

**STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION**

**North Little Rock**

**January 16, 2025, 8:30 AM**

**APPROVED FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

**Commissioners Present**

Blair Allen, Chair  
Austin Albers  
Bob Connell  
Kalene Griffith  
Shash Goyal  
Molly Houseworth Jackson  
Eric Jackson  
Jim Shamburger  
Randy Wolfinbarger  
Jordan Wright

**Commissioners Absent**

Rebecca Baker  
Gary Vernon

**Staff Present**

Shea Lewis, Secretary, ADPHT  
Suzanne Grobmyer, Chief of Staff, ADPHT  
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT  
Jami Fisher, Chief Financial Officer, ADPHT  
Clay Stone, General Counsel, ADPHT  
Dalaney Thomas, Director, Arkansas Tourism  
Leah DiPietro, Deputy Director, Arkansas Tourism  
Britney Young, Marketing Manager, Arkansas Tourism  
Susie Cowan, Industry Relations Manager, Arkansas Tourism  
Klein Mitchell, Website Coordinator, Arkansas Tourism  
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue Operations Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Mike Wilson, Assistant Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, Arkansas State Parks

**CJRW**

Shawna Blair	Brian Kratkiewicz
Blake Bowlin	Wade McCune
Beth Brumley	Mark Raines
Lauren Euseppi	Mary Read
Jessica Frahm	Sara VanDoorn
Darin Gray	Katherine Vasilos
Jill Joslin	

**MMGY via Zoom**

Megan Shills  
Lauren Ticie  
Carrie Gill  
Kendall Vincent

### **Guests**

Karen Trevino, North Little Rock Tourism  
Everett Gaither, North Little Rock Tourism  
Chris Kennedy, North Little Rock Tourism  
Shelbey Morris, North Little Rock Tourism

Heather Kouns, North Little Rock Tourism  
Gina Gemberling, Little Rock CVB  
Seth Billingsly, Governor's Office

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

Chair Blair Allen called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. Elaine Lienhart called the roll. The Chair thanked North Little Rock Tourism, the Arkansas Automobile Dealers Association and Chris Olson/Edgemont House for their generosity and assistance with this month's meeting. Allen thanked everyone for attending and recognized guests: the North Little Rock Tourism team, Gina Gemberling with LRCVB and Seth Billingsley with the Governor's Office.

### **Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Allen asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**Eric Jackson made the motion to approve the agenda; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Approval of November 2024 Minutes**

Chairman Allen asked for a motion to approve the November 2024 minutes.

**Austin Albers made the motion to approve the minutes; Randy Wolfinbarger seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Secretary's Report**

Secretary Shea Lewis welcomed everyone and remarked the year is off to a fast pace and the Tourism team is shifting focus towards the Governor's Conference on Tourism. Lewis said the Governor appointed four new commissioners to the commission. He introduced and welcomed Jordan Wright and stated Mitchell Allen, Clint Gaston and Marshall Ney are the other new commissioners.

Lewis presented a brief overview of the upcoming Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism, to be held February 23-25, 2025, in Bentonville. For the first time the conference will be held in conjunction with the Office of Outdoor Recreation's Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit. At the conclusion of the Governor's Conference there will be a joint meeting of the SPRTC and the Natural State Initiative; following, SPRTC will conduct commission business. The April SPRTC meeting will also be a joint meeting with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and likewise, the commissions will conduct business separately following the joint meeting.

Lewis gave an update on the upcoming Natural State Day to be held at the State Capitol, February 4, from 9 am – 3 pm. Governor Sanders will be speaking at the event, which is led by the Office of Outdoor Recreation. Industry partners will set up booths on the second floor of the rotunda and Arkansas brands will be highlighted. There will be boats, recreational vehicles, etc. on the lawn of the Capitol. This event will give legislators an opportunity to mingle with people from the Outdoor Industry.

The 95th Legislative session of the Arkansas General Assembly is underway. The session serves as a time for state agencies to evaluate internal processes and procedures.

Lewis, Suzanne Grobmyer, Jeff King and Becky Flynn gave a presentation to the Petit Jean Mountain Community Association regarding the Petit Jean Master Plan. Secretary Lewis said it was a positive meeting and showed how engaged the community is in the work that ADPHT is doing. Since the meeting, Lewis said he's received several letters from climbing associations interested in recreational rock climbing at the park and that ADPHT is moving forward with the plan while addressing a few issues. Cragworks, LLC is lined up to assist with climbing improvements and via Ferrata and Road Trails is under contract to help expand and improve existing trails and consider new ones, including mountain biking trails.

The public comment period for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the Trails at Mena will soon close, with a decision anticipated later this month regarding the permit. The project has a lot of community support.

Secretary Lewis provided information on a grant that Arkansas State Parks is currently working on alongside the City of Little Rock, ARDOT, Office of Outdoor Grants and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. The 30 Crossing Cultural Corridor project could be a trailhead for the Maumelle Pinnacles project or a starting point for a State Park experience in downtown Little Rock and could have a huge impact as a tourist attraction. The crossing is close to the Clinton Center and the River Market. There are a lot of concepts, but the final direction is unknown. Jeff King will provide additional updates on the project.

ADPHT staff located at 1 Capitol Mall will be moving to the Division of Arkansas Heritage building at the recommendation of Arkansas Forward. Ultimately, the move will save ADPHT ½ million dollars per year and will bring all divisions together in one location which will help with communication and collaboration between divisions.

Clay Stone, ADPHT General Counsel, reminded commissioners to submit the annual Statement of Financial Interest form to the Secretary of State's Office before the end of the month. Newly appointed commissioners have 30 days from the date of appointment to file the form.

Stone informed commissioners of the 2025 per diem and stipend for the SPRTC, which must be approved each calendar year.

**Eric Jackson made the motion to approve the 2025 per diem and travel rates as well as the stipend of \$85; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.**

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

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2025 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the one (6) month period ending December 31, 2024.

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$18,504,300 an increase of .19%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$1,033,660 a decrease of 7.19%

- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$24,198,090 a decrease of 1%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$14,439,467 an increase of 2.13%

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$63,527,895 an increase of 14.24%
- Tourism Division - \$11,570,208 an increase of 18.02%
- War Memorial - \$1,224,222 an increase of .59%
- Department Total - \$76,322,326 a decrease of 14.55%

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

**Jim Shamburger made the motion to approve the financials; Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **STATE PARKS DIVISION**

### **Director's Report**

Deputy Director Jeff King stated state parks saw some decreases in December after having some increases in November. This fluctuation was due in part to the number of weekends in each month as well as the implementation of the new Property Management/Point of Sale System (PMS/POS) in mid-November. However, if you look at the bottom line, Parks is trending about the same for November/December 2024 as the same time period in 2023. King said that he has no concerns about the numbers, but Parks would continue to monitor revenue trends, specifically the revenue buckets Fisher called out, to make sure things aren't getting moved based on where they are being input in the new POS system.

Camping occupancy for December was tracking down 1.3%. Cabin occupancy was down 5.2% and lodges were down 4.1%. State Parks has all camping inventory available for pre-booking, therefore, three new parks are being included in the occupancy reporting this month.

Arkansas State Parks is running a winter promotion "warm escapes for winter blues!" Guests can use the promotion code WARM15 to get 15% off all accommodations now through March 1. Parks doesn't publish its winter base rates so the promotion is a way of using the dynamic pricing strategy to be able to decrease some rates during the off season. Parks has been working with Communications and CJRW who are bringing in Arkansas based influencers to stay at various parks and then post about their experience as well as the promotion.

The new reservation system went live on November 12, 2024. Parks continues to see an improved online experience for guests. Guests now have the ability to search for accommodation by type across the entire park system (not just one park at a time). If they want to go camping next weekend and they select an RV spot, the system will show a map of all locations with matching RV spots available for the timeframe selected.

State Parks is seeing improvements with its inventory process through the new POS system. A new inventory process was implemented system-wide and inventory sales can now be seen across the

system in real-time. Jeannine Bruner and her team will continue to refine and improve the process as needed.

Jeannine Bruner, Manager Revenue & Sales, spoke about the new inventory process. She stated each item now has its own barcode that is scanned at the point of sale. This allows for a much cleaner and faster process than the manual process that was used before implementing the new POS system. The real-time tracking allows the sales team to see what inventory is getting low and thus better know when to reorder. They can see what's on each individual invoice and can differentiate between tent sites and AAA sites and better implement dynamic pricing strategies accordingly. In addition, the new POS system makes it easier for guests to make and to track their own reservations by typing in their email address. This saves time for the guests and prevents them from having to call individual parks to verify information about upcoming reservations. The new POS system and processes helped address issues from a customer standpoint as well as adding some efficiencies within our own staff operations. Also, guests now have the ability to cancel online.

Deputy Director King mentioned the Trackchair Press event that took place on November 22, 2024, at Logoly State Park and shared a video featuring Amanda Dessert's speech from the event which outlined her reason for beginning Accessibility Across Arkansas. King added Dessert's words really brought home the reason behind the program and State Parks plans to expand the program further and add two more parks as well as some financial contributions to Accessibility Across Arkansas. State Parks is proud of this program.

In December, we had the grand opening of the Playground and Pump Track at Lake Sylvia Recreation Area. This project wasn't a large investment but is important to the partnership State Parks has with the Maumelle Pinnacles initiative in Central Arkansas. (Lake Sylvia Recreation Area is leased from the Ouachita National Forest and is operated as part of Pinnacle Mountain State Park.) First Gentleman Bryan Sanders, Representative Mary Bentley, Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation Katherine Andrews and Secretary Shea Lewis were present for the ribbon cutting event along with members of the Chamber and representatives from Perry County. It was a cold morning with good representation and media coverage.

Arkansas State Parks had one agenda item for the Legislative Council PEER Subcommittee in December. The request was a \$1M cash appropriation to support some insurance proceeds needed to make repairs to roofs at the Ozark Folk Center State Park due to storm damage a few years ago.

On January 6, Delta Heritage Trail State Park received some damage due to straight line winds and possible tornadic activity on a newly opened trail section north of Yancopin near the Arkansas River bridge. There was quite a bit of rail damage and downed trees. The contractor, Pioneer Civil Construction, is covering the repairs with their insurance. It will take a bit of time to get new product there to make the needed repairs.

During the winter snow event earlier this month, snow accumulated on the dock at DeGray Lake Resort State Park and caused one side of the dock to sink. The team at DeGray said the snow is gone and the dock has bounced back. There is some minor damage to boats but none sunk. There may be some claims filed in the future for some personal property damage but there were no major repairs to facilities.

Arkansas State Parks has four new graduates from the NASPD Leadership School. This year's graduates from the two-year program include Monica Fuller (Plantation Agriculture Museum State Park), Davey Ashcraft (Cossatot River State Park-Natural Area), Nick Lowe (Lake Catherine State Park) and John Latch (War Memorial Stadium). This is a great leadership program and congratulatory letters will be sent to each graduate.

The hours of operation for State Parks were modified at the beginning of this year. The two main changes were extension of pool hours which had been shortened due to both Covid and issues hiring lifeguards. Pool hours have been extended back to 10 am to 6 pm. Also, Visitor Centers are going to start opening for First Day Hikes on January 1. Typically, they are closed 4 days out of the year, including January 1. The decision was made to start opening the Visitor Centers in order to enhance the experience of First Day Hike participants.

### **First Day Hikes**

Kelly Farrell, Manager of Program Services, gave an update on First Day Hikes. Farrell explained that the First Day Hike program is in alignment with the core mission of State Parks and that it's not just an Arkansas State Parks program. First Day Hikes have been held at parks in all 50 states for the past 10-11 years. Participants are taking part in a nation-wide movement. Every park that has a trail is required to host a guided hike. Guests can either take part in guided hikes with park staff or volunteers or they are encouraged to hike between December 27 through January 5. There is a growing tradition for families in Arkansas and across the nation to take part every year. First Day Hikes is guests gathering to do the same thing, to connect with the landscape, to make meaningful memories with friends and family, and to be part of this larger event.

- Arkansas State Parks hit 500,000 hikers and over 1 million miles last year.
- Arkansas State Parks had 57 hikes at 39 parks this year. 1,661 hikers hiked 1,922 miles in the guided hikes. A self-log was offered again for the week after Christmas to right after New Year's and just shy of 1,500 people reported hikes. There were 100 more hikers registered this year than last year.
- State Park's parking lots were full on New Year's not only with hikers but with guests paddling, biking, etc.
- Some parks offer midnight hikes. Others, like Pinnacle, offer sunrise hikes. 70 people showed up at Pinnacle to go to the top of the mountain for sunrise this year.
- Arkansas edged out Tennessee for the number 7 spot in the top 10 hikes offered across the nation and normally sits squarely in the top 10 year after year.
- Each participant receives a unique First Day Hike sticker and guests line up to make sure they get their sticker each year.

Farrell shared photos from hikes across the state as well as guest anecdotes which show positive impacts of First Day Hikes. Some include:

- Encouraging people to gather on cold, wintry days instead of staying indoors.
- Encouraging people to make memories/traditions with their friends and family.
- Assist in helping people meet new friends.
- Encouraging people to join new hiking groups and connect with nature.

The event is becoming meaningful for not only guests but for park staff who look forward to coming up with new, creative ideas to engage with guests each year.

#### **Permits, Resolutions, Leases and Agreements**

##### **Queen Wilhelmina – Concession Agreement, Miniature Train & Associated Facilities \***

Jeff King requested approval for the miniature train and miniature golf at Queen Wilhelmina State Park.

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.**

##### **Various State Parks - Memorandum of Understanding, Summit Aviation, LLC \***

King requested approval for a new partnership opportunity with Summit Aviation, LLC, (aka Heli Oz) which would allow landing at specified zones at specific parks to bring in mountain bikers. The initial pilot agreement would include only three park locations: Devil's Den State Park, Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area and Pinnacle Mountain State Park.

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve. Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.**

##### **Various State Parks – Memorandum of Agreement Addendum, Accessibility Across Arkansas \***

King requested approval for an addendum to the existing agreement with Accessibility Across Arkansas that adds two more parks (Pinnacle Mountain State Park and Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area).

**Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve. Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion carried.**

##### **Resolution for RAISE Grant Application - Little Rock 30 Crossing Park \***

Deputy Director King requested approval for the 30 Crossing Resolution which is a kind of partnership effort in downtown Little Rock for public development of park property. Jordan Thomas with Arkansas State Parks will write the grant application on behalf of all the partners: City of Little Rock, Arkansas State Parks, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Office of Outdoor Recreation and ARDOT. The project would be associated with the Maumelle Pinnacles Project and would be a gateway to the River Trail.

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

#### **Planning & Development**

##### **Systemwide – FY26 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Proposed Project Funding \***

Chris Myers, Manager Planning & Development, asked for approval of the FY26 CIP Proposed Project funding.

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

##### **CIP Quarterly Report**

Chris Myers explained that this item is informational. Currently, State Parks has 31 construction projects under contract for nearly \$56.5M. Another 26 projects are under review by DBA and 63 are in various stages anywhere from pre-design to almost ready for DBA review. There are 24 active State and Federal Grants worth just under \$55M.

As of the end of December, State Parks maintained 37 open MOFs with approximately \$102M in prior encumbered funds. Over \$42M of that has been spent from the open MOFs and there is an open balance of approximately \$60M remaining. Since the passage of Amendment 75, State Parks has utilized approximately \$243M to complete system-wide improvements.

## **TOURISM DIVISION**

### **Director's Report**

Director Dalaney Thomas provided an update on the 2025 Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism, which is nearly sold out. Monday of the conference will focus on the Outdoor Economy Summit. Katherine Andrews from the Office of Outdoor Recreation will unveil the Outdoor Economic Report, a year-long project in conjunction with Heartland Forward. Governor Sanders will be the keynote speaker on Monday.

Tuesday's keynote will be motivational speaker Calvin Stovall. Participants will be given opportunities to get out and experience Bentonville at locations around town. The annual Henry Awards ceremony will be held at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

Thomas also highlighted recent partnership opportunities, including Arkansas Tourism collaborations with the Eureka Springs A&P and Send it South in Bentonville. Hot Springs Village and Cherokee Village will attend two Ideal Living trade shows to represent Arkansas.

Deputy Director Leah DiPietro will attend the International Media Marketplace in January, with our partners from MMGY.

Arkansas Tourism is working with statewide partners to host media/journalist trips being held in conjunction with Travel South USA Global Week in Louisville, KY, beginning April 3.

### **Partnerships and Projects in Development:**

- Industry Communications Strategy being released at Governor's Conference
- Sea Otter Classic that ends in Bentonville
- Partnership with Visit Hot Springs to help support the BFL All-American fishing tournament in May
- Outside Festival and Summit – Denver, CO – May 29-31
- Arkansas Graveler, June 3-8
- IPW Tradeshow – Chicago, June 14-18
- Music Cities – Fayetteville, September 15-18

### **Marketing and Research**

Katherine Vasilos with CJRW provided an overall marketing update. The recent marketing focus has centered on refining the Arkansas Tourism brand including brand attributes, brand promise and brand essence. CJRW has been working closely with MMGY to develop creative strategy.

Winter snow market efforts will now include North Dakota, in addition to a trip giveaway component. There are currently 75 industry partners participating in Tourism's cooperative marketing program. The Arkansas Travel Guide will launch in April.

Staff from MMGY presented the media strategy, media plan, media placement and monitoring/reporting.



**MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING**

Chairman Allen discussed committee assignments, stating if anyone wanted to change to a different committee to let him know.

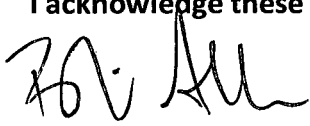
Secretary Lewis thanked Commissioner Shamburger for his service as 2024 SPRTC Chairman.

There were no public comments.

Being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:54 am.

###

I acknowledge these minutes are approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blair Allen", is written over a horizontal line.

2/26/2025

Blair Allen, Chair