



Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan **Framework**

for the
Lone Star Coastal Alliance

PART 1: Regional Itineraries

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Definitions and Acronyms

Definitions

Understanding the following terms will be useful in understanding this document:

- Project Area
- Curated Story-based Regional Trip Experiences
- Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan
- Interpretive Program or Network
- Message (theme)
- Visitors
- Priority Audiences
- Nature

Project Area

This plan covers the 4 counties on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast who are a part of the Lone Star Coastal Alliance. This includes Jefferson, Galveston, Brazoria, and Matagorda Counties.

Curated Story-based Regional Visitor Experiences

When people vacation, they buy ‘experiences.’ What we want to create are curated story-based visitor experiences focusing on the natural history and history of the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. Story-based visitor experiences, also known as interpretive experiences, are not simply an encyclopedia spread out over a geographical area but are rather a *story* with different chapters in different locations, creating a network of sites throughout the region. For example, if you look at the Texas Historical Commission’s Independence Trail Region, it lists numerous sites in the target area and provides a description of each, including its role in Texas independence. But a visitor reading those descriptions does not get the *story*, but rather just information. We want them to ‘see’ the revolutionary army fighting a rearguard action (in addition, because the listed sites are not curated, visitors run the gamut between engaging high-quality sites to sites with just a heritage marker). To engage a visitor in the story, they must ‘see’ the story evolve as women and children leave their homes and flee across a landscape more mud than solid ground in advance of Santa Ana’s army. We want people to feel their fear and desperation instilled by Santa Ana’s massacre of troops at the Alamo and Goliad. We want people to see the intelligence of Sam Houston as he gathered more and more troops as the army moved toward Galveston, which helped offset the numerical superiority of the Mexican forces. We want people to see the famous battle at San Jacinto where Texas won its independence and set the stage for the Mexican American war.

‘Seeing’ the story involves visiting many places along the route, which is exactly what we want visitors to do – spend more time soaking up the history and/or natural history of the area rather than simply visiting the beaches and leaving.

Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan

Up until very recently, an 'Interpretive Plan' was the document that was typically produced to guide development of an Interpretive Program, which includes all the exhibits, interpretive panels, publications and similar interpretive opportunities for a site or facility. While such plans can identify opportunities that communicate desired themes to target audiences, they often fail because they do not take into consideration the experiential context in which they must function.

The best interpretive planning models reflect the need to take target audience, goals and objectives, constraints, opportunities, and themes into account when selecting information delivery strategies and content. However, they still treat the array of strategies – the Interpretive Program as a whole – as the focal point of the plan. Although any interpretive planning effort should result in identifying the array of interpretive opportunities to develop, the approach should be to first identify the ideal *visitor experiences* (ones that by their nature would benefit from effective interpretive opportunities) from the perspective of those developing the Interpretive Program, and then use those experiences to determine what interpretive and other information to offer. Such experiences also must be ones that the target audience are willing to buy with their time, which requires knowing your target audiences beyond basic demographic information.

Using a visitor experience approach ensures that you develop a plan, labeled a 'Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan,' for a complete information network that begins with reaching your target audiences where they are – physically, emotionally, and intellectually – and taking them where you want them to go by using a linked combination of trip planning, orientation, wayfinding, and interpretive information. It also ensures that you identify barriers to the desired experiences, such as facilities that are not fully accessible, so you can address those barriers within the context of developing your Interpretive Program, thus increasing the probability the visitors can access and engage with the information.

In sum, people today buy *experiences*. Consequently, the desired product to guide development of an Interpretive Program is a Visitor Interpretive *Experience* Plan (VIEP), which uses desired audience experiences as the frameworks for determining the trip planning, orientation, wayfinding, and interpretive information to develop and actions to take to facilitate experiences that will attract, hold, and communicate effectively with target audiences, whether on or off-site.

Interpretive Program or Network

This refers to all the interpretive opportunities offered in the Project Area as opposed to just an evening 'program.'

Message (Theme)

The interpretive profession adopted the term 'theme' to indicate the set of 'points,' or 'messages' to be communicated in interpretive opportunities. The issue is that most people use 'theme' and 'topic' synonymously. Consequently, many people reading Interpretive Plans of any type do not understand what is meant when the term 'theme' is used. Therefore, we use the term 'message' instead of the term 'theme' as an attempt to provide clarity.

Visitors

The goal of a network of interpretive opportunities is to forge an emotional/intellectual connection between a member of a target audience and the primary topic(s) included in that network. Although a visit to the Project Area might be the most effective vehicle for creating such connections, it is not the only one. In other words, people do not have to physically step foot in the area to be termed a visitor. The term 'visitor' in this document is applied to anyone engaging with an interpretive opportunity that is a part of the network of interpretive opportunities being developed, such as the website. In other words, it includes 'virtual visitors.'

Priority Audiences

Priority Audiences are those who need to be reached to accomplish the Primary Goals. In this case, key target audiences include potential visitors to the Project Area who are interested in the cultural and natural history rather than just sun and sand.

Nature

Everyone has a connection with nature since they breathe air, drink water and eat food, all of which are linked to our natural world. Most people already have a relationship and value nature in some way, but the nature they value may not be native flora and fauna. One goal of the Lone Star Coastal Alliance is to preserve native flora and fauna by establishing an economic value for this resource. Consequently, the term 'nature' in this document refers to native flora and fauna unless otherwise defined.

Acronyms

The following acronyms are used in this document:

VI EP: Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan

LSCA: Lone Star Coastal Alliance

CVB: Convention and Visitor Bureau

FWS or USFWS: US Fish & Wildlife Service

NWRS: National Wildlife Refuge System

NPS: National Park Service

Introduction

What is this Document?

This is a Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan *Framework* for the counties comprising the Lone Star Coastal Alliance (LSCA) on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast – Jefferson, Galveston, Brazoria, and Matagorda Counties. It contains recommendations for four Curated Regional Trip Adventures that identify sites to include in each itinerary, information on each site, the Key Concepts to communicate, and stories to tell to communicate those concepts. This is the draft final version of the plan.

Because these are curated story-based experiences, sites were selected based on their ability to tell aspects of a specific story (which is based on the features on the site and/or what happened at the site), and whether the site is ‘visitor ready,’ at least in terms of basic needs. A completely visitor-ready site is one that has a good orientation and wayfinding network, has clean restrooms, and maintained infrastructure. Key sites that could be a part of an itinerary that are not visitor ready are also noted.

Because it is only a Framework, the plan does not identify specific media to be used to deliver information and does not contain design concepts for recommended information strategies. Those elements must be determined in the next step of the process.

How to Use This Plan

The VIEP is a planning document. It is not meant for public consumption but is meant to be used by the LSCA to guide developing public-facing products. LSCA can provide specific information to stakeholders regarding a particular site and identify the recommendations for the concepts that should be communicated, stories they should tell to communicate those concepts and any other actions they should take to meet minimum requirements necessary for the site to be considered ‘visitor ready.’

When providing information to stakeholders, it is important to emphasize a few key points:

1. The Examples of Supporting Stories are just that – examples. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but is meant to be used as a starting point for identifying stories to tell.
2. Many sites in a specific itinerary will be communicating the same concepts. That does not mean that the interpretive opportunities are duplications. The difference lies in the stories used to communicate those concepts. Every site will have stories it can tell best based on features on the site, location, or events. They should concentrate on telling those stories to communicate the concepts.
3. For the Regional Itineraries to work, interpretive information for each site must be available. However, that does not mean that it must be a series of fixed interpretive opportunities on the sites in an inventory. It can be a booklet, a cell phone tour or some other information-delivery strategy encompassing all sites in an itinerary. The keys are for the sites to be interconnected so all sites tell their story and market the other sites to maintain a visitor’s interest, for the wayfinding to be easy, and for a visitor’s needs to be met throughout the regional trip.

4. This plan is an ever-changing document. The Goals and Key Messages do not change, but implementation of interpretive opportunities associated with any existing or potential attraction will impact potential itineraries. For example, if the Luther Hotel is renovated and interpreted, it can become a primary attraction to bring visitors to Palacios. Consequently, the other attractions in Matagorda County, such as Camp Hulen, become viable interpretive opportunities because the Luther Hotel has already attracted visitors to Palacios. In contrast, Camp Hulen by itself, due to the lack of interpretive opportunities, is not enough to motivate visitors to come to the area.

Executive Summary

The overall goal of the LSCA is to attract experiential travelers to the region for multi-day trips as a means of increasing sustainable tourism, particularly nature-based and heritage tourism, which in turn will support conservation of natural areas and historic sites by establishing an economic value for them. Preserving natural areas also helps maintain quality of life for residents and serves as a damage risk reduction strategy for flooding. One approach to achieving these goals is to create a Regional Destination Brand Identity that markets the region as a whole to such travelers.

These travelers come from all typical market segments, such as families, the elderly, groups of friends, etc. What sets them apart is the desire to immerse themselves physically, emotionally, and intellectually in an authentic place rather than to simply visit generic locations and engage in generic activities. This is a desirable tourism market because they tend to stay longer, spend more money, and leave a place better than they found it. (For profiles of this target audience, go to Appendix B: Audience Profiles).

The LSCA goals were derived from priorities noted by stakeholders during stakeholder workshops in 2019, discussed in a Strategic Analysis Plan delivered in 2020 and recent input from stakeholders. The following interpretive network goals were derived by asking the question, “How will story-based regional itineraries help achieve the stakeholder goals?”

Interpretive Goal 1

Increase the attraction and holding power for experiential travelers. (These are travelers interested in exploring the cultural and natural history of the area rather than just the beaches.)

Interpretive Goal 2

Increase the attraction of the entire 4-county region, including smaller towns and rural areas, rather than just individual sites within the area, such as Galveston Island.

Interpretive Goal 3

Maintain the livability of the area by contributing to the conservation of natural areas that provide recreational and aesthetic benefits to those who live in the area, and that provide some protection from natural disasters.

Interpretive Goal 4

Maintain the livability of the area by seeking to maximize the positive impacts of tourism (increased revenue) while minimizing the negative impacts.

The complete Goal Hierarchy is included in Appendix A.

The key challenge in creating Regional Itineraries lies in the fact that tourism involves a wide array of independent entities, such as public agencies, NGOs, the travel industry, restaurants, etc. To achieve the LSCA goals, these independent entities must have a vested interest in working together to create effective regional visitor experiences.

One opportunity for achieving the desired goals within that parameter is to create Regional Story-Based Itineraries. The story-based nature of the itineraries helps meet the experiential travelers' desire to immerse themselves intellectually in an area. The regional nature of the experience helps ensure that every County has the potential to benefit significantly, which is of benefit in motivating independent entities to work together.

This plan provides the framework for four Story-Based Regional Itineraries focusing on the following stories: Texas History, Texas Culture and Mystique, Nature Exploration, and the Balancing Act. The first three are self-explanatory. The last one, Balancing Act, focuses on the ever-changing conditions that residents must adapt to in order to continue living and thriving in this environment and the ways in which they have adapted. Each itinerary lists sites to be included, key concepts to communicate (which is critical for a story-based itinerary), and an overview of the sites in the itinerary.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

Introduction

This plan provides the core of the Regional Story-based Itineraries for Experiential Travelers, but there are significant tasks to be completed during implementation for this plan to be effective in helping attain the goals of the Lone Star Coastal Alliance. This section contains our recommendations for moving forward, which focus on three major areas:

- 1) making it easy for visitors to do what you want them to do,
- 2) making what you want them to do so appealing that they are motivated to engage, and
- 3) managing expectations.

Making it easy for people to do what you want them to do is essentially making the trip planning, orientation, wayfinding, and interpretive information clear and complete, which must happen on both a regional level and a site-specific level. Making the itineraries more appealing will be accomplished in part by ensuring that visitors know that their needs will be met, which does not mean every site needs to have a restroom, but that each area that is being visited has public restrooms. It will also be met in part by enhancing the experience, which is what the interpretive opportunities do. In addition, it means building out the Story-Based Itineraries, so they include activities, opportunities that are fun, etc.

Create a Story-based Network of Sites

The key to making this interpretive plan work effectively to meet the LSCA's goals is to create an interconnected network of story sites. This is more than simply listing the sites that have other parts of the story and putting that information at each site. Each site is a story point. After each story point is a decision point where the traveler can decide to continue with the itinerary or do something else. To motivate the traveler to continue engaging means each site needs to not only tell the part of the story it tells best, but also market the nearby sites in that itinerary and market the itinerary as a whole. That often means providing 'teasers' about some other aspect of the story, telling the traveler where to go to get that part of the story (another site in the network) and making sure they can find that site easily. The marketing of other sites to go to 'see' a story is what is lacking in most museums in the area. They often do a good job of telling a story, but they do not market sites where travelers should go to see that story. Doing so would increase the holding power of the network, which is a key to tourism.

In terms of the LSCA role, it could be to review the interpretive opportunities being developed at each site to ensure that they do market nearby sites in that network (which means providing a teaser regarding what the travelers can see or do there), presenting the network as a whole, and making sure that the wayfinding provided will ensure that visitors can easily find the other sites. The latter may simply mean creating a brochure of each Regional Itinerary with good wayfinding information and distributing it at each site.

Develop Complete Regional Itineraries

The sites selected for each Regional Itinerary are based in large part on their ability to tell part of a specific story, but travelers typically desire some variety in their trips. For example, in analyzing travelers

focused on exploring the Oregon Trail during the 150-year anniversary, research found that although they were interested in history, they liked to stay at places along the route that had a variety of activities. With that in mind, each Story-Based Regional Itinerary needs to be built out to include options for activities (paddle sports, hiking, tours, etc.) that do not necessarily have anything to do with the story. These should be included all along the route so the traveler can easily put together an itinerary that includes the story points and fun opportunities that they find appealing.

Ensure Each Itinerary Meets Visitor Needs (Manage Expectations)

Interpretation is an optional component of a person's trip – they do not need it to have a good experience. What they do need are restrooms, water, trip planning information and an effective orientation and wayfinding network. Those are all needs. If you meet their needs, they are more amenable to engaging in options, such as interpretive opportunities. Again, that does not mean every site has to have restrooms, but travelers need to know that they have access to clean public restrooms along the way, with no long stretches without such amenities.

Develop Some of the Regionwide Components

The plan identifies where visitors should go and the stories that should be available at each site in an itinerary, but it does not recommend information delivery strategies, such as exhibits, tours, etc. Each site will need to determine what to do in that regard. However, there are several actions that can be taken for the region as a whole that LSCA could spearhead such as:

- Offer training sessions for tour operators (park rangers, fishing guides, paddling guides, etc.) to give them the main storylines that you are wanting to promote.
- Provide training on interpretive guiding (maybe offer Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) training sessions).
- Develop table teasers, such as placemats, laminated cards, etc., in restaurants, music and dance venues that tell the Texas Culture and Mystique stories and that direct visitors to other locations to get more of the story.
- Work with Google Maps and Maps (the iPhone app) and possibly Waze to correct incorrect GPS location information for sites on itineraries.
- Develop auto tours for areas that have a lot of secondary or minor sites that would be effective if viewed as a whole. Highway 521 would benefit from an Auto Tour focused on alternative energy and impacts of global climate change on agricultural practices. The highway to Sea Rim Park would benefit from an Auto Tour focusing on the integration of elements of the petrochemical industry while maintaining natural areas. Bolivar Peninsula would benefit from an Auto Tour focusing on the impacts of global climate change on rising sea levels, more and higher intensity storms, etc. using houses on stilts, the remnants of housing developments that have been washed away, riprap along the highway, and the closing of a section of Highway 87.

- Support visitor locations as they update their orientation and wayfinding network. (In the meantime, produce downloadable wayfinding information for sites on the itineraries that are not up to par.)
- Develop virtual video tours of each itinerary to post on the website.
- Create short 2-minute video introductions to the different itineraries that can be used on the website.
- Work with sites to help them identify upgrades that matter to visitors (restroom availability, signs to trails/restrooms, upgrade parking areas, maps available when visitor facilities are closed, etc.) You could also develop a checklist for each site that they can work from (adapt the one we used for information gathering earlier in the planning process).
- Identify fully accessible sites and put together a tour focused on those sites.
- Make downloadable files (itineraries, etc.) available in multiple languages.
- Add scavenger hunts to each itinerary with things to look for along itinerary routes. Include children's versions for families.
- Create an interactive tour app for use on cell phones.
- Encourage/help to develop more vendors and guided tours that focus on one or more of the Regional Itineraries.
- Create a library of photos of people enjoying the various itineraries to use in marketing.
- Work with museums, visitor centers, etc. to encourage them to adjust open hours to match when visitors are available: weekends, after school, etc. Many are currently closed too often to work in itineraries.
- Work with sites that have high potential to upgrade their experience so they can be included in an itinerary. For example, try to work with the Texas Longhorn and Italian Museums before they move to determine if they can make modifications so they can be a part of the Culture and Mystique itinerary.

Regional Itineraries

Introduction

Each Regional Itinerary includes an overview of the story to be presented at the sites within the itinerary, sites to be included, a map depicting the sites (with a possible route) and the Concepts, Sub-Concepts and Examples of Supporting Stories for that itinerary. Recommendations for individual sites on what concepts to focus on and stories to tell, and recommendations for modifications are included in the section entitled 'Individual Site Information,' which begins on page 35.

Each itinerary has two or more of the following types of sites listed (if applicable):

Primary Sites: These sites cover key aspects of the storyline and have an extensive enough visitor opportunity to make a trip to such a site worth the time spent getting there. They are, for the most part, ready for visitors.

Secondary Sites (side trips): These sites cover secondary aspects of the storyline or contain only small parts of the basic storyline.

High Potential Sites: These sites have high potential because they can be effective in telling key aspects of the storyline but are not ready to receive tourists.

The list of sites in each itinerary, organized by County, is followed by a map depicting their location in the 4-County area. The number/letter designation corresponds to the Regional Itinerary map at the end of this section.

Texas History Regional Itinerary

Story Overview

The history of Texas is unique in many ways, and much of it took place along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. That history was driven largely by the availability of abundant natural resources and long growing season combined with easy access offered by inland and coastal water routes. Abundance and access made the Upper Texas Gulf Coast desirable first to the indigenous Karankawa and Atakapa, and then to Spain, France, Mexico, Anglo-Europeans, and the United States. Vast wealth, driven in part by a robust slavery-based agricultural sector, supported Galveston becoming the ‘Wall Street of the Southwest,’ and the ‘Ellis Island of the West.’ It is what first attracted Anglo-Americans to settle in what was then New Spain, the beginning of an era that would culminate in the Texas Revolution. The history includes the most devastating natural disaster in U.S. history in terms of loss of life – the 1900 hurricane that flattened Galveston – and the first ‘gusher’ (Spindletop) that ushered in the modern petroleum age. From indigenous peoples, to colonizers, to formerly enslaved Africans and voluntary immigrants from across the globe, the history of the Upper Texas Gulf Coast is rich with the presence and stories of many cultures, past and present.

Recommended Sites

Matagorda County

Primary Sites

1. City by the Sea Museum (Palacios)
2. Matagorda County Museum (Bay City)

Secondary Sites

- a. Sanford Community Center

Sites with High Potential

- Luther Hotel (if it is purchased and renovated).
- Camp Hulen (if it is interpreted significantly and included with other nearby historical sites giving it bigger attraction and holding power.)

Brazoria County

Primary Sites

3. Varner-Hogg Plantation
4. Lake Jackson Historical Museum
5. Stephen F. Austin – Munson State Park

Secondary Sites

- b. Capitol of Texas Park
- c. Bell's Landing and nearby Victorian Homes (should be in context to a visit to Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site)
- d. Gulf Prairie Cemetery and Church
- e. Freeport Museum and Downtown Area
- f. Fort Velasco (and view to gun emplacements on West bank)

Sites with High Potential

- McCroskey-Stringfellow House

Galveston County**Primary Sites**

- 6. Historic Homes Tour and Museum – League City
- 7. Texas City Museum
- 8. Ocean Star Oil Rig Museum
- 9. Galveston Historic Seaport – Ship to Shore Exhibit
- 10. The Strand + Railroad Depot and Museum
- 11. Galveston County Museum
- 12. Bryan Museum
- 13. Juneteenth Exhibit “And Still We Rise” in Ashton Villa

Sites with High Potential

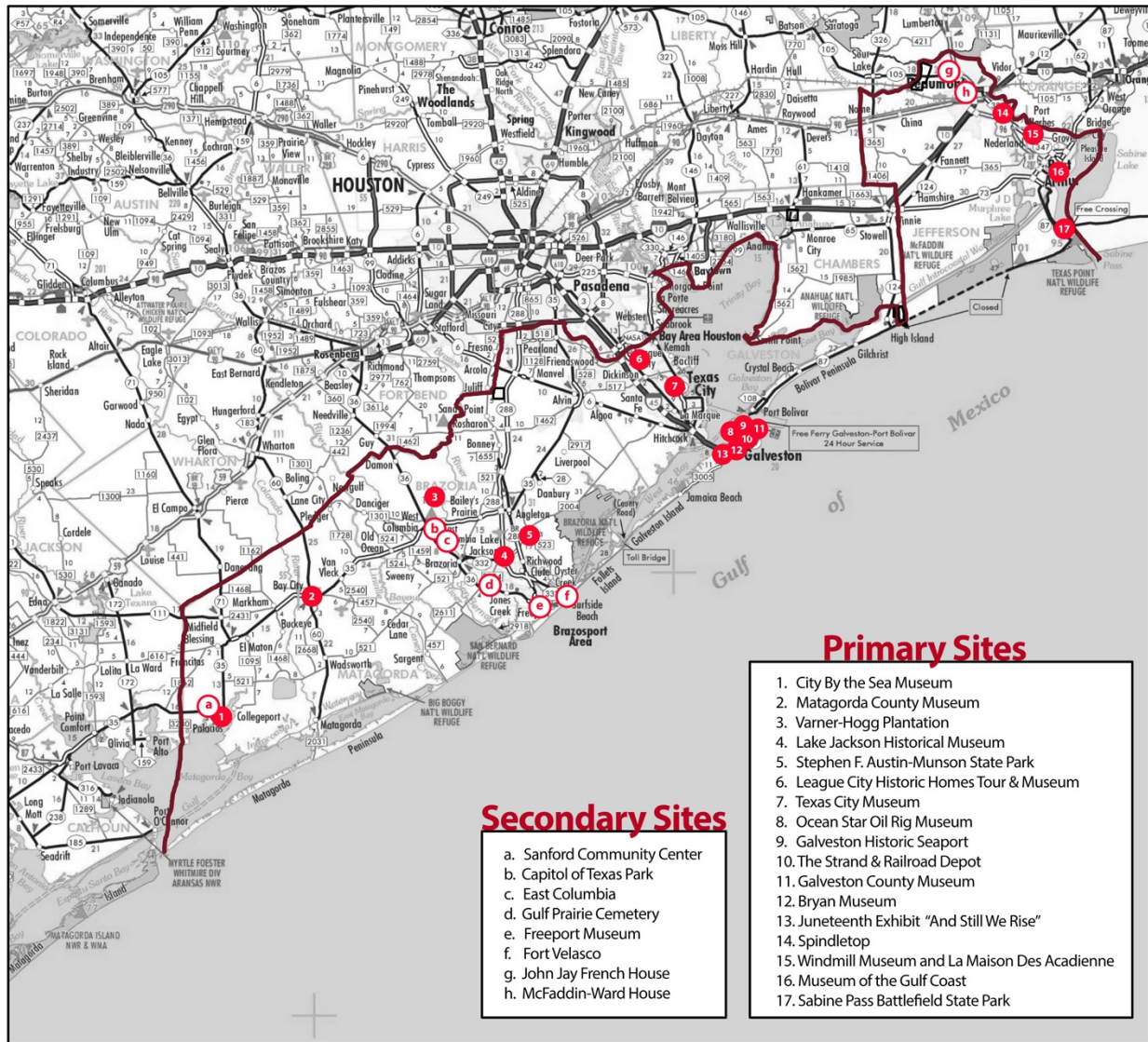
- Butler Longhorn Museum + Italian Museum
- Juneteenth Museum (after it has been developed and opened)

Jefferson County**Primary Sites**

- 14. Spindletop (Gladys Museum)
- 15. Windmill Museum and La Maison Des Acadienne (listed together because they are adjacent)
- 16. Museum of the Gulf Coast
- 17. Sabine Battlefield State Park

Secondary Sites

- g. John Jay French House
- h. McFaddin-Ward House



Texas History Concept Hierarchy

These are story-based itineraries, which means that the interpretive information at the sites as a whole is trying to communicate key concepts regarding Texas history instead of simply listing facts. Although the latter is perhaps more appealing to the hobbyist or specialist, a story-based approach is best for tourists in general, including Experiential Travelers. The following are the Primary Concepts, Sub-Concepts and Examples of Supporting Stories for the Texas History story that should be used to develop interpretive opportunities:

Primary Concept H1: Transportation routes combined with desirable resources were key to cultural activity and development, including settlement, commerce, prosperity. Because the Upper Texas Gulf Coast had both, it attracted people throughout human history and interest from a lot of nations.

Sub-Concept H1-1: With oceans and waterways primary access routes to resources and to the rest of Texas and the United States for much of the Anglo history of the area, the rivers and coast were the focus of cultural activity, including settlement, commerce, and development.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The importance of the Colorado River in Euro-American settlement.
- The importance of the Brazos River as a link to the Gulf and consequently, the location of many settlements and plantations associated with Austin's Colony and the importance of Bell's landing in East Columbia.
- Establishment of the Port of Galveston by Mexico.
- The importance of Port Arthur as a shipping outlet for petroleum from the Beaumont Area.
- Building of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and subsequent impact on communities along its route.
- The siting of Matagorda (3rd established town in Texas) because of its location near the mouth of the Colorado River.

Sub-Concept H1-2: With oceans and waterways primary access routes to resources and to the rest of Texas and the United States, the Texas coast and major rivers were keys to controlling and defending the area for much of its history, resulting in nations battling for dominance trying to control and defend access to the coast, especially the rivers.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- French establishing colony at Matagorda Bay
- Spanish establishing a fort on the Neches River to confront French expansion
- Mexicans establishing a fort on Galveston Island and at the mouth of the Brazos (Fort Velasco)
- US annexing Texas, which led to war with Mexico
- The importance of the Sabine River during the Civil War as a vital route for supplies.

- The Confederacy establishing defenses at Sabine Pass and the subsequent battle of Sabine Pass
- US blockade of the gulf coast in the Civil War and the Confederacy smuggling supplies up the Sabine River
- Conflicts between Union and Confederate Forces on Galveston Island
- Establishment of Army Air Base at Texas City (creation of Air Force) because of tension with Mexico
- Spanish trying to find Fort St. Louis to destroy it and establishing a Presidio nearby
- Establishment of gun batteries at Freeport
- Establishment of Forts Travis, Crockett, and San Jacinto
- Mexico establishing the Port of Galveston
- Fortifications along the coast – especially at the mouths of rivers – such as at Freeport, Galveston Island, Bolivar Peninsula, and Sabine Pass.

Sub-Concept H1-3: Because of its location on the Gulf and its natural port, Galveston became a focal point for commerce and development in the area, and consequently, a focal point for immigration.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Galveston becoming the Wall Street of the Southwest
- Galveston becoming the Ellis Island of the West
- Galveston as one of the richest cities in the United States
- Galveston as a major port for importing enslaved people and exporting cotton
- The number and origin of ships carrying immigrants to Galveston
- The railroads to Galveston connecting it with sites inland and the resulting impact to Galveston.

Sub-Concept H1-4: As transportation routes change, so does the importance of different communities, leading to expansion and decline.

Examples of Supporting stories

- With the advent of roads, Palacios' importance waned.
- Dredging the Houston Ship Channel, which allowed large ships to enter, turned the Houston area into a major port and diminished the importance of the natural port of Galveston.
- The railroads linking Galveston to the interior increased the importance of the city because they were an efficient link to the interior.
- With the building of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, communities along its route increased in importance.
- Bell's landing was important when cotton was king because that was the point for shipping cotton to national and international markets.
- The importance of Freeport due to its location at the mouth of Brazos.
- Understanding changing settlement patterns in such communities as Palacios, Matagorda, Galveston, Port Arthur, and Columbia in relation to transportation routes.
- The location of Lake Jackson is due to access to the Brazos River.

Primary Concept H2: The resources and opportunities attracted people from all over the world to settle in this part of Texas.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Settlement by the semi-nomadic Karankawa Indians.
- Austin's Colony coming because of the fertile land for cotton plantations and ability to ship cotton out
- Roughnecks coming to work in the oil fields
- People coming to start businesses to supply new settlers and communities
- Cajun coming to work the oil fields in Beaumont and Port Arthur
- Businesses locating in Galveston because it was at the nexus of the marine highway and land transportation, especially railroads
- Immigrants from around the world coming to establish a new life and new communities, such as Italian farmers and grocers, Dutch settlers in Nederland, etc.
- Vietnamese refugees settling along Upper Texas Gulf Coast, including Palacios, Port Arthur

Sub Concept H2-1: Immigrants with different cultural backgrounds added parts of their culture to help create the rich cultural milieu present today.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Foods from different cultural groups
- Architectural influence from different cultural groups
- Religions established by different cultural groups.
- Traditions established by different cultural groups

Sub-Concept H2-2: Clash of cultures and way of life often caused conflict.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- One of the major reasons for the Texas Revolution was the cultural clash between Anglo settlers and Mexico.
- Immigrants from Viet Nam [and other Southeast Asian countries] clashing with locals due to impact on the fishing and shellfish industry.

Primary Concept H3: The energy Industry has and continues to be a major factor in the economy of the area and a catalyst for Texas history.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The impact of Spindletop
- Wind farms in Matagorda County

- Nuclear facility in Matagorda County
- Solar Power fields anywhere in the 4-county area
- First E Hydrogen plant in US permitted in Matagorda County
- Energy infrastructure in Freeport area
- Energy infrastructure in Texas City area
- Energy infrastructure in Port Arthur area
- Gulf Intracoastal Waterway Port Arthur as a focal point for shipping petroleum from the Beaumont area
- Texas City Port
- Houston Ship Channel

Primary Concept H4: Despite difficult living circumstances, African Americans had and continue to have significant impact on the history and development of this part of Texas.

***Note:** The Primary Concepts and Supporting Stories associated with African Americans is incomplete and possibly inaccurate because it was developed primarily from existing sources that were not necessarily developed or vetted by African Americans. Consequently, it is important to have them reviewed and expanded by people whose story it is and, therefore who understand that story. These Primary Concepts and Supporting Stories should be considered starting points.*

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The economy of much of this part of Texas in the first part of the 19th century was fueled by plantations, which depended on enslaved labor.
- Emancipation caused a significant impact on plantations because enslaved labor was no longer available (although for some time it was replaced in some areas by convict labor).

Sub-Concept H4-1: Life for African Americans post-Civil War was not easy, but they have persevered, adding their cultural traditions to the rich mix of cultures that make up the Texas you see today.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The Rosenwald school in Columbia
- The Sanford Community Center in Palacios (formerly the Palacios Colored School, a school for African Americans)
- Original community at Freeport (initially forced to settle on undesirable land)
- Importance of churches (Reedy Chapel) as places to gather and draw strength from community

Nature Exploration Regional Itinerary

Story Overview

Because of its location at the intersection of four geological regions, the Upper Texas Gulf Coast is home to a diverse array of ecosystems, including estuaries and bays, saltwater marshes, freshwater marshes, beaches, coastal prairies, hardwood bottomland forests, and piney woods. Each has within it a diversity of plants and wildlife. It contains critical habitat for many species, including neotropical birds, such as warblers and hawks, migrating along the central flyway and stopping to rest and refuel after a grueling flight across the Gulf of Mexico from Central and South America where they winter. It is home to 5 species of Sea Turtles, including the endangered Kemp's Ridley. This abundance of plants and wildlife supports a wide array of recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, biking, kayaking, boating, and exceptional birding. The Galveston Bay estuary system is the 2nd most productive in the nation. It provides billions of dollars' worth of economic benefits and supports the livelihood of tens of thousands of people.

Recommended Sites

Matagorda County

Primary Sites

1. Matagorda Bay Nature Park
2. Matagorda County Birding Nature Center

Sites with High Potential

- PMAR
- Dog Island

Brazoria County

Primary Sites

3. Hanson Riverside County Park & Beal Unit
4. Gulf Coast Bird Observatory
5. Sea Center Texas
6. San Bernard NWR
7. Brazoria NWR

Secondary Sites

- a) Dow Woods
- b) Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary
- c) Kelly Hamby Nature Trail

Galveston County

Primary Sites

8. Galveston Island State Park
9. Armand Bayou Nature Center* (Harris County)
10. Galveston Pelagic Tours
11. Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary
12. Anahuac NWR* (Chambers County)
13. High Island

Secondary Sites

- d) Lafitte's Cove
- e) Artist Boat Coastal Heritage Preserve
- f) East End Lagoon Nature Preserve
- g) Texas City Dike
- h) Dudney Nature Center

*Included because of their immediate adjacency to 4-county region and consequently extreme value to nature exploration itinerary in the four counties.

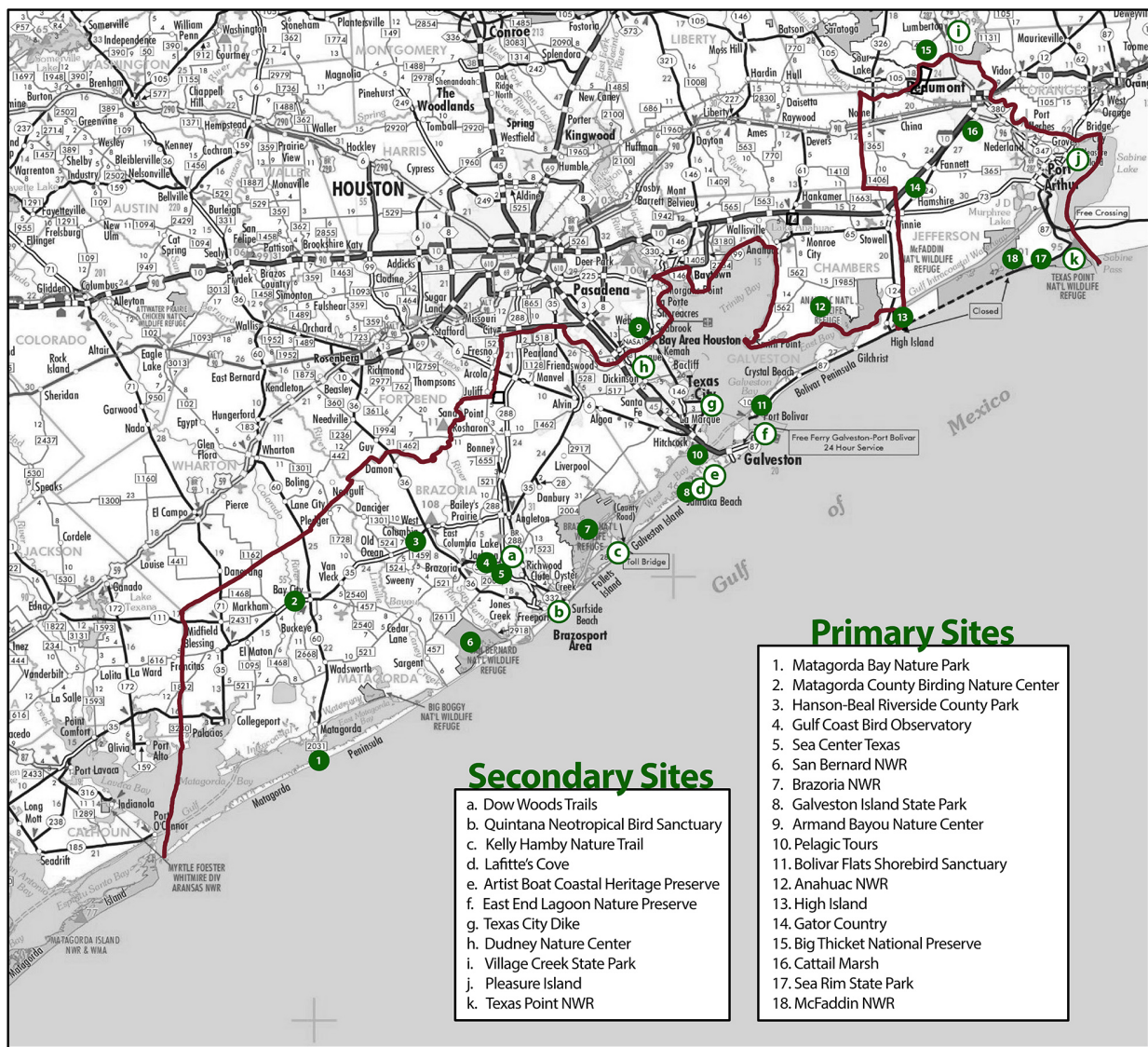
Jefferson County

Primary Sites

14. Gator Country
15. Big Thicket National Preserve
16. Cattail Marsh
17. Sea Rim State Park
18. McFaddin NWR

Secondary Sites

- i. Village Creek State Park
- j. Pleasure Island
- k. Texas Point NWR



Nature Exploration Itinerary Sites

Nature Exploration Concept Hierarchy

These are story-based itineraries, which means that the interpretive information at the sites as a whole is trying to communicate key concepts regarding the Nature found in the Project Area instead of simply listing facts. Although the latter is perhaps more appealing to the hobbyist or specialist, a story-based approach is best for tourists in general, including Experiential Travelers. The following are the Primary Concepts, Sub-Concepts and Examples of Supporting Stories for the Nature Exploration Story that should be used to develop interpretive opportunities:

Primary Concept N1: Nature is an indispensable component of quality of life in this region.

Sub-Concept N1-1: Nature is a key to many aspects of tourism, which supports the local economy.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Sportfishing
- Birdwatching
- Paddle sports

Sub-Concept N1-2: Nature supports many recreational experiences enjoyed by residents.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Fishing
- Birdwatching
- Paddle sports
- Hunting

Sub-Concept N1-3: Nature provides foods we enjoy.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Oysters
- Different species of fish
- Shrimp

Sub-Concept N1-4: Many people depend on nature for their livelihoods.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Fishermen
- Shrimpers
- Guides for sportfishing
- Anyone making money from birders

Sub-Concept N1-5: Nature contributes to the natural resiliency of the area, which helps mitigate negative impacts from weather events and mitigate impacts from Global Climate Change.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Wetlands soak up flood water and mitigate storm surge.
- Native vegetation is better adapted to hold soil in place in weather events.
- Native vegetation helps protect oil and gas infrastructure.

Sub-Concept N1-6: Nature contributes to the health and well-being of residents and visitors.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Nature contributes to mental health (Nature Deficit Disorder)
- Plants help maintain air quality and water quality

Primary Concept N2: Plants and wildlife are adapted to habitat. You can find a wide variety of different birds, plants, and wildlife in this area because it contains a multitude of different habitats.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Unique plants and wildlife found in Columbia Bottomlands.
- Unique plants and wildlife found in Coastal Prairies
- Unique plants and wildlife found in riparian areas.
- Unique plants and wildlife found in prairie wetlands
- Unique plants and wildlife found in coastal wetlands and estuaries.
- Unique plants and wildlife found in Piney Woods (this is the only place you can find red-cockaded woodpeckers).

Primary Concept N3: Nature is at risk.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Texas only has 3% of its natural habitat remaining.
- % of wetlands that have been lost.
- Migratory birds are in danger due to loss of critical habitat for feeding and resting after crossing the Gulf.
- Decline of shellfish industry due to changing salinity and temperature, and overharvesting.
- Decline of fishing industry due to changing salinity and temperature, and overharvesting.
- Decline of shrimping industry due to changing salinity and temperature, and overharvesting.
- Amount of land being developed every year.
- Pollinators needed to grow our food are declining due to loss of habitat.

Primary Concept N4: Nature needs everyone's help.

Sub-Concept N4-1: Many organizations – public and private – and individuals are engaging in efforts to coexist with, preserve, conserve and/or restore nature, and by extension, help maintain the economic benefits and quality-of-life residents enjoy.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- PMAR researching and implementing farming oysters and developing artificial oyster reefs to help restore oyster populations.
- TPWD creating near and offshore artificial reefs from Sabine Lake to Matagorda helping restore populations of fish and other organisms that depend on reefs.
- Cattail Marsh – use of a water treatment plant as a nature preserve.
- High Island – converting a former sulfur mine into critical habitat for migratory birds.
- San Bernard NWR – converting former ranch land into a wildlife refuge
- McFaddin NWR – converting former ranch land into a wildlife refuge
- Lafitte's Cove – coexisting with nature by establishing a small nature preserve in the middle of a housing development.
- NGO's and companies contributing to conserving nature such as Artist Boat – focused on preserving part of Galveston Island in the face of continued development; Dow Woods – a part of San Bernard NWR donated by Dow Chemical Co.; and the Nannie Stringfellow WMA purchased by the Texas Dept. of Transportation (and transferred to the TPWD).
- Houston Audubon buying and managing critical habitat for birds (High Island, Dos Vacas Muertas, Horseshoe Marsh, etc.)
- The USFWS conserving wildlife habitat in National Wildlife Refuges throughout the region.
- The Trull Foundation establishing Trull Marsh.
- Palacios Prairie Wetlands Organization
- Matagorda Birding and Nature Center
- Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary

Note: Examples of individual actions need to be identified and used in interpretive materials because such stories empower and motivate individuals to take action.

Sub-Concept N4-2: You can contribute through your own actions.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Plant a pollinator garden.
- Use native plants in landscaping.
- Volunteer and/or contribute to organizations involved in conserving nature.
- Support Open Space
- Turn off your lights at night (Dark Sky Program)
- Support legislation for a National Recreation Area
- Put up solar panels
- Recycle

Balancing Act Regional Itinerary

Story Overview

Throughout human history, living in this part of Texas required a measure of fortitude and resiliency given the ever-changing set of conditions that had to be endured and adapted to in order to survive. Life in this part of Texas is essentially a balancing act between quality of life, economic and industrial development, and natural disasters such as hurricanes. It is in this part of Texas where:

- LaSalle wrecked his ship in Matagorda Bay
- Most of Texas City was flattened by an explosion of a cargo ship
- The 1900 hurricane wiped out Galveston
- The oil spill from 'Deepwater Horizon' threatened biological life on the entire coast, and therefore the fisheries industry
- Changes in salinity in the bays and Gulf threaten the shellfish industry
- Changes in the water temperature in the bays and Gulf threaten the flounder fishery
- The first 'gusher' (Spindletop), ushered in the modern petroleum age worldwide
- A variety of energy sources are used to power the region, including oil, wind, solar and nuclear
- Development of the petrochemical industry and expanding population must be balanced with conserving the natural world that is a key component of the economic wellbeing and quality of life of residents.

Through it all, Texans have been resilient, constantly trying to adapt to changing conditions to maintain their lifestyle.

Recommended Sites

Matagorda County

Primary Sites

1. PMAR – this assumes PMAR will be open to the public by the time full itineraries are prepared
2. Matagorda Bay Nature Park

Secondary Sites

- a) Palacios Waterfront

Sites with High Potential

- PMAR
- Dog Island

Brazoria County

Primary Sites

3. San Bernard NWR
4. Sea Center Texas
5. Lake Jackson Historical Museum

Secondary Sites

- b) Dow Woods
- c) Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary
- d) Surfside Beach (riprap)

Galveston County

Primary Sites

6. Galveston Island State Park
7. Artist Boat Coastal Heritage Preserve
8. Galveston Island Sea Wall and the Strand
9. Texas City Dike
10. Bolivar Spit
11. High Island

Secondary Sites

- e) Houses on stilts
- f) Lafitte's Cove
- g) Ocean Star Oil Rig Museum
- h) East End Lagoon Nature Preserve
- i) Texas City Museum

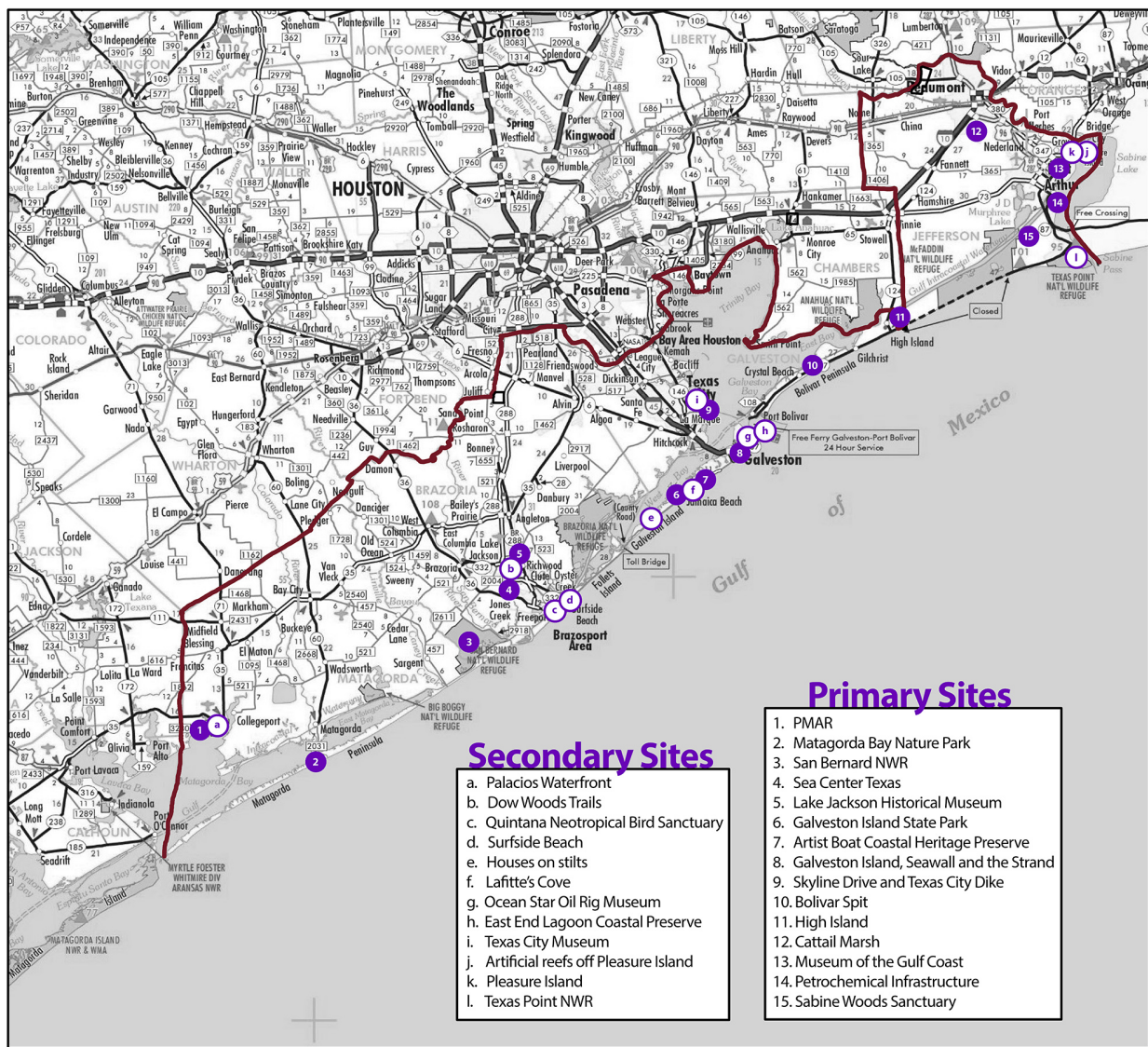
Jefferson County

Primary Sites

12. Cattail Marsh
13. Museum of the Gulf Coast
14. Petrochemical Infrastructure
15. Sabine Woods Sanctuary

Secondary Sites

- j) Artificial reefs off Pleasure Island
- k) Pleasure Island
- l) Texas Point NWR



Balancing Act Itinerary Sites

Balancing Act Concept Hierarchy

These are story-based itineraries, which means that the interpretive information at the sites as a whole is trying to communicate key concepts associated with the Balancing Act story instead of simply listing facts. Although the latter is perhaps more appealing to the hobbyist or specialist, a story-based approach is best for tourists in general, including Experiential Travelers. The following are the Primary Concepts, Sub-Concepts and Examples of Supporting Stories for the Balancing Act story that should be used to develop interpretive opportunities:

Primary Concept BA1: Coexisting with nature is a constant and evolving balancing act that has shaped and continues to shape the region.

Sub-Concept BA1-1: People have had to continue to adapt to the natural environment to continue living in the area.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The raising of the town of Galveston 15' and the building of the sea wall after the 1900 disaster to reduce the impacts of storm surges.
- The raising of housing on 'stilts' to avoid storm surges from hurricanes.
- Global climate change causing shifts in agricultural practices.
- Negative impacts of global climate change on the fish and shellfish industry.

Sub-Concept BA1-2: The desire for energy in the form of petroleum has caused unforeseen impacts that have shaped and continue to shape the region.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The Deepwater Horizon disaster and consequent impact on the natural environment, which in turn affected people's lives and the economy (significant impact on fishing and shellfish industry).
- The 2005 Texas City Refinery Explosion.
- The impact of worldwide use of fossil fuels on global climate change and subsequent negative impact on the natural environment, which has had significant and highly apparent negative impacts on the way of life in this part of Texas.
- Global climate change causing an increasing number of more powerful hurricanes as Gulf waters warm.
- Historic rainfalls in northern states causing huge volumes of freshwater to flood the nearshore ocean, reducing salinity, and devastating the fishing and shellfish industries.
- Historic droughts causing saltwater intrusion into previously brackish and freshwater systems.
- Global climate change causing sea level rise, which threatens houses, the tourism industry, the natural environment, and the way of life.

Sub-Concept BA1-3: This area is a focal point for developing alternative sources of energy to reduce the use of fossil fuels with the intent of combatting global climate change.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The development of wind farms in Matagorda County
- The nuclear facility in Matagorda County
- Other alternative energy establishments, such as solar fields and eHydrogen plant

Sub-Concept BA1-4: This area contains many examples of balancing the natural world with energy production and human settlement.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Oil and gas infrastructure in Brazoria NWR.
- Wind farms combined with research on how to mitigate impact to bird populations, especially migratory birds.
- New safeguards to prevent oil spills like the one that occurred in the Deepwater Horizon disaster.
- The Lafitte Cove Natural Area within a housing development.
- The setting aside of wildlife refuges and bird sanctuaries to protect natural habitat.

Sub-Concept BA1-5: Natural areas are critical to protecting and maintaining the way of life along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast.

Examples of Supporting Stories and Sites

- Natural areas soak up floods and excess rainfall, thus reducing damage to infrastructure and threat to life.
- Coastal wetlands help reduce storm surge
- Natural areas can protect oil and gas infrastructure from hurricane force winds.
- Natural areas and associated flora and fauna are important for the economy (tourism).
- Natural areas are critical to the mental health of residents.
- Native indicator species of flora and fauna help gauge changes to the natural systems, allowing more time to develop protection against such changes.
- Saltwater wetlands are critical nurseries for fish that are necessary for supporting the fishing industry and sportfishing.
- Natural areas support tourism, an important sector of the economy in the area.

Texas Culture and Mystique Regional Itinerary

Story Overview

Texas, and all that it has offered at different times in its history, attracted people from all over the world. The result is a unique culture, based on and evolved from cultural influences brought by a vast array of different cultural groups over the years. It has created a mystique that has captured the imagination of people from all over the world, many of whom have made the trip to the state to ‘experience’ cowboys, rodeos, barbeques, and other aspects of this unique Texas culture. Part of that mystique lies within the story of independence, and much more of it lies in the culture of the people who have lived and ultimately thrived here.

Recommended Sites

***Note:** The issue with developing a Regional Itinerary for Texas Culture and Mystique is that, unlike other itineraries, many aspects of this story are not associated with a specific site, but rather are things that can be experienced at multiple sites, such as foods, music, dance, and clothing. In addition, many of the opportunities to experience Texas Culture and Mystique are associated with events, which only occur at specific times of the year. Consequently, a significant part of this itinerary will be somewhat of a treasure hunt if visitors can learn to recognize different cultural influences before they start their trip.*

Of critical importance is the authenticity of a place, event, or product. We do not want to send people to places that sell cowboy hats that no cowboy in their right mind would buy. Visitors are going to be much more interested in visiting places where cowboys actually shop for hats and belt buckles and are more likely to buy such products than imitations.

Matagorda County

Primary Sites

1. Matagorda County Museum

Secondary Sites

- a. Palacios Waterfront
- b. City by the Sea Museum

Opportunities to Experience Culture

Tran’s Restaurant, Palacios
Danny’s Seafood House, Palacios
Matamoros Taco House, Palacios
The Fat Grass, Bay City

Brazoria County

Primary Sites

2. Varner-Hogg Plantation
3. Capitol of Texas Park
4. Stephen F. Austin-Munson State Park

Secondary Sites

- c. East Columbia (Bell's Landing and Historic Homes)

Sites with High Potential

- McCroskey-Stringfellow House – Cedar Plank Trail

Opportunities to Experience Culture

Red Snapper Inn, Surfside

On The River, Freeport

Killen's Barbeque, Pearland

Giovanni's Italian Kitchen, Angleton

Galveston County

Primary Sites

5. Bryan Museum
6. Galveston County Museum
7. Galveston Historic Seaport
8. Ocean Star Oil Rig Museum

Secondary Sites

- d. Historic Homes (on Broadway Avenue in Galveston)

Sites With High Potential

- Butler Longhorn and Italian Museums
- Juneteenth Museum once established

Opportunities to Experience Culture

Kritikos Grill, Galveston

Katie's Seafood, Galveston

Gaido's, Galveston

Maceo Spice and Import Company, Galveston

Jefferson County

Primary Sites

9. Spindletop/Gladys Museum
10. Windmill Museum and La Maison Des Acadienne
11. Museum of the Gulf Coast

Sites With High Potential

- AMSET—Art Museum of Southeast Texas (include in itineraries if and when exhibits focus on art and culture of the Upper Texas Gulf coast.)

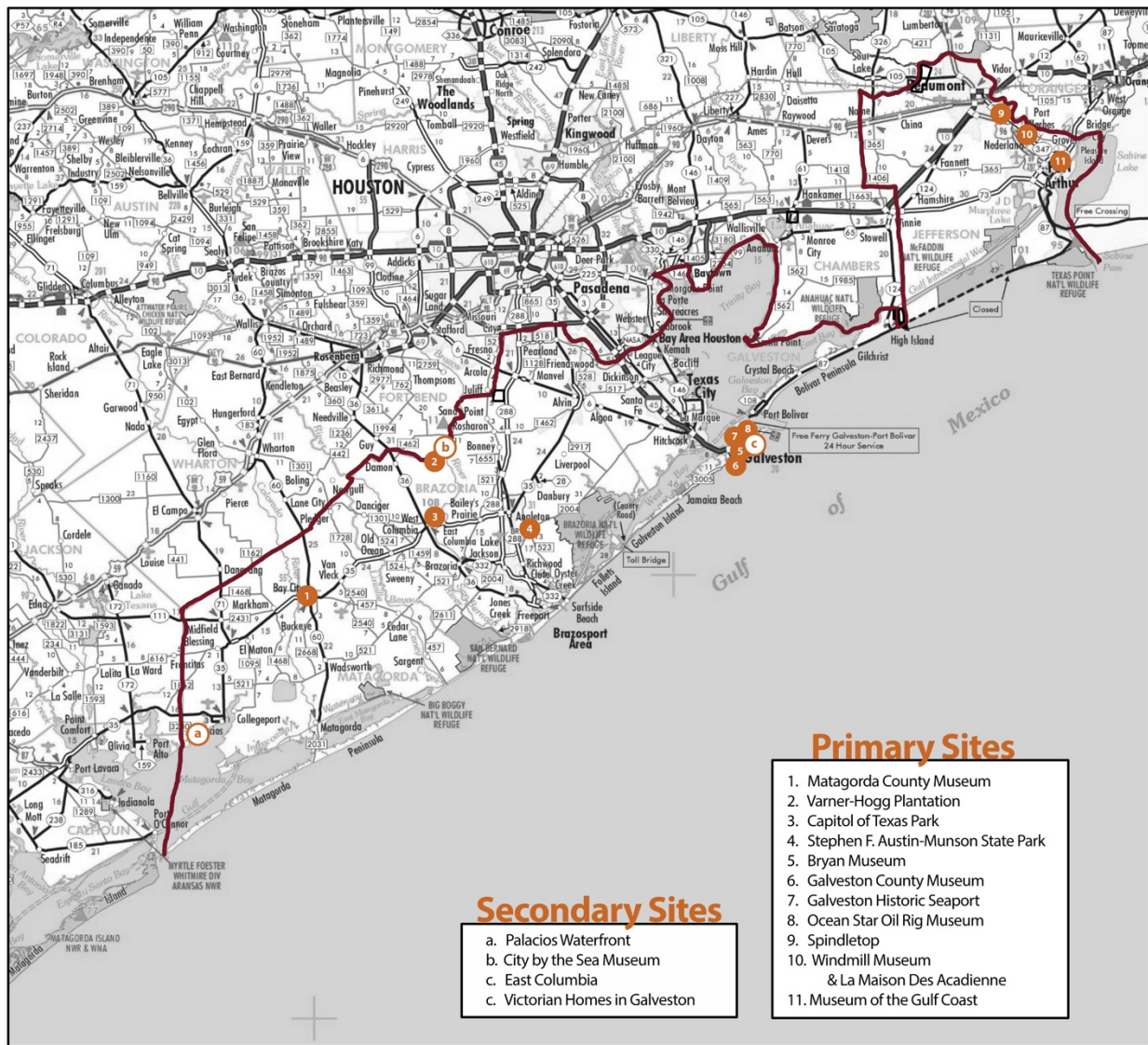
Opportunities to Experience Culture

The Boudain Hut, Port Arthur

Tia Juanita's Fish Camp, Beaumont

Patillo's BBQ, Beaumont

Pine Tree Lodge, Beaumont



Culture and Mystique Itinerary Sites

Texas Culture and Mystique Concept Hierarchy

These are story-based itineraries, which means that the interpretive information at the sites as a whole is trying to communicate key concepts with the Texas Culture and Mystique story instead of simply listing facts. Although the latter is perhaps more appealing to the hobbyist or specialist, a story-based approach is best for tourists in general, including Experiential Travelers. The following are the Primary Concepts, Sub-Concepts and Examples of Supporting Stories for the Texas Culture and Mystique story that should be used to develop interpretive opportunities:

Primary Concept CM1: Opportunities in Texas have attracted a wide variety of cultural groups over its history, who have all influenced a present-day unique culture that has captured the imagination of people from across the world.

Sub-Concept CM1-1: Opportunity for expanding and maintaining territory caused a number of countries to try to establish control of the area, bringing their cultural influence.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Spain initially establishing possession and control of the area as an expansion of their control of Mexico.
- France trying to expand into Texas through expedition of La Salle and establishment of forts in Neches River area.
- Mexico trying to control the area after taking over from Spain.
- The United States wanting control of the area to expand the country.
- Different countries trying to establish their religion in Texas, such as Catholicism by the Spanish and Mexicans, religions from Europe established by immigrants.
- Spanish bringing horses which helped give rise to rodeos.

Sub-Concept CM1-2: Opportunities provided by large Spanish Land Grants to establish a new life attracted a significant number of Anglo-Americans in the early 19th century, particularly the opportunity to establish sugar and cotton plantations.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- The key movers in establishing Austin's colony were attracted by the significant economic opportunity to establish plantations.
- Other Anglo-American colonies established in Texas when it was under Mexican control.

Sub-Concept CM1-3: African Americans, first brought as enslaved people primarily to work on cotton and sugar plantations, have added their unique cultural heritage.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Music
- Foods

Sub-Concept CM1-4: Lack of opportunity in Europe combined with opportunities afforded in the New World attracted a lot of Europeans in the time after the Civil War, resulting in a variety of cultural influences being introduced into Texas.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Dutch settling in Nederland
- Germans arriving in large numbers to the point where German was as common a language as English in Galveston.
- Italians settling in north part of Galveston County.
- Galveston becoming known as the Ellis Island of the West due to the number of people immigrating through the Port.
- Thousands of immigrants arrived through Galveston to settle along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. Today there are pockets of European culture throughout this region.
- Different religions being established in the area.

Sub-Concept CM1-5: Spindletop and the subsequent expansion of the petrochemical industry attracted people from all over the world, resulting in additional cultural influences.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Cajuns, descendants of Roman Catholic French expelled from the French colony of Acadia in Canada in 18th Century, coming from Louisiana due to opportunities in the oil industry with their foods, cultural traditions, and music.
- ‘Roughnecks’ and oil speculators coming from all over.

Sub-Concept CM1-6: Opportunities in Texas have continued to attract different cultural groups in the 20th and 21st centuries, who have added to the continually evolving culture of Texas.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Vietnamese refugees coming to area, particularly Palacios and Port Arthur.

Primary Concept CM2: The environment afforded opportunities that required adaptation to the environmental conditions, causing impact on development of the unique Texas culture.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Ranching, which gave rise to the ‘cowboy’ culture, became a key industry after emancipation due in part to lack of a cheap labor force to support plantations and in part due to the environment.
- Texas longhorns were developed by crossing Brahmin cattle with local cattle to produce a species more adapted to the environment.

Primary Concept CM3: Texas culture has many unique aspects that began here and spread to other parts of the United States.

Examples of Supporting Stories

- Tex-Mex food
- Texas longhorns
- Texas line dancing