

State Parks Recreation, and Travel Commission
DeGray Lake Resort State Park, 2027 State Parks Entrance Road, Bismarck, AR
August 16, 2019

Commissioners Present

Jim Shamburger, Chair
Kalene Griffith, Vice Chair
Austin Albers
Bill Barnes
Jeff Baskin
Mike Gibson
Shash Goyal

Ron Gossage
Eric Jackson
Bob Knight
Montine McNulty
Cindy Smith
Mike Wilson

Commissioners Absent

John Gill
Weston Lewey

Ness Sechrest
Randy Wolfinbarger

Department Staff Present

Cynthia Dunlap, Chief Fiscal Officer
David Bell, Chief of Policy and Legislative Affairs
Caleb Osborne, Chief of Staff
Jim Dailey, Tourism Director
Grady Spann, State Parks Director
Joy Barlogie, Research & Development Manager
Tammy Boyce, Tourism Director Assistant
LaJeana Carroll, State Parks Executive Assistant
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager
Brandy Flowers, Research Analyst
Kayla Hardage, Welcome Center Administrator

Joe Jacobs, Marketing and Revenue Manager
Jeff King, Special Projects Manager
Shea Lewis, Deputy Director State Parks
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Tourism Director
Kris Richardson, Executive Assistant
Randy Roberson, Planning & Development
Manager
Walt Reding, DeGray Lake State Park
Superintendent
Jill Rohrbach, Travel Writer
Michael Sindelar, DeGray Lodge Manager

CJRW/Miles

Darin Gray
Chris Ho

Susie Kardas
Jennifer Morgan
Dalaney Thomas

Guests

Stephen Bell, Arkadelphia Alliance
Chris Fletcher, Governor's Liaison
Gretchen Hall, Little Rock CVB

Bill Ott, Crescent Hotel
Debbie Roberson, Caddo Valley A&P
Kevin Sexton, Hot Springs Village

Gary Jones, Jones Media

Ann Tucker, Diamond Lakes

Call to Order

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. Kris Richardson called roll.

Approval of Agenda

Jim Shamburger requested approval of the agenda.

Eric Jackson moved to approve the agenda as presented. Montine McNulty seconded and the motion carried.

Presentation of the Minutes from Previous Meeting

Jim Shamburger requested approval of the minutes from the July 18 meeting. Shamburger requested a revision to the minutes.

Montine McNulty moved to approve the minutes from the July 18 meeting with revision. Austin Albers seconded and the motion carried.

Jim Shamburger introduced guests and introduced Caleb Osborne as Chief of Staff and David Bell as Chief of Policy and Legislative Affairs of Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism.

ADPT Financial Report

Cynthia Dunlap presented the FY 2020 Year-to-Date financial report for the period ending July 31, 2019.

FY 2020 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Department Total - \$8,934,520 an increase of 5.14%
- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$8,130,682
- Tourism Division - \$353,650
- Keep Arkansas Beautiful - \$19,732
- Administration Division - \$303,037
- War Memorial - \$127,419

FY 2020 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$2,880,023 a decrease of 2.12%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$82,159 a decrease of 49.98%

- 1/8% Tax Revenues - \$2,826,221 a decrease of 0.23%
- 2% Gross Tax collections - \$1,651,126 an increase of 5.41%

* Please Note: percentages (%) are in comparison to the same period in the prior fiscal year

Cynthia Dunlap reported on the budget and stated that it reflects only Parks and Tourism Divisions and does not include Heritage Division. There was a change in accounting in the Parks reservation revenues. The reservation system moved from Aspira to Maestro. Discussion ensued on how that will change reporting.

Dunlap stated there has not been a discussion about how things will change moving forward with transformation and how the financial summary will be reported. Parks and Tourism have reports in common with Heritage but for now only Parks and Tourism will be reported.

Bob Knight moved to approve the financial report as presented. Kalene Griffith seconded and the motion carried.

DeGray Lake Resort State Park Presentation

Walt Reding spoke on the amenities that DeGray Lake Resort State Park has to offer. He touched on how visitation numbers were good despite 2018 historic flooding.

Office of Secretary's Report

Caleb Osborne gave a brief history on his background. He gave an update on Transformation. Transformation Shared Services will report successes and progresses that are made.

The "Transformation Action Team" is a group of fifteen to sixteen employees representing each division of Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism to meet and talk through the process of transformation within the agency. The first few meetings have been introductory. They are getting to know how each division works and how to combine them effectively and efficiently. The next task is to create a mission statement for the department.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Jim Dailey spoke about meetings he and Deputy Director Kristine Puckett have had with Secretary Hurst and Cynthia Dunlap. The Secretary has been very reassuring and complimentary of how Tourism is working with staffing, goals and the relationship with CJRW.

Dailey reported the 2019 commitment to visit all fourteen Welcome Centers has been met in six months.

Puckett gave a sneak peek on 2020 Governor's Conference that will be held in Fort Smith on March 1-3, 2020. She requested assistance finding speakers for the conference.

Kayla Hardage reported on the upcoming Fall Study Tour, September 30 – October 4, and the Bentonville Welcome Center renovation.

Dailey informed the Commission of the upcoming Tourism Staff Conference, August 26-28, at Mountain View and that he and Puckett were traveling to Austin, Texas, August 17 – 20, for the Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO), where the Tourism Division was nominated for a couple of awards.

Research and Development

Joy Barlogie introduced Brandy Flowers, Research Analyst, in Research and Development. The Governor's Conference theme this year is "GRIT." The division is working on building from what that word means. Barlogie touched on the 2018 Economic Impact Report that will be released when actual numbers are available. U.S. Travel Association provided the numbers that will be presented in a press conference at the Arkansas Hospitality Association Showcase on September 25.

Advertising

Chris Ho and Susie Kardas reported on Arkansas.com numbers. It was the last month to report month-to-month data and the focus was on the trend line. With summer coming to an end, there was a 33% drop in Google search in August because people are not planning trips. The focus remains on conversion rates and despite a drop-in traffic, the conversion rates saw an increase of roughly 6%. Also implemented was a Bing search campaign.

Dalaney Thomas spoke about the new objective for the year of activating Convention and Visitor's Bureaus and Advertising and Promotion Commissions and what they can do with their content on Arkansas.com. There will be co-op training opportunities in different cities throughout the year on how to utilize social media on the industry insider.

Miscellaneous

Jim Dailey gave an update on the 501 Project. Dailey has reached out to over 200 cities and towns, not including the cities that various employees have visited previously.

PARKS DIVISION

Parks Committee Report

Eric Jackson reported the first phase for the Monument Trail at Nebo State Park has been completed, including a rescue extraction access. The Arkansas Recreation and Park Foundation is working on plans for nine additional miles at Devil's Den State Park and the design for mountain bike trails at Pinnacle Mountain State Park is underway. Park staff completed and manually converted 200,000 future reservations into the new Maestro reservations system with no double bookings; Maestro is working to resolve minor upgrades. The new digital press has been installed at the Exhibit Shop and staff are learning to operate it. Arkansas Department of Transportation is replacing faded or missing Arkansas State Park signs; Jeff King organized a spreadsheet with photographs of the signs and the GPS coordinates from the park staff. The new sign shop at Petit Jean State Park has completed the signs for Devil's Den State Park. The National Association of State Park Directors Conference is scheduled for September 2-6 with currently 42 of the 50 state park systems and Canada registered. The Salt Bowl will be held on August 30th. War Memorial Stadium staff and Arkansas State Parks Emergency Services Coordinator and Chief Ranger are working with schools and security from other state and city agencies. War Memorial Stadium has approval from the Alcoholic Beverage Control Division (ABC) and Southeastern Conference (SEC) for alcohol sales during the November 2019, Razorback football game. The Ozark Folk Cultural Center Commission was abolished by Mountain View City Council during a recent city council meeting. ASP reported 69 open positions and a challenge to keep positions filled. Parks Committee suggested linking the maps from the ADPT and the Department of Heritage (DAH); both offer great maps and websites. However, it would be helpful for all the ASP sites and DAH sites to be marked on one map. Lastly, a 2.122 carat diamond find was reported was at Crater of Diamonds State Park.

Ozark Folk Center Cultural Commission (OFCCC) Update

Grady Spann reported the Ozark Folk Center Cultural Commission (OFCCC) was established in 1965 and that this commission has final approval for Ozark Folk Center State Park (OFC) improvements. The OFCCC is a great resource for the park, though the commission does not regulate the daily operation of the OFC. The current lease for the park property expires in 2033. The lease renewal for the 320 acres connected to the park was approved by OFCCC and sent to the city for updating as the city originated the original lease. The mayor sent the lease renewal request to the city attorney for review, who then alleged the lease approval by the OFCCC was not legal. The Mountain View City Council disbanded the OFCCC stating their concerns regarding the definition of a qualified electorate. ASP has fulfilled their duties as stated in the OFCCC by-laws and will continue to operate the park but will be working with the city council until and if the city creates a new commission.

Salt Bowl Update

Spann stated a security meeting was held on August 15, 2019. The Salt Bowl will be held on August 30th. War Memorial Stadium staff and Arkansas State Parks Emergency Services Coordinator and Chief Ranger are working with the Benton and Bryant schools and security from other state, county and city agencies to review the new safety measures. The safety measures were established following the 2018 Salt Bowl ending with the largest stadium evacuation that year. Some of the safety measures will include: the public address system (PA) announcer to be replaced with ASP Shea Lewis in the event of a safety concern; no loitering permitted in the concourse; and the schools are pre-selling tickets for \$7 in advance or \$15 at the door.

Superintendent's Meeting

Spann remarked the annual Superintendent's Conference will be held on September 24-26, 2019, in Little Rock in conjunction with the Arkansas Hospitality Association Vendor Showcase and Convention. Superintendents will attend the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission September 2019 meeting.

Interpreter's Meeting

Spann announced the annual Interpreters' Workshop is scheduled for August 20-22, 2019. The interpreters will be staying at the Ferncliff Camp & Conference Center and will be meeting at the ADPT Central Office, War Memorial Stadium and touring three Little Rock Department of Heritage sites. Speakers for the conference include ADPHT Secretary Stacy Hurst, ASP Director Grady Spann, Girl Scouts of America Katie Dailey, Chief Operating Officer, and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Tabby Kinion, Chief of Education.

National Association of State Park Directors Conference

Shea Lewis commented ASP is just 17 days from the National Association of State Park Directors Conference (NASPD). This year's theme is Honoring Tradition and Seeking Innovation. ASP appreciates the efforts from the conference team and park staff as they have prepared for this conference. Grady Spann is a member of the America's State Parks Board of Directors and is currently serving as the secretary/treasurer. He will serve as vice president for two years, and then two years as president of the board of directors. America's State Parks is working toward marketing the brand and will be selecting a marketing firm during their pre-conference board meeting. Speakers for this year's conference include Governor Asa Hutchison; Dan Bartlett of Walmart; Richard Davies, retired ADPT; Jody Mayberry, The Park Leaders Podcast; Machiko Martin, U.S. Forest Service; Rex Nelson, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette; Collin O'Mara, National Wildlife Federation; David Vela, National Parks Service; and Gary Vernon of the Walton Foundation. Discussion followed.

Mount Nebo Monument Trail Update

Grady Spann announced the Mount Nebo State Park Monument Trail Phase I is open, the second phase will be added and will include all skill levels. An additional part of the future build will include a walking trail along the road to provide a safe location for walkers and hand-built repairs to the CCC built Rim Trail. Representative Bentley introduced legislation that allows nonprofits to build trails, with ASP approval, and donate the completed trail to the park system. Devil's Den State Park and Pinnacle Mountain State Park have submitted proposals for Monument Trails. Spann reported that Trail Forks and MTB Project will include trail maps and the ASP websites will include a link to Evenza maps that are downloadable PDF to cell phones. Discussion ensued.

ASP Awards Program

Shea Lewis described the redevelopment of the recognition program to highlight ASP staff and park accomplishments. The existing Park of the Year (POY) program was missing the ability to recognize the accomplishments/efforts of park staff. The new awards program recognizes three former staff members Dennis Allen, Stan Speight, and Ralph Vance and will also recognize Dr. Hardison with awards being established in their names. Revisions to the POY award include changes for submittal. Regional supervisors will select a park to nominate, and the five nominated park reports will be reviewed by a committee selected by the park director. This process will eliminate an unnecessary report and presentation by every park superintendent.

Whistler, BC, Canada; Familiarization Tour Report

Joe Jacobs reported on the recent visit with Grady Spann, Walton Family Foundation members, trail builders, and Arkansas Parks and Recreation Foundation staff to Whistler, British Columbia, Canada, to tour the largest downhill mountain bike park in the world. Whistler added mountain bike coaches to ride with their visitors to provide safety and learning opportunities. ASP is looking toward Mount Magazine State Park for a possible downhill mountain bike park with a chair lift system. At Whistler, in addition, to the mountain bike trails and chair lift, other activity options included zip lines, family friendly green trails offering day camps teaching kids how to ride, white water rafting tours, boat tours, kayaking/canoe/stand up paddleboard trips, and other outdoor activities. The 2016 economic impact study for mountain biking at Whistler indicated that visitor spending directly attributed \$46.6 million to mountain biking with 389 jobs supported and \$18.1 million in wages. International visitors account for 26% of their visitation with 18% from the United States. The chair lifts reported more revenue from sightseers than mountain bikers. In all, this would be a terrific economic boom for the area it is placed in, the state and the region. With feeder markets like Memphis, Dallas, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Saint Louis, New Orleans and more, an attraction like this could bring a lot of new money to the state. National flight service into Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport and

Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport would make this accessible to national and international travelers. This type of project would also bring the need for experienced staffing. Discussion ensued.

Miscellaneous

Grady Spann reported that Mr. McCready has spoken out about the issue of cigarette butts at DeGray Lake swimming beaches. There are nine public swimming beaches on the lake and only two are in the state park. ASP is against litter and rangers have been instructed to enforce zero tolerance for litter. Mr. McCready has requested a rule be written to abolish smoking on the beaches. Spann stated ASP must follow the legislative process for rules and policies that affect the public and the legislative process takes 3-6 months. Superintendent Walt Redding is looking at a rake that would sift the sand, however, the natural rock on the beach will cause some issues. Spann noted any policy established must be enforceable. Discussion ensued.

Maestro Reservation System Update

Joe Jacobs reported the Maestro reservations system change was successful thanks to ADPT staff from Cynthia Dunlap's section to field staff training a team of super users and trainers. The super users and trainers are not compensated with extra pay and they volunteered for the assignments. The team of trainers and trainees manually entered the existing 200,000 reservations without any double bookings. Jacobs recognized Stella Seale and awarded her with an honor coin for her assistance during the changeover.

Outdoor Retailer Conference Report

Joe Jacobs reported on his attendance of the Summer Outdoor Retailer Show (OR) held in June in Denver, Colorado. This industry is focused on concerns that affect outdoor recreation including access to public lands, conservation and recently diversity in the outdoors. OR is primarily an industry show. Jacobs' goal for attending was first to look for possible resale items that to carry in the park stores. Secondly, investigate supply channels for future centralized buying for park stores. One item of interest was the IGLOO ReCool reusable cooler made from recycled paper products, an alternative to Styrofoam coolers. Jacobs stated that he found that Arkansas is not recognized as an outdoor destination. He spoke with National Geographic and the only trail map they had for an Arkansas site is one for the Buffalo National River; they have since contacted Jacobs to help develop a book on short hikes in Arkansas. Jacobs provided several suggestions for increasing Arkansas viability in the outdoor recreation market: actively recruit outdoor industry businesses; create an office of Outdoor Recreation to promote recreation in the state; apply promotional efforts to outdoor recreation opportunities to attract visitors; and to work with outdoor retailers to carry Arkansas focused products.

ASP Television – Digital Ad

Jennifer Morgan, CJRW account representative, presented the ads for the fall digital media campaign which included increasing ASP digital presence. The goal was to feature a park in The Delta and the renovated cabins at Village Creek State Park. CJRW used students from the University of Central Arkansas in the ads. Discussion ensued.

Grady Spann announced NASPD hired CJRW to produce a video on a national level. The video used the photographs from the yearly photo contest sponsored by Aspira where visitors submit their photographs from their visits to state parks. Discussion ensued.

Girl Scouts love State Parks

Kelly Farrell reported America's State Parks had established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Girl Scouts of America to include a National Thunder Clap Moment (national event) held on July 13-14, 2019. 30,000 Girl Scouts participated in 400 state parks in almost all 50 state parks. Girls Scouts have requested more outdoor activities. Arkansas hosted 99 girl scouts in 15 state parks providing meaningful activities. Events included girl led activities when possible, nature observations and two Arkansas State Parks offered adventures for older Girl Scouts. Following suggestions from the park systems, next year's event will be held on September 12-13, 2020.

Adjournment

The State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission adjourned at 12:10 pm on August 16, 2019, DeGray Lake Resort State Park, Eagle Room, 2027 State Parks Entrance Rd, Bismarck, AR.