

# Vision For A Better Tomorrow

## A Strategic Plan for Claiborne Parish Louisiana



*People Resources*



*Water Resources*



*Timber Resources*

*(Abridged Version)*  
Prepared by the  
Planning Committee on Economic Development  
April 2002

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## Mission Statement

The Mission of Claiborne Parish is to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of all citizens by empowering them to achieve their creative potential through: (1) lifelong education and skill development; (2) access to excellent health care facilities; (3) careful identification, prudent development, and wise conservation of natural resources for economic development and recreation; (4) provision of appropriate infrastructure, including highways, modern communications capability, utilities, water, and sewerage; (5) establishment of progressive incentives for expansion of existing industries and enticement of new industries; (6) fostering more effective cooperation and communication among elected officials and other appropriate groups, both inside and outside the parish; and (7) ensuring public safety in drug-free communities.

## Executive Summary

The primary objective of *Vision for a Better Tomorrow* is to communicate to the Economic Development Board, Police Jury, and other elected and appointed officials, as well as to all citizens of the parish, the compelling need to reinvent ourselves while expanding and diversifying our economy through innovative initiatives that build upon our strengths and address our weaknesses. The plan recognizes we must make better use of our most important and abundant assets, which include: (1) **people resources**; (2) **water resources**; and (3) **timber resources**.

Our report, though comprehensive, is not all inclusive. In many instances, it will be necessary for teams or task forces to be appointed to further study specific projects and provide additional information before implementation. No doubt, many additional economic development projects not recommended herein will be identified and developed in the future.

It is imperative there be **no hidden agendas** in economic development projects. Public support must be sought and citizens must be kept fully apprized of all projects on a timely basis. Every proposed project must be based on sound economic principles, excellent engineering design, and must reflect good stewardship of the environment and other resources. Landowners and other individuals who will be impacted by proposed economic development projects must be made fully aware of those projects at the earliest practical time.

Most rural communities like Claiborne Parish are experiencing major changes that continue to have a significant impact on economic vitality. The changes include: (1) a shift in population from rural to urban centers; (2) declining agricultural and manufacturing sectors; (3) changes in federal tax and revenue sharing; (4) persistent poverty; and (5) chronic unwillingness to invest heavily in education. Thus, we must recognize that Claiborne Parish will not stay the way it is today because nothing is static or unchanging. We will either **progress** as a result of bold and far-sighted initiatives, or we will continue to **regress** due to failure to take

control of our own destiny. The choice is ours, and ours alone. The writer of Proverbs stated “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Let us dedicate ourselves to ensuring that this *Vision for a Better Tomorrow* becomes reality for the benefit of all citizens, present and future. Moreover, because **Claiborne Parish has barely enough population to constitute a single community** it is essential we think in terms of a single community, rather than as several different communities with different and potentially conflicting agendas.

Economic developers must be constantly aware of the need to identify projects where there is synergy or complementarity. For example, the further development of our water resources will provide: (1) water for consumption; (2) specific economic development projects; (3) additional recreation; (4) new sites for construction of homes, businesses, etc; (5) encouragement of more tourism; (6) incentive for retirees to locate here; (7) a higher level of awareness and appreciation of the environment; and (8) increased population, which will encourage other economic development activities.

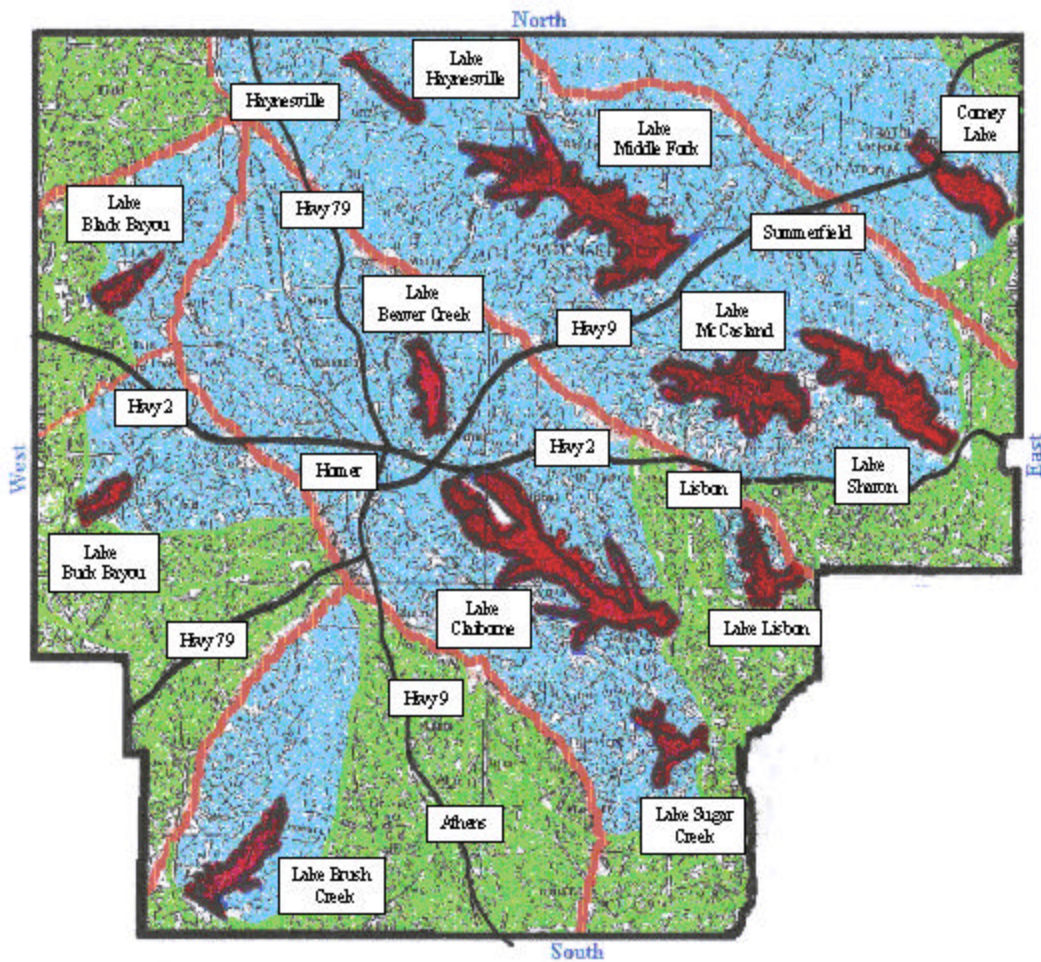
Every citizen is encouraged to look for things in this strategic plan with which they **agree** and which they can support, rather than for things with which they **disagree**. We need a parish-wide spirit of cooperation for the greater good of all citizens, and we need to remember that a positive, cooperative mental attitude by our people will do much to ensure the future success of our parish. We must also recognize that success and economic prosperity are not a matter of **chance**, rather, they are a matter of **choice**. Moreover, there is a price to be paid for success, and our citizens must make a commitment to pay that price by working throughout their lives to improve their working skills, constantly improving their store of knowledge, and working diligently and unselfishly to make Claiborne Parish a better place in which to live and work.

Agriculture, which was the basis for our economy throughout much of our history has diminished greatly, and revenue from oil and gas have also decreased in importance. Total animal agricultural sales in Claiborne Parish are approximately 42 million dollars annually, of which 94% is derived from poultry. Annual income from all agricultural plant crops is 33 million dollars, of which 90% is derived from the sale of timber. Approximately 81% of the land area of the parish is covered with timber. A concerted effort must be made to attract industries that will add value to this natural and renewable resource. We are not being good stewards of our abundant timber resources if we continue to ship our timber out of the parish for value-added processing to the benefit of citizens in other parishes and states. Consideration should be given to building and operating a small sawmill that might produce specialty lumber suitable for use by Louisiana Wood Moulding Corporation.

Few communities the size of Claiborne Parish have produced as many individuals who have achieved a high level of professional success. Thus, it is tragic that a majority of our best and brightest young people traditionally have migrated to other communities and states where they have helped build a better future for their adopted community or state. The trend is continuing at the present. This fact alone should be adequate incentive to motivate us to take visionary and decisive action to ensure the vitality of our parish in the future.

The Sparta aquifer on which we and neighboring parishes depend for most of our municipal and industrial water is rapidly diminishing and **a water crisis looms ominously on the horizon**. In fact, the quality of life in Claiborne Parish will be significantly lower in 10 to 20 years if this problem is not dealt with in an expeditious and appropriate manner. Fortunately, the present and potential water resources of Claiborne Parish are more than ample to meet our needs, and the needs of surrounding parishes. Thus, **our abundant water resources can become the centerpiece of economic development**, but we must begin immediately to address this important issue.

**Figure 1. Location of existing lakes and approximate location of additional lakes in Claiborne Parish. (The blue-shaded areas inside red borders indicate approximate watersheds for the different lakes.)**



The map of Claiborne Parish shown in Figure 1 indicates we have the potential to construct as many as 10 additional lakes to impound water runoff from approximately two thirds of the watershed area in the parish at a typical ratio of 10 or more acres of watershed to 1 acre of impounded water surface area. The proposed sites shown on the map are only speculative locations. The specific location of any new lake will

of necessity have to be determined by such things as property ownership considerations, environmental concerns, and civil engineering studies.

Using average annual rainfall figures of 4.5 feet, and assuming 25% of the rainfall collected as runoff (less estimated evaporation), equals 357,000 acre feet of water (or 118 billion gallons) per year of spillway discharge from the proposed lakes. At a wholesale price of \$1.50 per 1,000 gallons of water it is estimated that 177 million dollars worth of water is flowing out of this parish annually. These figures should be interpreted in the context that the total amount of water removed daily from the Sparta aquifer for all purposes is only about one half of the amount that is flowing out of impoundable watershed in Claiborne Parish.

The **crown jewel** in the Claiborne Parish lake system is **Lake Claiborne**. It has the purest water of any lake in Louisiana and has already contributed greatly to the economic health of the parish by attracting both tourists and retirees, increasing recreational opportunities, and enhancing residential development. A 1998 economic impact study showed the Lake Claiborne State Park generated \$685,933 in expenditures by visitors, with a total estimated local economic impact of \$1,677,000. These figures do not take into account the economic benefits derived from the large population of retirees who live on Lake Claiborne.

Elected officials must make major decisions about where and how to get the necessary tax revenue to support new initiatives that will result in further development of our parish, and this is going to be especially challenging in the face of a declining population. Extreme caution must be taken to ensure that an inordinately heavy tax burden is not placed on business and industry. Moreover, tax funds designated for economic development should be used for the purpose for which they were collected and not permitted to sit idly in bank accounts.

The combination of informed voters and elected officials who know how their constituents feel about major issues will aid in achieving key objectives relative to economic development. This does not negate the concept that public officials have a responsibility to act in the best interest of the general public without asking the public about their opinion on every issue, but the best progress is made when there is adequate dialog between public officials and a well informed electorate.

It is well established that **more and better education** is the primary ingredient in the wealth of nations. If the citizens of Claiborne Parish are to be competitive in the global, knowledge-based economy of the future they must become better trained, and our community and education leaders must focus more attention and resources on ensuring an excellent education for all citizens beginning in preschool and continuing throughout life. We must foster a culture of lifelong learning, regardless of whether the learning is to improve job performance, create a better employment opportunity, or simply enrich the quality of life.

Young people who grow up in homes where they receive adequate nurturing from excellent role models become more productive citizens and are more likely to become effective community leaders. Every child deserves the opportunity to be reared in a home where the father is resident and where faith,

love, discipline, responsibility, independence, and how to work are taught effectively, preferably by example of both natural parents. Interestingly, more than 90% of our young people who have qualified to receive awards at recent Claiborne Parish Academic Awards Banquets have come from two-parent homes, which confirms the statement made by Plato more than two millennia ago “For what is the worth of a human life unless it is woven into the lives of our ancestors.” Moreover, most of the students were involved in their church as evidenced by the presence of their pastor at the banquets. It is also significant that each of the 43 young men in Boy Scout Troop 72 who earned the rank of Eagle Scout over the past 40 years came from homes with both natural parents.

The Louisiana Small Towns Resource Team that spent a week in our parish in 2000 reported that marijuana, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine usage were very widespread in Claiborne Parish. They further reported that the lack of awareness among community leaders about the extent of drug usage in our parish has resulted in a lack of coordinated and well-developed strategies for fighting the drug problem. This situation must change.

Population projections for Claiborne Parish indicate a continuing decline through the year 2025. To reverse this trend we must implement a bold and innovative plan, but we must also recognize that not all economic development revolves around industrial parks. Thus, the further development of **tourism** and **retirement** as basic industries in our parish has immense potential for improving our economic vitality in the future. Tourism is the world’s fastest growing industry and has become a major part of economic development. In addition to benefiting from travelers to our area, we have the opportunity to attract them as permanent residents when they retire because it is well established that the top tourism areas are also the top retirement areas. This relationship leads to the obvious conclusion that a special effort should be made to grow these two industries together.

By the year 2020 the retirement age component of America’s population will have increased to approximately 80 million persons, or more than 25% of the nation’s population. Each retired couple will bring an estimated \$54,200 of annual income to the area in which they reside. Through the economic multiplier process, that income will generate \$81,000 in income for the area in which they locate, which is equivalent to securing three new factory jobs.

Potential sites for constructing a modern 18-hole golf course should be identified. If economically feasible, the golf course should be constructed to standards that would allow it to be included in the Audubon Golf Trail. Mr. Rex Bryan, Economic Developer from Shreveport who has been engaged by the Claiborne Economic Development Board, has advised that up to \$600,000 in grant monies are potentially available from the state to support this project.

The further expansion and development of the Homer Memorial Hospital as a regional health care center should be supported. Consideration needs to be given to exploring additional health-care related options to support and expand this industry that is essential for attracting retirees and for providing a variety of health care services to other citizens and caring for our aging population..

Economic development efforts in Claiborne Parish need to be consolidated. Moreover, appropriate properties need to be identified and developed as industrial parks because existing industrial parks have little or no space available for development. The construction of one or more spec buildings should be considered to aid in enticing industrial prospects.

The resources of Claiborne Parish are the greatest story never told, and we stand on the threshold of the best time in our history, but we must have open minds regarding economic development. Consensus must be sought on critical issues for the benefit of all citizens. Our citizens must also become deeply imbued with a vision for the future because that is where we will each spend the rest of our lives, and we must dedicate ourselves to making that vision become reality.

Because Claiborne Parish has a very small and declining population we desperately need to function as **a single community**, and ways need to be found to achieve closer and more synergistic cooperative working relationships between all elected officials, appointed boards, and citizen groups. By working together in a synergistic fashion we can build a better tomorrow. This will require the building of strong bridges between citizens in the north and south of the parish, between the sexes, between the races, and between different age groups. Moreover, it must be remembered that the building of a better Claiborne Parish will always be **“A work in progress.”**

### **Projects That Should Be Undertaken Immediately**

1. Formulate and initiate a well organized **educational initiative** to inform the citizens of Claiborne Parish of the need for, and the benefits to be derived from, the taking of appropriate actions to revitalize the economy of our parish.
2. Establish an **Office of Economic Development** in the new **Claiborne Parish Police Jury Office Complex** and staff it with a **Coordinator for Communication and Cooperative Relations** whose duties would include, but not be limited to: (1) serve as liaison between elected officials, appointed boards, and other groups; (2) maintain a **permanent archive** where all information on Claiborne Parish and surrounding area are catalogued and stored in a fire-proof vault; (3) establish and maintain a **calendar of events** for all organizations in the parish to use in scheduling activities; (4) publish a **monthly newsletter and/or news releases** for publication in local newspapers to keep the citizens of the parish apprized of information regarding significant events; and (5) maintain the **official website for Claiborne Parish** with links to attractions and similar websites in other parishes.
3. Develop and implement a strategy for **impounding more of our abundant water resources** by constructing dams on several of the tributary streams that flow out of the parish.
4. Develop a **water supply, treatment facility, and distribution system** for all of Claiborne Parish, with options for selling water to adjacent parishes.

5. Promote a **parish-wide millage** to support economic development programs for the municipalities and parish.
6. Acquire land and **establish additional industrial parks** and construct at least one spec building to aid in enticing industrial prospects.
7. Construct a modern, **18-hole golf course** on property adjacent to Lake Claiborne, or adjacent to any new lake that may be constructed in the parish. If economically feasible, the golf course should be constructed to standards that would allow it to be included on the **Audubon Golf Trail**. The possibility of arranging for the State of Louisiana to construct and manage the course should also be explored.
8. Develop a new, professionally prepared **brochure** for promoting Claiborne Parish and its attractions.
9. Establish and staff at least one **Visitor's Center** in Claiborne Parish with adequate signs throughout the area to tell visitors where to obtain information on attractions in the parish and area. This facility is urgently needed to better capitalize on the 57,000 visitors who come to Lake Claiborne and the State Park each year.
10. Seek out one or more **forestry-related businesses** to provide value-added processing for our timber resources and/or to utilize the biomass now being left in forests following harvesting operations.
11. Consolidate some **educational physical resources** into centralized facilities to allow the pool of tax dollars available for physical facility improvement to be concentrated on a smaller number of buildings within the parish.
12. Establish **leadership training courses** and mentoring programs for youth and other interested citizens.
13. Establish **school-to-work programs** that will help our youth work in partnership with businesses and other professionals. Such programs will strengthen learning and understanding about careers in many professions.
14. Establish a parish-wide **drug advisory council** made up of representatives from the different law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, school officials, churches, and other appropriate groups and agencies.
15. Combine all **economic development boards into a single parish-wide board** and combine all **hospital service districts** to achieve greater synergism and efficiency.
16. Work to obtain changes in the **inventory tax law** to aid in enticing primary and secondary timber processing industries to locate in the parish.

17. Develop **adult literacy and parenting programs** as a part of community education.
18. Organize and promote a **Shop Claiborne First** campaign to encourage citizens to show loyalty to Claiborne Parish merchants.
19. Secure the **services of a grant writer** to assist in applying for state and federal funds.
20. Encourage municipalities to address the question of **annexation** to increase the population and tax base and provide incorporated areas for future expansion.
21. Consider the possibility of a **parish-wide form of government**.
22. Develop an **appropriate ordinance** designed to reduce “visual clutter” in the parish. The ordinance should provide penalties for: (1) failing to improve or destroy unsightly or abandoned buildings; (2) dumping trash; (3) parking inoperable vehicles; or (4) permitting the accumulation of refuse that adversely affects the image of the parish, reduces property values, and threatens the health, safety, and welfare of the general public.
23. Encourage the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center to **expand the current research program on forestry** at the Hill Farm Research Station to facilitate better use of our forest resources, and **initiate a research program on poultry** to aid in the further development of our very substantial poultry industry.
24. Improve **pre-K education** programs throughout the parish.
25. Work with our **legislative delegation** to ensure the continued viability of the **Claiborne Campus of the Louisiana Technical College** preserving and expanding course offerings.

## **Implementation Strategy**

The **absence of an implementation strategy** is the single most important reason for failure of many strategic plans. Indeed, a good plan **is nothing more than a list of good intentions** unless it demands implementation and continuing commitment from key individuals in leadership roles in the parish. Thus, the Planning Committee on Economic Development proposes that an appropriate number of **broad-based implementation teams** be appointed by the Claiborne Economic Development Board and the Police Jury to assist with putting *Vision for a Better Tomorrow* into action, and to monitor the results of implementation through organized feedback from all appropriate groups on a continuing basis. It is further recommended that each member of the Police Jury serve on at least one of the implementation teams. The Claiborne Economic Development Board should periodically re-visit specific issues and recognize that some recommendations contained in this *Vision for a Better Tomorrow* will become less valid with the passage of time as both internal and external circumstances change.