

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION

Via Zoom

January 28, 2024, 10:00 AM

APPROVED 2/28/2024

Commissioners Present

Jim Shamburger, Chair
Blair Allen, Vice-Chair
Rebecca Baker
Bob Connell
Mike Gibson
Ron Gossage
Shash Goyal
Randy Wolfenbarger
Mike Wilson
Austin Albers
Trey Berry
Kalene Griffith
Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Eric Jackson
Weston Lewey

Commissioners Absent

Staff Present

Shea Lewis, Secretary, ADPHT
Suzanne Grobmyer, Chief of Staff, ADPHT
Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, Arkansas Tourism
Shealyn Sowers, Deputy Chief of Communications, ADPHT
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT
Jami Fisher, Controller, ADPHT
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Arkansas Tourism
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks
Mike Wilson, Manager of Operations, Arkansas State Parks
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue Operations Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Ed Thomas, Chief of Emergency Services, Arkansas State Parks
Kelly Farrell, Chief of Interpretation & Program Services
Marty Ryall, Director, Div. of AR Heritage & Legislative Affairs Director, ADPHT
Teddy Stewart, Chief of Staff to the First Gentleman
Lacie Kirchner, Office of Attorney General

CJRW

Darin Gray
Jessica Frahm
Katherine Vasilos
Blake Bowlin
Wade McCune

Miles Partnership

Johanna Etienne

Guests

Tina Archer-Cope, Experience Fayetteville, VP of Sales

Scott Sudduth, North Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, VP of Tourism Development

Welcome and Call to Order

Incoming Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 10:01am. He thanked everyone for pivoting to ZOOM instead of Northwest Arkansas (Rogers) due to the weather and thanked Randy Wolfinbarger for chairing the Commission last year. Elaine Lienhart called roll.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Jim Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the updated agenda.

Shash Goyal made the motion to approve the agenda; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of November 2023 Minutes

Chairman Jim Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the November 2023 minutes.

Kalene Griffith made the motion to approve the minutes; Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Shea Lewis welcomed everyone and thanked them for their willingness to pivot to ZOOM due to the weather. He said he had several orders of business to go over with everyone and wanted to start with the official items.

Statement of Financial Interest

Secretary Lewis reminded the commissioners to complete the Statement of Financial Interest form and submit it to the Secretary of State before the end of the month.

2024 per diem *

Secretary Lewis requested a vote of approval regarding the annual per diem. Per Diem is allowable up to \$85.

Eric Jackson made the motion to approve the 2024 per diem at \$85; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

2024 travel reimbursement *

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve based on Secretary Lewis' explanation.

Shash Goyal made the motion to approve the 2024 travel reimbursement; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary Lewis provided updates regarding items taking place this year and a brief recap of last year for the Commission:

- Governor Sanders' approach to parks and tourism and the momentum the department continues to see.
- Creation of the Natural State Initiative.
- State Parks' Centennial Year in 2023.
- Legislative session of 2023.
- Reopening of the Mosaic Templers Cultural Center gallery and celebration of the 15th anniversary of that museum in Little Rock.
- Tourism numbers for 2022 including 48.3M in calendar year 22.
- Dalaney Thomas hired as Director of Tourism
- Opening of a new Visitor Center at Pinnacle Mountain State Park which will be a hub for the new Maumelle Pinnacles Partnership project.
- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission celebrated its 50th anniversary.
- Arkansas Heritage distributed \$11.6M to support communities, museums, and historic properties through its grant programs.
- Katherine Andrews and the Office of Outdoor Recreation supported communities in 35 counties through grants and hosted the first Arkansas Outdoor Economic Summit in December 2023.

Looking ahead to 2024, Lewis highlighted:

- Elevating the image of Arkansas in everything we do whether it be Tourism promotions, Arkansas State Parks events, museum activities or publications, website updates, or advertising.
- Evaluating operations internally and externally to find opportunities for efficiencies.
- Raising the level of experiences we offer to guests and visitors to our state.

Secretary Lewis highlighted a few steps that are being taken to prepare for the upcoming Eclipse on April 8:

- Arkansas State Parks have created operational plans for each individual park and are partnering with other state agencies on operational plans.
- Feb 21-22: Dalaney Thomas is launching a Satellite Media Tour to promote "Come early, stay late" to promote different activities going on before and after the eclipse.
- We are activating an influencer (@coleyraeh/Run Wild My Child) to promote eclipse itineraries via blog posts and social media.
- Tourism is leaning into promoting more cities. Hot Springs is doing a huge amount of promotion for their events.
- Social media will continue, and content pages will continue to promote itineraries and all the eclipse events.
- The websites will be updated to be a resource to visitors. Itineraries, path of totality maps, and additional information will be posted.

FINANCIAL REPORT – December 31, 2023

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2024 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the six-month period ending December 31, 2023.

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$18,469,423 an increase of 9.35%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$1,113,746 an increase of 45.60%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$23,672,954 an increase of 1.54%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$14,138,569 a decrease of 4.41%

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$55,608,458 an increase of 16.17%
- Tourism Division - \$9,774,284 an increase of 3.29%
- War Memorial - \$1,217,052 an increase of 14.15%
- Department Total - \$66,599,793 an increase of 14.05%

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

Eric Jackson made the motion to approve the financials; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Dalaney Thomas reported her goals for engagement with the industry, elevating the image of Arkansas and making Arkansas a year-round destination. To accomplish these goals, she has contacted all of the Regional Tourism Associations, has attended some meetings and events, and has plans to attend more. The main purpose of attending these events and meetings is to understand the grants and funds being appropriated to the Regions to make ensure those dollars are working the best they can.

Thomas has also met with several Convention & Visitors Bureaus to learn what Destination Management Organizations are doing on their own and identifying opportunities for information sharing as well as tradeshow planning. She is looking for more opportunities for outdoor recreation tradeshows to attend.

In December, Arkansas Tourism attended the Travel South International Showcase in Memphis, TN. There was a pre-conference familiarization tour of Arkansas with fourteen international tour operators. The partners involved in the familiarization tour were Bentonville, Fayetteville, Little Rock, Rogers, Wilson, the US Marshals Museum, and the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash. At the showcase, Arkansas had five pods that included representatives from Arkansas Delta Byways, Bentonville, Fayetteville, Little Rock, and Rogers along with Arkansas Tourism staff. The Arkansas Tourism team alone had fifty meetings with international tour operators.

The next upcoming event is in Atlanta, GA, with The Local Palate, a media opportunity that Arkansas Tourism bought into as part of the Travel South partnership to help promote Arkansas as a culinary destination. Two videos have been produced. One focuses on Bentonville and the other on Little Rock. They premiered in New York City in December; following the Atlanta event, it will be premiered in Chicago.

Thomas and Shea Lewis have been meeting with and looking for ways to better partner with other state agencies.

Thomas spoke on a panel at the Municipal League Winter Conference about the upcoming eclipse. It was a fantastic opportunity to connect with different municipalities and mayors to understand what they have going on in their cities.

Some key projects that are going on are being prioritized by the five promotional pillars, including a collaboration with CJRW and an activation in Chicago. Other projects include staffing a new marketing manager and industry relations manager. Planning continues for the Southeast Tourism Society Domestic Showcase and the Governor's Conference on Tourism.

Website Refresh Review

CJRW's Jessica Frahm presented a sneak peek of the new website design. There are dynamic images and buttons to prioritize the five content pillars and there will be an eclipse icon at the top of the pages to take everyone directly to the eclipse page. This approach will allow people to engage with the content that is most relevant to them, to find the resources they need quickly, and will become the ultimate planning tool for our visitors. The goal is to have this new website live by the next commission meeting.

STATE PARKS DIVISION

Director's Report

Jeff King, Deputy Director, shared updates on the following items with the Commission:

- **First Day Hikes:** 63 guided hikes at 40 parks with 1556 hikers hiking 1767 miles.
- **Winter Storm Damage:** Water line breaks at AMNR and Lake Dardanelle; heating system issues at Mount Magazine; and Ozark Folk Center had multiple days of water service disruption related to city utility issues.
- **Winter Promotion:** ASP's Escape the Winter Blues promotion is running from December 1-February 10.
- **Brandt/Itinio implementation:** ASP started project planning and data collection for the new Point of Sale / Property Management System last week. ASP is targeting June 3, 2024, as a go-live date with August as a fallback go-live date.
- **Eclipse 2024 update:** ASP is working to finalize operational plans for all parks.
- **Pinnacle Visitor Center:** The new visitor center, as expected, is receiving significant visitation. Sales of merchandise at the Visitor Center is up YOY \$16,515 (\$18,635 or 2,120%). The park hand counted 5,363 visitors in December 2024.
- **iSOMS:** The parks team went live this week with iSOMS emergency management and record system for our LEO team.
- **Becoming rentABLE:** ASP is moving forward with a partnership with Becoming rentABLE, which will allow ASP to further certify our accessible facilities.
- **Trackchairs:** ASP's first Trackchair has been ordered for Logoly State Park; ASP is working with Accessibility Across Arkansas on funding for a second chair. ASP may also be able to partner with Game and Fish to use their new Trackchairs in our parks during off season.

Parks Policies, Rules & Directives

Millwood - Certificate of Appreciation – Kimberly Murphy *

Jeff King requested approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Kimberly Murphy who served over 36 years with Arkansas State Parks.

Ron Gossage made a motion to approve. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

Pinnacle Mountain – Donation of Art by the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation *

Jeff King requested approval for two pieces of art to be donated at Pinnacle Mountain State Park.

Shash Goyal made a motion to approve. Trey Berry seconded, and the motion carried.

Real Estate Leases & Agreements

Lake Catherine – Transfer of Concession Lease Agreement Rights – Arkansas Riding Stables *

Jeff King asked the Commission to allow a transfer of ownership for Arkansas Riding Stables, who ASP has partnered with since 1998 at Lake Catherine State Park. The owner and operator, Ray Lovett, is requesting to transfer the business to the current stable manager, Allison Crowder. With approval, a new concession lease will be entered with Ms. Crowder.

Eric Jackson made a motion to approve. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

Prairie Grove – Property Acquisition – Property Valuation – West Property Acquisition Phase V *

Jeff King asked the Commission to approve a property acquisition of a 36.5-acre tract of battlefield property from Mr. Randy West for \$976,000 which is 11% over the appraised value of the property.

Eric Jackson made a motion to approve. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

Prairie Grove – Pasture Lease Agreement *

Jeff King asked for approval of a lease for 125 acres of pastureland at Prairie Grove Battlefield for \$12,760 annually to Dwight Bartholomew. The lease would expire on December 31, 2026.

Mike Gibson made a motion to approve. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Mount Magazine – Use Permit Agreement – Corley Mountain Rural Fire Department *

The Commission was asked to approve an extension of the Corley Mountain Rural Fire Department's use permit at Mount Magazine's maintenance area for a fire substation.

Mike Wilson made a motion to approve. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Petit Jean – Temporary Property Lease – New Cingular Wireless PCS, LLC (d.b.a. AT&T) *

Jeff King requested approval for a temporary agreement with AT&T for a temporary cellular tower installation at Petit Jean State Park to help support communications during the eclipse event.

Weston Lewey made a motion to approve. Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.

Planning & Development

Bull Shoals-White River – Memorandum of Agreement with the Trail Team of North Central Arkansas (TTONCA) *

Jeff King asked the Commission to approve an agreement with TTONCA to help in efforts to expand mountain biking trails at Bull Shoals-White River State Park.

Trey Berry made a motion to approve. Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.

Systemwide – FY25 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Proposed Project Funding *

Jeff King asked for approval of the provided document detailing FY25 CIP Proposed Project funding.

Eric Jackson made a motion to approve contingent on the removal of property acquisitions at Historic Washington without further discussions. Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.

Systemwide – CIP Quarterly Report (2nd Quarter - FY2024)

King presented the current report which includes \$55M in encumbered funds for capital projects. This report was provided for review only.

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

Old Business/New Business

Chair Shamburger stated he would send an email with commissioner committee assignments.

2024 Meeting Dates

Commissioner Randy Wolfinbarger asked for a motion to approve the Revised 2024 Commission Meeting Dates.

Bob Connell made a motion to approve the revised meeting schedule for 2024. Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.

There were no public comments.

With no further business, a motion was made to adjourn.

Ron Gossage made a motion to adjourn. Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 11:56 am.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:

/s/ Jim Shamburger 02/28/2024

Jim Shamburger, Chair