

**State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission**  
**Delta Hotels, Little Rock West**  
**January 19, 2023, 8:00 a.m.**

**Commissioners Present**

Austin Albers  
Blair Allen  
Bob Connell  
Skot Covert  
Mike Gibson  
John Gill  
Ron Gossage  
Shash Goyal  
Kalene Griffith  
Molly Houseworth-Jackson  
Eric Jackson  
Weston Lewey  
Montine McNulty  
Jim Shamburger  
Randy Wolfinbarger

**Commissioners Absent**

Mike Wilson  
Ness Sechrest

**Department Staff Present/Zoom**

Mike Mills, Secretary, ADPHT  
Suzanne Grobmyer, Chief of Staff, ADPHT  
Marty Ryall, Chief of Legislative Affairs, ADPHT  
Shealyn Sowers, Chief of Communications, ADPHT  
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT  
David Flake, Human Resources Director, ADPHT  
Theresa Helliwell, Controller, ADPHT  
Monika Rued, Public Information Officer, ADPHT  
Travis Napper, Director, Arkansas Tourism  
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Arkansas Tourism  
Susie Cowan, Project Coordinator, Arkansas Tourism  
Jessica Frahm, Marketing & Development Manager, Arkansas Tourism  
Jessica Ledbetter, Sales Manager, Arkansas Tourism  
Shea Lewis, Director, State Parks  
Jeff King, Deputy Director, State Parks  
Yolanda Brown, Executive Assistant, State Parks  
Chris Myers, Planning and Development, State Parks  
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, State Parks  
Mike Wilson, Parks Operations Manager, State Parks  
Tom Stolarz, Region 1 Supervisor, State Parks  
Tracy King, Region 2 Supervisor, State Parks  
John Stewart, Region 3 Supervisor, State Parks  
Mike Farringer, Region 4 Supervisor, State Parks  
Becky Bariola, Region 5 Supervisor, State Parks  
Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager, State Parks  
Jimmy Bryant, Director, Division of Heritage  
Daniel Faulkner, General Counsel, ADPHT  
Ed Thomas, State Parks Emergency Services Section Chief  
Shelbey Morris, Tourism Sales Specialist

**CJRW**

Darin Gray  
Mark Raines  
Blake Bolin  
Shelby Fisher  
Brian Kratkiewicz  
Keegan Wright  
Delaney Thomas  
Sarah VanDoorn

**Miles Media**

Susie Kardas

**Guests**

Kandi Baker, Embassy Suites Jonesboro Red Wolf Convention Center  
Bill Barnes, Tri-Pennant Resorts  
Adam Berrios, Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Gina Gemberling, Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Renee Golas, Jonesboro Advertising and Promotion Commission  
Kraig Pomrenke, Embassy Suites Jonesboro Red Wolf Convention Center  
Renee Riddick, Atrium Hospitality  
Lauren Schlechte, Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Bill Solleder, Visit Hot Springs  
Gary Jones, Gary Jones Video  
Rhonda Mills  
Scott Sudduth, NLRCVB

**Welcome & Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 8:01 a.m. by chairman, Randy Wolfenbarger. Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

**Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Randy Wolfenbarger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**Commissioner Shash Goyal made a motion to approve the agenda; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Approval of the Minutes**

Chair Randy Wolfenbarger asked for a motion to approve the November minutes.

**Commissioner Eric Jackson made a motion to approve the minutes; Weston Lewey seconded; the motion carried.**

**Secretary's Report**

Secretary Mike Mills introduced new staff then asked Daniel Faulkner to give a legal report.

### **Attorney's Report**

General Counsel Daniel Faulkner reminded the commissioners to complete their statement of financial interest and submit it to the Secretary of State's Office before January 31, 2023.

Daniel stated a vote is required to accept the per diem and travel reimbursement for 2023.

**Commissioner Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve the per diem and reimbursement as received in 2022; Eric Jackson seconded the motion. Motion passed.**

### **Tourism**

#### **Governor's Conference**

Travis Napper announced that up next will be the bid presentations for the host city for the 2024 Governor's Conference. The cities will present in alphabetical order: Jonesboro, Little Rock, and Rogers. Kristine Puckett gave the commissioners clarification on scoring for the presentations.

Kristine Puckett presented an overview of the 2023 Governor's Conference on Tourism schedule. She reported that 297 registrations have been received to date, of which 101 are first time attendees. Robin Thurston, CEO of Outside, Inc. was announced as the keynote speaker. Hall of Fame inductees are Ben Fruehauf and Paula Miles. Instructions on voting for the recipient of the Rising Star Award were given. Travis Napper stated that we will be reverting back to the Henry Awards.

#### **Director's Report**

Travis Napper reported the 2023 Travel Guide is available in the Welcome Centers. Seventeen communities have signed up for the co-op with Shrpa to create local itineraries. The Arkansas Craft Beverage Pass is live as of a week ago, with 43 businesses participating.

The 2% tourism tax in October was \$2.3 million in collections, which makes 20 consecutive months of record collections. Welcome Center visitation is up 5.2% from the previous year.

Arkansas Tourism and five partner cities attended the Travel South International Showcase in late November in Louisville, KY.

The new Waterfall Guide publication has been delivered. This publication will be available exclusively in Welcome Centers or online.

#### **Marketing and Research**

Jessica Frahm presented research findings from two studies conducted by Longwoods International. The Resident Sentiment Study was presented, and it was determined that Arkansans support and encourage tourism in Arkansas. Arkansas residents thought more positively about tourism and its growth than U.S. or Southern benchmarks. The Brand Image study was also presented which helped to understand how people in our advertising markets perceive our brand, how advertising and visitation impacts their perceptions, and top travel motivators.

### CJRW

Dalaney Thomas and Brian Kratkiewicz presented the media plan for Spring/Summer 2023. Recommended distribution of 65% digital, 28% television, 5% print, and 2% radio.

### Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas presented the Q4 Web/Search/Social Report for Arkansas.com. There was a slight decrease in partner referral conversion rates from 11% to 10% from the last Q4 to the current Q4. The actual number of referrals went up, but the rate went slightly down. 70% of the users were from out of state which was down from last year at this time at 75%. The views of accommodations pages for camping and RVing were down by 5% due to cold weather in December but the hotel pages increased by 10%. There was a 31% increase in views of the events, with the top being Holiday Events. Restaurant page views are up by 34%. Overall comparison, there were 880,000 views in 2021 Q4 with a 38% increase to 1.2 million views in 2022 Q4. There is a 10% decrease in guides being ordered because they are being viewed more online.

### Paid Marketing Report

Keegan Wright reported the search engine marketing performance.

The overall paid advertising saw a 140% increase on the Google Search and Bing Search due to shifting the budget from Bing to Google. The result was a huge increase in clicks, large increase in conversions, and a small increase in spending. The big reason was new features on the Google Search showing better results. The clicks increased by 300% and the conversions weren't far behind.

Facebook and Instagram served 7.8 million ads. For every 1,000 ads, the cost was \$5.67. 2.5 million people were reached at the cost of \$17.48 per thousand. This was a little higher than normal because it was holiday season, which meant more advertisers and therefore less inventory. The 40,700 landing page views generated 8,000 guide requests. Paid engagement ads generated 1 million engagements and 11,600 reactions. Social ads generated 71,000 link clicks.

### 2024 Governor's Conference

Chairman Wolfinbarger announced Jonesboro as the host city for the 2024 Governor's Conference on Tourism.

**Commissioner Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve the vote for Jonesboro as the host city; Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.**

### FINANCIAL REPORT – DECEMBER 31, 2022

Agency Controller, Theresa Helliwell, presented the FY 2023 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the six-month period ending December 31, 2022.

FY 2023 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$16,890,164 a decrease of 0.17%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$764,920 a decrease of 3.83%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$23,314,513 an increase of 10.99%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$14,160,773 an increase of 12.31%
- General Revenue - \$13,104,038 an increase of 5.20%
- War Memorial General Revenue - \$179,000 an increase of 2.05%
- Transfers for Shared Services - \$3,881,135 an increase of 20.29%
- Parks & Tourism Total - \$79,949,725 an increase of 20.68%

FY 2023 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$47,867,909 an increase of 20.76%
- Tourism Division - \$9,462,858 an increase of 49.70%
- War Memorial - \$1,066,200 an increase of 25.11%
- Parks & Tourism Total - \$58,396,967 an increase of 24.74%

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

**Eric Jackson made a motion to approve; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **State Parks Division**

### **Director's Report**

Director Shea Lewis opened with thanking everyone and expressing how much of an honor it is to continue to serve as Arkansas State Parks Director. Director Lewis recognized the Arkansas State Parks Supervisors that were in attendance: Tom Stolarz, Region 1; Tracy King, Region 2; John Stewart, Region 3; Mike Farringer, Region 4; and Becky Bariola, Region 5. Director Lewis recognized the groups combined total of 152 years of Arkansas State Parks service and experience. Director Lewis recognized the section managers and announced they will be presenting at this and future meetings.

Director Lewis invited Parks Information and Innovation Manager, Darin Mitchell, to present. Darin's presentation included the visitation plateau that's currently reported on a weekly basis and will be transitioning to a monthly reporting process in the future.

Director Lewis stated that the calendar year 2022 revenue closed out with \$32 million in park revenue, which is very close to the fiscal year totals that ended on July 1, 2022.

Director Lewis reported on dynamic pricing and its impact including a current Winter Promo providing camping and yurt discounts of 10% off until March 1, 2023.

Director Lewis provided an update of his meeting with Keith McKnight with Skills USA Arkansas. ASP will participate in the Skills USA of Arkansas annual conference which could lead to future ASP employees.

Director Lewis provided an update for the ARKLA Broadband Grant. There are 14 parks that have been provided broadband and improved Wi-Fi.

Director Lewis stated that on December 15, 2022, the Department signed a MOU for a trail development project with the US Forest Service and the City of Mena. The MOU is a non-binding agreement to work together and is currently moving the Mena Trails Project forward.

Director Lewis announced that the ASP Point-of-Sale system has been sent to the Office of State Procurement and is currently out for bidding. Candidates for the system are currently being interviewed.

Director Lewis provided a positive report for Emergency Services including prescribed fires across the state. Emergency Services Manager, Ed Thomas, worked closely with Dr. Morshedi, Arkansas State Police's new Medical Director. Ed also worked on an Educational Campaign to inform park visitors of break-ins and "snatch and grabs" from parked vehicles. Director Lewis also reported that in the 2022 calendar year ASP had 69 serious violations to include weapons charges, theft, fraud, and assaults. Director Lewis further explained that ASP recently lost a total of 12 senior officers due to retirements and resignations.

In closing, Director Lewis advised that the Queen Wilhelmina train's contract has expired, and ASP is currently attempting to communicate with the owner regarding renewal, but there has been no return communication at this point.

Mike Wilson ASP Operations Manager reported on the Lake Catherine closing. Mike reported that the park closed December 1, 2022, and the park is scheduled to reopen on March 18, 2023. Mike reported that the project has resulted in a loss of \$72,000 in revenue since its closure, with \$1.1 million being invested towards capital improvements for the wastewater treatment, sanitary sewer collections, and general park improvements projects.

Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, presented on the 2023 First Day Hike events. Kelly highlighted the beauty of ASP year-round and stated that this year's hike was successful with 46 guided hikes.

#### **Park Policies, Rules & Directives**

Revisions to Policy Statement 2000 regarding CY2023 Fees and Rates. Deputy Director Jeff King presented a request for the Commission's approval to update select fees and rates. Following the approval and digital publication of ASP's fees and rates schedule for CY 2023, select edits were needed for both clarification and due to some administrative oversights of the document approved by the State Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission at the October 20, 2022, meeting.

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve; Molly Houseworth-Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

Update of Policy Statement 1030 regarding Concession Leases & Agreement – King presented for approval updates to the Policy Statement #1030 Concession Leases and Agreements. The policy created a revamped effort to PS #1030 to provide a more transparent and defined process of evaluation of respondents to our business partnership opportunities at Arkansas State Parks.

**Eric Jackson made a motion to approve, with it being reviewed in 60 days from today's meeting; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Agreements**

Queen Wilhelmina – Memorandum of Agreement with the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation for Trail Design – Deputy Director King presented the request to approve the MOA which will design a multipurpose mountain bike trail at Queen Wilhelmina State Park.

**John Gill made a motion to approve; Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.**

Mount Nebo – Memorandum of Agreement with the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation for Trail Construction – Deputy Director King presented the request. The MOA would allow Mount Nebo to host in the first week of May 2023, the Big Mountain Enduro, a downhill mountain bike race event at the state park. This event will be developed in partnership with the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation (APRF). In preparation for the event, our division will be working in collaboration with the APRF on course development and proposed permanent trail additions to Mount Nebo State Park.

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve; Molly Houseworth-Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

Lake Catherine – Entergy Arkansas Lease Agreement Amendment- Deputy Director King presented the request. The MOA would amend and extend the lease agreement with Entergy, Inc. The amended terms of the lease will extend the lease for an additional twenty (20) years and increase the Lessee liability insurance limits from \$1,000,000 to \$4,000,000.

**Shash Goyal made a motion to approve; Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.**

Pinnacle Mountain – Little Rock & Western Railway Lease Agreement – Deputy Director King presented the request. If approved the MOA would negotiate a lease agreement to construct, use, and maintain the at-grade public trail crossing under the Little Rock and Western Railway bridge for public use. In December of 2022, Little Rock and Western Railway agreed to the terms outlined in the attached State Lease Agreement. The initial term for the lease agreement will be for twenty-five (25) years and include a one-time upfront lease fee of \$15,000.

**Bob Connell made a motion to approve; Mike Gibson seconded; John Gill abstained. The motion carried.**

Various State Parks – Good Sam Camp Host Program Agreement – Deputy Director King presented the request. Approval of the MOA would allow Good Sams State Director, Jack C Godwin, Jr., to offer their continued support of providing volunteer Camp hosts at Bull Shoals-White River, Lake Catherine, and Petit Jean, in addition to Crater of Diamonds State Park. The new agreement would run from May 1, 2023, until April 30, 2028.

**Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve; Montine McNulty seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Planning and Development Manager**

Systemwide – ANCRC FY24 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Projects List – Planning and Development Manager, Chris Myers presented the request. The ANCRC CIP contains twenty-one (21) projects totaling \$15,455,000 in proposed funding. Included are seventeen (17) repair, renovation, or replacement projects; one (1) reporting effort; two (2) new developments; and one (1) property acquisition. This request contains a mix of new and previously reviewed projects. Some requests are a continuation of projects for which the design phase was funded by previous ANCRC grants or Amendment 75 funds.

**Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve; Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

Systemwide – Amendment 75 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) Projects List – Planning and Development Manager, Chris Myers presented the requested project. FY24 project list contains twenty-six park specific projects totaling \$10,770,857 and \$3,360,000 in design and systemwide funding. Included are seventeen repair, renovation, or replacement projects; three new developments; and six systemwide funding efforts. This request contains a mix of new and previously reviewed projects. Some requests are a continuation of projects for which the design phase was funded by previous Amendment 75 or ANCRC grants funds.

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve; Blair Allen seconded, and the motion carried.**

Devil's Den – Acceptance of Devil's Racetrack Trailhead & Campground – Planning and Development Manager, Chris Myers presented the project. The Monument Trail Amenities have been developed at Devil's Den State Park to complement mountain biking at the park, and provide a staging, camping, and access area for those who visit Devil's Den State Park. The total value of these Amenities improvements is \$904,837.40.

The MOA called for transfer of exclusive rights and ownership of the projects to Arkansas State Parks, upon completion of the development projects and would allow the acceptance of the contributions used to improve the state park system.

**Austin Albers made a motion to approve; Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Quarterly Updates**

CIP Quarterly Report (Planning & Development) – Chris Myers reported that inventory ending in December 2022 that ASP maintained 29 open methods of finance in the amount of \$39 million of post submitted and committed & available funds. 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2023 closed with 3 open MOF with over \$9 million and close to \$200,000 in Amendment 75. Chris reported that Delta Heritage Trail completed 48 miles of trail with 21 under construction with 3 open projects to be completed in 2025.

Susie Kardas with Miles Partnership presented ArkansasStateParks.com quarterly report with keynotes that out of state traffic was down. Organic traffic is down; less people are visiting parks by the websites. Bookings were down due to inflation and health concerns; however, the bookings are currently increasing. Views of accommodations are down mostly in camping and



cabins due to weather. Views of events had an increase with interest in First Day Hikes. The search for what is being looked at has increased from the previous year. All data was in comparison from 2019 to current. Referrals are down on ArkansasStateParks.com with the same trend in Tourism. With tourism there were 14,000 clicks which is currently up. The State Parks Passport page provides information for the Parks Passport program. The Holiday promotions page had 3,000 page views with 85% percent leading to the visit of the deals page.

**Old Business/New Business**

**Naming of the John H. Johnson Commemorative Plaza at Delta Heritage Trail**

As a component of the Walton Family Foundation's (WFF) \$20 million grant funding completion of the Delta Heritage Trail, the WFF saw an opportunity to provide for recognition of John H. Johnson (JHJ) and allocated \$225,000 of the grant to aid in development of a JHJ recognition piece in Arkansas City, Arkansas. The expanded park space is a small plaza and short walking path with exhibits chronicling the life of JHJ and anchoring the plaza is a proposed life-size bronze statue of JHJ.

**Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Per the department's policy, staff will research and hold a public meeting regarding the naming proposal.**

Due to the Legislative Session, the 2023 meeting locations were revised.

**Shash Goyal made a motion to approve the revised meeting schedule; Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Public Comment:**

Bill Barnes, with Tri-Pennant Resorts, made a public comment welcoming the new Department Secretary.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:54 P.M.

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