

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Mosaic Templars Cultural Center Ballroom
& via ZOOM
501 W. 9th Street, Little Rock, AR 72201
10:00 a.m., June 17, 2020

Commissioners Present

Kalene Griffith, Chair
Eric Jackson, Vice Chair
Bob Connell
John Gill
Weston Lewey
Jim Shamburger
Mike Wilson

Commissioners via Zoom

Austin Albers
Blair Allen
Jeff Baskin
Ron Gossage
Shash Goyal
Molly Jackson
Montine McNulty
Randy Wolfenbarger

Commissioners Absent

Mike Gibson
Ness Sechrest

Staff Present

Stacy Hurst, Secretary
Jim Andrews, ADPHT General Counsel
Joy Barlogie, Research and Development
David Bell, ADPHT Chief of Policy and Legislative Affairs
Tammy Boyce, Tourism Director Assistant
LaJeara Carroll, State Parks Executive Assistant
Leah DiPietro, Tourism Communications Manager
Cynthia Dunlap, ADPHT Chief Financial Officer
Leigha Jones, Tourism Development Consultant
Jeff King, Parks Special Projects Manager
Jessica Ledbetter, Tourism Sales Manager
Shea Lewis, Parks Deputy Director
Elaine Lienhart, ADPHT Executive Assistant
Travis Napper, Tourism Director
Caleb Osborne, ADPHT Chief of Staff
Kristine Puckett, Tourism Deputy Director
Grady Spann, Parks Director

CJRW

Darin Gray
Chris Ho
Brian Kratkiewicz
Wade McCune
Jennifer Morgan
Dalaney Thomas
Margaret Willis
Keegan Wright

Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas
Ryan Thompson
Ileana Franscone
Daniel Czerwinski

Governor's Office

Chris Fletcher

Chair Kalene Griffith called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. and Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

Griffith welcomed the Commission back to the first in-person meeting since February and thanked everyone who joined on Zoom. Griffith stated that the advertising and parks committee meetings went well, and reports will be given later in the meeting.

Approval of Agenda

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Weston Lewey motioned to approve the May minutes as presented. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

Financial Report

Cynthia Dunlap presented the year-to-date financials as of May 31, 2020. Commissioner John Gill asked if any unused reserve funds could be used the next fiscal year and if so, do they require legislative approval. Dunlap said they do not require legislative approval because the funds carry over.

Jim Shamburger motioned to approve the May financials. Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Stacy Hurst stated that Parks and Tourism are both navigating through the public health emergency. A hiring freeze will continue through the end of the fiscal year; this presents some challenges, but the staff is working through them. State Parks is hiring extra help positions to add staff for the busy summer season. They will continue to monitor staffing and visitation levels and will look at making changes in July.

Hurst reported that financials are not as bad as initially predicted. She reported that many staff are working remotely, and plans are being looked at for a gradual return to the office. Hurst gave a brief update on economic recovery and stated that she is part of a small group working towards a hospitality relief recommendation that will go before the CARES Act Committee and the Governor. Information on this is forthcoming.

TOURISM DIVISION

Advertising Committee Report

Austin Albers reported on the previous day's Advertising Committee Meeting. Albers said there was a good discussion on what has been happening to advertise and market the state during the COVID situation. Discussions were had regarding the purpose of the committee and changes that were being made in the wake of COVID.

Director's Report

Travis Napper updated the Commission on staff working remotely and that a plan is being worked on to slowly bring them back to the office. Napper gave a brief update on the fiscal year 2021 budget. The total budget is \$15.4 million and the advertising budget for CJRW is \$11.7 million. The budget for regions is \$100,000 each.

Napper is looking into an opportunity to apply for an EDA grant to address creating a recovery plan.

Napper gave a brief report on projects being worked on by staff. Communications is focusing on using the website to keep people engaged with games and puzzles as well as encouraging conversations with visitors via social media channels. Discussions on production of the new Travel Guide have begun. Sales implemented a newsletter campaign to keep in contact with vendors and partners during the pandemic.

Jessica Ledbetter was selected as one of ten people to serve on Travel South's strategic planning process. Research and Development has been working closely with Regions to close out the fiscal year. Napper stated he tasked the section to look into an overhaul of the festival advertising grant to make it more beneficial. Staff are creating an online hospitality training focused on making frontline employees advocates for Arkansas Tourism.

Napper reported on Arkansas' South and asked the Commission to temporarily suspend them as a recognized Tourism Association unless their nonprofit status is reinstated by the federal government before July 1. Kalene Griffith stated that Arkansas Tourism staff has been working diligently to get Arkansas' South to move forward with getting reinstated.

Weston Lewey made a motion to suspend payments to Arkansas' South unless they are reinstated to their nonprofit status with the IRS by July 1, 2020. John Gill seconded, and motion passed.

Discussion ensued.

Gill asked when the Welcome Centers would open. Napper reported they are set to reopen June 29.

CJRW

Jennifer Morgan informed the Commission that CJRW received the final budget amount from Travis Napper and they would be putting together a media recommendation for the July commission meeting.

Digital Media

Brian Kratkiewicz reported on the summer-fall media campaign. The goal is to generate overall awareness to the Arkansas marketing message and reach key feeder states. For the month of June, there was a four week in-state only program running. Kratkiewicz plans to concentrate the support of the \$3.3 million budget from July through September by following patterns of media usage and researching where people are spending their media time.

Kratkiewicz stated that 55% of daily media time is spent on different digital devices. The agency is recommending digital over print. Digital Media gives a mass reach, and radio will extend that reach. There is support from all partners for running out-of-state and in-state ads for the months of July through September. Television will have a two-week flight running in July and August in key out-of-state markets. In-state television flight is running in June with support from the Arkansas Cable Telecommunications Association and Television Broadcasters of Arkansas partnerships. Radio ads running June in-state have an added value of about \$1.3 million and extends media by about 34%.

Website Update

Susie Kardas gave an update on Arkansas.com. In the conversion breakdown the year-over-year total users are down 12%. Partner referrals saw an 11% increase. Guides ordered had a 55% decrease and guides viewed online saw a 50% decrease. There was a 2% increase in newsletter subscriptions. Kardas stated that the agency is trying to find ways to support businesses during the pandemic by doing an update of listings on Arkansas.com, including some mapping and trail updates. People are less likely to order printed guides right now and those decreases are a result of COVID-19.

Traffic conversion rate saw a huge jump from April. Conversion rates were not where they should be in a typical year, but the good news is it is going up. There was a COVID-19 dashboard created for website performance with Arkansas.com and ArkansasStateParks.com. Accommodations on the website have seen a slight increase in views. There are steady increases over the last couple of weeks with a 27% increase of users on the site.

June Media Campaign

Dalaney Thomas reported on the June in-state campaign and reported a 30-second video is running on television. Thomas stated that 47% of the budget was being spent on in-state ads on Arkansas.com and this saw four million ad impressions with over eight thousand visits to the site. A new form to request the Arkansas Travel Guide was added to the social media campaign. As a result, there have been over 35,000 guides requested, 4.3 million impressions, and more than 800,000 visits to the site. Discussion ensued.

PARKS DIVISION

Parks Advertising Budget

Jennifer Morgan shared the proposed ASP Fiscal Year 2021 marketing budget. CJRW proposes three campaigns funded through the ASP budget for media placement for Arkansas State Parks, Lodges of Arkansas and Ozark Folk Center State Park, and Ozark Highlands Radio. The breakout for the general state parks will be 48.6% digital, 30% cable/co-op, 20% print, and 1% for a directional outdoor board. The Lodges campaign breakout will be 6.5% digital and 43.5% print. New for FY21 will be a featured listing on Arkansas.com for ASP lodging parks. The Ozark Folk Center media budget was reduced to what was spent last year; the breakout will be 71.5% rural radio network, 22.8% print, and 5.7% digital. Discussion ensued.

John Gill moved to approve the Arkansas State Parks FY2021 advertising plan presented by CJRW as follows:

Arkansas State Parks Proposed FY21 Marketing Budget

Arkansas State Parks Media	\$440,235.06
The Lodges of Arkansas State Parks Media	\$292,221.09
Ozark Folk Center State Park Media	\$44,081.72
Ozark Highlands Radio Promotion (Public Broadcasting)	\$6,780.00
Arkansas Press Association (Production & Commission)	\$12,000.00
2020 State Parks Guidebook (300,000)	\$169,712.00
Arkansas State Parks -- Passport/Field Guide (100,000)	\$40,000.00
Brochures/Collateral	\$12,000.00
Print/Online Banner Production	\$36,000.00
Video/Television/Radio Production	\$140,000.00
Website	\$282,239.60
Site Management, Development Requests, Hosting, Server Maintenance, Licensing Fees	
Contingency	\$24,730.53
Total Budget	\$1,500,000.00

Jim Shamburger seconded, and the motion carried.

Susie Kardas reported a 61% increase in website traffic, 45% increase in booking, 56% increase in the number of times the state park guide was viewed, and 30% increase in the number of newsletters requested. Discussion ensued.

Parks Committee Report

Eric Jackson reported the many negatives with COVID-19 have reminded Arkansans how important parks are; parks are essential services. ASP has had 1.7 million visitors since the pandemic began in March of 2020. Park staff are providing data for daily reports and parks are having to balance a surge in use with protecting resources, staff, and visitors. Park management has developed a plan of action to shut down and reopen state parks with new guidelines. Jackson remarked that parks revenue is down \$1 million and had to make a \$9.5 million cut to their operating budget this year, and is anticipating a \$15 million budget decrease for FY21 in addition to a hiring freeze. Severe weather affected nine parks with Petit Jean State Park (PJSP) taking one of the worst hits with over 300 trees falling in the campgrounds and damaging the

Cedar Creek Bridge. Bridge replacement will require hiking in materials and hiking out the damaged bridge. A lightning strike at PJSP also damaged 250 feet of an 8-inch waterline. Jackson commented that current ASP lodging policy is to maintain a 24-hour minimum resting period between guests, and the parks committee has requested this policy be reevaluated to be consistent with others in the industry.

Jackson reported Law Enforcement had 647 reportable incidents, 374 staff responses for assistance, 1 drowning, 3 medical assistances, 7 ejections from the park, 13 arrests, 13 rescues, and 3 attempted suicides. This is a reminder that one of the most important jobs ASP does is to keep visitors safe.

The Parks Committee recommends approval for a COVID-19 related grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for airports, funded from the Federal CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act for airport operating expenditures, repairs and improvements at Petit Jean State Park Airport (MPJ).

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the federal CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act application for the Petit Jean State Park Airport (MPJ). Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Parks Director's Report

Grady Spann remarked parks have exceeded Memorial Day weekend visitation every weekend since Memorial Day.

2019 SPRTC Retreat Items Update

Grady Spann commented ASP has not done much work on retreat items since the May SPRTC meeting.

Spann stated Ozark Folk Center has suspended all music shows temporarily due to COVID-19 and has not received any complaints. There may not be a demand for this service, probably because visitors are finding music free on the square in Mountain View. One recommendation may be to schedule fewer major events during the season.

Spann reported Joe Jacobs and his team continue to work to provide updates on a new workaround solution, by working with parks staff and Miles Partnership for a "what is available this weekend" button, which is now available on the ASP website. MAESTRO plans to reprogram Reseze, the online component for the online reservations system, and Joe Jacobs has requested to be a consultant for the reprogramming.

Spann reported Shea Lewis is updating the COVID-19 Reengagement Plan as ASP receives decisions for recommendations. This information is shared with the parks, so park staff know specific safety procedures by facility, to adhere to the Governor's Directives and Arkansas Department of Health guidelines. Discussion ensued.

Mammoth Spring State Park – VFW Concession & Operating Agreement Renewal

Grady Spann reported that the current concession and operating agreement for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post Number 7831, at Mammoth Spring, is due to expire May 30, 2020. The agreement allows for a VFW event that serves as a community fundraiser, and Spann requested approval to renew the agreement for a five-year period.

Shash Goyal moved to approve the renewal of the agreement with Arkansas State Parks and Post Number 7831, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Mammoth Spring for a period of five years. John Gill seconded, and the motion carried.

National Weather Service Agreement

Grady Spann reported a current operating agreement for the National Weather Service at Cane Creek State Park and DeGray Lake Resort State Park, is due to expire June 30, 2020. There is no charge to the parks; however, the parks will receive the benefit of the weather information and the weather monitoring system. Spann requested approval to renew the agreement for a five-year period.

Jeff Baskin made a motion to approve the renewal of the operating agreement for the National Weather Service, at Cane Creek State Park and DeGray Lake Resort State Park. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation – Marcel Hanzlik

Grady Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Marcel Hanzlik for his 38 years of service to Arkansas State Parks.

John Gill moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Marcel Hanzlik for his 38 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

Lease Agreement Renewal – Pinnacle Mountain State Park – Penney Property

Jeff King reported a lease agreement for James and Barbara Penney, to provide primitive camping for hikers of the Ouachita Trail located around mile 14, expired on April 30, 2017. The Lease expired without renewal due to being marked as a lease without an expiration date. The campsite continues to be utilized by hikers of the Ouachita Trail near Pinnacle Mountain State Park. King requested approval to renew the agreement for a five-year period.

Mike Wilson made a motion to approve the renewal of the lease agreement with James and Barbara Penney for approximately .85 acre (part of the SE ¼, SE ¼, SE ¼, Section 10, Township 3 North, Range 15 West, Pulaski County, Arkansas) for a primitive camping area for trail use. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

MISCELLANEOUS

“Arkansas Outdoor Series” branding proposal

Jim Andrews, ADPHT General Counsel, reported ADPHT has been contacted by a local alcohol distributor for a concept regarding private labeling on alcoholic beverage products for an Arkansas Outdoors Series theme. The distributor would be responsible for the content and expenses, with ADPHT approval, and ADPHT would receive 5% of the sales for the limited offering.

John Gill made the motion to authorize legal counsel to pursue the branding proposal for the Arkansas Outdoor Series and to bring additional information and details back to the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission for review. Bob Connell Seconded, and the motion carried.

Other Business

John Gill motioned to draft a proclamation to Governor Hutchison and the United States Legislators thanking them for their help in keeping tourism alive with the Small Business Administration loans and state grants that supported hotels and restaurants. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

John Gill moved to adjourn at 12:54 p.m. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

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