



Sarah Huckabee Sanders
Governor
Mike Mills
Secretary

MINUTES

Office of Outdoor Recreation February 3, 2023

ADVISORY BOARD

Bill Barnes
Amanda Herget
Will Montgomery

George Dunklin
Ernie Lechuga
Susan Peacock

Clint Gaston
Robin McClendon
Steve Straessle

STAFF (in attendance)

Katherine Andrews, Director Office of Outdoor Recreation
Carlie Cowgill, Administrative Specialist ANHC/OOR
Elaine Lienhart, ADPHT Executive Assistant

Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff
Mike Mills, ADPHT Secretary

VISITORS

William Armacost, Manager Arkansas Welcome Center – Bentonville/Bella Vista

Convene

At 10:40 a.m. on February 3, 2023, Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation (OOR) Katherine Andrews called the meeting to order. This was a hybrid meeting that took place both over Zoom Teleconference and at the Department of Arkansas Heritage (DAH) Headquarters.

A. Welcome

Andrews welcomed all the advisory board members and expressed her appreciation to the board members for attending the meeting. She stated that this meeting would likely be shorter than usual, as the board met less than three months ago. She provided the board with an outline of the agenda for the meeting.

B. Director's report – Katherine Andrews

Andrews stated that the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism (ADPHT) now has new leadership. Sarah Huckabee Sanders was elected as governor in the November 2022 election. Additionally, former OOR Board Member Mike Mills was appointed as the new ADPHT secretary. Andrews expressed her excitement about the new leadership and the work they plan to do. Andrews stated that one of Governor Sanders's top priorities is outdoor recreation in Arkansas. The First Gentleman Bryan Sanders will be focusing on outdoor recreation initiatives. Andrews stated that she anticipates that the OOR and Sanders will work well together to work on outdoor recreation in the state. Bill Barnes stated that he is thrilled with the new leadership.

Andrews stated that the OOR newsletter would be launching very soon. New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and Oregon are the only other offices of outdoor recreation that have newsletters. Andrews believes that a newsletter will be beneficial for Arkansas as well, as there is a lot of momentum regarding outdoor recreation in the state. The newsletter will serve to keep the public aware of upcoming events, announcements, and stories. The newsletter will be released on a quarterly basis. George Dunklin asked who would receive the newsletter. Andrews stated that anyone can receive the newsletter. Individuals who wish to receive the newsletter will have to input their email address so that they can be added to the mailing list. Andrews added that the link to input one's email address will be promoted on all the OOR and ADPHT social media platforms. Barnes asked if the OOR would utilize the mailing list for ADPHT and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC). Andrews confirmed that those mailing lists would be used to populate

the OOR's mailing list. Susan Peacock asked if there will be a link available on the OOR website that would direct someone to the necessary place to subscribe to the mailing list. Andrews stated that the exact details are still being discussed, but that she expects there will be a link to subscribe to the mailing list on the website and other social media pages. Barnes asked if it will be easily accessible on the homepage. Andrews confirmed.

The first newsletter will provide readers with an overview and introduction to the OOR. There will also be four main sections that will appear in each edition: a success story, grant updates, an organization or event feature, and general news and updates. Barnes asked if there were printed copies available for the board to look at. Andrews stated that the newsletter is still being finalized, so it has not yet been printed. Barnes asked who is in charge of producing the newsletter. Andrews stated that the ADPHT Communications team is producing the newsletter.

In the first newsletter, Altangle Cycling will be highlighted in the success story spotlight. Altangle Cycling is a small business that relocated to Bentonville from Houston, Texas. Andrews stated that they are being highlighted because they cited the OOR as part of the reason they moved their business to Arkansas.

At the last board meeting, Andrews announced that the OOR has absorbed the Outdoor Recreation Grants Program (ORGP), which was previously located under Arkansas State Parks. As such, each newsletter will now have a section for updates regarding news about the ORGP. Last year, the ORGP received a \$1.5 million special increase in appropriations. Barnes asked if that would happen every year. Andrews stated that there is no guarantee that the ORGP will receive that appropriation increase each year. Andrews stated that the ORGP usually averages around \$3.5 million per year. During the previous year, the ORGP awarded \$3.6 million in grants. Currently, the ORGP is awarding \$6.5 million in grants. The funding for the grant awards comes from the Real Estate Transfer Tax. The funding for the ORGP grants increased because of increasing real estate prices. It is not guaranteed that the ORGP will be given the same amount of funding next year. Barnes asked how much Andrews anticipates receiving next year. Andrews stated that she is not sure.

Barnes asked if the grantees for Fiscal Years 23-24 have already been decided. Andrews confirmed and stated that there will be a "Big Check" ceremony for the grant recipients on March 9 and 10. Andrews added that the next grant cycle has started. Barnes stated that he knows of a community that is looking for help improving their local park. Andrews stated that they have time to apply and that information about deadlines and any other updates will be available in the newsletter. Information on the Arkansas Department of Transportation's trail program, as well as information on any relevant federal grants will also be available in the grant update section of the newsletter.

The event featured on the first newsletter will be the Buffalo River Cleanup event. Other information includes dates for conferences, festivals, information regarding the Greenhouse Outdoor Recreation Program, and a call to action to find someone to launch an Arkansas chapter of the organization known as Outdoor Afro. Barnes asked if there is the capacity for mailing physical copies, or if it would all be sent via email. Andrews stated that it could likely be sent in the mail upon request, but that the primary method of delivery would be via email. The second newsletter will go out around the beginning of May.

Andrews stated that the OOR is hoping to revitalize the Great Strides Program, which previously existed from 2001 through 2017 in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). Funding for this program would come from the Arkansas Master Tobacco Settlement Award. The ORGP team will spearhead this effort. They are currently working with the ADH to get a Memorandum of Understanding signed. Barnes asked about the perimeters of the grant and asked how much money would be available. Andrews stated that it would likely be around \$200,000 a year, so it would be for smaller projects. Andrews added that the money is not currently being used. She also stated that the ORGP will be learning more information soon. The money will be awarded for trails, city parks, and county-owned lands.

Andrews provided the board with an update regarding the Maumelle-Pinnacle Trail masterplan. She stated that the OOR team is working through necessary processes to move forward. The masterplan will consist of a design plan for a Central Arkansas trail system that will run from Two Rivers Park through Pinnacle Mountain, Rattlesnake Ridge Natural Area (NA), Blue Mountain NA, and out to Lake Maumelle and the Ouachita trail. The project is a partnership between The Nature Conservancy, State Parks, Central Arkansas Water, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and the OOR.

Andrews stated that one of her priorities for the next year is putting on an annual summit. States such as Maine, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and North Carolina have hosted similar events, and Andrews stated that those states could serve as a model for Arkansas's event. The goal of the summit is to bring together a variety of stakeholders in outdoor recreation in Arkansas together. Andrews has spoken with the individual who has worked on the Annual

Outdoor Media Summit, and they have shared ideas for the annual summit. Andrews hopes for this event to be an opportunity for networking.

Dunklin asked if the private sector would be included in the attendee list. Andrews stated that the first summit will likely consist of mostly major stakeholders. She added that she would like to incorporate more ideas such as a trade show, a pitch contest, and a film festival into the summit as it grows over time. Dunklin asked what Andrews's objective is for the summit. Andrews stated that hosting such an event will be an opportunity to bring outdoor recreation stakeholders together in one place to discuss outdoor recreation and potential partnerships and initiatives. She also expects that it will be a good way to share more information about the OOR.

Barnes asked if Andrews would inquire about the main priorities of the major stakeholders so that those concerns can be discussed and addressed during the summit. Andrews stated that she thinks that is a good course of action. Barnes stated that he thinks the private sector needs to play a significant role in the summit. Andrews stated that her primary concern with involving the private sector for the first summit is that the attendee list may grow beyond what the OOR has the capacity to handle at the moment. Barnes stated that the private sector needs to be a principal component in the planning and execution of the event, as the private sector provides much of the funding for outdoor recreation, either through revenue or taxes. Dunklin stated that he agreed with Barnes and that the goal should be to have private entities working with government entities.

Steve Straessle asked if there would be an expo for private sector entities in addition to the summit. Andrews stated that she would eventually like to do that, but that it would not be feasible at the first summit. Barnes stated that it is unlikely that everyone invited would come, but that the invitations should be extended, nonetheless. Andrews thanked the board for their input and there will be more opportunities to discuss this soon.

Andrews stated that there was a press conference held recently at Blue Mountain NA to announce the completion of the trailhead and parking lot that will connect to the Rattlesnake Ridge NA and Lake Maumelle trail systems.

Andrews announced that the Natural State Initiative was created by Governor Sanders on January 24, 2023. Andrews stated that the Natural State Initiative Advisory Council has not yet met, but the goal is to be an inter-agency stakeholder group that will work to promote outdoor recreation and the outdoor recreation economy in Arkansas. The council will report directly to the governor and make recommendations on major goals and initiatives. Andrews stated that the Natural State Initiative will be able to help the OOR achieve its goals. Peacock asked when the board members for the Natural State Initiative will be announced. Andrews stated that the board will be announced in the coming week. Andrews added that she would send the PowerPoint to the board, so that they can access the links and look more closely at the information shown.

C. Outdoor Recreation Grants Program Updates

Andrews provided an update on the ORGP to the board on behalf of the ORGP director, Matt McNair. The "Big Check" ceremony for the grant award recipients will be held at the DAH headquarters on March 9 and 10, 2023. The ORGP team is also working on establishing project management days, which will allow staff to provide Arkansas communities with information on how to apply for grants. Barnes asked how the funding was distributed between the two ORGP grants. Andrews stated that they are split almost evenly. Barnes asked for the average amount that each grant awardee receives. Andrews stated that the ORGP tries to award each awardee the full amount requested. Andrews added that many of the FUN Park Grant awards were given to communities who have not had any kind of infrastructure for parks before. Barnes asked for a list of the grant recipients.

Barnes asked who would be responsible for checking on the progress of the grant recipients. Andrews stated that that would be the ORGP's responsibility. Barnes asked about the staff of the ORGP. Andrews stated that McNair leads the ORGP. Kristen Dane, Randy Roberson, and Mike Sprague all serve as project officers in the ORGP. Dunklin asked to whom the ORGP reports. Andrews stated that the ORGP reports to her.

D. Year Two Priorities

The OOR was able to accomplish a great amount of formative work in its first year of existence. Andrews stated that some formative work will continue to be done into the second year of the OOR's existence. Andrews stated that she would like to continue establishing connections and collaborations by hosting quarterly informative listening sessions. These would involve working with groups such as the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and the Arkansas Department of Commerce (ADC) to travel around the state and talk about the OOR. Andrews stated that private sector entities would also be invited to these listening sessions to speak about their experiences and the challenges they face.

During year two, Andrews plans to continue to develop the Maumelle-Pinnacles Masterplan and to continue developing ideas regarding the annual summit. Andrews also hopes to create an outdoor recreation angel network. Andrews stated that there is a gap in funding for small businesses and startups in outdoor recreation in Arkansas. An angel network would bring together major investors who could contribute to the small businesses and startups and help bridge the gap and bring more businesses to Arkansas. Dunklin asked if the startup or small business would need to be located in Arkansas in order to qualify for funding. Andrews stated that while the investor would not necessarily need to be in Arkansas, the startup would need to be in the state. Barnes asked if funding would come from the governmental level as well, or if all the investments would come from private sector investors. Andrews stated that it would be private sector investors. Barnes stated that it would be helpful to be able to create a guide for new entrepreneurs, so they know about the necessary steps to take and what resources are available to them. He added that the OOR should provide sound counsel to new business owners so that they have a realistic idea about what goes into business ownership. Andrews stated that the OOR would not necessarily provide that counsel, but that the OOR could help connect new entrepreneurs to organizations such as the AEDC and the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center.

Gaston stated that it could be beneficial if there was some kind of incentive to help support new outdoor recreation business owners in small towns and rural areas. He added that the effort to disseminate information about how to launch small businesses should target rural communities. Andrews stated that targeting rural communities is what she hopes to accomplish through the quarterly listening sessions. There are not any true economic development incentives that are specific to outdoor recreation in the country. Andrews has asked her counterparts throughout the country, and all the economic development incentives are more generalized. Andrews stated that she would like to explore that idea more. Gaston added that he believes there are a lot of people within rural Arkansas communities who would like to be able to experience, embrace, and promote outdoor recreation opportunities if they were provided with the chance to do so.

Barnes stated that navigating federal and state regulations can be intimidating for individuals hoping to use the land and water surrounding them for their outdoor recreation business. Barnes suggested finding an organization or entity to help new business owners deal with those federal and state regulations. Andrews stated that she believes it is a goal of the Natural State Initiative to work on how to navigate those intimidating regulations. She added that it will be vital to relay the concerns of small business owners to the members of the Natural State Initiative Advisory Council.

Another year two priority of the OOR is to build a Delta Heritage Trail community and economic development network. The Delta Heritage Trail State Park is on the eastern border of Arkansas. When completed, it will be an 84-mile gravel biking trail that will run from Helena, AR to Arkansas City, AR. There are many small towns along the trail. Andrews stated that these small towns may not currently be fully equipped to deal with the amount of people that will come to use the Delta Heritage Trail. For that reason, Andrews hopes to form a group of people who can help develop a plan to prepare these communities for an influx of tourists. These preparations may, in turn, help promote growth in outdoor recreation businesses. Barnes asked how many people are expected to use the trail. Andrews stated that she believes that an estimated 13 million people will travel on the Delta Heritage Trail per year. Barnes asked when the trail is expected to be completed. Andrews responded that it will be completed in 2025. Barnes stated that members of small communities can sometimes be resistant to change that would prompt an influx of tourists into the area.

Barnes stated that Robert Moore, who is from the area near Arkansas City, AR, would be an excellent person to confer with about working with the small community members along the trail. Dunklin stated that Moore has played an influential role in getting the trail project started. Dunklin added that the opportunity for economic growth is often embraced within small communities. Barnes stated that he believes there will be some resistance and that it could prove to be helpful to have some numbers about the anticipated turnout to show to the community members.

Andrews stated that the OOR is continuing work on developing the statewide economic impact study. The OOR is working with the Arkansas Office of State Procurement on the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process. Andrews hope to put the bid out sometime in June. The study will examine the impact of investments in outdoor recreation in Arkansas, and what the anticipated return or value of the investments will be. It will also examine reports from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and the impact of outdoor recreation on the state's economy as a whole. Andrews believes that the results from this study will help to promote future investments and marketing efforts. Barnes asked if the RFQ bid will be sent out to specific companies. Andrews stated that the bid will be advertised to the public, and companies will need to send in their qualifications.

Barnes asked whose investments into outdoor recreation in the state are being considered in the study. Andrews stated that it would look at monument trails and mountain bike trails. Andrews added that the OOR would also be partnering with the AGFC to look at the Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), lakes, and rivers in which they have invested. Andrews clarified that the study will likely look at state government investments into outdoor recreation. She

will also look into potentially investigating the impact of federal government investments as well. Barnes stated that private sector investments should be considered in some way.

After the bid for the economic impact study is advertised to the public, the OOR will turn efforts towards conducting a public health and wellness study. Andrews stated that many other states have done a similar study, and they have been able to promote outdoor recreation from a health and wellness perspective. Andrews will reach out to professionals in the health field to help develop a plan for the study.

The OOR website will move into the second phase of development during year two. This second phase of development will include compiling a large resource library and an asset map tool, which would provide users with information about outdoor recreation activities in the state. Andrews also plans to continue to develop a one-page information sheet that will help promote and market the OOR. Other priorities for the OOR during year two include creating by-laws for the OOR advisory board, revitalizing the Great Strides Program, and creating more structure for the ORGP. Andrews asked for any comments about the OOR's year-two priorities. Straessle commended the OOR staff for the work they have accomplished since the office's creation.

Barnes asked what the budget will be for the statewide economic impact study and the public health and wellness study. Andrews believes that the economic impact study will cost around \$100,000, and the public health and wellness study will likely cost around \$50,000. Andrews stated that the OOR does have the funding available to conduct the studies. Barnes asked if the funding could be used for other endeavors. Andrews confirmed. Barnes asked if the information that would come from the studies already exists in another capacity somewhere, so that the OOR might be able to avoid paying for new studies to be conducted. Andrews stated that there are plenty of studies that may have pieces of information but that all the information available needs to be aggregated.

ADPHT Chief of Staff Suzanne Grobmyer stated that being able to quantify data and determine real impact can prove to be challenging. Additionally, it is important to learn from the problems and challenges that have arisen during other studies to develop a plan to enhance the OOR's studies. Andrews added that the OOR will be able to utilize the information gleaned from the studies in the future to advocate for more funding for outdoor recreation and to demonstrate its importance.

Andrews discussed the placement of the OOR with the board. Initially, it was a priority to get legislation to codify the OOR within the ADPHT. However, the legislation was pulled to allow for further discussion about the best location for the OOR. Andrews stated that the OOR could potentially be moved to the ADC or the Governor's Office. Andrews showed the board a list of where other outdoor recreation offices across the country exist within state government. Andrews has been asked to consider the best long-term placement for the OOR. Andrews added that the OOR would continue with the same work, and the board would not be impacted by any move. Grobmyer stated that this idea was initially brought up because the ADPHT does not have any exceptions under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The ADC, however, has a FOIA exemption for recruiting businesses. Grobmyer stated that they are considering whether it makes sense to ask the legislature for a FOIA exemption for the OOR to recruit businesses, or if it would be more beneficial to move the OOR under the ADC. Barnes stated that he feels like the OOR is primarily focused on hospitality and tourism. He also expressed the belief that there would likely be legislative support for allowing a FOIA exception for the OOR, since there has been a precedent set with the ADC. Barnes stated that the OOR should stay within the ADPHT and try to receive an exception from the legislature. Dunklin agreed with Barnes.

Grobmyer stated that there are citizens and news associations who would likely oppose the proposed exception. She also stated that the new administration is seeking to give the OOR a much more economic focus, and that Andrews's background with the AEDC makes her especially equipped to realize that goal. She believes that moving the OOR under the ADC may provide the opportunity to achieve the goals of the office with fewer obstacles. Andrews stated that much of the work that the OOR is currently engaged in is largely centered around economic and community development. Grobmyer stated that they could explore the possibility of the office being shared between the ADPHT and the ADC. Dunklin stated that the focus on the office is still the outdoors, which would not fit under the ADC. He added that he would not want the purpose of the OOR to be lost under the ADC. Grobmyer stated that ADC Secretary Hugh McDonald is aware of the conversations being had and that he wants to work together, regardless of the ultimate location of the OOR. The Natural State Initiative Advisory Council will also be a good resource to provide guidance on this decision. Andrews stated that she and the leadership team would continue to consider the available options and that she would explore how the Natural State Initiative Advisory Council can help.

Will Montgomery asked if Andrews could provide a list of how the OOR might benefit from each of the potential departments. Andrews stated that she is already in the process of making that list. She will share it with the board when it is complete.

E. Board Member Updates and Discussion

Andrews asked the board to begin considering year three priorities for the OOR. Andrews asked the board members for any updates.

Barnes asked about term limits for serving on the OOR Advisory Board. Andrews explained that there are no term limits at the moment. She also stated that one of the priorities is to create by-laws for the board in order to provide some more structure. Barnes asked if the board is currently serving at the pleasure of the secretary. Grobmyer stated that the OOR is operating under executive order by the governor, so the board members serve at the pleasure of the governor until the OOR is codified. Barnes asked when the OOR will be codified. Grobmyer stated that legislation cannot be introduced to codify the office until a decision is made about where it will be located. Grobmyer stated that another potential location for the OOR would be the Governor's Office, but that the ADPHT and the ADC seem like the two best options at this point.

Montgomery stated that he was going to be taking a group of 65 boys and girls to Memphis, Tennessee for the 2023 Olympic Development Program (ODP) showcase. Montgomery stated that those going to the showcase are highly talented soccer players from all over the state. The ODP showcase will allow players to demonstrate their skills to Major League Soccer associations as well as colleges and universities. Andrews asked Montgomery to send her information about the showcase.

Barnes stated that the National Catalina 22 Regatta will be held on Lake DeGray in May 2023. There will be 30 boats sailing in a series of events on the lake. Andrews stated that the event could be featured in the OOR newsletter. Barnes stated that he would give Andrews additional information about the event.

Peacock stated that May will be National Bike Month. The Bentonville Bike Fest will be held in Bentonville, Arkansas from May 25 through May 28. She also stated that the Union Cycliste Internationale Cyclo-cross will be held in Northwest Arkansas again, though the dates have not yet been finalized.

Andrews stated that the board will meet again in either June or July, after she returns from her maternity leave.

Adjourn

At 12:20 P.M., Andrews adjourned.

APPROVED:

6/6/23
Date

K Andrews