

Physical Description:

Hill's Island, owned by Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation (TPGF), is located along the Cumberland River in Northwestern Davidson County. At 19.34-acres, it stretches linearly near the bank in Neely's Bend creating a half-mile-long channel on the west side of the island. The west channel measures approximately 30 feet wide and seven feet deep, creating a wilderness corridor for paddlers, fishermen, and island hikers. The east side of the island is sunny and gently slopes to the main channel of the Cumberland, making it ideal for walking, swimming, and fishing. Exploring the island on foot reveals a pawpaw grove, Tennessee's native citrus tree, at the island's north end and sycamores, red maples, and hackberries that stand tall throughout the property. A wide variety of wildlife is attracted to the property, including deer, turkey, herons, raccoons, snakes, otters, and a bald eagle. There is concern about exotic invasives that have taken over much of the island. Due to the varying water levels of the river, especially during high water, the island collects debris.

History:

At first occupied by Native Americans, Hill's Island is adjacent to land farmed by some of Tennessee's earliest settlers. Andrew Jackson lived just a short distance down the Cumberland from Hill's Island on his property, the Hermitage. Because the exact use or ownership of Hill's Island has not been documented, further study is needed to verify ownership.

As legend has it, an African born slave known as "Guinea George" occupied the island together with his wife and children. "Guinea George", also the colloquial term for the King of England's gold coin produced at the time, was supposedly sequestered to the Island because of his intimidating nature. For instance, as was customary in his native Ghana, he filed his teeth to points.

Hill's Island was also once in possession by Henry R. W. Hill, its eponymous owner. Hill was a wealthy slave trader that detained slaves on the island before sending them to New Orleans to sell.

The Island was next purchased by Ellen G. White in the 1880's as part of a 412 acre property for the Seventh Day Adventists who built a self-sufficient farm and later a school, Madison College, on the adjacent property.

The Seventh Day Adventists gifted Hill's Island to the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation in 2006.

Goals:

Since coming into possession of Hill's Island, TPGF has established certain goals to facilitate the transformation of this property into an outdoor classroom and wilderness park. First TPGF would like to encourage the imagination of visitors with a story describing the founding of Nashville and the Cumberland River's natural and historic attributes. Also TPGF wants to inspire the next generation of scientists with opportunities for discovery and scientific inquiry through creation of all taxa biodiversity inventory focused on insect identification, water quality testing, and scientific studies. As a long term goal, TPGF wishes to provide materials

for adventure, recreation, and exploration, including a tree house, fishing poles, kayaks, rustic accommodations, camping area, microscopes, and more to encourage learning and fun. Also central to the goals set forth by TPGF is the safety of the children and sustainable management of Hill's Island.

Executive Summary of Planning Workshop:

As part of the effort to accomplish these goals, TPGF conducted a half day planning workshop to present and help guide the evolution of the Conceptual Plan (pictured below). Collaborators included the following:

- Boy Scouts of America (**BSA**)
- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (**TWRA**) –State agency created to “preserve, conserve, manage, protect, and enhance the fish and wildlife of the state and their habitats for the use, benefit, and enjoyment of the citizens of Tennessee and its visitors.”
- Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (**TDEC**)- State Department meant to “safeguard the health and safety of Tennessee citizens from environmental hazards; protect and improve the quality of Tennessee's land, air and water and manage the Tennessee State Parks system.”
- Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association (**TSRA**)- “is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation, protection and restoration of the scenic, free-flowing rivers of our state.”
- Cumberland River Compact (**CRC**)- Organization formed to work to improve the quality of water in the Cumberland River Basin
- Metro Parks and Recreation, Davidson County
- US Corp of Engineers
- Tennessee Ornithological Society
- Tara Armistead, Landscape Architect
- Educators and Historians

As was reiterated by these collaborators and presenters, Hill's Island is a truly unique natural, educational, and recreational treasure on the Cumberland River.

Ecological Resource

Hill's Island is an ecological treasure waiting to be discovered. Two and a half million people depend on Cumberland River water and water around Hills Island is fishable and swimmable. The river ecology is so diverse; paddlefish and catfish in the river can weigh over 100 lbs. The Alligator snapping turtle species (pictured), which makes its home on the Cumberland River, is older than dinosaurs. There is an abundance of beaver, otter, mink and muskrat. Insects with larvae that live



in the water can be studied there. Examples of these include stone flies, caddis flies, and mayflies. Also, Osprey (pictured), bald eagle, heron, wood ducks, as well as migratory songbirds all use the Cumberland River as a resource, as many birds nest near water.



Educational Resource

There are many opportunities to utilize Hill's island as an educational resource as well. For example, TWRA could trap animals prior to arrival of school groups, so children could observe and investigate the animals themselves. School groups can collect all taxa specimens and study under microscopes in their laboratories (or floating classroom). Ornithologists and bird watchers could identify the birds visiting the island and Boy Scouts could help to build bird boxes to attract waterfowl and bats. Teachers and students could be actively building an on-line biological inventory that can be consistently expanded as data is collected. The history of the island could be discovered through archeological digs, exploration and river talks.



Recreational Resource

The recreational opportunities of Hill's Island are numerous for paddling, fishing, swimming, camping, exploration and boating. Hill's Island could be easily utilized as a hub for paddlers. Plans are underway to consider the Cumberland River as a Blueway, much like the Tennessee River flowing through Chattanooga (see Tennessee River Blueway). The water surrounding the Island is ideal for swimming and fishing. Numerous groups would use the property for camping. These organizations include the CRC who would lead adult wilderness camping groups, the Boy Scouts, and the TSRA who would lead paddling and camping trips. Boaters could access the area by boating through the locks at Old Hickory Dam or by boating from Peeler Park.

In order to maintain the Island as this incredible multi-faceted resource, several regulations would need to be put in place. First of all, access would be limited by permission only and would only be accessible by boat (in order to keep the island wild). Access by boat could be made via Peeler Park which is five miles downstream, by Old Hickory locks, which is five miles upstream, or potentially by Crooked Branch Park if access is built.

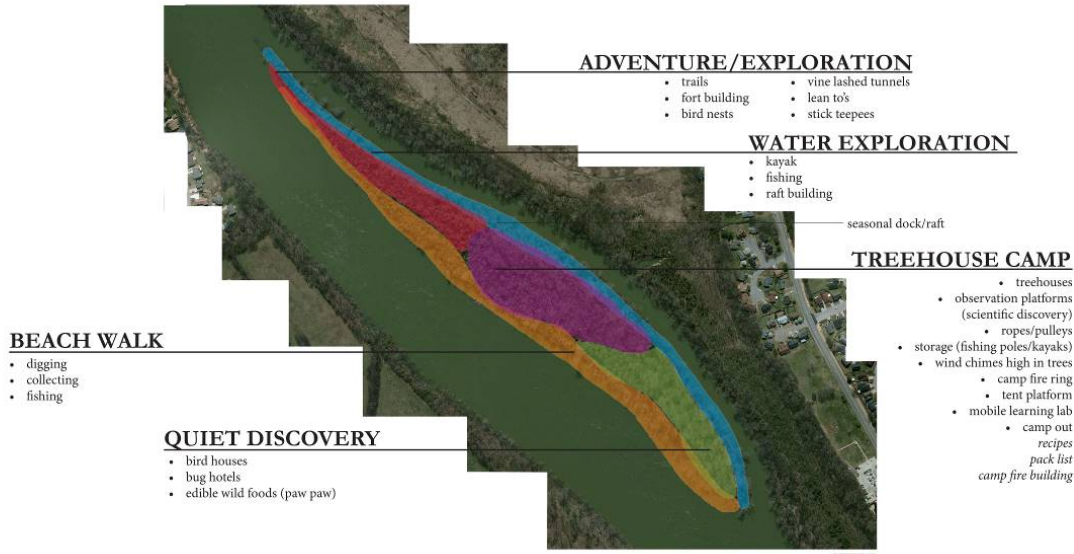
Also, the following challenges need to be considered for the Island while implementing use. Hill's Island is in five year flood zone. The US Army Corp of Engineers has a Flowage easement on Hill's Island so a variance is needed to build permanent structures. Lastly, water safety is of utmost importance. There need to be classes on boat safety, and rules around water.

Conceptual Plan

A Conceptual Master Plan was presented at the workshop to gather feedback and craft next steps moving forward. The plan suggests potential use of the island to remain wild, while offering a respite from our urban living. While access will be managed by Tennessee Parks and Greenways, opportunities abound to learn, explore, discover, and possibly camp on an island in the Cumberland River in Nashville Tennessee! It is rare to have an uninhabited wild island with a rich history so close to our city. The possibilities are endless!!

Consensus from the workshop included keeping the island wild, limiting access, pursuing partnerships with other environmental organizations to educate, recreate, and manage the island as a resource.

Hill's Island CONCEPT PLAN



Implementation Strategy

Step One: Remove the invasive privet that is on the island and return the island to its native forest, and begin an ongoing all taxa inventory of the island. Plant removal can be achieved by working with:

- Invasive Plant Control Inc. and volunteers
- Chew Crew, a prescribed grazing by a managed goat herd to remove exotic plant species
- Plant Hill's Island with native plant species

Cost Estimate: \$ 20,000

All taxa inventory of the island will change with seasonal flooding. Rather than a full inventory, a Hill's Island on line data observation site should be launched, with an opportunity to add to the observations after island visits. This ongoing inventory will encourage scientific research, as well as excite the casual observer.

Step Two: Schedule Field trip and Excursions to Hill's Island by boat to encourage interest and explore opportunities for use! These visits would be by permission only (to maintain wild character) and visitors could gain access from Old Hickory lake through the locks, or from Peeler Park. Excursions could be organized through Tennessee Parks and Greenways. Participants will be asked to sign a liability waiver and to provide limited service in the form of debris/trash removal. Possible trips might include:

- Fishing, kayaking or camping excursions
- Environmental educators in research
- Historical and Archeological excursions
- Wildlife excursions
- Island Discovery and Exploration

Cost Estimate: 5 excursions @ \$2,000/each

Step Three: Build partnerships with other interested parties and environmental organizations to develop further collaboration. Ongoing collaborations will be formalized.

For example:

- Further work with the Davidson County Historian to research the first deed on the property.
- Dialogue with the access committee of TSRA should be furthered to include Hill's Island as a hub on the proposed Cumberland River Blueway, and to advance exploration of building a paddling access at Crooked Branch Park.
- TPGF should partner with BSA and the Tennessee Ornithological Society to build bird and bat boxes, and additionally with the BSA to build temporary structures like tree house and camping platforms.
- Continuation of the dialogue with CRC to develop adult Wilderness camping on the island is vital as well.

Cost Estimate: to be determined as interest evolves

Step Four: Investigate boat transport and develop business plan with financial sustainability as a goal. Boat estimate is approximately \$250,000 to acquire an "outdoor classroom/open air vessel."

Step Five: Create a Sustainable Management Strategy for Hill's Island to cover cost of ownership and liability taxes. Continue to manage and monitor Hill's Island.

Cost Estimate: \$2,500.00/year for 5 years