

2007 Candidate Survey

In August candidates for Governor, Lt. Governor, Secretary of State, and Commissioner of Agriculture were sent a survey to find out more about their views on issues important to the Mississippi Wildlife Federation. Below are the results of that survey.

CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR

Haley Barbour

Mississippi Wildlife Federation

2007 Candidate Survey

1. Tell us about your outdoor recreation and conservation interests. What type of outdoor sports or activities do you enjoy? Have you been involved in any conservation or sportsmen's organizations or efforts?

I was fortunate enough to grow up in one of the richest wildlife regions anywhere in the world, the Mississippi Delta. I grew up in Yazoo City near Wolf Lake and near forests where I have hunted and fished since I was a kid. I have worked as a volunteer with some of our state's conservation organizations to provide additional fish and wildlife habitat and opportunities for the many anglers, hunters and wildlife watchers throughout Mississippi. I have served on the Board of The Nature Conservancy. My wife, Marsha, had a similar rural upbringing as I had and has a tremendous love for the outdoors. She understands the need for conservation and wildlife management. She's been actively involved and taken a leadership role in promoting many wildlife-related activities. She is the Chair of Wildlife Mississippi's Advisory Council. One of my heroes, President Theodore Roosevelt, was a conservationist. After Mississippi Governor Vardaman had attacked Roosevelt on his social policies, Roosevelt came to Mississippi to campaign. As a result of Roosevelt's trip, the "teddy bear" was born to honor his conservation ethic. Roosevelt's concern enabled him to be the pioneer of our first conservation agenda. In 1905 he worked with Congress to reserve to itself and the President the right to create federal wildlife reserves. He created the Forest Service. In 1907 he signed into law the Agricultural Appropriations Act which stated that the Forest Service shall aid in enforcement to protect fish and wildlife.

2. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) is charged with the management of all wildlife in Mississippi. However, funding for the Department has traditionally been provided almost exclusively by license fees and tax dollars from hunters and anglers. As the challenges facing MDWFP have grown, the costs of managing wildlife have risen to the point that hunter and angler contributions alone cannot keep up, barring large license fee increases that could price many sportsmen and women out of the market. At the same time, sportsmen value the political and budgetary independence of the MDWFP and Commission. What are your views regarding the need for alternative funding for the MDWFP,

potential sources for this funding, and the level of legislative oversight that should accompany additional funding?

See answer to Question #7.

3. Urban and suburban development (sprawl) is beginning to seriously impact our wildlife and fisheries habitat and resources in parts of the state. What are your thoughts regarding how Mississippi can better protect its open spaces for wildlife while at the same time provide for our increasing human population and growth?

Sprawl is certainly an issue that is important to me. One reason many people like to live, work and raise a family in Mississippi is because of our quality of life. Mississippi has such wonderful fish and wildlife resources and open space - and that makes us unique from other parts of the country. We have cypress trees that are as impressive as the redwoods, some of the best saltwater and freshwater fishing anywhere, top notch hunting and more species of birds can be seen in our state than almost anywhere. This is important not only in recruiting jobs, but maintaining opportunities for our citizens. President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "The problems of juvenile delinquency decrease in direct proportion to the opportunities of our young people to enjoy outlets for their energies in sports...I have observed the resourcefulness and stability of young who have had an opportunity to learn how to take care of themselves...as fishermen." The more our young people can take advantage of the outdoors, the more likely they will grow up to be well rounded citizens, have an appreciation for the outdoors and have a less chance of being involved with drugs and crime. President George W. Bush is advocating legislation to make permanent the tax incentives to preserve fish and wildlife habitat and open space so private landowners can continue to save federal and state taxes, as well as estate tax. I strongly support this legislation.

4. Nature tourism constitutes a major segment of the overall tourism market as revealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Moreover, a survey completed in September 2000 by the Recreation Roundtable, a tourism survey group in Washington, D.C., found that 78 percent of the American public participates in outdoor recreational activities at least once a month. Do you have any ideas to promote nature tourism in Mississippi?

Earlier in my Administration, I hosted a conference focused on revitalizing rural Mississippi. We brought in experts from all over the country to share ideas and discuss issues like value-added agriculture, revitalizing the economies of small towns, and nature-based and outdoor tourism, one of the areas I found particularly interesting. Hunters and anglers have been widely acknowledged for their role in conserving our fish, wildlife and natural resources, but they represent so much more. Sportsmen in Mississippi annually pay \$55.6 million in state sales, fuel and income taxes - this could pay 1,881 teachers' salaries or fund the annual education expenses of 10,488 students.

Sportsmen support 12,258 jobs in Mississippi. And the ripple effect of Mississippi's sportsmen is \$1.2 billion on our state's economy. It is a fairly simple equation - hunters and anglers mean jobs in the rural parts of Mississippi that have made the effort to maintain and promote their hunting and fishing opportunities. It boils down to quality of life. We have something that other states lack, and we need to use it to our advantage. We need to maintain quality fish and wildlife habitat not only for the sake of conservation, but for future generations and as a means to recruit business, industry, even physicians.

5. Access to clean water for recreation and consumption has become an issue in adjacent Southern states. How can Mississippi assure that it has the quantity and quality of water it needs to meet future demands?

The Executive Director I appointed to the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Trudy Fisher, and the entire Commission, are doing a great job at balancing our economic growth and meeting our water needs, from both a quality and quantity perspective. Besides that, on the quality side, the organizations Marsha and I are involved in are working hard on the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. Mississippi will benefit from the proposed increase in conservation funding in the bill. The Bush Administration's plan to increase the acreage available for the Wetland Reserve Program will certainly offer more conservation options for Mississippi farmers. However, the appraisal method for determining the value of easements must return to method that was utilized prior to Fiscal Year 2006. Because of the new appraisal method, Mississippi has gone from being a national leader in wetlands restoration to not enrolling one acre this year. Forestry is one of the most important economic commodities in Mississippi and the South, and contributes to improving water quality. I am advocating the establishment of an independent, Emergency Forest Restoration Program to help restore family forests after catastrophes as a part of the Farm Bill. This idea originated from my Committee on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal, which was established to address problems from Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, good use of Section 319 of the Clean Water Act and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program is making a real difference in improving water quality in Mississippi.

6. Every summer in the Gulf of Mexico an area becomes void of life due to severely depleted levels of oxygen in the Gulf's water, a state known as hypoxia. This condition kills every oxygen-dependent sea creature within its zone. The Dead Zone varies in size from year to year, but generally it has been growing since 1993. In 2005, researchers mapping the Dead Zone found that it covered 4,564 square miles, an area slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. In some years it has covered up to roughly 7,000 square miles. How can Mississippi take action to protect water quality in the Gulf?

Good question. I chair an organization called the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. The alliance consists of Governors from the five Gulf of Mexico states – FL, AL, MS, LA, and TX.

After being formed in late 2005, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance embarked on a 36 month plan to address critical environmental and ecological issues in the Gulf of Mexico, such as the hypoxia problem. Due to great regional collaboration on the plan, accomplishments have exceeded earlier expectations, and the federal government is holding the Gulf of Mexico Alliance up as a model for regional collaboration for enhancing the environment. In August, I hosted a meeting in Biloxi that was well attended by the five states along with our many federal partners in this effort. Hypoxia was a primary topic of discussion. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is ahead of schedule in completing the 36 month plan and is now embarking on a longer term plan to work together as states to address the hypoxia problem and improve our Mississippi Gulf Coast treasure.

7. Mississippi is one of a few states without dedicated funding for its natural resources. Do you support/oppose creating a reliable source of funding to protect Mississippi's special, places, water quality and wildlife?

I absolutely support a reliable source of funding for “Mississippi’s special wildlife places”. In fact, the mechanism is already in place but has been conveniently ignored or overlooked by some Legislators in the past. In 2004, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed a bill to cut the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' general funding by \$8,549,764 or 90 percent. Most of the agency's funding is from park entrance fees, license fees, taxes on boat fuel, and hunting and fishing equipment. That same year the House also proposed to spend \$6,642,803 less than what the license and other fees generated the year before. Sportsmen have carried their load; therefore, I support these funds being used strictly for their intended use, which is to improve the state’s fish, wildlife and parks resources. However, accountability in spending taxpayer dollars is always important. These special funds go towards not only providing good wildlife habitat, but providing recreational places for people that can't afford a private place to fish or a place for outdoor recreation. My policy supports fees paid by sportsmen being used for enhancing opportunities for sportsmen.

8. Mississippi's State Parks and Natural Areas preserve our natural and recreational heritage for present and future generations. Parks provide the opportunity for interpretation, education and outreach to our youth and are vitally important to the tourism and travel industry and provide a boost to the state's economy. Yet parks are always in dire need of additional revenue to maintain them at a level acceptable to park users. How can we fund and manage the parks to reach their potential?

See answer to Question #7.

9. Because Mississippi has only a small percentage of land in public ownership that is dedicated to conservation, it is up to private landowners to be good stewards to millions of acres of forests, streams and habitat. How can the state encourage

landowners to protect, restore and conserve natural resources on their own property?

Mississippi is blessed with a rich natural heritage: prairies, red clay hills, bottomlands and bayous, coastal savannas, longleaf pine forests and scenic rivers and streams. Mississippi's private citizens own approximately 75% of the state's land. For many Mississippi landowners, their property is more than a financial asset; it is part of their family's history, their community and their state. The Mississippi countryside is changing too. One of the most significant factors affecting our landscape is the continued breakup of family-owned farms. Family-owned farms and recreational lands are affected by changing economics and the increasing tax burden on property owners. Passing on land to the next generation is a time-honored tradition in Mississippi. However, estate taxes, which can be as high as 55 percent of an estate's total value, may force heirs to sell all or part of a family property. One mechanism is for the Congress to eliminate the estate tax, permanently. Mississippi has a Uniform Conservation Easement Act that helps landowners take advantage of the tax benefits associated with conservation easements. This is a popular program and should be continued. Furthermore, a number of programs in the Farm Bill, such as the Wetlands Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, the Grasslands Reserve Program, the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, which was an idea of Senator Thad Cochran, all help private landowners be good stewards of the land. These programs should be continued. I also appreciate the hard work of the National Wildlife Federation in working on these programs as part of the new Farm Bill currently being debated in Congress. Finally, it is not always about government involvement; private landowners and citizens play a huge role themselves. Our wildlife and the efforts we've made toward improving habitat are something in which all Mississippians should be extremely proud. Species that were nearly extinct fifty years ago are now thriving due to the efforts of sportsmen. Wood ducks are flourishing. Wild turkey and whitetail deer are also good examples of species that were once in trouble but have repopulated with a vengeance. In fact, Mississippi leads the nation with more deer per acre than any other state. And much of the credit goes to private citizens and landowners.

John Arthur Eaves

No response

CANDIDATES FOR LT. GOVERNOR

Phil Bryant

1. Tell us about your outdoor recreation and conservation interests. What type of outdoor sports or activities do you enjoy? Have you been involved in any conservation or sportsmen's organizations or efforts?

Like many Mississippians I am an avid outdoorsman who has enjoyed hunting and fishing my entire life. My family owns a small tree farm in Copiah County where we spend many hours enjoying horseback riding and generally looking after the place. I have been a longtime member of the National Rifle Association's Institute for Legislative Action.

2. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) is charged with the management of all wildlife in Mississippi. However, funding for the Department has traditionally been provided almost exclusively by license fees and tax dollars from hunters and anglers. As the challenges facing MDWFP have grown, the costs of managing wildlife have risen to the point that hunter and angler contributions alone cannot keep up, barring large license fee increases that could price many sportsmen and women out of the market. At the same time, sportsmen value the political and budgetary independence of the MDWFP and Commission. What are your views regarding the need for alternative funding for the MDWFP, potential sources for this funding, and the level of legislative oversight that should accompany additional funding?

Its special fund status has provided the MDWFP with a degree of budget stability and independence that has been the envy of many general fund agencies. The department is basically in good financial condition based on its special fund sources. The general fund appropriations that the department receives are primarily for the Bureau of Parks and Recreation and a small amount to the Museum of Natural Science. So clearly, legislative focus needs to be on modernizing our parks and attempting to make them more self sufficient in order to alleviate funding pressures on the overall agency. Some have suggested that Parks and Tourism belong together and I think reorganization is an idea worthy of further review.

3. Urban and suburban development (sprawl) is beginning to seriously impact our wildlife and fisheries habitat and resources in parts of the state. What are your thoughts regarding how Mississippi can better protect its open spaces for wildlife while at the same time provide for our increasing human population and growth?

We need strict annexation laws and need to strengthen property rights laws. We do not need to allow builders/developers to seize lands under imminent domain proceedings except when it is clearly in the vested interest of the broader community. We can also look at encouraging the use of green zones in planning future developments and protective belts along our streams and rivers.

4. Nature tourism constitutes a major segment of the overall tourism market as revealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Moreover, a survey completed in September 2000 by the Recreation Roundtable, a tourism survey group in Washington, D.C., found that 78 percent of the American public participates in outdoor recreational activities at least once a month. Do you have any ideas to promote nature tourism in Mississippi?

As with any kind of tourism, advertising and education programs - that is, letting our own citizens as well as out of state visitors know what kinds of recreational assets we have available, are key to promotion efforts. Continuing support of programs like Rails to Trails and maintaining our current recreational trails and markers will also help. The same kinds of tax incentives historically extended to industrial developers should be maintained for private recreational developers.

5. Access to clean water for recreation and consumption has become an issue in adjacent Southern states. How can Mississippi assure that it has the quantity and quality of water it needs to meet future demands?

The federal Clean Water Act has gone a long way to restoring and conserving our rivers and streams and protecting our ground water supplies. We need to ensure that the MDEQ continues to have adequate resources as it serves as the state's regulatory and enforcement agency in implementation of this and other federal laws. Locally, it is important to continuously plan for future development when designing water treatment facilities. Citizen involvement in adopting stream programs can also be encouraged.

6. Every summer in the Gulf of Mexico an area becomes void of life due to severely depleted levels of oxygen in the Gulf's water, a state known as hypoxia. This condition kills every oxygen-dependent sea creature within its zone. The Dead Zone varies in size from year to year, but generally it has been growing since 1993. In 2005, researchers mapping the Dead Zone found that it covered 4,564 square miles, an area slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. In some years it has covered up to roughly 7,000 square miles. How can Mississippi take action to protect water quality in the Gulf?

The Gulf Dead Zone which is located off the coast of Louisiana is the result of excessive nitrogen pollution resulting from runoff throughout the Mississippi River Basin. This is a national problem that will require coordinated efforts among the federal oversight agencies and the numerous states in the basin. Mississippi can do its part by encouraging more limited use of chemical fertilizers when feasible and mitigating runoff of these agents into our rivers and streams.

7. Mississippi is one of a few states without dedicated funding for its natural resources. Do you support/oppose creating a reliable source of funding to protect Mississippi's special places, water quality and wildlife?

As noted above, MDWFP is primarily funded from user fees – mainly hunting and fishing licenses. These funds are dedicated to protecting our natural resources, parks and wildlife. I am not opposed to identifying additional funding sources for such purposes but this would have to be done as part of the overall state budget process and clearly there are many competing demands placed on that process from education to healthcare.

8. Mississippi's State Parks and Natural Areas preserve our natural and recreational heritage for present and future generations. Parks provide the opportunity for interpretation, education and outreach to our youth and are vitally important to the tourism and travel industry and provide a boost to the state's economy. Yet parks are always in dire need of additional revenue to maintain them at a level acceptable to park users. How can we fund and manage the parks to reach their potential?

Mississippi's state parks are not self sufficient and require significant support from the state's general fund. Consequently, our parks find themselves competing with other priorities of the state appropriations process. In the absence of significant budget surpluses the parks will always come up short as the legislature will always put education and healthcare programs ahead of them. Greater financial support from the public is going to be required to maintain the numerous parks we enjoy in Mississippi. We may want to look at outsourcing park services or even entire park operations to private firms that may be better able to make the investments in equipment and capital improvements that most of our state parks are in desperate need of in order to increase their marketability and profitability.

9. Because Mississippi has only a small percentage of land in public ownership that is dedicated to conservation, it is up to private landowners to be good stewards to millions of acres of forests, streams and habitat. How can the state encourage landowners to protect, restore and conserve natural resources on their own property?

Part of this is simply an education effort to help landowners know how to be better stewards of their land. But obviously, tax incentive programs will be the most effective means of promoting these goals.

Jamie Franks
No response

CANDIDATES FOR SECRETARY OF STATE

Delbert Hosemann

- 1. Tell us about your outdoor recreation and conservation interest. What type of outdoor sports or activities do you enjoy? Have you been involved in any conservation or sportsmen's organizations or efforts?**

I particularly enjoy hunting and am a member of the Mississippi Wildlife Federation, the Ducks Unlimited and a member of their Hinds County Committee, Delta Wildlife, and other Conservation groups. The majority of my hunting activities are either duck hunting or deer hunting. In addition, I have property which I have built a lake and it has been stocked with fish. Finally, I am interested in reforestation and have reforested approximately 200 acres of property in Money, Mississippi and approximately 100 acres of property in Ebenezer, Mississippi. This includes wildlife habitat, planting food for deer, turkey, dove and other wildlife, as well as forestry management for habitat. I am a lifetime member of the National Rifle Association. I am also a member of the Mississippi Forestry Association.

- 2. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) is charged with the management of all wildlife in Mississippi. However, funding for the Department has traditionally been provided almost exclusively by license fees and tax dollars from hunters and anglers. As the challenges facing MDWFP have grown, the costs of managing wildlife have risen to the point that hunter and angler contributions alone cannot keep up, barring large license fee increases that could price many sportsmen and women out of the market. At the same time, sportsmen value the political and budgetary independence of the MDWFP and Commission. What are your views regarding the need for alternative funding for the MDWFP, potential sources for this funding, and the level of legislative oversight that should accompany additional funding?**

First, as Secretary of State, I will be responsible for 600,000 acres of 16th section land and 800,000 acres of public lands. In addition, there are over 1,000 square miles of tidelands which are the responsibility of that Office. Where at all possible, those properties should be managed for public access to hunting and fishing. It is my goal as Secretary of State to increase the amount of acreage owned by the State of Mississippi and used for wildlife and recreation purposes.

With the increasing population, and limited wildlife areas, it will be critical to seek public support for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. In that regard, our Mississippi Wildlife Federation could receive monies to fund the addition and to fund the purchase of additional lands, the gifting of additional lands, and the raising of additional funding. As landowners become more sophisticated in their gift giving and more concerned for the future of their property, they are also more sophisticated in the restrictions that they may place on property. These restrictions could be honored in a non-profit organization

where they may not be able to be honored if the property were simply left to the State of Mississippi.

That said, great care should be taken to ensure access for every Mississippi resident to our fisheries and parks. Concerning legislative oversight, the legislature is charged with the oversight of all tax dollars and funds that are provided by the State of Mississippi through its taxation system.

3. Urban and suburban development (sprawl) is beginning to seriously impact our wildlife and fisheries habitat and resources in parts of the state. What are your thoughts regarding how Mississippi can better protect its open spaces for wildlife while at the same time provide for our increasing human population and growth?

The Secretary of State's office currently has hundreds of parcels of properties which have been obtained through tax sale. It is my proposal to increase the sale of these tax parcels. In meetings with the Secretary of State's office, currently these sales provide approximately \$500,000 per year in income. Our proposal would be to request the Mississippi Legislature to specifically earmark funds from tax sales to be utilized to purchase additional acreage for public utilization, recreation and conservation. Mississippi is blessed with sufficient areas for both humans and wildlife. However, as the human population increases, it will become more critical for Mississippi to continue to provide public recreation and hunting space. Therefore, purchasing of additional property at this time is important to the long term planning.

4. Nature tourism constitutes a major segment of the overall tourism market as revealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Moreover, a survey completed in September 200 by the Recreation Roundtable, a tourism survey group in Washington, D.C., found that 78 percent of the American public participates in outdoor recreations activities at least once a month. Do you have any ideas to promote nature tourism in Mississippi.

I have participated in nature tourism in the states of Colorado, Washington, California, Wyoming, Utah, Montana, Idaho, as well as throughout the South. As Secretary of State, I will add to our website any nature tourism project that is sponsored on lands owned by the State of Mississippi or by any non-profitable organization. This will provide direct website information concerning nature tourism in Mississippi. It would be coordinated with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks so that we can be linked together not only for business activities, but also for recreational activities.

5. Access to clean water for recreation and consumption as become an issue in adjacent Southern states. How can Mississippi assure that it has the quantity and quality of water it needs to meet future demands?

Mississippi has, as its major assets, its people, its water, its climate, its electrical capacity, and significant land mass. The needs for our farmers, our employers and the quality of the water available for recreation can be addressed

simultaneously, equally, and without detriment to any of the parties. On the properties which I will be entrusted, over one million acres, I intend to ensure that the quantity and the quality of the water will be available for our generation as well as the future generation and management over our water resources is similar, in my view, to management of our timber resources and wildlife resources. It will involve study, consistent review, and planning to ensure we achieve our goals.

- 6. Every summer in the Gulf of Mexico an area becomes void of life due to severely depleted levels of oxygen in the Gulf's water, a state known as hypoxia. This condition kills every oxygen-dependent sea creature within its zone. The Dead Zone varies in size from year to year, but generally it has been growing since 1993. In 2005, researchers mapping the Dead Zone found that it covered 4,564 square miles, an area slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. In some years it has covered up to roughly 7,000 square miles. How can Mississippi take action to protect water quality in the Gulf?**

While I have general knowledge concerning hypoxia, I am not an environmental engineer, nor do I have the knowledge necessary to address this point. In an area such as this, quite frankly, I would rely upon experts and their knowledge in regards to actions necessary to maintain the water quality in the Gulf of Mexico. However, I intend to leave those waters in better shape than I found them when I am elected.

- 7. Mississippi is one of the few states without dedicated funding for its natural resources. Do you support/oppose creating a reliable source of funding to protect Mississippi's special places, water quality and wildlife?**

As I mentioned above, I believe this sale of tax qualified real property, currently I have been informed that it is approximately \$500,000 per year, could be addressed as a funding for the acquisition of additional recreation and wildlife habitat. Because of the constant replenishment of these properties, this would end up being a reliable source of funding.

- 8. Mississippi's State Parks and Natural Areas preserve our natural and recreational heritage for present and future generations. Parks provide the opportunity for interpretation, education and outreach to our youth and are vitally important to the tourism and travel industry and provide a boost to the state's economy. Yet parks are always in dire need of additional revenue to maintain them at a level acceptable to park users. How can we fund and manage the parks to reach their potential?**

Unfortunately, I have not seen any information concerning the funding and management of parks. Further, I have not seen the balancing of general state funds utilized versus funds generated from people who actually use our parks. I would oppose sale of Mississippi State Parks and natural areas, if that alternative were proposed.

- 9. Because Mississippi has only a small percentage of land in public ownership that is dedicated to conservation, it is up to private landowners to be good stewards to millions of acres of forests, streams, habitat. How can the state**

encourage landowners to protect, restore and conserve natural resources on their own property?

I have participated in the Wetlands Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Program. Both of these are excellent opportunities and should be encouraged by both state and federal governments. They provide rental income to farmers to offset the cost of managing their property. The offset paid by the state and federal government never fully offsets the cost, but serves to encourage private landowners that these programs should be maintained and reviewed as the needs for protection, restoration and conservation shift.

Rob Smith

I have enjoyed bow hunting and dove hunting for years. Recently, my family has ventured into white water rafting. As a family of five, my brother is crazy about deer hunting and turkey hunting, while the eldest loves beagles for rabbit hunting. My dad, who is 86, loves to fox hunt and fish. So I come from a diversified hunting family. I was one of the first Hunter Safety Instructors in Mississippi. As a Jaycee, our WestPoint chapter trained our youth in Clay County. I had my two daughters attend Tara Wildlife for a summer camp and hunter safety program

Serving 20 years in the Mississippi Senate, I have seen first hand the importance of funding our parks and the MDWFP. Our state must continue to encourage our Federal delegation to support the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Programs. These programs provide additional funds to conservation in Mississippi.

With suburban development, sportsmen, conservationist and state departments should always remember how important it is to communicate and work with our private land owners. The Farm Bill is a great opportunity for farmers and conservationist to work together in benefiting Mississippi in funding programs, protecting our private land owners, and providing tax incentives to property owners.

Nature tourism will continue to expand, and with the programs at MSU and the Mississippi Federation, such as, the outdoor photo classes, the fishing rodeo for children, the Museum of Natural Science and other environmental stewardship programs, Mississippi can have an organized nature tourism program.

By forming alliances, we can join together to improve water recreation. Examples would be the Pascagoula River Basin Alliance. The Pearl River Basin Development District is another source of alliances that the state, private and corporate organizations can partner with on clean water issues. It is a partnership that makes for good stewards of our quality of water recreations.

Additional notes, I believe Conservation Easements have proven successful for wildlife issues. The Adopt A Stream programs are great to bring about awareness. While in the Mississippi Senate and House of Representatives, I know how important it is to have responsible, capable committee chairs. The parks program had a great challenge and the

legislature met, studied and listened to the experts and because of those meetings, funding was made available for our parks and recreation programs. The better we are creating partnerships and communicating with each other on the needs of wildlife, conservation, and private property rights and ownership, the better we all benefit.

CANDIDATES FOR COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE

Rickey Cole

1. Tell us about your outdoor recreation and conservation interests. What type of outdoor sports or activities do you enjoy? Have you been involved in any conservation or sportsmen's organizations or efforts?

We grew up fishing, mostly on Bogue Homa Creek and at a camp we owned on the Pascagoula River. I still enjoy fishing, although I haven't taken time in recent years to go fishing very often. Farm life kept me close to nature every day, and even at age 41 I get lonesome for the country when I've been away from the farm for a few days. One of my great joys in recent years has been to take long walks with my family through the wooded areas of our working family farm near Ovet, teaching the kids how to identify trees, plants and animals and observing the habits of wildlife. I do my best to make sure that the livestock, timber, excavated dirt and gravel, cultivated soil and water on the farm are managed in ways that conserve, protect and enhance our natural resources. My little girl will be two on September 27, and already she loves everything outdoors, from the woodpecker in the backyard she recently "discovered" to the running streams that seem to mesmerize her. I enjoy most of all the opportunity to teach her about nature as my parents and grandparents before me did. I am not a member of any sportsmen's groups, and have never been a hunter myself, but many of my family members do hunt, and I respect the rights and appreciate the valuable contributions of responsible hunters, fishermen and outdoorsmen. I am proud to have an "A" rating from the National Rifle Association.

2. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) is charged with the management of all wildlife in Mississippi. However, funding for the Department has traditionally been provided almost exclusively by license fees and tax dollars from hunters and anglers. As the challenges facing MDWFP have grown, the costs of managing wildlife have risen to the point that hunter and angler contributions alone cannot keep up, barring large license fee increases that could price many sportsmen and women out of the market. At the same time, sportsmen value the political and budgetary independence of the MDWFP and Commission. What are your views regarding the need for alternative funding for the MDWFP, potential sources for this funding, and the level of legislative oversight that should accompany additional funding?

While funding issues are primarily legislative concerns, I would be supportive of the Wildlife Federation's efforts to lobby for ways to preserve the independence of MDWFP and Commission, meet the need for alternative funding and carry out the vitally important work effectively. With that said, I won't be supportive of tax or fee increases at any

level, for any purpose. State government is spending quite enough of the people's money.

3. Urban and suburban development (sprawl) is beginning to seriously impact our wildlife and fisheries habitat and resources in parts of the state. What are your thoughts regarding how Mississippi can better protect its open spaces for wildlife while at the same time provide for our increasing human population and growth?

We need to encourage local governments to consider our natural resources, including wildlife habitat, when deciding whether or not to issue or restrict permits for development. There can be vibrant microforests in high-income subdivisions, and the kids that grow up in urban and suburban areas still need to be able to walk down to the bridge and fish with a cane pole, or wake up and see rabbits in the backyard early one morning. Absentee landowners who don't use their land need to be educated about how valuable that land can be if leased to a hunting club, as opposed to selling it to someone who will bulldoze it off for a trailer park. Property tax rates for agricultural or hunting land must be kept low, adding incentive to maintain that land undeveloped. I am a strong supporter of private property rights, but we do have to balance those rights with responsible stewardship of our water, air, plant and animal resources that we all hold in common.

4. Nature tourism constitutes a major segment of the overall tourism market as revealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Moreover, a survey completed in September 2000 by the Recreation Roundtable, a tourism survey group in Washington, D.C., found that 78 percent of the American public participates in outdoor recreational activities at least once a month. Do you have any ideas to promote nature tourism in Mississippi?

Yes. Agri-tourism and nature tourism go hand-in-hand. We need to establish a Rural Tourism Interagency Task Force with members from MDWFP, the Department of Agriculture and Commerce, the Division of Tourism, other related agencies along with citizen representation from organizations like the Wildlife Federation to develop a comprehensive plan to identify, develop and promote agricultural and rural tourism opportunities in our state. As fewer Mississippians live close to the land, it is vitally important to our heritage that our urban and suburban citizens see first-hand the value of maintaining our wild and rural places, and the money spent is an important contribution to our state's overall economy.

5. Access to clean water for recreation and consumption has become an issue in adjacent Southern states. How can Mississippi assure that it has the quantity and quality of water it needs to meet future demands?

We have to fairly and consistently enforce current laws that protect our water quality, our water supplies, and our streams and lakes. The Department of Agriculture and Commerce has to work with other state and federal agencies, such as the state Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, along with many others, to keep our water resources free from harmful chemical

pollutants and to protect our waterways from becoming blocked by erosion. My job will be to apply the law fairly to everyone in order to balance the production needs of Mississippi's largest industry, agriculture, with our essential obligation to be good stewards of our God-given water resources. I will have zero tolerance for pollution or waste of our water supply, but I will enforce the law under my jurisdiction with common sense.

6. Every summer in the Gulf of Mexico an area becomes void of life due to severely depleted levels of oxygen in the Gulf's water, a state known as hypoxia. This condition kills every oxygen-dependent sea creature within its zone. The Dead Zone varies in size from year to year, but generally it has been growing since 1993. In 2005, researchers mapping the Dead Zone found that it covered 4,564 square miles, an area slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. In some years it has covered up to roughly 7,000 square miles. How can Mississippi take action to protect water quality in the Gulf?

We have to work with the federal government to reduce the causes of the Dead Zone. As I understand it, much of the blame for the Dead Zone is attributed to the presence of fertilizers in the runoff carried from agricultural operations throughout the Mississippi River Basin through tributaries, to the river to the Gulf. Our research universities and state agencies need to work on creative ways to reduce Mississippi's share of that runoff. Farmers must be able to fertilize their crops, but we can develop affordable means and methods of producing rich harvests without poisoning the Gulf. Mississippi ingenuity can find a way to fertilize the crops that keeps the fertilizer in the fields where the farmers want it, not in the water where no one wants it.

7. Mississippi is one of a few states without dedicated funding for its natural resources. Do you support/oppose creating a reliable source of funding to protect Mississippi's special places, water quality and wildlife?

I wholeheartedly support creating a reliable source of funding to protect and preserve our wildlife, water quality, natural spaces, and to enhance our rural economy and rural living--without raising taxes.

8. Mississippi's State Parks and Natural Areas preserve our natural and recreational heritage for present and future generations. Parks provide the opportunity for interpretation, education and outreach to our youth and are vitally important to the tourism and travel industry and provide a boost to the state's economy. Yet parks are always in dire need of additional revenue to maintain them at a level acceptable to park users. How can we fund and manage the parks to reach their potential?

We need to promote the use of our parks by businesses and non-profit groups for conferences, retreats, seminars etc. We could negotiate multi-year, package programs or recognition for corporations in return for corporate sponsorships. This has been done with public facilities in urban settings, and our more responsible corporate citizens would do the same for our state parks, if asked.

9. Because Mississippi has only a small percentage of land in public ownership that is dedicated to conservation, it is up to private landowners to be good stewards to millions of acres of forests, streams and habitat. How can the state encourage landowners to protect, restore and conserve natural resources on their own property?

1) Keep property taxes fair for property owners who agree to provide and protect habitat and natural resources.

2) Reward exemplary farmers, foresters and excavators who fully and honorably comply with state and federal conservation and environmental protection laws and regulations, by giving public recognition of their good stewardship, perhaps in the form of a state tax rebate.

3) Launch a public information campaign directed specifically at landowners who do not live on their land informing them of the financial opportunities for rural landowners who make their property available for hunting and/or nature tourism. Many have no idea of the value that such availability has gained in recent years.

Les Riley

No response

Lester Spell

1. Tell us about your outdoor recreation and conservation interests. What type of outdoor sports or activities do you enjoy? Have you been involved in any conservation or sportsmen's organizations or efforts?

- I am an avid sportsman and conservationist. I enjoy shooting sports activities, hunting and fishing with my family and friends.

- I belong to the Mississippi Wildlife Federation, Mississippi Forestry Association and the National Rifle Association.

- During the 1970's the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation was attempting to reestablish the wild turkey in the state through restocking efforts. I participated by providing my property as a release site.

- In 1981, I enrolled my land in the Mississippi Cooperative Deer Management Assistance Program to enhance and better manage the deer herd on my property. Sex, weight, antler measurements and other biological data are recorded from all deer harvested. This information is used by our biologist to make harvest recommendations. I utilized a professional forester and wildlife biologist for guidance in properly managing the natural resources on our property.

2. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) is charged with the management of all wildlife in Mississippi. However, funding for the Department has traditionally been provided almost exclusively by license fees and tax dollars from hunters and anglers. As the challenges facing MDWFP have grown, the costs of managing wildlife have risen to the point that hunter and angler contributions alone cannot keep up, barring large license fee increases that could price many sportsmen and women out of the market. At the same time, sportsmen value the political and budgetary independence of the MDWFP and Commission. What are your views regarding the need for alternative funding for the MDWFP, potential sources for this funding, and the level of legislative oversight that should accompany additional funding?

-As Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to offer advice to another state agency concerning its funding and operations.

3. Urban and suburban development (sprawl) is beginning to seriously impact our wildlife and fisheries habitat and resources in parts of the state. What are your thoughts regarding how Mississippi can better protect its open spaces for wildlife while at the same time provide for our increasing human population and growth?

-Urban sprawl is a problem that faces agricultural lands as well. The increased demand for commercial and residential development has caused land to be much more valuable for development than to remain in farmland or wildlife habitat. Most farm and wildlife lands in Mississippi are privately owned and therefore their fate resides with the landowner(s). Currently there are programs that attempt to preserve green spaces for farm and natural resources through incentive payments, tax breaks, etc. To be successful in preserving significant acres for wildlife and fisheries habitat the dollar value of preserving this land must be more competitive with its development value.

4. Nature tourism constitutes a major segment of the overall tourism market as revealed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Moreover, a survey completed in September 2000 by the Recreation Roundtable, a tourism survey group in Washington, D.C., found that 78 percent of the American public participates in outdoor recreational activities at least once a month. Do you have any ideas to promote nature tourism in Mississippi?

-My ideas would involve a strategy similar to that the Department of Agriculture and Commerce has to promote Agritourism in the state. Agritourism is a fast growing segment of agriculture in Mississippi. I established a website to keep the public informed on agricultural related events in our state. The purpose of this site is to provide information about all U-Pick Operations, Farmer's Markets,

Agricultural Meetings, and Festivals as well as a list of all farms that open their doors for onsite visits.

Today, the economic existence of the family farm is being threatened by the global agriculture economy. To offset the loss of traditional farm income, Mississippi farmers are looking for ways in diversifying their farming operations by taking advantage of the farms' uniqueness, and by developing entertainment attractions as additional sources of income. Expanding the farm to include agritourism can provide the means for keeping the farm financially sound. Agritourism is one alternative for improving the income and potential economic viability of small farms while benefiting visitors by offering a diversity of agriculture experiences. There is no reason why Nature tourism could not be a component in the effort.

5. Access to clean water for recreation and consumption has become an issue in adjacent Southern states. How can Mississippi assure that it has the quantity and quality of water it needs to meet future demands?

-Improvements in water quality are occurring. Prevention and remediation of water quality degradation can be effectively accomplished by the protection, enhancement or creation of riparian buffers, grassed waterways, wetlands or similar features to trap sediment and other pollutants. Adequate and sensitive programs exist to help land owners install such features. Ancillary benefits to the landowner from buffers and wetlands include wildlife and aesthetic appeal. It is important that landowners be made aware of water quality improvements, best management practices and available funding that can assist them in implementing some of these practices.

6. Every summer in the Gulf of Mexico an area becomes void of life due to severely depleted levels of oxygen in the Gulf's water, a state known as hypoxia. This condition kills every oxygen-dependent sea creature within its zone. The Dead Zone varies in size from year to year, but generally it has been growing since 1993. In 2005, researchers mapping the Dead Zone found that it covered 4,564 square miles, an area slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. In some years it has covered up to roughly 7,000 square miles. How can Mississippi take action to protect water quality in the Gulf?

-Due to the concern over the hypoxic zone the United States Environmental Protection Agency formed the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force during the fall of 1997. Members of my staff have participated in this task force since 2000. Nutrient over-enrichment from the river basins and stratification in coastal waters are believed to be factors contributing to Gulf hypoxia. As sound science gives us more definitive information on the causes of these conditions, we would be supportive of bringing together in a cooperative environment the stakeholders who would be involved to insure that the objectives of each could continue to be addressed.

7. Mississippi is one of a few states without dedicated funding for its natural resources. Do you support/oppose creating a reliable source of funding to protect Mississippi's special, places, water quality and wildlife?

-I would want to know the method of securing funding and how the use of these funds would be prioritized.

8. Mississippi's State Parks and Natural Areas preserve our natural and recreational heritage for present and future generations. Parks provide the opportunity for interpretation, education and outreach to our youth and are vitally important to the tourism and travel industry and provide a boost to the state's economy. Yet parks are always in dire need of additional revenue to maintain them at a level acceptable to park users. How can we fund and manage the parks to reach their potential?

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-It is generally known that natural resources, especially timber, fish and wildlife are valuable to the landowner. However many landowners are not aware of the many incentive programs that will assist them in better managing their natural resources as well as free technical guidance available from governmental professionals. Making landowners knowledgeable about federal, state and private assistance for natural resource conservation and management would be extremely helpful.