

**ATTITUDES ABOUT HERITAGE TOURISM  
IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA**

**A Policy Report from  
the 2005 Delta Rural Poll**

Alan W. Barton, Ph.D.

**DELTA RURAL POLL**

The logo for the Delta Rural Poll features the words "DELTA RURAL POLL" in a bold, black, distressed, stencil-like font. The text is centered and sits on a thin horizontal line. Below the line is a large, solid black triangle pointing downwards, which tapers to a point at the bottom.

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The Delta Rural Poll is administered by the faculty associates at the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) at Delta State University (DSU), with assistance from the DSU Division of Social Sciences. The 2005 survey was conducted by the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University under the supervision of Dr. Wolfgang Frese. The CCED faculty associates acknowledge and thank the Mid-South Delta Consortium for providing funding for the Delta Rural Poll.

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## The Mississippi Delta



## **Executive Summary**

### **ATTITUDES ABOUT HERITAGE TOURISM IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA: A Policy Report from the 2005 Delta Rural Poll**

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Heritage tourism, especially when institutionalized in a heritage area, can contribute to community and economic development in rural areas such as the Mississippi Delta. Using data from the 2005 Delta Rural Poll, a survey of over 1,000 randomly selected residents of 11 Mississippi Delta counties, this report examines perceptions and attitudes about heritage conservation and tourism.

A majority of Delta residents believe that local youth do not understand the region's cultural traditions and natural history. Yet, over 9 in 10 Deltans believe it is important for young people to know about local heritage. Greater emphasis on heritage tourism and establishment of a heritage area in the Delta could address this discrepancy, as the primary mission of a heritage area is to provide opportunities for locals and outsiders to experience and learn about local traditions.

Heritage tourism is more effective with the support of local residents. Delta Rural Poll results show that Deltans strongly support tourism to a variety of heritage sites in or near their communities. Differences in degree of support exist by age and educational level, and there are some differences as well by gender, race and income. Overall, however, Deltans strongly support tourists visiting blues clubs, festivals and museums in their communities, although there is little support for tourism to local juke joints. Deltans also support tourism to a home or museum dedicated to a local author or literary figure, and to historic sites such as civil rights sites and museums, historic churches and historic cemeteries. Only about half of local residents support tourists visiting the Delta to hunt at private clubs, but a large majority approve of tourism to local state and national parks and wildlife refuges, to agricultural sites, and to museums or sites interpreting the history of the Mississippi River.

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**Introduction**

Many rural areas across the country are looking closely at tourism as an engine of economic growth (Krannich and Petrzelka 2003; English, Marcouiller and Cordell 2000; Butler, Hall and Jenkins 1998; Hill 1993). While tourism is not a panacea, rural communities with amenities to attract outsiders, appropriate infrastructure and a good marketing strategy can reap many benefits by promoting tourism. In addition, it is important to have the support of local residents. An influx of tourists can disrupt residents' lives in many ways, and if a substantial portion of the local population is not ready to welcome visitors to their communities, it is unlikely that the region will have long-term success in the tourism business.

In some regions, tourism has been promoted in response to structural changes, such as the declining importance of family farms and deindustrialization; however, tourism can also offer opportunities for economic development in areas of perpetual poverty, such as the Appalachian region and the Mississippi Delta. For example, Tunica County, in the northern Delta region of the state of Mississippi, has experienced substantial economic growth through tourism fueled by the gaming industry (Eadington 1999). Can tourism provide similar economic benefits to other parts of the Delta? Moreover, can tourism contribute to social and community development as well?

It is unlikely that other parts of the Delta can replicate Tunica's success with casinos. The casinos in Washington County, for example, have not attracted nearly the outside tourism that Tunica's have. The Delta does have a highly marketable commodity, however, that could attract tourists from other parts of the United States and overseas, if developed and marketed properly. This is the region's unusually rich cultural and natural history.

Using a region's heritage to attract tourists has been successful in other parts of the United States and in other countries, and currently is being developed in northeastern and southern Mississippi.<sup>1</sup> Heritage tourism offers additional benefits, however, such as increased local awareness of and pride in a region's history and traditions (Shackel 2005). In areas such as the Mississippi Delta, which are experiencing sustained out-migration, building local pride can serve to slow the loss of human capital. A regional development strategy that includes a heritage tourism component should target both attracting tourists and building local awareness of the region's history, culture and nature.

The National Park Service offers assistance to regions looking to develop heritage tourism through its National Heritage Areas program (USNPS 2005). National heritage areas are designated by Congress, and offer funding and technical assistance through partnerships with a local coordinating agency and service providers. Areas with nationally significant heritage resources and broad-based local support are eligible for national heritage area designation. Given its importance in music and the arts, the Civil Rights movement, the Civil War, and nature and the environment, the Mississippi Delta is an excellent candidate for national heritage area status.

Heritage tourism is unlikely to succeed unless Deltans are willing to accept visitors to their communities. The 2005 Delta Rural Poll surveyed a random sample of residents in eleven northwestern Mississippi counties about their perceptions and attitudes towards heritage tourism in their communities. The perceptions of respondents towards heritage were measured by asking whether they thought children in their community understood local heritage. A follow up question probed respondents' attitudes by asking whether they thought it was important for children to understand about cultural and natural heritage. Then, people's attitudes about heritage tourism were assessed by asking whether they supported or opposed tourists visiting a variety of cultural, historic and natural sites in their communities. Here is what they had to say.

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<sup>1</sup> In December, 2004, a portion of Mississippi's Gulf Coast was designated as a national heritage area, although Hurricane Katrina inflicted heavy damage to most of this region in August, 2005. A group in Oxford, MS, is developing a heritage area for the Mississippi Hills region in the northeastern part of the state. Like the heritage area in the Mississippi Delta, the Mississippi Hills heritage area is under consideration for National Heritage Area status.



## **Who Responded to the Delta Rural Poll?**

The analysis of attitudes about heritage tourism presented here comes from data collected in the 2005 Delta Rural Poll, conducted in January and February, 2005. The survey was administered by telephone to a sample of 1,009 randomly selected residents of eleven counties in the Delta region of Mississippi.<sup>2</sup> Respondents were all over 18 years of age, 71% of respondents were female, 61% were black, and 60% worked full- or part-time during 2002.<sup>3</sup> Half of the respondents had a high school diploma or less, while one quarter had a college degree or higher, and the remainder had some college. Nearly two-thirds earned less than \$30,000 total household income in 2002, 15% had a household income above \$60,000, and 21.5% had a household income between \$30,000 and \$60,000.

One-quarter of the respondents lived in the North Delta (Tunica, Coahoma, Quitman and Tallahatchie counties), two-thirds lived in the Mid-Delta region (Bolivar, Sunflower, Leflore and Washington counties), and only 7.5% lived in the South Delta (Humphreys, Sharkey and Issaquena counties). Thirty-eight percent lived in larger towns (more than 10,000 residents), 28% lived in small villages (less than 1,000 residents), and 34% lived in towns with between 1,000 and 10,000 residents. Two-thirds lived within city limits, 11% lived outside a city on a farm, and 21.5% lived outside a city, not on a farm. Sixty percent had lived in the same community for more than twenty years, while 12.6% lived in their current community less than five years. See Barton (2005) for a more thorough analysis of the sample.

## **What is Heritage Tourism?**

Heritage tourism is a broad term that incorporates an approach to tourism that contrasts with the typical tourist experience. Like all tourists, heritage tourists seek specific experiences, and like many tourists, these experiences may involve visits to museums, parks, historical sites, and other points of interest. What distinguishes heritage tourists is that the activities they seek share a

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<sup>2</sup> The eleven counties selected for this survey are those that wholly lie within the Yazoo-Mississippi floodplain, the natural feature that forms the Delta region of Mississippi. These counties best represent the area's unique social, economic and cultural characteristics.

<sup>3</sup> It is common for females and whites to be overrepresented in a sample of this nature. To account for this, we applied a weighting procedure, which aligns sample characteristics with data from the 2000 U.S. Census, for analytical purposes. The data reported in this paragraph are unweighted; however, the weighting procedure is used for all subsequent analysis. See Barton (2004) for a description of the weighting procedure.

focus on what makes a particular place unique. Thus, they may choose to visit a local specialty museum rather than a world famous art gallery, and are more likely than standard tourists to go off the beaten path for unique experiences. Like other tourists, heritage tourists need to eat and sleep while away from home. What distinguishes heritage tourists is that they seek to experience what is authentic about a place, and thus tend to choose locally owned bed and breakfasts over chain motels, and eateries that prepare local dishes over national chain restaurants. Like other tourists, heritage tourists need information about the area they are visiting. Heritage tourists are less likely to seek information in standardized formats, however, so they probably avoid travel agencies and packaged tours, in favor of seeking out information on their own and through local contacts.

Because heritage tourists have a nose for the authentic and an aversion to commercialized mass-packaging, there is an inherent tension in the process of marketing heritage tourism. How can you mass market a unique experience? It is important for planners and service providers to recognize this inherent tension, and to approach heritage tourists as one who will facilitate their experience, rather than one who provides the experience. Using this approach, however, places greater responsibility on local residents in the overall tourism enterprise. Service providers extend information, and heritage tourists take the responsibility for creating their own unique experience, in conjunction with local residents. Because heritage tourists are fundamentally interested in local culture, local residents play a key role in ensuring that heritage tourists have a positive experience. In order for heritage tourism to be acceptable, it is important to understand up front that the local population is on board with the prospect of tourists visiting their communities, and that they are willing to share their heritage and culture with visitors. Local residents must also demonstrate a commitment to maintaining their own heritage, and an interest in keeping their traditions alive.

### ***The Value of Heritage Tourism***

Heritage tourism benefits local communities in a variety of ways. A community garners economic benefits by attracting tourist dollars from outside the community. The community benefits educationally, as technical experts come to assist in telling their story. And the community benefits culturally, as locals learn about their own traditions and the value of their

own culture, boosting local self-esteem and pride. These intangible elements of community development are often overlooked in economic cost-benefit equations, but bring many benefits to a community, including reducing incentives for individuals to leave the area in search of a job and better prospects elsewhere.

Heritage tourism is aimed at a particular type of visitor, one who is interested in the amenities that characterize a community or region, including its history, culture, and natural environment. Heritage tourists are generally interested in what is unique and different about a particular locale, and are more likely to patronize and support locally owned restaurants, lodging, museums, historic sites, and similar businesses and attractions. Compared to other types of tourists, heritage tourists are more likely to spend money in local enterprises, spend more money, and stay longer in a locale.

### *Heritage Areas*

Heritage tourists are generally interested in immersing themselves into the local cultural and natural environment. They find enjoyment visiting individual sites that tell stories about a locale, but their interest in this story is enhanced when they can visit multiple sites and grasp a multifaceted story that interprets not just one small piece of a culture, but that connects various aspects of the culture into a complex tapestry. Tourism planners have built on this preference by developing heritage areas, which are large areas that offer a multitude of interlaced heritage tourism opportunities. Organizing various sites into a centralized unit allows the broader story to be told, connecting the individual stories of each site. Tourists visit to learn about a landscape, incorporating the region's history, culture, and nature.

Heritage areas provide a variety of tools that tourists can use to learn about a region's heritage. These are oriented towards providing information to tourists. Maps, brochures, guide books, audio tours, and visitor centers all extend the various stories connected to the region's heritage to visitors. These resources also provide information on local restaurants, inns and bed and breakfasts, and shops that offer heritage-related merchandise. Together, these provide tourists with opportunities to experience the local culture in a variety of ways.

Heritage areas also provide opportunities to finance both local and regional tourism promotion efforts, through collective grants and by centralizing public relations efforts, gaining advantages of scale. Managing a heritage area requires an administrative and a financial infrastructure. Annual budgets can easily run over one million dollars. A regionally organized entity is more likely to attract funding, and can manage finance more efficiently than multiple individual sites.

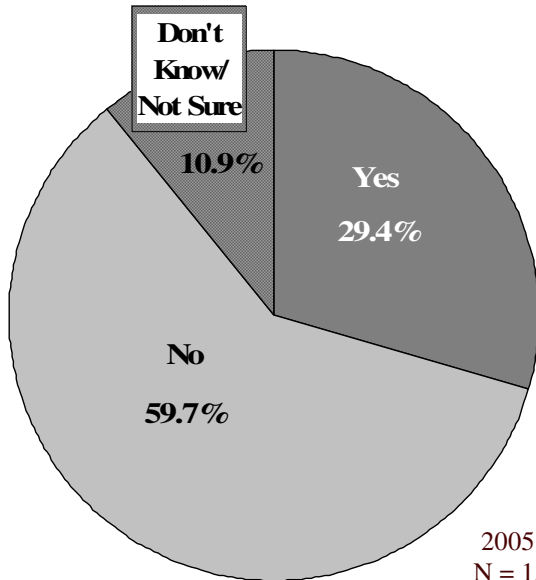
Finally, heritage areas organize learning opportunities for heritage managers and local residents involved in marketing heritage tourism, as they can attract tourism planners, heritage experts, and others to mentor and instruct people on technical matters pertaining to management of the area. They can also organize events and seminars that teach local residents about their own heritage, building local pride and incorporating more people into the heritage conservation effort. All of these contribute to regional economic and community development.

### ***Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area***

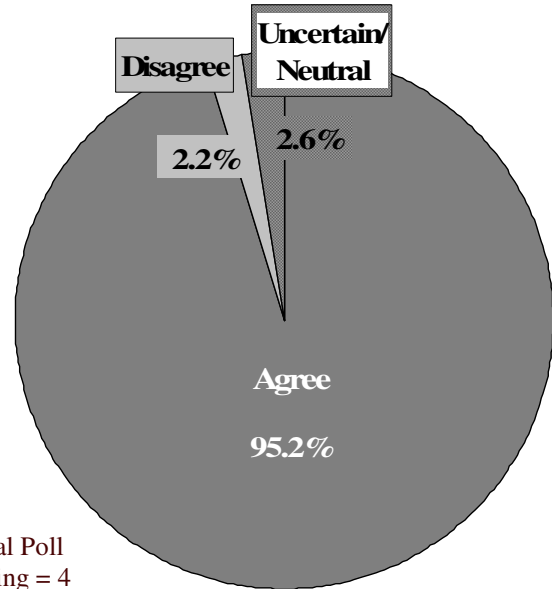
There have been discussions about forming a heritage area in the Mississippi Delta region for over a decade. The National Park Service has showed substantial and sustained interest in a national heritage area in this region, as many of the Delta's stories are nationally significant. Various groups have worked to promote a greater awareness of the region's tremendous heritage and to increase heritage tourism in the region, but to date none of these efforts have been organized systematically at the regional level. A heritage area, particularly one with national heritage area status, would bring many benefits to the area, and could serve as one engine of economic growth.

In order to establish the basis for a heritage area in the region, it is important to assess the degree of public support for heritage tourism in their area. Clearly, a public that is ambivalent about or opposed to outsiders visiting their communities and learning about their lives would not be conducive to success. Strong and broad-based public support is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for a successful heritage area. Results from the Delta Rural Poll suggest that such support exists in the Mississippi Delta region.

**Do you believe children in your community understand the local cultural traditions or history?**



**It is important for the children in my community to understand the local culture and traditions**



Source:  
2005 Delta Rural Poll  
N = 1,000, Missing = 4

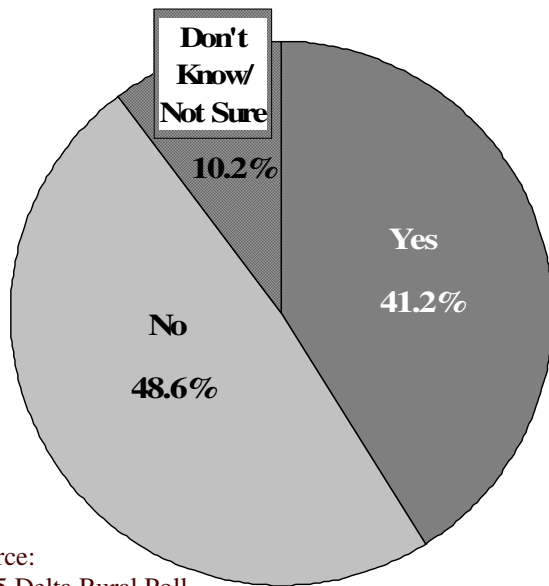
**Figure 1: Perceptions and Attitudes of Local Understanding of Cultural History in 11 Mississippi Delta Counties**

### **Perceptions and Attitudes About Local Heritage**

The perceptions and attitudes of respondents to the 2005 Delta Rural Poll regarding local cultural heritage suggests there is a disjuncture between what people would like and what currently exists. Respondents were asked whether they believed the children in their community knew about the local cultural traditions, and whether they thought it was important for children to know about these traditions. Results are summarized in Figure 1.

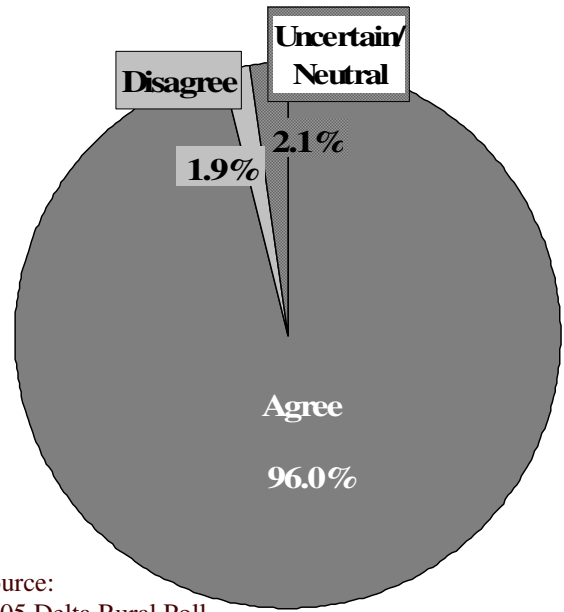
Less than 30% of all respondents say that they believe the children in their community understand local cultural traditions, and 60% say they think children do not understand local cultural heritage. Yet, 95% of all respondents say they believe it is important for the young people in their communities to learn about and understand local cultural history. While the vast majority of Deltans want to pass along cultural traditions to the next generation, this desire is not being realized in the eyes of most respondents.

**Do you believe children in your community understand about nature in your area?**



Source:  
2005 Delta Rural Poll  
N = 1,000, Missing = 4

**It is important for the children in my community to understand about nature in my area**



Source:  
2005 Delta Rural Poll  
N = 998, Missing = 6

**Figure 2: Perceptions and Attitudes of Local Understanding of Natural History in 11 Mississippi Delta Counties**

When asked their perceptions regarding the area’s natural history, respondents provided similar answers, as shown in Figure 2. Nearly half say they do not think children understand about nature, while slightly more than forty percent say children do know about nature. Yet 96% agreed that it is important for kids in their community to know about nature, and less than 2% disagreed with this sentiment. As with cultural history, the vast majority of Deltans believe children should understand local natural history, yet close to half believe this is not the case.

These results suggest that local people perceive a substantial need for education on local cultural and natural heritage. These perceptions provide strong justification for the formation of a heritage area, as one of the purposes of a heritage area is to increase local knowledge of their own traditions. A heritage area could serve as a venue through which local people, including young people, come to learn more about the history of the blues, the Mississippi River, the area’s wildlife, local civil rights leaders, the Civil War, and other important natural amenities and cultural events that have formed and shaped the Mississippi Delta.

### *Perceptions and Attitudes by Respondent Characteristics*

Table 1 breaks down respondent perceptions by age, race, gender, educational attainment, income and size of place of residence. Results show that across all categories, a minority of respondents believe that children in their communities understand the area's natural and cultural heritage, but over 90% of respondents in all categories believe it is important for local youth to know about the Delta's natural history and cultural traditions.

Although respondents show substantial agreement, there are some differences in the attitudes and perceptions expressed by some respondents. Across the board, the most significant differences exist between respondents of different ages. Differences were also observed between respondents of different races, levels of education, and that lived in different sized communities. There are no significant differences between males and females, nor between respondents with different incomes, in their perceptions and attitudes regarding the knowledge of natural and cultural heritage among their community's youth.

In general, the belief that children understand local cultural traditions increased with age. About 27% of respondents between ages 18 and 34 (hereafter, younger respondents) believe children in their communities understand local cultural traditions. These are the ones most likely to be parents of young children. This increases to 28% of those between ages 35 and 54 (hereafter, middle-aged respondents), and 33% of those over age 55 (hereafter, older respondents). The difference between age categories is highly statistically significant.<sup>4</sup> Similar percentages hold for race: 27% of black respondents and 33% of white respondents indicate they think children understand local cultural traditions. This difference is also highly statistically significant. And one-quarter of those who have attended some college, including those with bachelors, graduate and professional degrees (hereafter, some college), but one-third of those with no college, including those with a high school diploma or less (hereafter, high school), say they believe children understand cultural traditions, a highly significant difference. Twenty-seven percent of

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<sup>4</sup> A test for significance tests the probability that an observed difference between variables is due to random chance, as opposed to a true correlation. By convention, a result is considered statistically significant if the probability that a difference is due to random chance is below 0.05; a result is highly significant if the probability is below 0.01. Tables 1 and 2 also report significance at the 0.10 level (Freedman, Pisani, Purves and Adhikari 1991).

**Table 1: Perceptions and Attitudes of Respondents Regarding Cultural and Natural History (Percent)**

Respondent Characteristics	Response Category	Cultural History		Natural History	
		Children in Community Understand the Delta's Cultural Traditions	Important for Children to Understand the Delta's Cultural Traditions	Children in Community Understand the Delta's Natural History	Important for Children to Understand the Delta's Natural History
	All Respondents	29.4	95.2	41.2	96.0
Age	18 – 34	26.8	97.7	43.2	99.1
	35 – 54	27.7	94.1	35.6	96.5
	55 and Older	33.2	94.5	46.6	93.7
	Significance	***		***	**
Gender	Male	29.3	96.1	38.6	95.9
	Female	29.7	94.3	43.2	96.1
	Significance				
Race	White	33.3	93.9	42.2	96.4
	Black	26.9	96.2	40.3	95.8
	Significance	***	**	*	
Educational Attainment	H.S. Diploma or Less	33.4	94.7	46.8	94.9
	Some College	25.4	95.5	35.7	96.9
	Significance	***		***	
Income	Less Than \$30,000	27.9	96.0	42.1	96.2
	\$30,000 to \$60,000	26.5	96.2	35.8	98.1
	More Than \$60,000	23.6	97.2	32.1	97.2
	Significance				
Population of Nearest Community	Rural (< 10,000)	34.7	95.9	47.4	94.9
	Micropolitan (≥ 10,000)	27.0	94.7	38.2	96.9
	Significance	**		***	

Significance: \* =  $p \leq 0.10$     \*\* =  $p \leq 0.05$     \*\*\* =  $p \leq 0.01$

Source: 2005 Delta Rural Poll



those who live in or near communities with 10,000 or more residents (hereafter, micropolitan<sup>5</sup>), and 35% those living in communities of less than 10,000 residents (hereafter, rural) say they believe the children in their communities understand local cultural traditions, a statistically significant difference.

Over 90% of respondents in all groups and categories say it is important for children to understand local cultural traditions. Responses are remarkably similar across age, gender, education, income and population categories. Only race shows a statistically significant difference, with 96% of black respondents and 94% of white respondents indicating that children should understand local cultural traditions. While this difference is significant in a statistical sense, it is slight in a practical sense.

Perceptions of the extent to which local youth understand natural heritage vary by the respondents' age, race, education and size of community as well. Younger and older respondents agree that children in their communities know about local natural history at a higher rate than middle-aged respondents. In all cases, less than half express agreement, however: 43% of younger respondents, and 47% of older respondents think children know local natural heritage, and only 36% of middle-aged respondents agree that children understand the Delta's natural characteristics. This difference is highly statistically significant. Perceptions of knowledge about nature by local youths vary by educational attainment, by race and by the population of the respondent's place of residence as well. Among high school respondents, 47% say children understand nature, while only 36% of college respondents agree that young people understand natural history. Likewise, 47% of rural residents believe local youth understand nature, compared to 38% of micropolitan residents. While the difference by race appears slight – 42% of white respondents and 41% of black respondents say they think local children understand nature – this difference is statistically significant. By contrast, the difference by gender appears greater – 43% of females and 39% of males say local youth understand natural history, yet this difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, there appears to be a difference by income, with 42% of those earning less than \$30,000 annually (hereafter, lower income), 36% of those

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<sup>5</sup> Micropolitan is a term recently initiated by the United States Office of Management and Budget to describe urbanized areas that have a core population between 10,000 and 49,999. There are no urban (metropolitan) areas in the study region (those areas with a core population of 50,000 or more), but there are five micropolitan areas: Greenville, Greenwood, Indianola, Cleveland and Clarksdale.

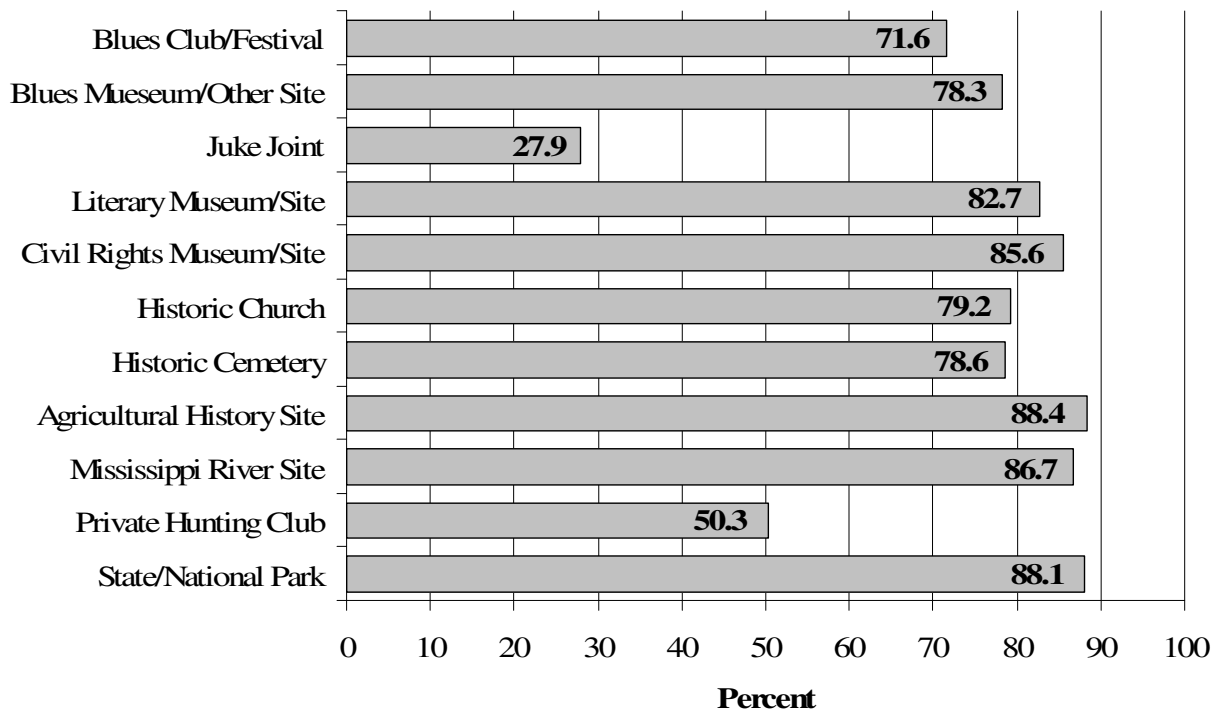
earning \$30,000 to \$60,000 per year (hereafter, middle income), and 32% of respondents who earned more than \$60,000 per year (hereafter, high income) saying young people know about local natural history, but again, this difference is not statistically significant.

There is widespread agreement across all groups that it is important for children to understand local natural history. Among all groups, at least 94% of respondents agree that children should learn about nature. Virtually all (99%) of younger respondents believe that children should understand nature, and the difference between the older and younger respondents is statistically significant. In practical terms, however, agreement that children should understand nature is so overwhelming that a statistically significant difference is not really meaningful.

### **Attitudes About Various Heritage Tourism Activities**

To assess the degree of support for heritage tourism in Delta communities, respondents were given a variety of natural, cultural and historical sites, and asked whether they would support having tourists visit such a site in their community. Respondents were given the option of expressing strong support, support, opposition, strong opposition, or uncertainty. The percentage of all respondents indicating support or strong support for various forms of heritage tourism is shown in Figure 3. In general, respondents show substantial support for most forms of heritage tourism.

Four types of sites were used to assess support for culturally oriented heritage tourism. Three of these were tied to blues music, as the Delta is generally considered the location where the blues were born. Respondents were asked if they would support outsiders coming to their town to visit a blues club or blues festival, a blues museum or other blues related site, and a juke joint, a local term indicating a particular type of blues club. Over 70% say they would support tourists visiting a blues club or blues festival in their community, and 78% indicate they would support tourists visiting a blues museum or other blues related site in their community. However, only 28% of respondents support juke joint tourism in their communities. Apparently, the term juke joint conjures images in many respondents' heads of a particular type of establishment, with features that they do not associate with other blues clubs. Some blues aficionados no doubt will wish to visit an authentic juke joint. In fact, a recent syndicated article which appeared in travel



**Figure 3: Support for Tourists Visiting Various Heritage Sites in Respondents' Community**

sections of various newspapers chronicled a search for an authentic juke joint in the Mississippi Delta (Downs 2005). The desires of tourists should be balanced against the wishes of local residents, however. It appears that many Delta residents do not want juke joints in their communities, even if juke joints do attract tourists.

A fourth question asked about a different type of cultural site, representing the Delta's rich literary history. Respondents were queried if they would support tourism at a home or museum tied to an important local author or literary figure. Over four in five say they would support tourists visiting a site tied to a Delta literary figure.

Respondents express strong support for tourists visiting various historic sites in their communities. Support for tourism at historic sites was measured using three types of sites: civil rights museums or sites, historic churches and historic cemeteries. Many Delta communities were involved in the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s, and the Delta produced several national civil rights leaders. And many Deltans are clearly proud of these achievements,

as 86% support tourism to civil rights sites. Religion also plays an important role in Delta communities and in the lives of many residents, and 79% say they support tourism to historic churches and historic graveyards in their communities. In some areas, local residents do not like to promote tourism to sites with religious significance, such as churches and cemeteries, yet this was clearly not the case in the Delta as the level of support for tourism at these sites was high.

Four types of sites were used to assess support for tourism to natural heritage areas: a museum or site that exhibited the region's agricultural heritage; a museum or site dedicated to interpreting the Mississippi River; a state or national park, forest or wildlife refuge; and a private hunting club. Over 88% of respondents say they would support visitation to an agricultural museum or site. Likewise, over 88% express support for tourists visiting a state or national park, or similar protected area, near their community. And over 86% say they support tourism to sites about the Mississippi River. Only half of the respondents, however, indicate support for tourism to private hunting clubs in their communities.

### *Attitudes by Respondent Characteristics*

Table 2 summarizes attitudes about heritage tourism by various groups in the Delta. While all respondents show a high level of support for heritage tourism to most sites, there are substantial differences in degree of support between younger and older Deltans, and between those with some college and those that never attended college. Respondents of different races and income categories also differ in their opinions regarding tourism to most types of sites. Males and females, and people from smaller and larger communities show a greater degree of agreement in their support for tourism to most types of sites.

Younger respondents express higher rates of support for most heritage tourism activities in their communities, while the older respondents show the lowest levels of support. This difference is particularly strong for cultural tourism, and especially for blues-related sites. For example, 83% of younger respondents express support for tourism to blues clubs and festivals, compared to 74% of middle-aged respondents, and only 63% of older respondents. A similar difference is evident for blues museums and other blues sites; 88% of younger respondents express support,

**Table 2: Percent of Respondents Who Support Tourists Visiting Various Heritage Sites In or Near Their Community**

Respondent Characteristics	Response Category	Blues Club or Festival	Blues Museum or Other Site	Juke Joint	Literary Museum /Site	Civil Rights Museum/Site	Historic Church	Historic Cemetery	Agricultural History Site	Mississippi River Site	Private Hunting Club	State/National Park
	All Respondents	71.6%	78.3%	27.9%	82.7%	85.6%	79.2%	78.6%	88.4%	86.7%	50.3%	88.1%
Age	18 – 34	83.1%	88.3%	39.8%	87.9%	93.5%	82.6%	85.4%	91.6%	87.7%	55.9%	90.1%
	35 – 54	73.7%	82.2%	29.3%	83.0%	88.3%	81.2%	76.9%	87.8%	88.3%	45.4%	90.6%
	55 and Older	63.3%	68.2%	20.3%	80.0%	78.8%	75.6%	77.0%	87.4%	84.9%	54.0%	84.8%
	Significance	***	***	***	***	***	**	***	***	***	***	***
Gender	Male	76.7%	81.3%	37.2%	83.3%	86.8%	78.7%	79.8%	88.5%	87.0%	52.8%	89.1%
	Female	67.4%	75.5%	19.8%	82.2%	84.7%	79.6%	77.4%	88.3%	86.5%	48.6%	87.2%
	Significance	***	*	***								
Race	White	76.9%	80.3%	30.0%	85.0%	76.9%	79.4%	83.9%	91.1%	91.4%	65.8%	90.0%
	Black	68.6%	77.1%	25.7%	81.7%	90.8%	79.1%	75.5%	86.9%	83.8%	41.1%	87.1%
	Significance	***		**		***	*	***	**	***	***	
Educational Attainment	H.S. Diploma or Less	65.8%	71.8%	23.8%	78.1%	82.3%	73.6%	75.0%	85.7%	83.4%	45.0%	85.7%
	Some College	77.6%	84.7%	31.9%	87.2%	89.3%	84.7%	82.7%	91.3%	90.1%	56.1%	90.9%
	Significance	***	***	***	***	***	***	**	***	***	***	***
Income	Less Than \$30,000	68.4	75.1	26.6	80.4	86.9	78.1	77.1	86.9	85.5	48.1	86.9
	\$30,000 to \$60,000	70.6	85.4	26.2	88.2	85.8	84.0	78.7	93.4	91.5	50.0	92.5
	More Than \$60,000	85.8	88.8	42.5	88.7	84.9	89.6	87.7	91.5	89.7	72.4	96.2
	Significance	***	***	***	*		***		*		***	**
Population of Nearest Community	Rural (< 10,000)	73.6%	81.3%	25.3%	86.7%	86.7%	81.6%	84.2%	90.3%	89.8%	53.4%	91.7%
	Micropolitan (≥ 10,000)	73.8%	81.0%	30.1%	86.0%	87.3%	81.4%	80.3%	90.5%	90.3%	54.6%	91.4%
	Significance		*								*	

Significance: \* =  $p \leq 0.10$     \*\* =  $p \leq 0.05$     \*\*\* =  $p \leq 0.01$

Source: 2005 Delta Rural Poll

compared to 82% of middle-aged respondents and 68% of older respondents. While the majority of respondents do not support tourism to juke joints, older respondents are the most likely to oppose tourists coming to the Delta to visit a juke joint. Forty percent of younger respondents back tourism to local juke joints, compared to 30% of middle-aged respondents and 20% of older respondents. All of these differences are highly statistically significant. There is also a significant difference in approval for tourism to literary sites, with 88% of respondents in the youngest age category, 83% of respondents in the middle age category, and 80% of respondents in the oldest age category indicating support.

Younger Deltans also express significantly higher levels of support for tourism to historic sites. Over 93% of younger respondents back tourism to civil rights sites, compared to 88% of middle-aged respondents, and under 80% of older respondents. Younger residents also show greater support for visitation to historic churches and cemeteries than the oldest age group. Roughly 82% of younger and middle-aged respondents approve of tourism to historic churches, compared to 76% of older respondents. And over 85% of younger respondents show support for visitation to historic cemeteries, compared to 77% of middle-aged and older respondents.

Younger and older Deltans differ in degree of support for visitation to natural sites as well. Among younger Deltans, over 91% support visitation to agricultural sites, and 88% of middle-aged and older respondents back tourism to agricultural sites. Sites interpreting the history of the Mississippi River garner support from 88% of younger and middle aged respondents, and 85% of older respondents. And 90% of younger respondents, 91% of middle-aged respondents and 85% of older respondents support tourism to national and state parks. Only 56% of younger respondents approve of tourism to private hunting clubs, compared to 45% of middle-aged respondents and 54% of older respondents. All differences are highly statistically significant.

Delta residents who have attended some college express a significantly higher degree of support for tourism to all sites than those with a high school diploma or less. Across the board, higher education correlates with more support for heritage tourism. For example, 78% of college respondents support tourism to blues clubs or festivals, compared to 66% of high school respondents. Likewise, 85% of those with college back tourism to blues museums or other sites, compared to 72% of those with no college, and 32% of those with college support juke joint

tourism, compared to just 24% of high school respondents. Not surprisingly, a higher percentage of those who have attended some college (87%) express support for tourism to a home or museum celebrating a literary figure than those with no college (78%).

Deltans with some college also express approval for tourism to historic sites at significantly higher rates than those with a high school education, although the vast majority of respondents in both groups indicate support for historic tourism. Eighty-nine percent of college respondents support tourism to civil rights sites, compared to 82% of high school respondents. Likewise, 85% of those who had attended college say they would support tourism to a historic church, while 74% of those with a high school education or less indicate similar support. And 83% of college respondents, but only 75% of high school respondents, support tourists visiting a local historic cemetery.

College educated Delta residents also express greater support for tourism to natural sites than those with a high school education or less. Ninety percent of college respondents back tourism to museums and sites about the Mississippi River, compared to 83% of high school respondents. Ninety-one percent of college respondents back tourism to agricultural history sites, and the same percentage support tourists visiting a local protected area; while 86% of high school respondents support visitation to agricultural sites and to state and national parks. Only 56% of college respondents support tourism to private hunting clubs, compared to 45% of high school respondents.

While there are significant differences in degree of support for tourism to all types of sites between Deltans of different ages and educational levels, the differences in support by gender, race, and income categories vary. There are significant differences in support for tourism to some types of heritage sites, but agreement in level of support for other sites between males and females, between white and black Deltans, and between residents with different annual incomes. Some interesting patterns and paradoxes emerge from the differences.

Males and females express similar levels of support for tourism to historic and natural sites, and to literary museums. In all cases, over 75% of both men and women approve of tourism to these sites, with the exception of hunting clubs. Men show support for hunting clubs at a slightly

higher rate (53%) than females (49%), but this difference is not statistically significant. Men and women differ significantly in their support for tourism to blues sites, however. Men show greater support for blues tourism: 77% of males and 67% of females back tourism to blues clubs and festivals; 81% of males and 76% of females show support for tourism to blues museums or other sites; and 37% of males but only 20% of females support tourism to juke joints.

Some interesting differences emerge in support for heritage tourism by race. For one thing, white respondents support tourists visiting blues-related sites at higher rates than African Americans. These differences are interesting, since blues sites highlight an important aspect of African American heritage in the Delta. There is a particularly strong difference in support for tourism to blues clubs and festivals, where 77% of white respondents indicate support, while only 69% of black respondents show support, a highly significant difference. Both groups express strong support for visitation to blues museums and other sites, although again a slightly higher percentage of white respondents (80%) indicate support than black respondents (77.1%). Neither group shows strong support for juke joint tourism, but a significantly higher percentage of white respondents (30%) express support, compared to 26% of African Americans.

The one type of site that garners greater support from African Americans than whites is civil rights sites. Over 90% of African Americans favor sharing this aspect of Delta heritage with tourists, while 77% of whites support civil rights tourism in their communities. This difference is highly statistically significant. The difference in support for tourism to historic cemeteries is also highly significant. Eighty-four percent of white respondents, but only 76% of black respondents, support opening local cemeteries to tourists. As for historic churches, 79% of both white and black Deltans express support, but there was enough difference that the result is marginally significant.

There is a marked, and highly significant, difference in support for tourism to private hunting clubs between blacks and whites. Nearly two thirds of white respondents express support for hunting clubs, while only two fifths of black respondents show such support. There is also a highly significant difference in support for tourism to a Mississippi River site, backed by 91% of white respondents but only 84% of black respondents. Ninety-one percent of respondents support tourism to an agricultural site, compared to 87% of black respondents, a statistically



significant difference. Support for tourism to protected areas does not show a statistical difference, but 90% of white respondents and 87% of black respondents favor tourists visiting local parks and reserves.

There are differences in level of support for heritage tourism activities by income, and Deltans with high incomes show the greatest level of support for tourism to almost all types of sites. High income respondents back tourism to blues clubs and festivals at a substantially higher rate (86%) than middle income (71%) or low income (68%) Deltans. The same is true in support for tourism to blues museums and other sites: 89% of high income respondents express support, compared to 85% of middle income respondents and 75% of low income respondents. And 43% of respondents in the highest income category support tourism to juke joints, a much higher percentage than middle income (26%) or low income (27%) respondents. All differences in support for blues tourism by income category are highly statistically significant. There is also a marginally significant difference in support for tourism to literary sites, backed by 89% of high income respondents, 88% from the middle income group, and 80% of those in the low income category.

Support for tourism to civil rights sites is almost identical across income categories, with support decreasing slightly as income increases. In the high income group, 85% support civil rights tourism, compared to 86% in the middle income group and 87% in the low income group. The difference is not statistically significant. Likewise, the difference in support for tourism to historic cemeteries is not statistically significant, although high income respondents show greater support (88%) than middle income (79%) or low income (77%) respondents. The difference in support for tourism to historic churches is highly statistically significant, and again the high income respondents show the most support. Ninety percent of high income Deltans back tourism to historic churches, compared to 84% in the middle income group and 78% of low income respondents.

There is a marked, and highly significant, difference among income groups in support for tourism to hunting clubs. Seventy-two percent of respondents in the high income category favor bringing tourists to the Delta to visit private hunting clubs, but only half of the respondents in the middle income category, and just 48% of low income respondents support tourism to hunting

clubs. Support for tourism to state and national parks also varies by income, with 96% in the high income group, 93% in the middle income group, and 87% in the low income group supporting protected area tourism, a statistically significant difference. There is not a significant difference in support for tourism to Mississippi River sites. The middle income group shows the highest approval (92%), but the high income (90%) and low income (86%) respondents also express strong support for tourism to sites interpreting the river's history. Support for tourism to agricultural sites shows a similar pattern, as middle income respondents (93%) back agricultural tourism at a slightly higher rate than high income (92%) and low income (87%) respondents.

There is very little difference in support for tourism to various heritage sites among Deltans who reside in rural areas versus those that live in larger towns. Notably, 30% of micropolitan residents support tourism to juke joints, compared to 25% of rural residents, although this difference is not statistically significant. Also, 84% of rural respondents approve of tourism to historic cemeteries, compared to 80% of micropolitan residents, again a difference that is not statistically significant. Across all other types of heritage tourism sites, rural and micropolitan residents show remarkable agreement.

Although there are differences in opinion by age, educational level, gender, race and income, overall, respondents show a remarkably high level of support for heritage tourism to a variety of cultural, historic and natural sites. Only tourism to juke joints garners little support, and support for tourism to private hunting clubs was marginal. The differences by group are important to recognize, as they help planners target information and marketing materials to specific groups. These differences also raise interesting questions for future research.

### ***Explaining the Differences: Open Questions***

Results from the Delta Rural Poll show a correlation between factors such as age and education, and support for tourism to various heritage sites. These statistics do not explain why these differences exist, however. Why do younger Deltans or Deltans with some college express greater support for heritage tourism? Why is there a significant difference in opinion between males and females in support for tourism to blues sites, but not for any other forms of heritage

tourism? And why is there virtually no difference in support for heritage tourism between those who live in the larger towns, and those who live in smaller, more rural settings?

Additional qualitative research can address these issues, using techniques such as open-ended interviews and focus groups with Delta residents, tourism managers, and heritage specialists. Qualitative techniques allow informants to frame issues and express their own perceptions, rather than fitting their perceptions into a list of predetermined responses, as they would do on a survey. While surveys are useful for identifying general patterns of correlation, interviews provide greater detail and depth of insight into how people perceive and experience natural and cultural heritage, and tourism to their communities. Future reports in this series will report on results from qualitative research in these areas, to sort out explanations for some of the quandaries that arise from these results.

Qualitative studies can address why younger Deltans show greater support for heritage tourism than older residents, for example. Higher levels of support by younger respondents perhaps reflect more openness to outsiders by the younger generation, and a greater willingness to share their traditions with others. Or, perhaps younger people are truly less aware of local heritage, and therefore are less concerned than older residents about the threats that commercialization could pose to local heritage and traditions. Alternatively, younger Deltans may be more economically oriented than their elders, and see the potential financial gains of heritage tourism. Although support for heritage tourism to most types of sites is very strong among older residents, they express less support for some types of heritage tourism than younger Deltans, and the attitudes of older residents merit further attention. Older Deltans are in some ways repositories of the Delta's heritage and traditions, and their support for heritage tourism is important.

Another interesting and perplexing question is why a lower percentage of African Americans than whites support visitation to blues clubs, festivals and museums. This may be because some African American respondents are reluctant to commercialize blues music through these venues; it may be because some African Americans believe that blues festivals showcase black talent but make money for white businessmen; or it could be that African Americans are more likely to view the blues as a negative influence on their community and culture, a message promoted by

some religions. These are simply hypotheses; further qualitative interviewing is necessary to explain these differences.

The lack of support for tourism to juke joints is also interesting, and it is particularly interesting to note that African Americans show less approval than whites for tourism to juke joints, since these locales are generally patronized by black Deltans. It is also interesting to note that the strongest support for juke joint tourism came from high income respondents, since this group is not likely to patronize these establishments. While it is true that few authentic juke joints exist any longer, they hold tremendous appeal to serious blues fans, and it is clear that Deltans have strong opinions about them. Qualitative interviews could elucidate local perceptions of how juke joints differ from other blues establishments, and why local residents do not want to open juke joints to outside visitors.

Results from this survey also show that African Americans support civil rights tourism at a higher rate than whites. Is this because some white respondents are embarrassed by the region's civil rights record, and thus do not want to publicize it? Are they against the results of the civil rights movement? Or do they think that this era was too political and marketing this part of Delta history would decrease interest in other heritage tourism opportunities in the region?

Another notable result is the difference in support for hunting clubs between African American and white, and between high income and lower income Deltans. Does the difference between the races exist because African Americans feel excluded from such clubs? Or do more African Americans oppose hunting? Or, perhaps, African Americans simply do not want hunters in their communities. And does the difference in income categories represent perceptions among lower income residents that private clubs benefit only elite Deltans? Or are lower income Deltans less interested in hunting than those with higher incomes? Or, do lower income respondents believe that private clubs occupy land that could be better used for other purposes? Again, sorting out these attitudes requires in-depth qualitative research.

### **Conclusion**

Two important functions of heritage areas are to provide greater opportunities for tourism and a greater appreciation of local heritage among local populations. Results from the Delta Rural Poll

suggest residents would view a heritage area as a positive development in the Mississippi Delta region. Local residents overwhelmingly believe that it is important for young people in their communities to understand local natural and cultural heritage. Respondents also saw this as a deficit in their young population. A heritage area would provide many opportunities to educate both residents and tourists about the Delta's rich history and traditions, increasing both awareness and pride among the local youth.

In addition, local residents strongly support bringing tourists to the Delta to visit a variety of cultural, historical and natural sites. Residents like the idea of tourists visiting blues clubs, festivals and museums in their communities, although most would not encourage tourism to juke joints. A substantial majority of Deltans also said they would like to have tourists visit literary sites, civil rights museums, and historic sites such as churches and cemeteries in their communities. And residents also approve of tourism to museums or other sites that interpret the history of the Mississippi River and the agricultural history of the region. A high percentage of Deltans also liked the idea of tourists coming to their communities to visit state and national parks, forests and wildlife refuges, although residents were cooler to the idea of tourists visiting private hunting clubs in their communities.

Heritage tourism, particularly if institutionalized through a locally managed, nationally designated heritage area, has the potential to provide important opportunities for community and economic development in the Mississippi Delta region. Heritage tourism is not a guaranteed panacea to solve the Delta's economic troubles, but it can contribute to an overall strategy of regional development, by providing an organizing structure to oversee heritage conservation and tourism; by establishing partnerships with heritage organizations, sites, service providers, businesses and other organizations; and by increasing local knowledge and pride in the Delta's cultural traditions and natural history.

A successful heritage area requires broad-based support across a variety of community groups and interests, investment by local public agencies and private interests in tourism infrastructure and services, and open leadership that coordinates the activities of diverse groups and meets the interests and needs of many Delta visitors. This report establishes that local residents support the goals of a heritage area, and provides an idea of some of the differences in levels of support

among different groups. These results will help heritage managers make decisions about how to target marketing, educational, and community development efforts.

With the success of gaming tourism, Mississippi has dedicated more resources and effort to tourism development in the past fifteen years, and some of this has been aimed at heritage tourism. National heritage leaders have also expressed strong support for a heritage area to increase tourism to the Mississippi Delta, as the Delta has such a rich, varied, and nationally significant history. In many ways, the stories of the Delta reflect the stories of America. A heritage area would offer many benefits to local populations, but would also benefit the nation by creating opportunities for Americans and for visitors from around the world to learn about Delta heritage first hand. The Delta's stories are too compelling and too important, and they should be shared with the world.

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