
Chapter II **Description and Significance of the Area**

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Daniel Payne (an anthropologist working on his thesis studying the plant life in Bluffton) and his assistant Francisco Javier Dominguez-Roblero describe the area along SC 46 Bluffton Scenic Byway and its uniqueness best in their Bluffton Critical Resource Study completed in December 2004*:

Bluffton was originally settled as a summer community where planters came to escape the heat, malaria, and worries of the plantations. Ever since, it has continued to serve as a refuge for people. Now, the challenge for Blufftonians is to determine how to enjoy the benefits of economic growth while preserving the special "state of mind" that drew them and their ancestors here...*

...Bluffton still feels like a small southern town. It still contains many elements of its unique natural heritage. Numerous small streams cut through the high bluff on which the Town was founded. These form Bluffton's famous coves. Bluffton's May River is so clean that oysters are still harvested from its water. This varied terrain supports a wide variety of forest and woodland types. The New River, the only freshwater river in Southern Beaufort County, forms part of the eastern border of Town. The remains of rice fields line the lower limits of the New River, and cypress-tupelo swamps line the upper reaches.

As noted at the Beaufort County Planning Session in March of 2006

The county is experiencing an explosive time of growth especially in the southern portion of the county and although the region has made great efforts to protect its natural assets, *"more regional cooperation and planning is needed to better protect these assets in light of future population growth"*. In regards to transportation, *"if no capital improvements are made, over the next 15 to 20 years, most of Southern Beaufort County's regional road network will have a level of service of E or F."*

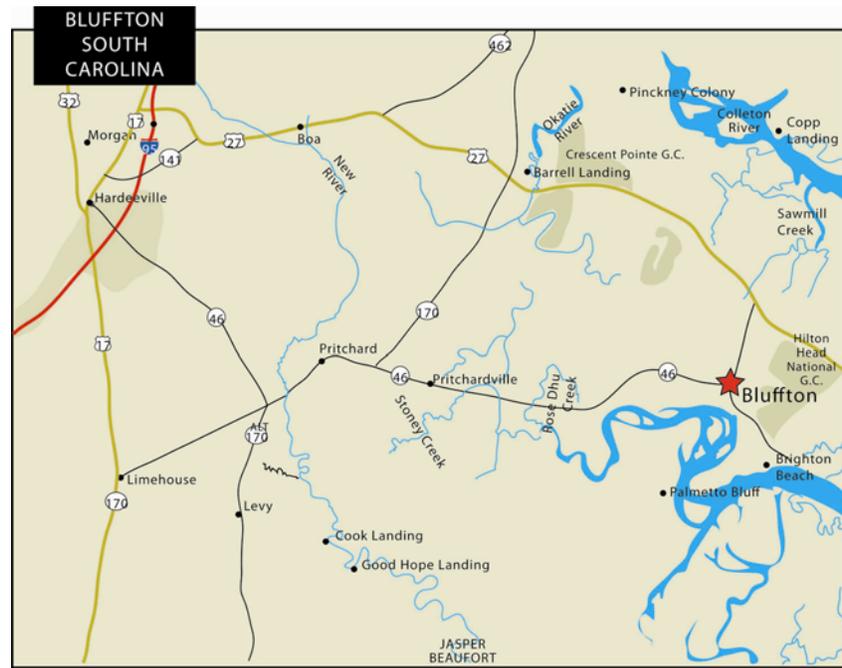
**Please Note: The Town of Bluffton, through annexing, has expanded to nearly 54 square miles within the past six years and has the potential to grow in population tenfold in approximately that same amount of time. This greatly concerns the citizens of Bluffton especially those living along SC46 who see change happening too quickly and would like to*

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protect and preserve that which they have before it is too late. See Chapter II – Current Situation for more information on this subject.

As noted in the Old Town Master Plan developed in the Spring of 2006

...Nestled along the banks of the May River, the Old Town of Bluffton is treasured by residents and visitors alike for its natural beauty and unique physical character. Once a summer retreat, Bluffton has truly come into its own as a well-established community with a storied past. During the past five years, the Town of Bluffton has experienced tremendous growth and prosperity, having expanded its territory from one square mile to approximately 50 square miles through the annexation of large parcels of undeveloped land. The Town strives to achieve economic vitality through development and redevelopment while ensuring that Bluffton's community character and historical heritage are preserved.



The Town of Bluffton is located in Beaufort County, the southernmost coastal county in South Carolina. It is situated on a high bluff overlooking the May River, a pristine waterway that has strongly contributed to the Town's history and continued success. Bluffton is located just twelve miles west of Hilton Head Island, SC and approximately twenty miles northeast of Savannah GA. In 1852, the Town of Bluffton, comprised of approximately one square mile, was officially incorporated by an act of the South Carolina General Assembly. This original one square mile of Bluffton is referred to as

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Old Town which was granted National Historic Register District designation in 1996.

To qualify for national scenic byway designation, a route must include at least one qualifying intrinsic quality. The route must be scenic, historic, natural, have archaeological or cultural significance, and/or provide recreational or tourism opportunities. SC 46 and the Town of Bluffton actually are blessed to possess all seven. An overview of just a few of the qualifying intrinsic qualities are summarized below. A more detailed look at each of these qualities is provided in Chapter VII.

Natural

- Environmental includes:
 - a. Marshland
 - b. Lagoon
 - c. River Access
 - d. Bay/Estuary
 - e. Lakes/Ponds
 - f. Streams/Rivers
 - g. Forested Wetlands
 - h. Abundance of plant and animal life

Scenic

- Scenic Vistas
- Scenic Beauty
 - a. Large Trees, Canopies

Recreational

- Walking Trails:
 - a. 3 ½ mile Rails to Trails walking trail from the New River north along the Jones estate which connects to 170 near the Bluffton Parkway.
- Historic Downtown Walking Tour
- Parks and Picnic Areas:
 - a. There is the planned 40 acre park in the New Riverside Tract along the New River Trail.
 - b. The Buckwalter Regional Park
 - c. Three parks within the Town of Bluffton with a new park being developed near the Oyster Factory.
- Fishing on the pier and public boat dock.
- Golf
 - a. Numerous existing and proposed golf courses in close proximity.

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- Boating on the New River
- Kayaking / Ecotourism tours
- Bicycle Route
 - a. The entire SC 46 Corridor from US 170 to the downtown area has been designated a bicycle route with a 4 foot paved shoulder on both sides of the road used by both pedestrians and bicyclists.

Historic

- Historic Homes and Churches within the Old Town.
- History Museum within a home built prior to the Civil War.
- There are many other treasures along SC 46 including:
 - a. The old cannery building, the old post office and a number of historic homes actually visible when driving down SC 46.

Cultural

- Artisans and Crafters
- Artists Guild
- Theater
- Other
 - a. Praise House, churches and more.

Archeological

- Other thirty significant sites recorded along SC 46 with over 120 sites documented within 200 ft.

Other

- Architectural Significance especially within the Old Town
- Tourism offerings
 - a. Welcome Center
 - b. Restaurants
 - c. Lodging
 - d. Shopping
 - e. Eco-tourism guided tours