

State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission
The Thaden Fieldhouse Hanger, 2505 SW I St., Bentonville, AR 72712
8:30 a.m., January 16, 2020

Commissioners Present

Kalene Griffith, Chair
Eric Jackson, Vice Chair
Austin Albers
Bill Barnes
John Gill
Ron Gossage
Shash Goyal

Montine McNulty
Ness Sechrest
Jim Shamburger
Cindy Smith
Mike Wilson
Randy Wolfinbarger

Absent

Jeff Baskin
Mike Gibson
Weston Lewey

Department Staff Present

Stacy Hurst, Secretary Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism
Grady Spann, Director, Arkansas State Parks
Kristine Puckett, acting Tourism Director
Shea Lewis, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism
Joy Barlogie, Tourism Development Manager, Tourism Division
Tammy Boyce, Tourism Director Assistant, Tourism Division
Joe Jacobs, Marketing and Revenue Manager, Parks Division
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, Parks Division
Mike Wilson, Operation Manager, Parks Division
Becky Bariola, Region V Supervisor, Parks Division
Jeff King, Project Manager, Parks Division
LaJeana Carroll, Executive Assistant, Parks Division
William Armacost, Bentonville Welcome Center

CJRW

Darin Gray
Chris Ho
Brian Kratkiewicz
Jennifer Morgan
Dalaney Thomas

Miles Media

Susie Kardas
Ileana Franscone

Guests

Chris Fletcher, Governors Liaison
Amanda Khanga, Visit Bentonville
J R Shaw, Visit Rogers
Kelly Parker, Visit Rogers
Ryan Baird, Runway Group
Katie Howell, Runway Group
Theresa Crossland, Red Iron Strategies
John Burris, Capitol Advisors Group
Mike Maloney, Lowell A&P
Mike Malone, Runway Group
Debra Layton, Peel Company
Charlotte Buchanan, Museum of Native American History
Charlie Gocio, Sells Agency
Drew Finkbeiner, Sells Agency
Karen Singleton, Walmart Museum
Doug Thompson, Northwest Arkansas Democrat Gazette
Molly Rawn, Experience Fayetteville
Amy Stockton, Experience Fayetteville
Hazel Hernandez, Experience Fayetteville

Chair Kalene Griffith called the meeting to order at 8:43 am. Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

Recognition of Guests

Kalene Griffith welcomed guests to the State Parks Recreation and Travel Commission (SPRTC) meeting. Griffith welcomed Commissioners and guests to Bentonville and thanked Diane Carroll, from Crystal Bridges, for the tour of The Momentary on Wednesday afternoon, Visit Bentonville and Crystal Bridges for Wednesday nights' tickets to the Infinity Room exhibit, dinner at Eleven at Crystal Bridges, and the tickets for the North Forest Lights exhibit. Griffith thanked Courtyard by Marriott for the evening hospitality and dessert bar, Thaden Fieldhouse for providing space for the SPRTC meeting, and Runway Group for providing breakfast and refreshments for the break during the commission meeting.

Approval of Agenda

Austin Albers moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.

Presentation of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Austin Albers moved to approve the Minutes from the November 21, 2019, meeting. Montine McNulty seconded and the motion carried.

Welcome

Mike Malone, of the Runway Group, thanked the State Parks Recreation and Travel Commission (SPRTC) for visiting Northwest Arkansas and for their dedication to promoting Arkansas. Malone stated that the Runway Group is a private development group supported by members of the Walton Family. Thaden Fieldhouse is a private facility that is open to the public to provide access to the airport and the restaurant is a community gathering spot. Oz1 social club was built to attract aviation enthusiast and the exhibit hanger was built to allow access to the public. The next offering will be a 75-acre Osage Park, next to the airport, a privately-owned park with public access.

Malone thanked the SPRTC for promoting trails in cycling; it is a great economic benefit to the state. VRBO has reported Bella Vista, Arkansas, as one of their top 5 destinations and has reported a 70% year over year growth. Finally, a 10-million-dollar investment was recently announced in the Pine Mountain Jamboree as a redevelopment into a mountain bike lodge for access to the mountain bike trails in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. A recent economic impact study in Northwest Arkansas shows the trails contribute \$137 million dollars annually just in these four counties.

Stephanie Orman, Mayor of Bentonville welcomed SPRTC to Bentonville. Tourism and parks are a big part of the quality of life in Northwest Arkansas. Bentonville is excited to showcase the parks and Arkansas to visitors from around the nation and the world.

DIVISIONS OF PARKS AND TOURISM FINANCIAL REPORT

FINANCIAL REPORT – December 31, 2019

Cynthia Dunlap presented the FY 2020 Year-to-Date financial report for the four (6) month period ending December 31, 2019.

FY 2020 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Department Total - \$58,403,717 an increase of 2.09%
- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$46,017,093
- Tourism Division - \$8,860,503
- Keep Arkansas Beautiful - \$265,345
- Administration Division - \$1,689,578
- War Memorial - \$58,403,717

FY 2020 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$14,346,672 an increase of 8.48%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$1,122,849 an increase of 1.57%
- 1/8% Tax Revenues - \$17,848,842 an increase of 5.54%
- 2% Gross Tax collections - \$10,371,133 an increase of 7.29%

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

Ness Sechrest moved to approve the Divisions of Parks and Tourism November Financial Report as presented. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Bill Barnes moved to approve the Divisions of Parks and Tourism December Financial Report as presented. Montine McNulty seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Stacy Hurst reported Kristine Puckett has been asked to serve as acting Tourism Director in the interim, Jimmy Bryant is the new Director for the Division of Heritage, Dr. David Ware is the new State Historian and Director of the Arkansas State Archives.

Secretary Hurst stated with transformation all the position appropriations will be changed to the Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. Presently positions are financed by divisions; however, that will change in the future. ADPHT's employee cap is 900 total positions within the department. ADPHT will continue to track positions as they were historically assigned and reported, as a point of reference.

Secretary Hurst reported ADPHT has effectively moved toward a new shared service for fiscal operations led by Chief Fiscal Officer, Cynthia Dunlap. The new organizational structure will involve approximately 30 ADPT and DAH staff members from accounting, budgeting, procurement, and fixed assets. The Big Mac Building ADPT fiscal area will be reorganized to accommodate additional personnel.

Secretary Hurst mentioned Caleb Osborne continues to lead the transformation effort. This involves attending many meetings and a lot of reporting. This effort continues to move forward smoothly. ADPHT anticipates that in the Legislative fiscal session a combined budget as one new Department will be presented.

Hurst advised David Bell serves as ADPHT's Legislative Affairs Director; Bell continues to identify more ways ADPHT can work more closely with our legislatures.

Hurst thanked Jim Andrews, ADPHT General Counsel, for his work in striking the agreement with C&H Hog Farms Inc., which essentially closed the combined animal feeding operations on the Buffalo River watershed. The deal has been consummated and escrow was broken, and it is now the responsibility of the Department of Environmental Quality to clean the ponds.

Hurst advised of an issue regarding the challenges with internet connectivity at state parks; this is a priority for the department, and work continues with the Arkansas Division of Information Systems and potentially private providers to find solutions.

SPRTC 2020 stipend

Jim Andrews advised per Arkansas Code Annotated 25-16-904 the Commission must approve its annual stipend at the first meeting of the calendar year. The stipend is \$85 per day by statute; SPRTC's approved stipend rate for 2019 was \$65. Discussion ensued.

John Gill moved to approve the Commissioners' stipend rate of \$65 for calendar year 2020. Ness Sechrest seconded, and the motion passed. Dissenting: Shash Goyal.

SPRTC 2020 travel reimbursement

Jim Andrews stated per Arkansas Code 25-16-902 the Commission must approve its travel reimbursement at the first meeting of the calendar year.

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the commissioners' travel reimbursement for calendar year 2020. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

Statement of Financial Interest

Jim Andrews advised SPRTC Commissioners must file their Statement of Financial Interest per Arkansas Code Annotated 21-8-701. The form is due by January 31, 2020, to the Secretary of State's office. Discussion ensued.

Andrews informed Commissioners of the board member handbook published in 2015 by the Attorney General's office, is available on their website. Commissioners were encouraged to obtain a copy; this handbook provides information regarding commissioner duties and how the commissions fit into state government.

Parks Directors

Park Committee Update

Eric Jackson provided a Parks Committee update. 2019 was a good year for state parks and it was the second-best year recorded despite flooding and facility renovation closings. Park staff kept expenses down even as revenue grew. Negative developments included tornado damages at Lake Chicot State Park with an estimated total loss of \$100,000 to \$150,000; also, Mississippi River State Park's Bear Creek Dam was damaged. The flooding damage at Pinnacle Mountain State Park totaled \$200,000. ASP provided a 10-year summary of emergency services, with a

small number of incidents considering the average of 8 million annual visitors. State Parks currently has 10% of its positions unfilled. Arkansas State Parks are the largest out of the classroom education program in Arkansas. Discussion followed.

Mountain Glory Station agreement renewal

Grady Spann reported that Ronnie Waggoner, Concessionaire of the Mountain Glory Station at Queen Wilhelmina State Park, sent a request to modify the operating days and hours. The request is to operate the Mountain Glory Station on Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Discussion ensued.

Shash Goyal moved to approve Mountain Glory Station’s request to operate on Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day through Labor Day at Queen Wilhelmina State Park. Randy Wolfinbarger seconded, and the motion carried. Dissenting: Jim Shamburger.

Acceptance of the “Connector Trail” of the Chickalah Loop at Mt. Nebo

Spann stated through Memorandums of Agreement with Arkansas State Parks, the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation (APRF) has recently completed construction of a portion of Monument Trail at Mount Nebo State Park. The 0.72-mile Chickalah “Connector Trail” was accepted as substantially complete on December 30, 2019, bringing the total distance for the Chickalah Trail development to approximately seven miles.

The previously mentioned Memorandum of Agreement calls for the transfer of exclusive rights and ownership of the projects to Arkansas State Parks, upon final completion of the development projects. In conjunction with Arkansas Code Annotated 22-4-103, Spann asked the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, at its discretion, to accept the contributions of the Arkansas Parks and Recreation Foundation used to improve the state park system through a transfer of exclusive right and ownership of the projects to Arkansas State Parks, upon final completion of the development projects. Discussion ensued.

Ness Sechrest moved to formally accept the gift of the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundations improvements completed at Mount Nebo State Park. Cindy Smith seconded, and the motion carried.

2020 Annual Foodservice Workshop’s Top Chef Competition

Spann invited Commissioners to attend the Arkansas State Parks 2020 Food Service Workshop’s Top Chef Competition to be held on February 11, 2020. The competition will begin at 11:30 AM at the University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical College.

Ozark Folk Center retreat report

Grady reported the ASP management team has reviewed revenue and expense reports from 2002 through 2019 and visitation from 1980 through 2019 for the Ozark Folk Center State Park (OFC). The immediate response is to reduce the operation to a sustainable level according to visitation.

Shea Lewis remarked that in the past reductions have been made to reduce the expenses at the Ozark Folk Center State Park as an attempt to improve the profit-loss margin. The visitation continues a slow and steady decline, expenses have increased, and total revenue remains flat. Marketing campaigns have not shown a return on investment and although the Ozark Highlands Radio has been successful, visitation has not improved. Noticeable declines continue in gift sales and music events. The OFC facilities are in excellent condition; occupancy rates for the lodge rooms show room for improvement and the Skillet Restaurant continues to do well.

Mike Wilson reported some immediate changes would be implemented such as reduction of extra help, maintenance and operation, and contract labor, and maintaining a freeze on two full time positions for OFC. Operations changes will include: evaluate and increase food prices at The Skillet Restaurant, establish a goal with a plan to increase group sales, evaluate opportunities for dynamic pricing for the lodge rooms, evaluate park hours of operations, hours for The Skillet, review and update job descriptions for full time positions to outline additional off-season responsibilities, and develop a plan for scaling the auditorium operations and utilizing the White Oak Stage for smaller shows.

Lewis commented the vision for the future for OFC includes working with OFC stakeholders, seek an underwriter for the Ozark Highlands Radio, seek to hire a consultant to evaluate and make recommendations, increase groups especially in the off season, adjust the hours of operations and finally to review the mission and realign to increase revenue. Discussion ensued.

John Gill made a motion to accept the Ozark Folk Center Operational Plan report and move forward with the park staff recommendation. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Reservation System

Joe Jacobs reported on the reservation system overview. The first online reservations system was implemented in 2003 and the analytics system was added in 2006. ASP continued with the Northwind/MAESTRO/ResEze system through 2017. The contract for Reserve America was awarded in 2015; ASP held off switching to the new system until 2017 to allow Reserve America time to create the system needed to interphase with the Aloha point of sales system and group sales. MAESTRO continued work in the background for the sales and catering systems.

Jacobs remarked with the end of the contract and the risk of going out to bid and an unknown reservations system being awarded the new contract, it was better to upgrade the MAESTRO reservations system and work on upgrades to camping and other guest experience features.

Future upgrades will improve the guest experience such as adding photographs, what's available button, interactive mapping, adding pavilions and meeting rooms at parks not currently using MAESTRO, cleaning up reporting capabilities, and expanding the system to accommodate new facilities/properties. Discussion ensued.

Park Strategic Plan Framework

Grady Spann reported on the November 20, 2019, SPTRC Retreat meeting. ASP was directed to develop a strategic plan for the state parks division.

Jeff King stated ASP held an initial framework meeting on December 12, 2019, to discuss prior ASP strategic plans from 1981, Arkansas State Parks Road Map from 2016, and Arkansas Outdoors SCORP revised in 2019, review state Park Strategic Plans from other states, identify key components and strategy options, and set a timeline for plan updates including the framework at the January 2020 SPTRC meeting.

Shea Lewis remarked the strategy framework for ASP's strategic plan and key components include: ASP's vision for plan development with bottom-up and top-down input and recommendation, a final document that includes annual reportable components, final document to be visually appealing and engaging to the reader. The plan's goal to evaluate effectiveness of key components of park missions and fit into the core values of the park system, define specific aspects of spending and set priorities for future funding, identify means of measurable resource management strategies, evaluate and look for efficiencies within existing management and processes, and potential for outside consulting to look at the ASP operation. The next step will proceed with internal meetings, draft goals, objectives and priorities, identify key performance measurables and reportable components, present to SPTRC for review, input, and approval proposed for May 2020. Discussion ensued.

10-minute BREAK --resumed at 11:11

Parks Miscellaneous

NASPD Leadership School

Grady Spann reported he has completed his three-year term on the of National Association of State Parks Directors' (NASPD) Board of Regents for the NASPD Leadership School. The Leadership 2-year program provides state park professionals an opportunity to learn about running park systems. NASPD Leadership School is taught by 12 regents that are traditionally state park directors; however, one of the newly appointed regents will be Kelly Farrell, Chief of Interpretation for ASP. Kelly Farrell will be the first non-director park professional to sit on the board of regents for NASPD.

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) ArDOT Grant Awards

Jeff King reported Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and Recreational Trails Program grants (RTP) are federally funded programs for the purpose of building and maintaining motorized, nonmotorized, and multiple-use trails. Local, county, state, and private/non-profit agencies are eligible to apply for funds, so long as access by the general public is provided throughout the life of the project. The TAP and RTP Programs are managed by the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and are reimbursement-type grant programs, providing for an 80 percent federal share and a 20 percent local match, which is required from the eligible sponsor. Four projects meeting the requirements of the grant program were identified by the planning staff in early 2019. Applications were initially developed to include project scope, costs, criteria compatibility, and land ownership or use permit documentation for the project and location. On April 18, 2019, the Arkansas State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission (SPRTC) endorsed a resolution providing support for the four projects and the pursuit of the TAP and RTP grants for each. These projects and their requested grant amount were:

- Delta Heritage Trail – Elaine to Mellwood – 9.00 miles, \$500,000.00
- Cossatot River State Park Natural Area – New Highway 278 Bridge Pedestrian Sidewalk, \$500,000.00
- Lake Chicot State Park – Woodland Trail Improvements, \$195,000.00
- Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park – Plum Bayou and Knapp Trail Improvements, \$228,726.00

Following SPRTC approval, the planning staff submitted the applications for the FY19 TAP and RTP Grant cycle on May 28, 2019. On September 30, 2019, the Arkansas State Highway Commission awarded two of the four State Parks projects submitted for funding. The awarded grant amounts are:

Delta Heritage Trail – Elaine to Mellwood – 9.00 miles: \$250,000.00 (total project estimate = \$1.52 million).

Lake Chicot State Park – Woodland Trail Improvements: \$195,000.00 (total project estimate = \$243,000).

TOTAL AWARDED: \$445,000.00

CIP Quarterly Report

Jeff King reported the CIP Quarterly Report for the end of the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2020, Arkansas State Parks maintains thirty-two (32) open Methods of Finance (MOF) for design, construction, and property acquisition efforts of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) with approximately \$60.8 million of encumbered funds and an available balance of \$25.7 million. The State Parks Division currently is underway with 206 projects of various size and scope within these open MOFs.

Some noted projects that have recently been completed include Village Creek State Park cabin renovations, War Memorial Stadium visiting team locker room, official's locker room, the command center, and Powhatan Historic State Park Maintenance Building.

CIP Updated Spending to include DHT 5-year Allocations

Postponed to February 20, 2020, SPRTC meeting.

ASP Passport

Joe Jacobs announced Arkansas State Parks has created a Parks Passport. The Parks Passport will allow guests to record park visits with a stamp/rubbing available at each of the state parks, date of visit, and a space for a personal note of their favorite thing about the park. ASP's goal is to go live with the new passport program in February with the new State Park Guide. Once visitors have visited all 52 parks, they can have their passport verified in a staffed park then ASP will send them a promotional item. Discussion ensued.

First Day Hikes

Kelly Farrell presented First Day Hikes. The intention of the hikes is to remind people that state parks are open year-round. This trademarked initiative of the National Association of State Park Directors is in its eighth year! With 42 states reporting there were 1,328 events, 84,242 participants and 176,366 miles hiked. ASP reported a record year with over 350 more visitors than last year's 400 participants. ASP offered 59 guided hikes scheduled in 40 state parks with 1,484 hikers for 2,437.7 miles number of participants this year. This does not include park visitors who hiked and visited parks on their own.

2019 NAI Media Award

Farrell reported the Jacksonport State Park Visitor Center was the first-place winner for interior exhibit gallery in National Association for Interpretation's 2019 Interpretive Media Award. The interior gallery media award is an extremely competitive category; Farrell stated one of the reasons she believes they were a category winner was the dedication of the Jacksonport State Park Staff, Angela Gibbs, Curator Jacksonport State Park, and exhibit contractor Taylor Studios, Inc. The exhibits at Jacksonport State Park were designed using universal design for accessibility; ASP will continue to use universal design as a new standard for exhibits.

12:00 break

TOURISM

Director's Report

Interim Director Kristine Puckett talked about progress that has been made on agenda items from the November retreat. The Division is working on building more community outreach to attend commission meetings and is tracking writers and influencers. The Welcome Centers have started collecting the zip codes of guests. In 2019 there were over one million visitors.

Jessica Ledbetter is working on travel and tradeshow for 2021. Ledbetter has reached out to the convention and visitors bureaus and other partners to see what shows they would like to attend. Tourism and CJRW are putting together educational content for constituents and legislators; they are also working to create speaker guides and presentations internally for staff when they need to speak at events.

Puckett informed the commission that production artist, Jennifer Hoornstra, had taken a job with Heifer International.

Puckett reported that there are continuing efforts to resolve the connectivity issues at all the Welcome Centers.

Cynthia Dunlap gave a breakdown of the 2% tax gross collection along with the advertising and M&O budget as requested at the November retreat. Puckett reminded the commission about the Southeast Tourism Society Conference taking place in Little Rock on February 9 -12 and Governor's Conference on Tourism in Fort Smith on March 1 - 3.

Research and Development

Joy Barlogie gave an update on the Governor's Conference regarding some of the changes and additions to the schedule. Discussions about the 2024 eclipse along with members of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration will be featured at the conference.

Barlogie gave an update on the Regional Tourist Associations and informed the commission that Drew County is considering a move from the Delta Byways Regional Tourist Association to join Arkansas' South. Barlogie asked for a preemptive vote from commission ahead of the county's decision to stay or leave the Delta Byways region.

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the motion for Drew County to move from the Delta Byways Region to Arkansas' South. Cindy Smith seconded, and the motion carried.

All Regions have submitted their reporting for the halfway mark of the fiscal year. Barlogie reported that the Regions are performing well.

Communications

Leah DiPietro announced that U.S. Travel's National Plan for Vacation Day is January 28, 2020. Arkansas Tourism has helped to promote the event through media releases and guest editorials.

Advertising – CJRW

Dalaney Thomas and Shelby Fisher revealed the new "Take Off Arkansas" in-state campaign encouraging the public to use their paid time off and take an in-state vacation. A landing page with activities and itineraries was developed and added to Arkansas.com as part of the promotion.

Brian Kratkiewicz presented the spring/summer 2020 digital media campaign plan and reported on media usage and ad spending. Kratkiewicz stated that the goal is to generate a mass reach of all target audiences and to maximize awareness of all messaging. The number of ad impressions increased to 67.3 million. The goal was 64 million. The cost per thousand impressions was \$10.90 and the goal was \$11.52. The visit percentage of people clicking on ads was 0.29%. The goal was 0.39%. Kratkiewicz stated that is above the curve for the entire industry.

For the fall/winter purchase, a test market was Colorado's mountain biking enthusiasts. This was a successful area to market; it will continue to be an area that is targeted. Kratkiewicz reported that people are spending around 55% of their time using digital media. The industry is about 50/50 where ad dollars are spent between digital and traditional media.

Susie Kardas and Chris Ho gave an update on Arkansas.com and social media traffic numbers for November and December. In October, partner referrals were down 6% so a change was made to the site mid-November which brought performance up. In November, total traffic to the site was up by 27.5%. There was a 1,319% increase to guides viewed online. Newsletter subscriptions decreased by 2.6%. In December, total traffic increased by 37.8% and partner referrals jumped up to 5.8%. Guides ordered increased to 16.9%, while guides viewed online saw a 960% increase. Newsletter subscriptions were down slightly at .17%.

MISCELLANEOUS

Mike Wilson moved to adjourn at 1:00. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

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