

**State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission Retreat  
Red Admiral Room, The Lodge at Mount Magazine State Park,  
577 Lodge Dr., Paris, AR 72855, November 20, 2019**

**Committee Members Present**

|                             |                    |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Jim Shamburger, Chair       | Ron Gossage        |
| Kalene Griffith, Vice Chair | Eric Jackson       |
| Austin Albers               | Bob Knight         |
| Bill Barnes                 | Weston Lewey       |
| Jeff Baskin                 | Cindy Smith        |
| Mike Gibson                 | Mike Wilson        |
| John Gill                   | Randy Wolfinbarger |

**Committee Members Absent**

Shash Goyal  
Montine McNulty  
Ness Sechrest

**Staff Present**

Stacy Hurst, Secretary, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism  
Jim Andrews, General Counsel, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism  
Caleb Osborne, Chief of Staff, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism  
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism  
Jim Dailey, Tourism Director  
Grady Spann, Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Tourism  
Shea Lewis, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Jeff King, Project Manager  
LaJeana Carroll, Executive Assistant, Parks Division  
Tammy Boyce, Tourism Director Assistant

**Guests Present**

Bill Ott, Eureka Springs, Crescent Hotel

Committee Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm. Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

## **PARKS DISCUSSION ITEMS**

### **1. What challenges (revenue, visitation, participation, facilities) for specific parks can we identify? What can we do to help address?**

Grady Spann reported revenue challenges include Ozark Folk Center State Park (OFC) mission and attracting visitors; DeGray Lake Resort State Park (DLRSP) lodge occupancy, golf course, and DeRoche Ridge campground restoration/repairs; Village Creek State Park (VCSP) golf; Queen Wilhelmina State Park (QWSP) lodge occupancy; smaller parks, and day-use parks with high visitation but low revenue production; and museum parks with low visitation and low revenue production. Renovating and upgrading revenue producing facilities cabins, camper cabins, and camping, which will have a negative impact on revenue for a time.

Spann reported lower visitation at the Crater of Diamonds State Park (CDSP) with a finite resource and the park reaching carrying capacity issues; Petit Jean State Park (PJSP) and Devil's Den State Park (DDSP) with high occupancy and renovations needed for their park facilities; Pinnacle Mountain State Park (PMSP) is being loved to death by the number of visitors. He noted the overall standardized methodology for counting guests needs to be standardized parkwide.

Spann stated participation at OFC is dependent on staying relevant with the changes to the Arkansas music scene and the seasonal visitations in Mountain View.

Spann commented park facilities and staff residences in connection with an overall aging infrastructure and dated facilities, such as the campgrounds create a perpetual cycle of repairs and renovations. Also, some of the newer facilities are larger and impose increased operating expenses.

Spann remarked the park system needs an effective visitor feedback program/system and a Point of Sale (POS) system. The park system needs support to update the aging infrastructure, maintenance, and repairs. Spann also noted it is important to focus on the parks' missions.

Discussion ensued. Spann requested SPRTC Commissioners continue to share their knowledge, advice, and share their opinions.

Action Items include: creating a strategic plan with measurable goals, OFC hire a study group for the local area, scheduled a meeting for January to review the mission statement and creating a plan to reach younger visitors, and develop a plan to manage expenses and increase revenue.

**2. Do we have activities trending in the wrong direction? What can SPRTC do to help address this decline?**

Spann commented there is a decline in golf, fishing, boat and lake use and other recreational activities. While there is an increase in the non-revenue producing facilities such as trails. Spann stated the visitation and music scene at OFC and the visitation at the museums and historic sites also continues to decline. Spann commented SPRTC can aid with future legislation as needed and possible park name changes such as Arkansas Post Museum to provide a name the better fits the park. Discussion ensued.

**3. Discussion about the capital project process (costs, inspections, Commission approval, etc.)**

Jeff King stated most projects are bid in the open market by the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) and The Arkansas Division of Building Authority (DBA) excludes Emergency Projects, e.g. War Memorial and disaster recovery projects, and Alternative Delivery Projects, i.e. Petit Jean Visitor Center. The current market is the primary decider on project costs, with factors that include project location, type and size of construction, and time of and for construction. Discussion ensued. Stacy Hurst commented with ADPHT justifying with supporting documentation it may be possible to request legislation modifications to the bidding process.

Jim Andrews reported DeRoche Ridge campground at DLRSP to fix the current campsites and keep PMI engineering firm is on board and they will do remediation and they are committed to working on our schedule. ASP is currently waiting on a set of plans to move forward. The project will go out for a public bid with a different construction company. Andrews commented if Goslee Construction Corporation feels they are owed money they may present a claim for payment. Discussion followed.

Shea Lewis remarked one thing ASP will try is to include a construction observation on the contract so, a consultant or their staff will be there regularly. ASP only has three inspectors with 27 current projects ongoing across the state. It may also be possible to pre-set inspections for critical points of the construction in the contract. Lewis noted adding a trial basis of construction observation component to contracts, estimated at 2-4% of the total project cost. Discussion ensued.

King commented ASP's long-range development plans and park master plans have been approved by SPRTC. These documents are still used to guide Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) project decisions.

King explained the annual application for Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) funding applications are brought before the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission (SPRTC) each January before the February/March application

submittal. Biennium Amendment 75 CIP spending plans are typically brought to SPRTC in June.

King communicated the CIP Process beginning with the initiated request, planning and development of budget estimate for project, program plan/concept development, planner updated cost estimate, funding secured, architect/engineering services initiated, schematic design and schematic design estimate, design development and updated cost estimate, construction design and final cost estimate, certification of funding, project bid, project awarded or re-bid, construction, change orders, and ending with the final project completion.

King remarked that federally funded Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT) grant projects require daily inspection log; such as the Delta Heritage Trail State Park (DHT), Mount Magazine State Park (MMSP) and, Cane Creek State Park CCSP).

**4. Are there activities ASP doesn't offer in parks that we should consider? Are there activities ASP's offer that no longer make sense?**

Grady Spann remarked the 1981 State Parks Plan defines the "state park type recreation" offerings. The ASP Park of The Year (POY) includes seven defining components. Some recreational activities such as golf, equestrian, pools, playgrounds, concessionaires, and other non-resource-based events are offered by the parks. Grady stated the impact on the visitors including the emotional connection to the parks. Discussion followed.

**5. Discussion session on how to develop Parks champions in the Legislature**

Grady Spann stated ASP developed the ASP profile sheets are a great tool to educate legislators, the parks fact sheets provided for each SPRTC meeting include infographics on the nearby state parks. SPRTC Commissioners can build relationships with local legislators and engage with the local legislators and other legislators during the Legislative session. Finally, building connections within the profession and tourism industry. Eric Jackson recommended an action item for a plan to improve legislative relationships. Discussion ensued.

**6. Is there a way to leverage Parks quality of life to enhance Arkansas economic development?**

Grady Spann requested support for funding of a statewide economic impact study of Arkansas State Parks that would include the local communities and the quality of life added by the parks. The second part of this study is to find out what visitors want; ASP needs to reach a more diverse customer base. Grady commented the DHTSP impact study on the Delta is significant. Eric Jackson commented you cannot separate economic impact from the quality of life.

Stacy Hurst stated an economic impact of historic preservation to contain quantitative data and qualitative data is being conducted.. Grady remarked ASP has a model from Alta from the DHT study. Eric Jackson commented that you cannot put a dollar amount on the education impact provided by the parks. Discussion ensued.

**7. What ideas do we have to increase revenue at WMS? What can SPRTC do to help?**

Shea Lewis remarked the best way for SPRTC to help with increasing the revenue at War Memorial Stadium (WMS) is to seek out sponsorship growth and building on relationships. The current focus for WMS revenue is to focus on finding facility specific events. Discussion ensued.

Grady Spann commented WMS is truly an athletic stadium; the Guns and Roses cost the stadium and caused the field failure. ASP must protect the resource; a lighter stage might be an option to allow a concert without causing the damage to the turf. Jeff King is the project manager for the upgrades to the stadium. Upgrades include the turf, visitor locker room, and the command center; next spring the home team locker room will be upgraded.

**8. Is it possible to develop a 3-5 year plan with measurable goals and objectives?**

Grady Spann communicated that he had created the ASP Roadmap in 2016 after he was made Parks Director to share with ASP team. The road map showed where ASP was heading as a department. Spann noted he plans to update the ASP strategic plan after transformation is complete. Spann is currently working on the Performance Goals Compensation Standards (PFCS) that includes written expectations, goals for each section, Fiscal Year accomplishments that are connected to performance. Equally important the Director's expectations and supervisor's expectations are being shared.

**9. Bench strength and leadership development – report from Grady**

Spann noted that the ASP Bench has been depleted through retirements and transfers. To rebuild the bench, ASP is utilizing the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) State Park Leadership School, using Seasonal Rangers and Seasonal Interpreters positions to recruit, and is revamping the Park Superintendent Trainee Program. The Park Management Trainee Program is used to offer additional training and education to current staff who remain at their current park and cross-train. Spann commented ASP is conducting out of house and advanced job advertising approach to attract new staff. Finally, ASP routinely sends staff to national level conferences to encourage professional development.

## 10. What opportunities exist for better collaboration across state government?

Spann reported ASP is actively seeking ways to collaborate with other state agencies; he cited meetings with Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission on coordinating prescribed burns. Spann noted Governor Appointments for ASP staff include Darin Mitchell to the Arkansas Geographic Information System Board and Joe Jacobs to the Governor's Advisory Council on Cycling. Spann also noted Michael Sprague from Outdoor Grants is the State Trails Coordinator for the Legislative enacted Arkansas Trails Council.

Spann stated Jeff King coordinated a project to identify all ASP park signs that needed to be replaced across the state and is working with the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT) to have new signs installed. Spann also made a connection with ArDOT and is working on a partnership where ASP will provide the materials and ArDOT will lay pavement on the Delta Heritage Trail. Spann announced ASP meetings with Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, the Division of Arkansas Heritage and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Stacy Hurst commented ADPHT will be working closely with Arkansas Economic Development to blend our message and working with private partners across the state. Discussion ensued.

### Break ###

### TOURISM ADVANCE MATERIAL

1. Five-year comparison of actual marketing expenditures with key details (time, space, print, digital, social, production, fees, results, measurements, etc.)

The Board requested a list of what the 2% tax covers outside of marketing. Cynthia Dunlap will provide the list. Jim Dailey discussed partnerships within the industry and their economic impact.

### DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. ***What are our biggest challenges? How do we address them?***

Dailey talked about the education that is occurring with staff to help them better their job performance. Dailey asked what more could be done to better salaries for the employees of our department. Dailey spoke about strategic planning, research and salaries being the biggest investments of the department, despite the budget making it challenging. Kristine Puckett informed the commission that the first cooperative research program would be announced soon. A phone call had taken place that morning with the Arkansas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus to determine industry interest. Puckett mentioned that the department spends about 1% of budget on

research; that is an area where the spending could be increased. Commissioner Jackson expressed concerns on where the 2% tax is being used. He was uncomfortable specifically with retirement and relocation as a facet of Tourism. Puckett responded that there was an appropriation specifically for promotion of retirement and relocation. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Griffith suggested that Tourism work with advertising and promotion commissions when creating plans.

**2. *General marketing discussion. (Social, influencers, time/space, and digital vs printed materials.)***

Commissioner Shamburger stated that moving from paper to digital publications has been a good move and using social influencers has been a great success. The key is to vet the influencer and use multiple influencers to make an impact. Commissioner Griffith requested more documentation of the value that travel writers or influencers have had. Puckett told the commission that Tourism just started a contract with a company called Simpleview that can help track and monitor those areas. Commissioner Gill expressed concern over where ad placement is online. Discussion ensued. Dailey expressed that CJRW/Miles are doing a remarkable job for Tourism. Commissioner Smith asked how there could be a deeper reach nationally and discussion ensued.

**3. *Ideas to cultivate better relationships with local Advertising and Promotion Commissions and Convention and Visitors Bureaus***

Commissioner Griffith said that after polling the convention and visitors bureaus, the consensus was that meeting with leaders regularly, reviewing the strategic plan more often, and letting the convention and visitors bureaus know about partnerships and decisions around the state in advance are crucial. Regional Tourism Associations are also there to help advertising and promotion commissions. Commissioner Griffith suggested adding another destination marketing organization to the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission.

**4. *How do we gain better legislative support and enthusiasm?***

Secretary Hurst told the commission that David Bell is charged with policy and legislative affairs. Caleb Osborne is working on a strategic plan. Secretary Hurst said it is important to educate and build relationships with the legislators.

**5. *Ideas to develop more community outreach at commission meetings.***

Commissioner Shamburger said that events and receptions in the areas where the commission meetings are being held are a good idea. Dailey suggested a tourism leadership program or initiative where leaders visit different community functions and

give presentations. Shamburger suggested having a one-day program with the local communities to get them involved. Puckett informed the commission that there is not a dedicated staff member that acts as an industry liaison. However, in the absence of that position there are general Power Point presentations and handouts in development for use by commissioners or staff to ensure that everyone is giving the same message at speaking events.

**6. Discussion about visitor information centers and Arkansas Department of Transportation.**

Dailey talked about visiting all fourteen welcome centers with Puckett and meeting with all the Welcome Center managers at their recent staff meeting. Commissioner Jackson asked about issues with the ArDOT on and the Welcome Center facilities finding ways to work better together. Dailey said Welcome Center administrator Kayla Hardage is the resource for that and she is doing a great job of bringing the two together. Puckett informed the commission that the biggest issue at the centers is internet and wi-fi connectivity. Commissioner Griffith said she would like to see more data regarding where people are coming from and where they are going.

**7. Would it be valuable and possible to benchmark against other comparative states?**

Commissioner Griffith stated that we have Miles Partnership, the number one company with the largest outreach to all the states and to utilize their expertise.

**8. Brainstorm how to take advantage of new tourism products (Momentary, U.S. Marshals Museum, Saracen Casino, Southland expansion, Oaklawn expansion, others)**

Commissioner Jackson stated that Arkansas has never seen anything like this in the history of Tourism in regard to the casino growth, the U.S. Marshals Museum, and other growth in several Arkansas cities. Tourism has to challenge CJRW/Miles to reach out to advertising and promotion commissions and find ways to take advantage of the billion-dollar investment that is happening in the state. Dailey suggested there should be a design to take a national approach at advertising. Discussion ensued.

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