

**State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission**  
**Via Zoom or in-person for Commissioners & Key Staff**  
**1100 North St., Little Rock**  
**Via Zoom for Public**  
**10 a.m., November 19, 2020**  
*Approved January 28, 2021*

**Commissioners Present**

Kalene Griffith, Chair  
Eric Jackson, Vice-Chair  
Austin Albers  
Jeff Baskin  
Bob Connell

John Gill  
Ron Gossage  
Weston Lewey  
Jim Shamburger  
Mike Wilson

**Commissioners on Zoom**

Blair Allen  
Mike Gibson  
Molly Jackson

Montine McNulty  
Ness Sechrest  
Randy Wolfinbarger

**Commissioners Absent**

Shash Goyal

**Department Staff Present**

Stacy Hurst, Secretary Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism  
Jim Andrews, ADPHT General Counsel  
Leslie Fiskin, ADPHT Chief of Policy and Legislative Affairs  
Cynthia Dunlap, ADPHT Chief Fiscal Officer  
Caleb Osborne, ADPHT Chief of Staff  
Elaine Lienhart, ADPHT Executive Assistant  
Travis Napper, Tourism Director  
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Tourism Director  
Tammy Boyce, Tourism Director Assistant, Tourism Division  
Joy Barlogie, Tourism Research and Development Manager  
Jessica Ledbetter, Sales Manager  
Leah DiPietro, Communications Manager  
Grady Spann, Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Shea Lewis, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager  
Joe Jacobs, Marketing and Revenue Manager, Parks Division  
Jeff King, Project Manager, Parks Division  
Lajeana Carroll, Executive Assistant, Parks Division

**CJRW**

Darin Gray  
Jennifer Morgan

Dalaney Thomas  
Mark Rains

**Miles Media**

Susie Kardas  
Daniel Czerwinski

## **Guests**

Chris Fletcher, Governor's Liaison  
Miguel Fuenteville, Imprenta Printing  
Scott Suddath, North Little Rock CVB  
Gray Jones, Jones Video  
Hazel Hernandez, Experience Fayetteville  
Bill Solleder, Visit Hot Springs  
Andrea Huisden, SMAR Insight

Chair Kalene Griffith called the meeting to order at 10:06 am. Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

## **Welcome**

Kalene Griffith welcomed Commissioners and all participants to the Zoom/conference call to the State Parks Recreation and Travel Commission (SPRTC) meeting.

## **Approval of Agenda**

**Mike Wilson moved to approve the Agenda as presented. John Gill requested an addendum to the November 19, 2020, Agenda: Report of the Sultana Disaster Museum. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **Presentation of Minutes from Previous Meeting**

**Weston Lewey moved to approve the minutes from the October 23-23, 2020, meeting. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **FINANCIAL REPORT – October 31, 2020**

Cynthia Dunlap, CFO, presented the FY 2021 Year-to-Date financial report for the four (4) month period ending October 31, 2020.

FY 2021 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$10,545,478 a decrease of -1.56%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$254,527 a decrease of -59.61%
- 1/8% Tax Revenues - \$12,913,610 an increase of 9.41%
- 2% Gross Tax collections - \$5,510,615 a decrease of -22.09%

FY 2021 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Department Total - \$34,635,023 a decrease of -15.19%
- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$26,807,631 a decrease of -18.58%
- Tourism Division - \$5,300,201 a decrease of -8.81%
- Keep Arkansas Beautiful - \$140,583 an increase of 12.70%
- Administration Division - \$2,019,174 an increase of 67.87%\*\*
- War Memorial - \$367,434 a decrease of -52.49%

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

\*\* Beginning in FY 2021, the Central Administration Division includes ADPHT Shared Services which represents the appropriation for positions that are identified as providing services to all divisions of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. Appropriation and funding are allocated to Shared Services, as applicable, from other Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism divisions.

**Ness Sechrest moved to approve the Divisions of Parks and Tourism September 2020; Financial Reports as presented. Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Tourism 2% Trust Fund / CJRW Expense Analysis**

In addition to the monthly financial report, Chief Fiscal Officer Dunlap presented an analysis of the Tourism Trust Fund and CJRW Expense Analysis for the fiscal years 2015 through 2021. This report was originally presented at the Commission Retreat in FY 2020 and was updated with year-end actual expense amounts for FY 2020 and budget amounts for FY 2021. The discussion primarily focused on the budget differences between years 2020 and 2021.

The different sections of the report were explained:

- Tourism Tax gross income less DFA Administrative Fees
  - The 3.3% DFA Administrative Fee is included in the Act that established the 2% Tourism Tax and is customary for special revenue funds disbursed by DFA.
- Tourism Tax expense budget and actual expenses in AASIS
  - Retirement and Relocation—FY 2021 budget is approximately \$300,000 less than FY 2020 based on the projected revenues expected in FY 2021.
  - Tourism Special Revenue—FY 2021 budget is approximately \$2.9 million less than FY 2020 based on the projected revenues expected in FY 2021.
  - Depending on 2% revenue during the year, the budget amounts set for FY 2021 can be adjusted up to the allowed appropriation.
- CJRW Advertising budget and actual expenses—The CJRW contract for the FY 2021 year is \$11,791,204 with current budget in AASIS of \$11,921,508. The contract amount is allocated as follows: Retirement and Relocation \$600,000, Tourism 2% Special Revenue \$11,060,900 and General Revenue \$130,304.
- CJRW advertising expense budget allocation to specific categories—The report shows the current budget allocation for FY 2021 and the budget and actual expense allocations for FY 2020 and prior years.

Secretary Hurst stated that a more detailed history and overview of the Tourism Trust Fund will be presented at the January meeting by Tourism Director Travis Napper and his Team.

Commissioner Jackson stressed the importance of spending wisely the proceeds of the 2% revenue fund in promoting the second largest industry in the state of Arkansas.

## **2021 State Parks Recreation and Travel Commission Schedule**

Kalene Griffith presented the proposed 2021 State Parks Recreation and Travel Commission (SPRTC) meeting schedule with two options the first option with the existing schedule for the third Thursday of the month and the second proposal for the fourth Thursday of the month ; it was noted several months did not have cities assigned. Griffith stated it was brought to SPRTC that the third Thursday of the month often has a conflict with Legislative Committee meetings that are also scheduled for the third week of the month. Discussion ensued.

**John Gill moved for the State Parks Recreation and Travel Commission chairman to be authorized to change the meeting dates to prevent a conflict with the meetings of the Legislative general assembly. Kaleen Griffith proposed an amended 2021 schedule with January, February, and April meetings held on the fourth Thursday of the month in Little Rock and the May through November meetings following the traditional third Thursday of the month with cities to be decided. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **Secretary's Report**

Secretary Stacy Hurst reported the bulk of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism's budget has been finished. Thank you to Cynthia Dunlap for leading ADPHT's efforts. There may be a few small items remaining that will be approved and completed shortly.

Secretary Hurst commented on recent conversations with state legislators Bruce Westerman and French Hill regarding additional all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails as an opportunity to grow tourism in Arkansas. The suggestion was to expand ATV trails in state parks; however, Grady Spann and Shea Lewis shared the concern of the limited acreage in state parks. The recommendation is for those who are interested in expanding ATV trails in Arkansas to work with the Federal Government for Federal land access. Secretary Hurst advised the Arkansas Business Interruption Grant (BIG), a grant to aid Arkansas service and hospitality industries, as of the morning of November 19, 2020, ADPHT has received 2,915 applications. It was noted not all were eligible entities. The BIG application portal opened Monday, November 16, 2020, and will close Wednesday, November 25, 2020. The grant is not a first-come-first served grant and will be awarded on a prorated basis based on eligibility. Hurst noted she requested and received permission from the CARES Committee, that if there are remaining funds from the \$150 million in CARES Act funds set aside for Arkansas cities and counties, that money will be reallocated and available to the convention & visitor bureaus and the advertising information commissions and that would include Simmons Bank Arena in North Little Rock. That request was approved and ADPHT is waiting to see if there is any money left over from the CARES Act. As of right now, there is about \$6 million that has not been requested and may be available. Discussion ensued.

Jim Andrews reported on the naming policy rules process for ADPH. The mandatory 30-day public comment period has ended, and no comments were received. The proposed rule was submitted to the Bureau of Legislative Research as required for rule promulgation to request the proposed rule be placed on the Arkansas Legislative Council (ALC) agenda. On Monday, November 16, 2020, ADPHT attended the Legislative Rules Committee meeting and the proposed rule will be presented to the full Legislative Council on November 20, 2020. Once the proposed rule is approved by the ALC the final step is to file the naming policy rule with the Arkansas State Library and the Arkansas Secretary of State office.

Leslie Fiske reported three main pieces of legislation: dynamic market-based pricing for Arkansas State Parks (ASP); modify construction design requirements for ASP; and a structural move to eliminate the

Great River Road Commission and merge that program with Arkansas Tourism. ADPHT has received offers from legislators to sponsor the proposed bills in the general assembly. Fisker anticipates starting to meet with legislators on the proposed legislation in the next ten days. Discussion ensued.

### **State Parks Director's Report**

#### **SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation**

Grady Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Karen Cool for her over 28 years of service to Arkansas State Parks.

**Austin Albers moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Karen Cook for over 28 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.**

#### **Delta Heritage Trail published in the Fall 2020 issue of Rails to Trails**

Spann highlighted the article "Arkansas' Delta Heritage Trail State Park," this article was featured in the *Emerging Rail-Trails* (Stark, Rails to Trails, Fall 2020), the article received national publicity on the \$20 million dollar grant from the Walton Family Foundation to assist with completing this project in the next four years.

#### **Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area Monument Trail merit award from the American Institute of Architects Kansas City chapter**

Spann reported the Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area Monument Trail's trailhead and campsite structures won a Divine Detail Merit Award from the American Institute of Architects Kansas City Chapter. The purpose of the Divine Detail Award is to recognize an instance in which the expression of architectural theory becomes an artistic medium, defining the relationship between architecture and craft. Projects illustrate the governing design concept of the building in which the detail is found using a particular material, detail, or technology. This project was completed in close coordination with the APRF, ASP, and the design team. This is a great feature that adds to the Monument Trail experience.

### **Miscellaneous**

Spann remarked the ASP e-newsletter report will be provided at the January SPRTC meeting. Spann reported First Day Hikes have become a tradition across America. Spann mentioned a recent meeting with Kelly Farrell and the Program Services team for suggestions on ways to participate safely such as having guests self-report online and receiving an incentive sticker by mail. The online reporting would also include options to opt-in for the e-newsletters, request an ASP passport, ASP guides, and other publications. Another option is to extend the hikes from one day to the first weekend of January. With current ASP staffing park event capacity is a concern: staff can offer hospitality and selfie stations, but not refreshments; social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures must also be observed.

## **Monument Trails Summary and Update**

Spann presented a Monument Trails update of the digital promotion by ASP of the almost 60 miles of trails completed in Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area (Hobbs), Mount Nebo State Park, Pinnacle Mountain State Park, and Devil's Den State Park (DDSP) valued at over \$4 million. The Monument Trail approval process includes reviewal by park staff and in some cases the US Forest Service. Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and The o Witsell have also reviewed proposed trail routes. Arkansas Parks and Recreation Foundation (APRF) assigns the projects to contractors and the contractors are given a corridor for mountain bike trails. The contractor selects the route for the trails. Spann remarked eco counters have been installed in the parks in several locations on the trails. The counters provide the number of passes and show the busiest days and times with the highest trial use. The social media platforms include Monument Trails Facebook with 2,700 followers, and the individual trail conditions Facebook groups for Hobbs with 2,000 plus members, Nebo with 1,100 plus members and Pinnacle 549 members, and Instagram with 1,606 followers. APRF promotes the Monument Trails through digital and printed media, their recent Little Rock Rail announcement received 67 pieces of coverage with 712,000 estimated views and 470 social media shares. In an addition, Trail Forks and Mountain Bike Project are interactive digital platforms that provide trail map access to visitors. The Monument Trails website analytics from January 1, 2020, through October 31, 2020, show 45,000-page views with an average stay time of 2 minutes and 24 seconds, which is 1 minute above average. The Monument Trails webpage was also designed to be mobile-friendly. Other paid digital advertisement placements included MTBR, Carbon Media, Audience X, and 4INFO; digital banners and video placement and printed ad placement included BIKE, Bike Arkansas, and the cover and a 2-page editorial in the Arkansas Cycle Guide. Arkansas Tourism is utilizing the Monument Trails photography and video assets in their tourism ads. ASP is dedicated to building parking lots near Monument Trails to accommodate increased park visitation. Spann noted Hobbs has five hike-in/bike-in campsites and DDSP will have hike-in/bike-in campsites that will be built in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) style. ASP and APRF are currently working to establish the artwork approval process for the Monument Trails to ensure the artwork will match the park and ties into the park resource. Discussion followed.

## **Petit Jean State Park – Museum of Automobiles – Fifth Amended Lease Agreement**

Jeff King reported Buddy Hoelzeman, the Director of The Museum of Automobiles at Petit Jean State Park has a request. It is Mr. Hoelzeman's desire to extend the current lease agreement for an additional five years, as per previous lease extensions. Mr. Hoelzeman is also requesting from Arkansas State Parks a waiver from reimbursing the building insurance beginning with FY21 and continuing thereafter. The loss of tourism revenue due to COVID-19 has been financially hard on the museum this year. The current Fourth Amended Lease Agreement with the Museum of Automobiles at Petit Jean State Park will expire on December 31, 2020. King requested approval of lease renewal of five years and consideration of nonpayment of building insurance for one-year FY21. Discussion ensued.

**Eric Jackson moved to approve waiving the building insurance reimbursement for The Museum of Automobiles at Petit Jean State Park for FY21. Jim Shamburger second, and the motion carried.**

**John Gill moved to approve the 5-year lease agreement terms with Arkansas State Parks and The Museum of Automobiles, Petit Jean State Park for a period of five years with a 1-year waiver from reimbursing Arkansas State Parks for the building insurance for FY21 and insurance reimbursement evaluation annually. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lease – Gillam Lake**

Jeff King reported a lease agreement with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), Little Rock District, Gillam Lake Project on the Cossatot River for Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area, dating back to 01/01/1994. The previous lease was for a total of 25 years and expired this past December 31, 2019. Due to inspection delays and COVID-19, the COE has experienced a severe backlog of projects and delays in the processing of a new lease document. The COE has recently submitted the new lease form to Arkansas State Parks for signature. The new term of the lease will be ten years retro-dating back to the first of this year January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2030. The shortened lease term is per the COE's current policies and regulations. King recommended renewing this lease with the COE for an additional 10 years.

**Ness Sechrest moved to approve the renewal of the lease agreement with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), Little Rock District, Gillam Lake Project on the Cossatot River for Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area for a period of ten years. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Crater of Diamonds State Park structure removal**

Jeff King requested permission to remove two structures from Crater of Diamonds State Park's inventory. Bathhouse/Laundry (Building No. 11.17 /AASIS Nos. 120005598) is a 1,120 square-foot building with wood frame construction, concrete foundation, and shingled roof that was constructed in 1972 to provide a bathhouse and laundry facilities to the campground. And Small Bathhouse (Building No. 11.18 /AASIS Nos. 120005599) is a 672 square-foot building with wood frame construction, concrete foundation, and shingled roof that was constructed in 1979 as a secondary bathhouse to the campground. The structures have had three complete remodels over their lifespan, but due to age, moisture over time, and old plumbing lines in concrete, it was determined the most effective course of action was to demolish these structures and replace them with new bathhouse facilities. Construction of the new bathhouses is underway and removal of structures will be part of the contractor's responsibilities. The building will be demolished and disposed of in accordance with all Federal, State, and local regulations.

**Jim Shamburger moved to approve based on the information presented; the commission finds the following structures at Crater of Diamonds State Park Bathhouse/Laundry (Building No. 11.17 /AASIS Nos. 120005598) and Small Bathhouse (Building No. 11.18 /AASIS Nos. 120005599) are obsolete notwithstanding the insured value and approves the removal from Arkansas State Park inventory. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Lake Dardanelle State Park structure removal**

Jeff King requests requested permission to remove the following structures from the Lake Dardanelle State Park's inventory.

- Maintenance Building (Building No. 25.16 /AASIS Nos. 120005898) is a 1,456 square-foot building with mixed wood and metal construction with 1 service bay. The building was constructed in 1972 to house the entire park maintenance tool and parts inventory, maintenance supervisor office, and weed eater/chainsaw storage.

- Pole Barn (Building No. 25.28 /AASIS Nos. 120005599) is an 864 square-foot open-air pole barn storage with wood frame construction and metal roof. Used for storing lawn tools and mowing equipment.
- Portable Storage Building (Building No. 25.99 /AASIS Nos. 120005911) is a 240 square-foot prefabricated metal storage shed with interior lighting. This building is used for storing park maintenance supplies and materials.

All three structures are located within the maintenance area where a new maintenance facility is being constructed to replace these three structures. Construction for the new maintenance building is underway and removal of these structures is part of the contractor's responsibilities. The buildings will be demolished and disposed of in accordance with all Federal, State, and local regulations.

**Bob Connell moved to approve based on the information presented; the commission finds the following structures at Lake Dardanelle State Park the Maintenance Building (Building No. 25.16 /AASIS Nos. 120005898), Pole Barn (Building No. 25.28 /AASIS Nos. 120005599), and Portable Storage Building (Building No. 25.99 /AASIS Nos. 120005911) obsolete notwithstanding the insured value and approves the removal from Arkansas State Park inventory. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.**

#### **Mammoth Spring State Park– Bench and Memorial Plaque Donation**

Jeff King reported Arkansas State Parks (ASP) has a memorial bench and plaque donation request necessitating SPRTC approval at Mammoth Spring State Park. The family of Jack Johnson, who was a frequent visitor to Mammoth Spring State Park, has requested to donate a memorial bench to the park in his honor. The Johnson family has agreed to pay for the bench and all materials required for installation with a total cost estimate of \$1,200. The installation will be undertaken by park staff. Exact verbiage for the proposed bench plaque: "In Loving Memory, Jack Johnson, 1945 – 2020"er Arkansas State Parks is seeking permission from the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission to accept these donations and install the memorial bench and plaque. Discussion ensued.

**Bob Connell moved to approve the memorial bench and plaque as follows: Mammoth Spring State Park – Memorial Bench and Plaque; plaque to read, "In Loving Memory, Jack Johnson, 1945 – 2020." Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.**

#### **Acceptance of donated funds for monument raising at Louisiana Purchase State Park**

King stated through Memorandum of Agreement with Arkansas State Parks, The Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation (APRF) has donated \$6,000 to the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism, State Parks Division, for improvements to the historic survey marker at Louisiana Purchase State Park. This donation was supplemented with state funds to install a new concrete monument base and raise the monument approximately 18 inches. This improvement will allow visitors to see the entire monument in high water and better appreciate its national significance. In conjunction with Arkansas Code Annotated 22-4-103, King asked the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, at its discretion, to accept this contribution the APRF has provided to improve the state park system. Discussion ensued.

**Eric Jackson moved to formally accept the gift of the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation for improvements to the historic survey marker at Louisiana Purchase State Park. Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **Lake Poinsett Summary and Update**

King reported work was completed by the Arkansas Game and Fish (AG&F) during the drawdown of Lake Poinsett. A full report on the project, including costs, will be presented by AG&F staff to the AG&F Commission at their January Commission meeting. ASP will request a copy of that final report once it is available. The information within is compiled from communications with Brett Timmons, District 3 Fisheries Biologist Supervisor, and AG&F official press releases. This information should be considered preliminary until the AG&F's final report is released.

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| March 2017 | The first public meetings held.  |
| July 2017  | Draining of the lake begins.   |
| Phase 1    | Completed – Water control structure, outflow pipe, and emergency spillway renovation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May 2018 – Final engineering design completed.</li><li>• November 9, 2018 - Bid opening. Bids were rejected due to bids being higher than estimated.</li><li>• January 11, 2019 – Re-bid opening. Bids were significantly higher than estimates.</li><li>• March 13, 2019 – Bid opening for third time. Bid awarded in the amount of \$1,200,000.</li><li>• April 8, 2019 – Construction started.</li><li>• May 2020 – Construction completed.</li></ul> |
| Phase 2    | Completed – Shoreline stabilization and fish habitat. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10,271 linear feet of shoreline repair.</li><li>• Over 100 fish habitat sites.</li><li>• Over 100 trees anchored.</li><li>• October 2020 – Construction completed.</li></ul>   |

Total cost over \$3.2 million dollars for Phase I and Phase II. This is the largest lake renovation project in the history of AG&F. AG&F is to close the gates and begin filling the lake on December 1, 2020.

## **CJRW / Miles**

Danny Czerwinski reported the Arkansas State Parks' website September 2020 to October 2020 comparison had a 32% decrease in website traffic. There was a significant decrease in the website and social media this past month; the booking sites click did not see a huge decrease with a 3% decrease in booking; 1,326 guides ordered was a 319% increase. There was a 75% decrease in the number of times the state park guide was viewed online and a 16% decrease in the Arkansas.com referrals. Comparing October 2019 to October 2020 the conversion breakdown shows a 50% increase in website traffic, a 75% increase in booking site clicks, a 13% increase in the number of guides ordered, a 12% decrease in guides viewed online, and a 34% increase in the Arkansas.com referrals. This growth of October 2019 to October 2020 conversion breakdown shows good health of the website. The total traffic and conversion rate have stayed consistent since May between 11%-14% for the past 6 months. This is a testament to the work the state park's staff has done.

Danny Czerwinski reported on the user location breakdown from January-October 2019, 23% in-state and 77% out-of-state. When compared to January-October 2020, 25% in-state and 75% out-of-state. The views on the park's accommodation pages have increased since May and continue to stay strong and exceed 2019 levels. The event page with the COVID-19 restrictions had small increases in the number of page views; however, the page views continue to be lower than the pre-COVID-19 page views. Czerwinski stated until the restrictions from COVID-19 are lifted, they do not anticipate these numbers to improve. The Digital Discovery webpage had 25,956 page views from March-October with an average stay time of 3 minutes 22 seconds; this stay time average is very impressive and well above average. The engaging digital content is bridging the gap between 2019 and 2020 due to the lost traffic on the events page, and shows visitors are still interested in state parks. The website traffic from organic search has stayed strong for organic search in 2020 and since June/July of 2020 website traffic continues to outperform 2019 levels. Discussion ensued.

*Break for 10 minutes 11:46 am*

## **TOURISM DIVISION**

### **Director's Report**

Travis Napper gave an update on the personnel vacancies in Tourism. Communications is still without a production artist. The Welcome Centers still don't have an operations manager, three travel consultants (central office, Blytheville and Helena), assistant manager (West Memphis), and manager (Texarkana). The Department is primarily back to working remotely and in-office work is optional. Napper has made several more site visits around the state and visited seven more state parks. He also spoke at the Rotary Club on his visit to Morrilton.

Sales participated in seven conferences and tradeshow, all virtually. The Sales Section collaborated with Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri to create a fall-themed itinerary that was presented to tour operators as part of a program led by Oklahoma Tourism.

The economic development grant review has been postponed but there should be a decision in the coming days. Research and Development continue to work on 2021 Governor's Conference planning and will send out a follow-up survey. The section is working with the new research studies discussed at the last commission meeting and hoping for an update with better data with the consumer index studies.

Communications proofed the 2021 Travel Guide and Motorcycle Guide. The fall color updates have been completed and the section is continuing to receive and publicize information on the Trail of Holiday Lights. Travel writer Kim Williams participated in the radio show First News with Kevin Miller on News Radio 102.9 KARN. The Chris Stapleton song "Arkansas" has received a lot of coverage and the Tourism Division is in conversation with his team to see if there is a potential partnership.

The Arkansas Cycling guide has just been released. The Monument Trail at Pinnacle Mountain is featured on the cover, three new trails have been added and 50,000 copies are being printed.

U.S. Travel continues to promote the "Let's Go There" campaign to encourage future family travel planning when the time is right.

Welcome Center visitation has maintained a steady number of visitors since July. Visitation dropped due to being closed for a while because of COVID-19 but has since seen a resurgence. It is expected to make another drop due to COVID-19 numbers rising. Discussion ensued.

Napper reported on the two-percent tax collection. July and August numbers are reported to be less negative. He broke down the two-percent sales tax collection by region showing where some regions have recovered quicker than others, but almost every region has stayed steady through August. Literature orders were down during the first months of COVID-19 and now have trended upwards. The Smith Travel Research data reported that October saw a slight increase in hotel occupancy to 47.5% after a very small downward turn in September. All consumer spending increased slightly but overall, restaurants and entertainment were down. Small business revenue overall was down 14.3%, but the leisure and hospitality industry saw a large decrease of 41.9%.

Andrea Huisden of SMARI presented the Ad Effectiveness report on Arkansas Tourism's July-September campaign. SMARI has been doing tourism research since 1990 and is involved with more than 25 state tourism organizations and 75 destination organizations. Their research is patterned after the way consumers make travel decisions and the insights they gain reflect the industry trends. There were 1,053 surveys conducted in October. The ads received excellent ratings for communicating key attributes and for motivating interest in an Arkansas trip along with strengthening consumer views of the state. Huisden went on to speak about the benchmark numbers and the impact the advertising has had.

### **CJRW**

Susie Kardas gave an update on Arkansas.com. Month-over-month total users decreased by 30%. Partner referrals decreased by 11% and guides ordered decreased by 18%. Guides viewed online decreased 3% and newsletter subscriptions increased by 1%. Comparing year-over-year, total users decreased by 2% and partner referrals increased by 22%. Guides ordered increased by 13% and guides viewed online decreased by 13%. Newsletter subscriptions decreased by 35%. Total traffic online trends from 2018-2020 saw a decrease in 2020 which is typical in the early months. Total traffic and conversion rates dropped a little in October but since August the number is trending up. Kardas reported on the email marketing performance. The open rate needs to stay at about 20%; it is around 27.5%. The clicks to open rate needs to stay around 10% and at this point it is around 10.9%. Since the pandemic hit the number of people subscribing to emails has shot up to around 6.7%. Only about .15% are unsubscribing.

Napper gave a breakdown of the number of literature pieces ordered: 99,615 Travel Guides. The second most requested publication was the State Parks Guide at 70,000. Next was Water and Woods with 56,000; 18,500 Motorcycle guides and 14,700 Cycling Guides were ordered.

Chris Ho reported on paid marketing. Google year-over-year clicks had a 40.9% increase. Conversions saw a 46.4% increase. The conversion rate had a 1.6% increase. The spend was down by 22.8%. Bing year-over-year saw a 62.7% increase in clicks. Conversions a 96% increase and the conversion rate an 8.7% increase and the spend was up 49%. Combining Google and Bing, there was a 48.5% increase in clicks, and 63.9% increase in conversions, a 10.5% increase in conversion rate, and a 7.4% decrease in spend. Keegan Wright reported on the social media campaign. There were 1.9 million ads served at \$6.25 cost per one thousand ads. There were 489,220 people reached at \$25.55 per one thousand people reached. Visitors are spending around two minutes on the site and the conversion rate has more than doubled on the social media platform. There were 2,034 guides requested from Facebook ads and 7,483 total conversions from social media sites. Wright reported that this is the first time a social cost per conversion is lower than search engine marketing at \$1.67. A two-week trial ad campaign is running, targeted at college students and has already reached 18.5k people, generated 131 link clicks to the online guide at a cost of \$2 a click. After the two weeks, the results will be evaluated to provide recommendations on future college-specific campaigns.

Jennifer Morgan and Lauren Euseppi gave an update on the strategic plan to distribute the remaining travel guides. Euseppi stated there were less than 10% remaining in inventory. All the guides are expected to be mailed out by the end of November or early December.

**New Business/Old Business**

John Gill gave an update on the new Sultana Disaster Museum that is being built in Marion, the money that has been raised to complete the museum and the impact that it will have on tourism.

**Austin Albers made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.**

###