

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Red Wolf Convention Center, 223 Red Wolf Blvd., Jonesboro, AR 72405
8:30 a.m., February 20, 2020

Commissioners Present

Kalene Griffith, Chair
Eric Jackson, Vice-Chair
Austin Albers
Bill Barnes
Jeff Baskin
Mike Gibson

John Gill
Ron Gossage
Montine McNulty
Mike Wilson
Randy Wolfinbarger

Commissioners Absent

Shash Goyal
Weston Lewey
Ness Sechrest
Jim Shamburger
Cindy Smith

Staff Present

Stacy Hurst, ADPHT Secretary
Jim Andrews, ADPHT General Counsel
Joy Barlogie, Tourism Research & Dev. Mgr.
Tammy Boyce, Tourism Director Assistant
LaJeara Carroll, ASP Executive Assistant
Marcel Hanzlik, Region 3 Supervisor
Sheila Ward, Welcome Center Manager

Joe Jacobs, Parks Mktg. & Rev. Manager
Jeff King, Parks Special Projects Manager
Shea Lewis, Parks Deputy Director
Grady Spann, Parks Director
Elaine Lienhart, ADPHT Executive Assistant
Kristine Puckett, Interim Tourism Director

CJRW

Darin Gray
Chris Ho
Tiffany Holland Maltezo
Wade McCune
Jennifer Morgan
Dalaney Thomas
Keegan Wright

Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas
Ileana Franscone

Governor's Office

Chris Fletcher

Guests

Christie Appleton, Jonesboro A&P
Shane Broadway, VP University Relations-ASU
Harold Perrin, Mayor of Jonesboro
Kraig Pomrenke, Embassy Suites General Manager

Call to Order

Chair Kalene Griffith called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Elaine Lienhart called roll.

Welcome and Recognition of Guests

Griffith introduced the guests. Shane Broadway spoke about opportunities available and the growth happening in Jonesboro. Kraig Pomrenke, General Manager of Embassy Suites, said the hotel is working with Arkansas State University to start a hospitality program. Mayor Perrin thanked the commissioners for all their work in the hospitality industry and presented Secretary Stacy Hurst with a key to the city.

Approval of Agenda

Kalene Griffith requested approval of the agenda.

Austin Albers moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

Presentation of the Minutes from Previous Meetings

Kalene Griffith requested approval of the minutes from the January meeting.

Montine McNulty moved to approve the January minutes as presented. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

Griffith requested approval for the amendments to the October 17, 2019, minutes, previously adopted in November.

Randy Wolfinbarger moved to approve the amendments. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried

Financials

Cynthia Dunlap was not in attendance. Secretary Hurst gave the option to approve the financials at a future meeting. Discussion ensued.

Office of the Secretary

Secretary Hurst gave an update on transformation. Division of Heritage accounting staff, are being relocated to the Big MAC building. Shared services in human resources and management information services are also being incorporated. Going into the fiscal session, the budget will be reported in separate reports but under one umbrella in shared services.

Hurst met with Jonesboro Mayor Harold Perrin about the growth of the community and what Parks and Tourism has done to help support it. Hurst spoke on the challenges of connectivity issues in state parks and has been working with the Department of Information Services to resolve it. Hurst met with the governor and stated they might be reaching out for help from staff and elected officials for assistance.

Tourism

Director's Report

Kristine Puckett reported on the Southeast Tourism Society 2020 Conference that took place in Little Rock. The Tourism Division worked with several cities to welcome over 300 industry visitors to the state. Arkansas Tourism was presented the State Tourism Office of the Year award. Jessica Ledbetter, Tourism Sales Manager, and Kelly Parker with Visit Rogers graduated from the Marketing Professional Destination Program and were presented with certificates at the conference. Puckett said that Arkansas's photography exhibit was recognized and named a AAA Southern Travel Treasure and presented with a plaque. Puckett informed the commission that the traveling photography exhibit had moved to Fort Smith in time for Governor's Conference. Puckett gave a brief update on the Arkansas Soul partnership with the University of Arkansas scheduled to begin on June 7, 2020 and will last for two weeks. Tourism will be working internally to determine how to get more information out about the program and how to better promote it.

Research and Development

Joy Barlogie presented the commission with the copies of the 2020 Governor's Conference program. Barlogie gave an update on the presenters and the sponsorships that have been secured. Barlogie advised that registration is down and hoping it will pick up. She is looking ahead to the 2021 Governor's Conference in Fayetteville with a goal of 1,000 registrations. ARKTank has expanded the number of presenters this year from four to five. Barlogie traveled to Chicago in January to the Ideal Living show and talked to approximately 775 people about relocating to Arkansas.

Sales

Jessica Ledbetter gave a report on the last two tradeshows that occurred since the previous commission presentation. Shelby Morris attended TEAMS, a sports partner, in Anaheim, California, in November of 2019 and had 83 scheduled appointments shared between 12 Arkansas representatives, with planners of large sporting events. Ledbetter attended the American Bus Association Marketplace that took place in Omaha, Nebraska, in January. Ledbetter stated there were 12 representatives from Arkansas with over 200 prescheduled appointments set between them. Travel South International Showcase took place in St. Louis, Missouri, in December 2019. Ledbetter hosted a familiarization tour that visited Fayetteville, Bentonville, and Eureka Springs. There were six international tour operators, three international journalists, and two international country representatives. Six countries were represented and those were Argentina, Australia, Ireland, Netherlands, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The showcase saw immediate results with two articles written about the tour in the "KarryOn Australia" publication. Commissioner John Gill asked about the status of bus tourism in Arkansas. Discussion ensued.

Great River Road

Kristine Puckett informed the commission that Kim Williams and the Great River Road Commission are applying for All American Road status. The deadline to apply is May 15, 2020.

Advertising

Wade McCune with CJRW gave an update on the “Take Off Arkansas” in-state campaign. Research has shown that the word Arkansas needs to be front and center to show during scenes of embracing the outdoors and showing a diverse array of activities to remind the public they are seeing things to do in Arkansas. Two 30-second ads for television were revealed.

The Idle Theory Bus road trip resulted in an incredible reach. The cost to bring them in was \$15,000. Commissioner Jeff Baskin inquired about where it was being promoted. Discussion ensued.

Susie Kardas gave an update on Arkansas.com. The website traffic saw a 27.9% increase in total users. Organic traffic is up. Kardas stated there was a small increase of 1.2% in partner referrals and some changes are being made that will help bring those numbers up. Guides ordered saw a 10% increase while guides viewed online increased 536%. Newsletter subscriptions were down by 2%.

Chris Ho reported that search engine traffic has begun to pick up from where it was in the winter. Google clicks from 2019 to 2020 were down by 7% but the conversion rate was up 15%. Bing is performing well. Clicks were down by 3% but conversions are up 38%. That put the conversion rate up by 45% which means more people are continuing to search and are going further into the website. On social media ads, served on Facebook and Instagram in January were a little over 3.5 million. Cost per ad served was \$4.02 and 1.6 million people were reached at a cost of \$8.75 per 1,000 people. There was a total of 1,108 conversions.

PARKS DIVISION

Certificate of Appreciation

Grady Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Danny Shepherd for his 33 years of service to Arkansas State Parks (ASP).

Austin Albers moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Danny Shepherd for his 33 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Grady Spann highlighted the article “Parks director responds to concerns about future of Ozark Folk Center” (Freeze, Stone County Leader, January 29, 2020). Grady Spann was interviewed following the January 2020 SPRTC commission meeting in Bentonville and an article regarding the shortfall at the park was published. Spann noted Stone County provided a fair and honest reflection in this article.

Spann mentioned the article “\$20M Walton Family Foundation grant to help complete Delta Heritage Trail in east Arkansas” (Kruse/Moritz, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, January 30, 2020). Several news stations were on-site during the announcement and Local ABC Memphis Channel 24 posted a live stream of the announcement in their online article.

Spann highlighted the recent article, “Damage to spillway leads to drawdown at Bear Creek Lake” (Walkenhorst, Arkansas Online, January 12, 2020). Kristina Root, Superintendent provided good information for the article and is working with the U.S. Forest Service to ensure the project is a priority. The U.S. Forest Service has temporarily added sandbags to bring the level up and has started the process for funding and repair.

Spann highlighted the article “Forged in Fire: Sevier County is Home to Arkansas Knifemaker” (McKinney, Only in Arkansas, January 14, 2020). Arkansas competing in this season’s Forged in Fire on the History Channel.

Spann mentioned the article, “A Closer Look: Take a hike... for a good reason” (Sosa, KNWA/FOX 24 KFTA, January 2, 2020) “Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation.” Research has shown that people who spend less time with technology and more time in nature, improve in problem-solving tasks by fifty percent; time in nature is healthy.

Grady Spann reported on the 2020 Arkansas Top Chef competition and Annual Food Service Workshop, a recent training event for the ASP restaurants. The workshop involved presentations at DeGray Lake Resort State Park and Pulaski Technical College Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management Institute (PTC-CAHMI) by Ben E. Keith, Sysco, Springfield Grocery Company (SGC), Kristy Baumgardner, David Flake, and Healthy Active Arkansas; presentations included Serve Safe, menu analysis, portions, market trends, healthy options, CES items and new stock items, safety, addressing personal issues, packaged snacks and beverages, prepared food and breastfeeding, presentation and plating. ASP team partnered with ADPHT Central Office staff for the Top Chef Competition at PTC-CAHMI; each team prepared an entrée and sides from the secret food pantry. Discussion followed.

Ozark Folk Center update

Grady Spann reported he met with all stakeholders, including legislators with Secretary Hurst’s assistance. This included a meeting with the Committee of One Hundred, the Mountain View City Council and Ozark Folk Center Craft village crafters and musicians; each meeting included a report of the revenue and attendance data and future cost-saving strategies. Cost savings that will be incorporated include eliminating Thursday night shows to reduce the deficit and focusing on increasing group business.

The best statement came from Jeanette Larson (paraphrasing), it will not be a single silver bullet that will solve the deficit, it will take a bunch of BBs. Park staff have begun making changes to manage the park expenses and salaries: extra help staff were used in the past to scan documents and now the cabin office’s front desk staff are scanning the documents in their downtime, resulting in a weekly saving of \$20. The park has held two group events using almost only full-time staff resulting in a \$90 savings. For the recent housekeeping training and recent couples retreat, changes were made resulting in a savings of \$700. Another park suggestion was to require the craft contractors to provide their own bags and receipt books, this resulted in a savings of \$1,800 per year. The questions about the Ozark Folk Center has encouraged park staff to be more efficient. Discussion ensued. Spann commented he believes it is time to hire a consultant to figure out why visitation has dropped and recommendations to increase business.

Reservation System update

Joe Jacobs reported the reservation cancelation policy has been revised and will be implemented in the next couple of weeks; this will be dependent on MAESTRO's ability to make the required changes.

The group booking contracts are completed and are currently at MAESTRO to be put into the system.

On April 3, 2020, Jacobs announced the "what is available" button should be functional on the reservations system. Work will begin on this as soon as the reservation policy is updated. ASP will also be working with Miles and MAESTRO to complete this function for the reservation system.

Jacobs projected April 17, 2020, as the deadline for the updated campground maps; Darin Mitchell is updating our Graphic Information systems (GIS) data to match parks and the reservation system.

Other projected reservation system updates should be completed in June. Projected date of June 13, 2020, for cleaning up reservation system information and June 30, 2020, to post new campsite and cabin images on the reservation site. Staff is currently waiting on spring for pretty pictures then will enter them into the system.

Jacobs anticipates by August the pavilions will be added to the online reservations system for parks without overnight accommodations; these parks do not currently have MAESTRO and will need to be added. This will also include Historic Washington State Park's Jailhouse Bed and Breakfast that will be added and will also add the schoolhouse and gymnasium at the same time. This will allow a way to track occupancy for these facilities. Discussion ensued.

Strategic Plan Update

Shea Lewis reported work has continued for the State Parks strategic plan; the plan is currently 40% complete. The team met last week off-site at CJRW. Meetings offsite provided an opportunity to think without interruptions. The team has set the framework for seven goals and the strategies to address those goals. Section Managers and their teams are writing measurable objectives to meet the strategies. The goal is to have something to show at the April SPRTC meeting and the plan be finalized at the May meeting. Discussion ensued.

ANCRC FY21 Grant Application

Jeff King presented the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) - FY21 Proposed Projects Grant Request. The ANCRC was established by the Arkansas Legislature in 1987 in order to manage and supervise a grant and trust fund for the acquisition, management, and stewardship of state-owned properties acquired or used for ANCRC approved purposes. The grants are funded by the state's real estate transfer tax. Last funding cycle (FY20) the council awarded \$24,755,300 in grant dollars to sixteen different applicants. The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism requested \$14,622,183 in FY20 grant funds and received an award of \$8,250,000 for various State Park improvements.

This year's request contains twenty projects totaling \$10,678,708 in proposed funding. Included are ten repair, renovation, or replacement projects; six new developments; three reporting efforts; and one property acquisition. Some requests are a continuation of projects for which the design phase or previous construction phase was funded by prior ANCRC grants.

Eric Jackson moved to approve the Fiscal Year 2021 Arkansas Natural & Cultural Resources Council grant request as presented, totaling \$10,678,708 in projects for Arkansas State Parks. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

Queen Wilhelmina State Park – Bench and Memorial Plaque Donation

Jeff King reported Arkansas State Parks (ASP) has a memorial bench and plaque donation request necessitating Commission approval at Queen Wilhelmina State Park. The Asal Family would like to donate a memorial bench and plaque in the memory of Shala Shafaie Asal. The Asal family will purchase all materials required for installation. The installation will be undertaken by park staff. The plaque shall read: "To our mother, Shala Shafaie Asal, thank you for creating a lifetime of fun adventures and lasting memories."

Arkansas State Parks is seeking permission from the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission at their meeting on February 20, 2020, to accept these donations and install the memorial bench and plaque.

Montine McNulty moved to approve the memorial bench and plaque as follows:

Queen Wilhelmina State Park – Memorial Bench and Plaque; plaque to read: "To our mother, Shala Shafaie Asal, thank you for creating a lifetime of fun adventures and lasting memories." Randy Wolfinbarger seconded, and the motion carried.

First Amendment to Concession and Operating Agreement for Viasat Inc. at Arkansas State Parks

Jeff King reported Viasat, Incorporated (Inc.) has requested an amendment for the Use Permit Agreement between Viasat, Inc. and Arkansas State Parks. Viasat, Inc. has worked to provide communication improvements at Devil's Den and Village Creek State Parks. The installation of the equipment at Village Creek State Park did not provide an adequate signal for all the cabins. Viasat, Inc. will install additional equipment to boost the signal, ASP is requesting to discontinue the ten percent cost-share until Viasat, Inc. has recouped the cost of the additional equipment. Discussion ensued.

Eric Jackson moved to approve the First Amendment Use Permit Agreement with Viasat, Incorporated and Arkansas State Parks for Village Creek State Park. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

CIP Updated Spending to Include DHT 5-year Matching Allocations

Jeff King stated on November 1, 2019, Arkansas State Parks received a 1:1 matching grant not to exceed \$20 million dollars from the Walton Family Foundation (WFF) for the completion of the remaining 40.01 miles of Delta Heritage Trail State Park (DHT). At the November 2019, meeting of the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, following acceptance of a resolution supporting the grant, additional information on funding and project timelines were requested by the Commission regarding our Division's projected grant match.

The completion of the remaining 40.01 miles of the DHT is estimated to cost \$40,838,973 and be completed in seven phases. As part of the grant requirements, a deadline of August 2024, (FY2025) was placed on matching fund requests, giving State Parks approximately 4.5 years to submit for matching funds to complete the DHT. Requests for matching funds must be submitted in January and August of each year.

This planning document assumes no additional federal and/or other grant support will be utilized and represents a "worst-case scenario" for the effect of the grant on non-DHT capital improvement projects throughout our state parks system over the next five fiscal years.

Lake Poinsett Update

Jeff King reported Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) is undertaking repairs to Lake Poinsett Dam Structure and Shoreline Erosion in two phases. The following timeline is a summary of the information provided by Brent Timmons, AGFC Regional Fisheries Biologist:

March 2017 The first public meetings held

July 2017 Draining of the lake began

Phase 1 – Repairs to water control structure, outflow pipe, and emergency spillway renovation.

- May 2018 - Final engineering design completed.
- November 9, 2018 - Bid opening. All bids were rejected due to bids being higher than estimated.
- January 11, 2019 - Re-Bid opening. All bids were again significantly higher than estimates and rejected.
- March 13, 2019 - Bid opening for the third time. Bid awarded in the amount of \$1,200,000.
- April 8, 2019 - Construction started.
- May 21, 2020 - Estimated construction contract end date.

Phase 2 – Shoreline stabilization, repairing as much of the shoreline as possible with the funding the commission appoints the project.

- AGFC currently seeking \$3,100,000 to repair 100% of the shoreline.

- To complete 100% of the shoreline it is estimated by engineers to take approximately 8 months, weather dependent. The final amount of shoreline completed is funding dependent

Lake Charles State Park – Removal of Bathhouse in Area “E”

Jeff King reported the Lake Charles State Park Bathhouse E (Building No. 24.11/AASIS No. 120005877) is a 760 square foot masonry structure with a composition roof built in 1974. The structure has reached the end of its useful life and will be rendered redundant by its replacement with a new bathhouse facility currently under construction. Removal of the existing structure will be part of the general contractor’s responsibilities. The existing bathhouse building will be demolished and disposed of in accordance with all Federal, State, and local regulations. Discussion followed.

Montine McNulty moved to approve based on the information presented; the commission finds the Lake Charles State Park Bathhouse E (Building No. 24.11/AASIS No. 120005877) is obsolete notwithstanding the insured value and approves the removal from Arkansas State Park inventory. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Bull Shoals-White River State Park – Removal of Residence

Jeff King reported the Bull Shoals-White River State Park Employee Residence (**Building No. 06.41/AASIS No. 120005300**) is an 840 square foot single wide FEMA mobile home. The 15-year-old mobile home has been used to house seasonal park rangers for 6 months of the year. It has outlived its usefulness and requires extensive repairs to the HVAC, roof, windows, as well as replacement of sub-floor and sheetrock throughout. The cost of needed repairs exceeds the value of the mobile home. The mobile home will be put up for sale/bid through DFA-Marketing and Redistribution.

John Gill moved to approve based on the information presented; the commission finds the Bull Shoals-White River State Park Employee Residence (Building No. 06.41/AASIS No. 120005300) is obsolete notwithstanding the insured value and approves the removal from Arkansas State Park inventory. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Old Business/Other Business

Commissioner Mike Wilson mentioned an item that was discussed at the SPRTC retreat, the millions of dollars spent on a capital basis all over the state. Is there a way for ADPHT to join forces with the private dollars that are benefitting state?

Commissioner Kalene Griffith asked how tourism was working with local communities and the new tourism draws like the Momentary.

Commissioner Eric Jackson stated we are seeing really big changes across the state: the Momentary, The Marshall's Museum, El Dorado the Murphy Art District, Jonesboro Convention Center and downtown, Walton Family Foundation and trails, South Oaklawn, Saracen Casino, and the casino in Russellville. These are huge tourism changes; how does this change our thinking and ultimately our marketing?

Commissioner Griffith said she would visit with Secretary Hurst and her team and would provide an update for the April SPRTC meeting.

Commissioner Bill Barnes had a recent conversation from a gentleman regarding Missouri trails and he encouraged him to look in Arkansas. Think about a sub-marketing plan that tells about the new things going on in Arkansas right now; focus on the new tourism products.

Commissioner Kalene Griffith remarked Commissioner Bob Knight's wife, Sue Knight, recently passed away. SPRTC would be collecting money for a donation in her memory.

Commissioner Griffith stated this was Commissioner Bill Barnes last meeting. The SPRTC is sad to lose him from the commission he has been a great mentor and provided great leadership for the past 18 years.

Commissioner Bill Barnes remarked he was stepping off the commission, but not leaving the group. Barnes remarked Mountain Harbor Resort depends on the state and how SPRTC contributes to tourism so he will stay involved. Barnes stated Arkansas has the finest state park system and so much to be proud of. Please remember Arkansas tourism is where it is today because the private sector's initiative to tax themselves with Amendment 75 and the 1/8 cent to promote the state park system and to market tourism in Arkansas.

Adjournment

The State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission adjourned at 11:24 am on February 20, 2020, Jonesboro Red Wolf Convention Center, 223 Red Wolf Blvd., Jonesboro 72405.

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