

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION

Petit Jean State Park

August 15, 2024, 8:30 AM

**APPROVED SEPTEMBER 19, 2024**

**Commissioners Present**

Jim Shamburger, Chair  
Blair Allen, Vice-Chair  
Randy Wolfinbarger  
Shash Goyal  
Mike Gibson  
Rebecca Baker  
Mike Wilson  
Austin Albers  
Bob Connell  
Eric Jackson  
Weston Lewey  
Gary Vernon

**Commissioners Absent**

Kalene Griffith  
Molly Houseworth Jackson

**Staff Present**

Suzanne Grobmyer, Chief of Staff, ADPHT  
Clay Stone, General Counsel, ADPHT  
Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, Arkansas Tourism  
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT  
Jami Fisher, Chief Financial Officer, ADPHT  
Leah DiPietro, Deputy Chief of Communications, ADPHT  
Kori Bull, Project Coordinator, Tourism  
April Kiser, Deputy Chief of Communications  
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Mike Wilson, Assistant Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Joe Buckley, Park Superintendent, Petit Jean State Park  
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
John Stewart, Operations Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Becky Bariola, Region 5 Supervisor, Arkansas State Parks

**CJRW**

Darin Gray  
Katherine Vasilos  
Brian Kratkiewicz  
Wade McCune  
Jill Joslin  
Keegan Wright  
Ashley Moore

**Guests**

Benny Baker, City of Morrilton  
Donnie Crain, Conway County Economic Development Corporation  
Gary Jones, Jones Video  
Bill Solleder, Visit Hot Springs

### **Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. The chair thanked Point Remove and the Petit Jean Farmers Market for the reception. Shamburger also thanked the Conway County Economic Development Committee for sponsoring the dinner. Chair Shamburger acknowledged Petit Jean State Park staff for hosting and welcomed guests Donnie Crain (Conway County Economic Development), Gary Jones (Jones Video) and Benny Baker (City of Morrilton) to the meeting.

Joe Buckley, Superintendent of Petit Jean State Park, welcomed everyone to the park and gave a few updates. Petit Jean's revenue last year was over \$4.6M with steady visitation of approximately 850K visitors a year. Buckley acknowledged the work the Commission does is very much appreciated.

Donnie Crain, with Conway County Economic Development, welcomed everyone to Morrilton and the Petit Jean River Valley (Conway and Perry Counties). He expressed gratitude for all the Commission does for the area and for the state. Mr. Crain stated that Petit Jean was the first state park and economic development started atop Petit Jean Mountain with Winthrop Rockefeller. Crain discussed how, like Arkansas Tourism, the Morrilton Area Chamber of Commerce is working to promote the Morrilton area using tourism, economic development and outdoor recreation and has started its own incentive program for new businesses.

### **Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**Rebecca Baker made the motion to approve the agenda; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Approval of July 2024 Minutes**

Chairman Jim Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the July 2024 minutes.

**Weston Lewey made the motion to approve the minutes; Blair Allen seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Secretary's Report**

Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff, presented the Secretary's Report on behalf of Secretary Shea Lewis.

Grobmyer stated that the department is very goal minded. All ADPHT Divisions have their own goals, and the team has met extensively to make sure the ADPHT team is aligned and that everyone is working towards the goals.

Parks is preparing for the War Memorial Stadium football season, particularly the UA vs. UAPB game and the Salt Bowl which are on consecutive nights. The Parks team has been working on solutions to last year's challenges and visitors will see a lot of changes at the Stadium this year, which include a more accessible concourse, cooling areas, 3<sup>rd</sup> party food vendors, free water stations, water hawkers in the stadium bowl and large fans.



Dalaney Thomas, Katherine Andrews and the Communications team have been working with Commerce on a joint campaign relating to workforce recruitment and retainment. They are also working with CJRW on this effort. When the plan is finalized, it will be shared with the Commission.

Some key State Parks projects in the works are:

- A Master Plan is in the works for Petit Jean State Park. The plan includes more parking, expansion of trails, adding climbing opportunities, expansion of some activities and improvements to facilities. Deputy Director King will provide more details.
- Parks is working on its last two contracts for the Delta Heritage Trail which is on track for a fall 2025 grand opening for the completed trail system.
- The public comment period for the NEPA for the Mena Trails Project at Queen Wilhelmina State Park has wrapped up. Parks hopes to receive a decision on the NEPA by October so the project can move forward.
- The public comment period has closed on the Maumelle Pinnacles Master Plan at Pinnacle Mountain State Park. This plan is a multi-agency partnership and Deputy Director King will provide additional details.

In the Heritage Division, the new statue of Johnny Cash will be unveiled at the National Statuary Hall on September 24, 2024, in Washington D.C.

Work is underway onboarding MMGY and working with CJRW on new systems and processes; advertising efforts are moving forward. ADPHT and CJRW are in daily contact sharing ideas about how best to implement.

### **FINANCIAL REPORT – July 31, 2024**

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2025 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the one (01) month period ending July 31, 2024.

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$3,715,731 a decrease of 5.95%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$108,061 an increase of 18.08%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$3,993,719 an increase of 3.32%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$2,891,754 an increase of 6.39%

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$8,190,077 a decrease of 9.47%
- Tourism Division - \$3,216,782 an increase of 23.99%
- War Memorial - \$71,074 an increase of 43.05%
- Department Total - \$11,477,933 a decrease of .91%

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

## **STATE PARKS DIVISION**

### **Director's Report**

Jeff King, Deputy Director provided the following updates:

- Regarding State Parks Revenue for July, the main driver in revenue being down was the extra Saturday and Sunday in FY24 (July 2023 had five weekends, July 2024 had four). The impact could especially be seen at the big five parks but there were a couple of other contributing factors including:
  - The slip rental policy was changed a couple of years ago and was supposed to require renters to pay annually, however, we allowed 6-month rentals up until this year. This is the first year we didn't see revenue from those rentals in July.
  - Hobbs State Park had campground closures due to the Memorial Day storms, 36 campsites at Lake Chicot being taken offline due to renovation and campsites offline at Devil's Den due to ongoing renovation projects. This caused inventory differences which contributed to our July revenue decrease.
- Point of Sale/Property Management System: The launch date was pushed back from August 5 to October 1, 2024. The launch was delayed again for:
  - Continued efforts to install the new credit card processing system and setup to work with World Pay has taken additional installation time.
  - IT issues centered around firewall and security processes for the reservation system.
  - Getting all the photos, maps and other online content updated to the reservation system before launch.
- Since the last meeting, the ALC-Review Subcommittee approved a MOF (Method of Finance) for ARPA funds (American Rescue Plan) that are allocated to State Parks. Projects benefiting from this MOF include the Delta Heritage Trail, Mena Trails Project, Pinnacle Mountain pedestrian and cycling improvements that are part of the Maumelle Pinnacles Master Plan and Petit Jean Master Plan improvements.
- Next week State Parks will request a reallocation of \$261K in ARPA funds that were allocated for Broadband so additional infrastructure improvements can be completed in the parks.
- War Memorial Stadium: There has been a huge push to improve the game experience at War Memorial Stadium.
  - Scott Blankenship and team installed new data lines required by the University of Arkansas and Wi-Fi has been boosted to improve the ticket sales. All tickets are digital now and the network had to be improved to make that happen.
  - The Point-of-Sale system at War Memorial has been updated. This is not part of the Itinio/Brandt POS system. The updates include Apple touch and tap to pay and should greatly improve the speed for credit card transactions.
  - A new Military Hall of Fame veteran's exhibit is being installed on the wall at the main gate of the stadium.

### **Leases & Agreements**

#### **Delta Heritage Trail State Park – Entergy Arkansas Right-of-Way Request \***

- Deputy Director King requested approval for an agricultural easement across the Delta Heritage Trail.

**Shash Goyal made a motion to approve. Blair Allen seconded, and the motion carried.**



**Devil’s Den State Park – Ozarks Electric Coop. Corp. Electrical Right-of-Way Request \***

- King requested approval for a utility easement at Devil’s Den SP that’s in coordination with cabin improvements and efforts to move utility and fiber lines into underground conduits. It will improve service and overall experience at the park.

**Eric Jackson made a motion to approve. Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Pinnacle Mountain State Park – Maumelle Water Corporation Water Utility Easement Request \***

- Deputy Director King requested approval for an easement that will move a water line currently in the roadway onto State Park property. The water line supports a lot of facilities at the park.

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

**Planning & Development**

**Adoption of the Maumelle Pinnacles Conservation Area Master Plan as framework for future development at Pinnacle Mountain State Park \***

King explained that State Parks has been working on this plan since February 2023 and it’s a coordinated effort between Arkansas State Parks, City of Little Rock, Central Arkansas Water, Pulaski County, The Nature Conservancy, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and eventually the US Forest Service. The intention of the resulting master plan was to provide a means of coordination between the various partners to develop further recreation opportunities that fit within a larger vision of this unique natural resource area stretching from Two Rivers Park to Lake Sylvia Recreation Area. The Pinnacle Mountain Visitor Center will be used as a gateway for the proposed opportunities. King asked that the Commission approve/adopt the draft of the plan.

**Shash Goyal made a motion to approve. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Petit Jean State Park Master Plan DRAFT**

King went over the Petit Jean Master Plan draft which focuses on 11 areas including stewardship, water resources and opportunities to expand services and serve guests. A few of the planned projects associated with this plan include the upcoming renovation of Mather Lodge, expansion of multi-use trails and rock-climbing opportunities. The plan is being introduced to the public at this meeting in a storyboard format. The next phase will be a draft outlining specifics of the plan followed by an open period for people to review the plan. The plan would be brought back to this Commission for final approval.

**TOURISM DIVISION**

**Director’s Report**

Tourism Director Dalaney Thomas announced that a branding manager has been added to the staff, with intention to have them onboarded by the next meeting. Thomas attended U.S. Travel’s Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO) along with Melissa Adams, Leah DiPietro and Jill Rohrbach. Thomas explained that there is a shift being made to not only include management in conference attendance but also staff. During their time at ESTO Thomas served on a panel to discuss influencer marketing.

Progress is being made on the economic impact report. The new version will be a blend of the annual report and the economic impact report. It will include key initiatives implemented and is intended to be a useful piece for legislators and industry alike.

Thomas and other members of the department's leadership attended the unveiling of the Justin Moore sign in Poen in celebration and recognition of music as a tourism pillar.

Thomas shared that the Tourism Division is working to implement industry roundtables in conjunction with commission meetings. One such meeting will be held in Morrilton following this meeting. Attendees include city leaders, restaurants and the biking industry.

### **Ad Committee Report**

Commissioner Wolfenbarger invited other members of the commission to join future ad committee meetings. He expressed that CJRW's partnership with MMGY will be superb for the department. Wolfenbarger explained the coming changes with our market areas and increase in detailed data driven approaches. He also covered the consistencies of the media mix remaining heavily digital.

Thomas gave an update on promotional partnerships with Hot Springs and their Phoenix bass fishing tournament, which will be televised on CBS sports network and online.

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission collaborative programs will be a recurring topic, as the decrease in fishing license sales has directed the focus toward trout fishing. Travel writer Jill Rohrbach will be hosting a fishing FAM at Norfolk later this year. Other PR initiatives such as media FAM tours and influencers are being explored.

The division is also increasing their partnership with the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, with a possibility for Central High to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Arkansas Cinema Society is promoting arts in Little Rock for FilmLand, taking place the week of the meeting.

In music and events, Arkansas Country Blues & Stringband in Springdale and Peacemaker in Fort Smith are coming up. Consistent events like these push the "year-long/always-on" narrative that there are no off-seasons in The Natural State.

### **Fall Tourism & Parks Media Campaign Overview**

Brian Kratkiewicz with CJRW began with sharing the timeline for the fall media campaign. August will continue the interim plan, September will consist of strategy refinement and the new plan will be finalized in October and implemented in November.

Tourism's budget is set for \$3.8 million. Key demographic targets include women ages 25-54, women 55+, and adults 40-49. These are the same demographics that the division has been targeting.

The FY25 Interim Opportunity Markets consist of 15 DMAs in metros as opposed to states. Commissioner Shash Goyal questioned why Atlanta, GA, was not being targeted considering its direct



flights. Kratkiewicz explained that while Atlanta is not in the plan for the interim, it can be considered in the new market approach.

Commissioner Gary Vernon questioned the approach to climate driven markets. It was explained that research layers are being added to target people more likely to fall into one of the demographic personalities.

Thomas shared details on the strategic shift in co-ops for the industry next year. The only publication will be the Travel Guide. Regarding the Regional Tourist Associations, a draft of the updated rules will be presented at next month's meeting. The goal of the updates is to make the process less burdensome for administrators in the industry and departmental staff. She expressed the desire for the department to be more of a resource for them and to build rules that make it easier for the industry to process.

#### Fall Creative Update

Wade McCune with CJRW presented the fall creative plan. He led with a sampling of video and digital content. While the samplings shown consisted of high-level expertise in outdoor recreation, the agency plans to be conscious to target the beginner levels as well. This is intended to be done by utilizing State Parks as an entry point to outdoor recreation in the state.

Commissioner Bob Connell provided feedback regarding the "ARK" watermark and the public's misconception of "AR" representing other states, such as Alaska or Arizona. The creative team explained this confusion is what led to the new "ARK" design.

McCune showcased shortform story telling videos and explained the idea of brand building by telling stories of people doing cool things in Arkansas. Various commissioners gave positive feedback.

Katherine Vasilos with CJRW gave the marketing update. Leading with the website, she explained that there will be more to come on that topic and stakeholder engagement at next month's meeting. A brand immersion trip is being planned for the week of September 16 with MMGY. Vasilos outlined strategies on a national and local scale, as well as influencer strategies. Chairman Shamburger commented on website concerns. Vasilos ensured that the website is a priority for CJRW as well.

Commissioner Wolfenbarger gave commentary on an article he had recently read which stated that Arkansas was in the top five states to retire to, and asked where this came from. It was explained that communities are working towards this goal with approximately \$900,000 in funding going towards these efforts. Data has shown Texas, California and Florida are among the top states relocating to Arkansas. This can be credited in part to the halo effect in marketing, a concept that suggests if marketing makes a person want to travel to a destination, it can make them want to move there. Commissioner Goyal noted that bordering states Louisiana and Texas are declining in population.

**MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING**

There were no public comments.

The commission was reminded of September's meeting at Queen Wilhelmina State Park. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Chairman Shamburger at 10:26 a.m.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:

  
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Jim Shamburgey, Chair

09/19/2024