participating in festivals and programs, in surrounding counties, by 50% within 3 years.

MANAGEMENT GOAL #4 – Respect the past and innovate for the future.

Objectives:

1. Complete a review of the volunteer program within 2 years. Review will include:
 - a) determine the housing and facility needs of volunteers,
 - b) identify best practices for management of volunteers, including supervision, paperwork management, prioritization of projects, hours tracking, and volunteer recognition,
 - c) analyze the pros and cons, and determine if there should be a USFS volunteer coordinator,
 - d) determine the potential for increasing volunteerism in wildlife and habitat management, visitor services, facility management, and interpretation and education programming
2. Establish volunteer events calendar that includes annual volunteer recognition event, national volunteer event days, and established cleanup days.