

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Historic Washington State Park, Washington
July 20, 2023, 9:00 a.m.
APPROVED 8/17/2023

Commissioners Present

Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair
Austin Albers
Rebecca Baker
Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Bob Connell
Mike Wilson
Eric Jackson
Shash Goyal
Jim Shamburger
Mike Gibson

Commissioners Absent

Dr. Trey Berry
Montine McNulty, Vice-chair
Ron Gossage
Ness Sechrest
Blair Allen
Kalene Griffith
Weston Lewey

Staff Present

Shea Lewis, Interim Secretary, ADPHT
Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff
Justin Rotton, Deputy Chief of Communications
Daniel Faulkner, ADPHT General Counsel
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT
Jami Fisher, Chief Financial Officer, ADPHT
Marty Ryall, Director of Legislative Affairs, ADPHT
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Arkansas Tourism
Susie Cowan, Project Coordinator, Arkansas Tourism
Jeff King, Deputy Director, State Parks
Yolanda Brown, Executive Assistant, State Parks
Chris Myers, Planning and Development Manager, State Parks
Mike Wilson, Parks Operations Manager, State Parks
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, State Parks
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, State Parks
Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager, State Parks
Mike Farringer, Region 4 Supervisor, State Parks
Pam Beasley, Park Superintendent, Historic Washing State Park
Amanda Thomas, Assistant Superintendent, State Parks
Caleb Howell, Park Superintendent, Crater of Diamonds State Park
Corbin Merriott, Park Superintendent, Logoly State Park
Tammie Summers, Assistant Manager, Texarkana Welcome Center

CJRW

Darin Gray
Jessica Frahm
Dalaney Thomas
Blake Bowlin
Wade McCune
Kinyata Gray

Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas
Kelly Parker

Guests

Mayor & Mrs. Paul Henley, City of Washington
Ray Wittenberg, Historic Washington Foundation
Missy McSwain, Historic Washing Foundation
Jim Hunter, Klipsch Heritage Museum Association
Gary Jones, Arkansas Travel Channel

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Randy Wolfinbarger. Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

Chairman Randy Wolfinbarger welcomed and recognized guests and thanked the Historic Washington State Park staff, City of Washington, Mayor Paul Henley, and Historic Washington Foundation.

Mayor Paul Henley welcomed and thanked everyone for visiting the city of Washington, AR for the July 2023 SPRTC Meeting.

President of The Historic Washington Foundation (formerly Pioneer Washington Restoration Foundation), Missy McSwain, also welcomed everyone to Historic Washington State Park. Ms. McSwain provided an overview of The Historic Washington Foundation's purpose and work accomplished.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Approval of the Minutes

Chairman Randy Wolfinbarger asked for a motion to approve the June 2023 minutes.

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

Secretary's Report

Mr. Lewis stated there will be an Arkansas Legislative Council (ALC) meeting July 21, 2023, where he will give a presentation on behalf of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism on the Transformation Bill.

ARPA, American Rescue Plan Act, has received tentative approved appropriation for four (4) State Parks. Delta Heritage Trail State Park received \$3 million that will be used for three (3) miles of trails. Petit Jean State Park received \$3 million that will be used for recreation expansions and Pinnacle Mountain State Park received \$2 million that will be used for trail expansions. Queen Wilhelmina State Park received \$1.8 million for trail expansions. All the projects that received funding are directly related to the Natural State Initiative.

The Office of Outdoor Recreation requested \$1.5 million to support the Russellville Connection Trail. Earlier this year Russellville received a Raise Grant similar to what was received for Delta Heritage Trail from the Federal Government.

Mr. Lewis announced that the Natural State Initiative continues to work with Commerce on the Tourism Development Act which is now in the rules process. There has been no public comments and the rule has closed. Comments have been received from the Bureau of Legislative Research to clarify a few items and the process will continue to move forward.

Lewis announced that War Memorial Stadium is in full planning mode moving into the football season for two of the largest events. The Salt Bowl football game will take place Saturday, August 26, 2023, at 7:00 PM. The Razorback game, University of Arkansas versus Western Carolina, will take place September 2, 2023, at 3:00 PM.

Mr. Lewis provided an update on the reservation system and point of sale system. Jeanine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, and her team along with Scott Blankenship, Chief Information Officer, continue to move things forward to implement the new system as planned.

Mr. Lewis commented the 2023 Park Superintendents Conference will be held at Mount Magazine State Park, September 26-28, 2023. Mr. Lewis announced that Governor Sanders and First Gentleman Sanders have been invited to attend.

Shea Lewis reported that the Tourism Director's position is being advertised for the next four weeks.

Lewis announced the partnership with CJRW and Free Hub. This is a new mountain bike specific publication and digital takeover that's going to take place in a travel guide specifically featuring Arkansas. The publication can be used to plan your next mountain biking adventure.

Mr. Lewis reported that Shealyn Sowers, Chief of Communications, and Leah DiPietro, Deputy Chief of Communications, participated in the National Geographic Food Festival in London and was joined in the London Activation by Chef Scott McGee from Yellow Rocket in Little Rock. They contacted over 10,000 international travelers and provided over 1,000 samples of chicken and dumplings, sharing the Arkansas experience. It was a great opportunity for Arkansas Tourism to attend the event. Chef McGee also taught a master class that was well received.

In closing Mr. Lewis mentioned the sponsorship of the Ozark Outdoor Foundation and the Highlands Gravel Race. This is a statewide bike race in Arkansas that involves many small communities. Arkansas Tourism, Arkansas Game and Fish, and the Department of Commerce are sponsoring the event, a great opportunity for Arkansas on a national level as this race is often completed by lots of influencers and others in large followings.

Daniel Faulkner, General Counsel, reported on the proposed Policy Statement 2600-Alcoholic Beverage Permit Rules for State Parks.

Mr. Faulkner requested to implement the proposed draft rules pursuant to Act 655 of the 2023 Regular Session. The proposed draft highlights and establishes a procedure for requesting approval from the Secretary, by way of the Director of the Division of State Parks for sales of alcoholic beverages in specific state park locations.

Commissioner Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve the proposed draft of rules pursuant to Act 655 of 2023; Eric Jackson seconded; the motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT – June 30,2023

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY2023 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the twelve-month period ending June 30, 2023.

FY 2023 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$33,003,366 an increase of 3.99%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$1,601,206 a decrease of 16.53%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$46,966,755 an increase of 6.67%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$24,435,299 an increase of 9.71%

FY 2023 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$109,108,007 an increase of 27.21%
- Tourism Division - \$24,192,045 an increase of 25.91%
- War Memorial - \$1,601,699 an increase of 32.00%
- Department Total - \$134,901,751 an increase of 27.03%

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

Eric Jackson made a motion to approve the financials; Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.

State Parks Division

Director's Report

Jeff King, Deputy Director presented the Director's Report for the Parks Division.

Mr. King opened by introducing Pam Beasley, Historic Washington State Park's Superintendent.

Superintendent Beasley welcomed everyone to Historic Washington State Park. Ms. Beasley expressed how her partnerships with the City of Washington as well as The Historic Washington Foundation has contributed to the function of Historic Washington State Park. Ms. Beasley invited everyone to visit the park following the meeting.

Mr. King reported it was a record year in revenue with cash operations exceeding \$33 million (up \$1.2 million or 4%). June YOY revenues were also up \$644,469, systemwide. King noted that there was a decline of 5% in occupancy that's reflected in camping, while cabins were also down 3% but lodge rooms continue to do well and are up 1% in occupancy. However, revenues related to these overnight accommodations were up 1% for camping, up 2% for cabins and up 2.4% for lodging. The largest share of park operating revenues continues to come from Mount Magazine State Park. Petit Jean State Park showed the largest increase in YOY revenue, up \$640,000 or 18%. The increase at Petit Jean reflects within the sale of prepared foods and additional AAA camping at the park.

King presented 4th of July holiday numbers as a comparison of this year to last year. Fourth of July was on a Tuesday this year compared to a Monday last year. The comparison included the entire five-day period. Occupancy showed a 2% increase in 2023. 6,977 unit nights were rented, which is an increase of 224 over the previous year. Overall, taking a look at Friday-Saturday weekend nights and not including Monday or Tuesday, the holiday occupancy comparison showed a slight decrease; however, revenue showed a gain due to our dynamic pricing abilities throughout the system. The increase in revenue was approximately \$42,000, ADR increased by \$4.22, and RevPAR grew by \$4.05. King shared an article that was in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* on July 17, 2023. The article featured tent glamping, a high-end camping experience that is on the rise. The KOA camping report showed traditional camping was up from 2019 to 2021 by 31%. All camping accounted for 40% of North American vacations in 2021. This number dropped back down in 2022; however, glamping continued to rise in 2023. Arkansas State Parks will have an opportunity to partner with a company, one of which is Tentrr, to offer additional glamping experiences in Arkansas State Parks. More to come on this item in the future.

In closing King commented on the Ricky Skaggs concert that was held at the Ozark Folk Center State Park. The event was a very successful sold-out event and was attended by Commissioners Gibson and Wilson, along with Interim Secretary Lewis.

Mr. Farringer, Region 4 Supervisor, reported on the Parks Superintendent Trainee Program, which has been very successful. The Superintendent training program was revamped in 2022. The program is geared towards hiring entry level superintendents into the system and training them in all aspects of park operations. There are 20 modules included in completing the training program which is generally completed within a year's time. Amanda Thomas is one of the trainees that has completed the Parks Superintendent Trainee Program and she is currently fulfilling the vacant Superintendent position at Daisy State Park.

Shea Lewis, Interim Secretary, presented Thomas with a certificate commending her outstanding dedication and accomplishment of completing the Parks Superintendent Trainee Program.

Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, reported on the Interpretative Services Program. The program provides an informative experience to park visitors creating a more personal, deeper meaning and connection with Arkansas State Parks. Park Interpreters facilitate guest experiences to find their own meaning, so that when they visit any of the 54 sites that are in 52 State Park locations, they find a connection to the landscape of Arkansas – what it means and what they see on a map of Arkansas understanding the place they visited.

Farrell announced that spring training has begun with 25 to 30 new staff trainees, which are split into two training sessions. The sessions are put in a safe space to challenge their skills where they are comfortable growing in a classroom setting. There are late night group discussions and one-on-one coaching where people practice programs in a 4-day time frame to deliver in front of their peers.

Ms. Farrell also announced that the exhibits at Pinnacle Mountain State Parks Visitor Center are well underway. The exhibits design phase is complete and are now deep in the fabrication phase. The exhibits are planned to be installed in the last two weeks of September. Another item that's on the schedule is a 360-degree banner that's being fabricated and will be hanging in the new Pinnacle Mountain State Park Visitor Center.

Farrell continued with a Centennial update. The Centennial exhibits have been installed inside the State Capitol. This was completed in conjunction with the Secretary of State's Office. There are four displays which feature Arkansas State Parks through the middle of August 2023.

The Centennial 100 Years of Service Reward Program is up and running, and is a self-guided program. There is a downloadable service log for all participants to log their hours of service. All service hours must be completed during the 2023 calendar year. Participants can claim rewards at the levels of 5, 40, and 100 hours of service. Participant will email or scan their completed service log found at ArStateParksCentennialService@Arkansas.gov. For 5 hours of service a participant will receive an exclusive Centennial sticker; at 40 hours a participant will receive a Centennial logo neck gaiter; and, for 100 hours of service a participant will receive an Arkansas State Parks Nalgene reusable water bottle and are entered in a special drawing for chances to win grand prizes. A grand prize winner will receive one of the hiking sticks that's currently on tour around the state. The hiking stick will have a hiking stick medallion from every Arkansas State Park. Two runners up will receive two (2) nights stays at an Arkansas State Park.

Jeanine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, presented the dynamic pricing report. She reported a 4.6% decrease in units sold YOY. This decrease can partially be attributed to the temporary closure of Lake Catherine in 2022/2023. Lodging at Lake Sylvia as well as Mississippi River State Park came on board in 2022, which contributed to an increase in overall revenue. In the future, the strategy will be to continue with promotions for targeted dates, expanding dynamic pricing to include group travel, and moving to a more automated and algorithm-based pricing method.

Mr. King requested approval for the Systemwide-Annual Dynamic Pricing Report.

Commissioner Shash Goyal made a motion to approve the Annual Dynamic Pricing Report; Molly Houseworth-Jackson seconded; the motion carried.

King requested approval for the naming recommendation per Department Policy Statement Criteria and Procedures for Naming ADPHT Amenities, regarding the Delta Heritage Trail and the John H. Johnson Commemorative Plaza. As part of the Walton Family Foundation's (WFF) \$20 million grant funding for completion of the Delta Heritage Trail, the WFF saw an opportunity to provide recognition of John H. Johnson and allocated \$225,000 of their grant to aid in development of a JHJ recognition piece in Arkansas City.

Commissioner Bob Connell made a motion to approve the naming of this ADPHT facility; Eric Jackson seconded; the motion carried.

Planning and Development

Chris Myers, Planning and Development Manager, presented for approval the Delta Heritage Trail-Memorandum of Agreement with Arkansas City for Sidewalk Development and Maintenance. The agreement is with the City of Arkansas City and State Parks to establish a paved pedestrian connection from the existing Trailhead to Sprague Street, through the proposed Arkansas City Park.

Commissioner Eric Jackson made a motion to approve the Delta Heritage Trail Agreement and Memorandum; Austin Albers seconded; the motion carried.

Mr. Myers also presented for approval the Capital Improvement Program Quarterly Report: Reporting that at the end of June 2023, Arkansas State Parks maintained 32 open Methods of Finance (MOF) for design, construction, and property acquisition efforts of the CIP, with approximately \$34.9 million of encumbered funds. Through the fourth quarter of FY23, eight MOFs were closed, totaling over \$20 million. Since the passage of Amendment 75, Arkansas State Parks has utilized approximately \$197 million to complete system-wide improvements with our apportionment of the 1/8th Cent Conservation revenue.

Real Estate Actions

Darin Mitchell, Information and Innovation Manager, presented the Devil's Den and Historic Washington initial approval for property acquisitions. The approval would allow Arkansas State Parks to acquire properties at Devil's Den State Park and Historic Washington State Park. At Devil's Den, the property consists of an 80-acre tract currently owned by William McClelland. At Historic Washington State Park, the property consists of five separate tracts (1889 Presbyterian Church, 1852 Stuart-Smith House, Livery Stable, Telephone Exchange, and Carrigan Field). Commissioner Mike Wilson, on behalf of the Historic Washington Subcommittee of the State Parks Committee, presented to the commission a recommendation of approval for acquiring the property at Historic Washington State Park. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Eric Jackson made a motion to approve the Devil's Den and Historic Washington State Parks Property Acquisitions; Bob Connell seconded; the motion carried.

Mr. Mitchell also requested approval for the Prairie Grove Battlefield-Pasture Lease Amendment. Susan Donnangelo, Superintendent at Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park, requested permission to enter into a Pasture Lease Amendment on a Tract #10 of battlefield land within the park. Donnangelo placed an advertisement in the local newspaper in order to inform the public of the availability of this tract and solicit competitive bids. Following bidding, a Lease Agreement was drafted by TSS-Division

of Building Authority. The property, known as Track 10 (131 acres), will be known as Tract C moving forward. Mr. Colt Bartholomew has the winning bid. Mr. Kenneth Renfro was the former tenant. Tract C (N9242) lease amount will be increased from \$9,264.40 annually or \$70.72 per acre to \$14,567.00 annually or \$111.20 per acre. A total increase of \$5,302.60 annually, in revenue. The new lease terms will be for three years and six months from July 1, 2023, to December 31, 2026. This is an effort to have all pasture leases end at the same calendar month and year for future competitive bidding.

Commissioner Eric Jackson made a motion to approve the Prairie Grove Battlefield Pasture Lease Amendment; Austin Albers seconded; the motion carried.

Systemwide ArkansasStateParks.com Website Analytics

Susie Kardas with Miles Partnership reported key takeaways:

- The spring campaign showed an influx of traffic particularly from new markets.
- New markets accounted for nearly 15% of new users.
- 80% of site users were out-of-state in 2nd quarter 2023 compared to 82% in 2nd quarter 2022.
- Views of events are up 23%.

Kardas reported a 14.8% increase in traditional markets-search engine marketing performance. New Markets city specific received 32,917 clicks and traditional markets received 248,191 clicks. Search engine new markets 2nd quarter 2023 served 6,069,634 ads and traditional markets 2nd quarter 2023 served 21,132,990 ads. Traditional markets social media performance 2nd quarter 2023 served 21,132,990 ads. New markets social media performance 2nd quarter 2023 served 6,069,634 ads.

FY24 Marketing & Advertising

Blake Bowlin with CJRW presented the FY24 Marketing Plan for the State Parks Division:

The overall marketing plan objectives are to encourage travel through increased brand awareness, increase visits and overnight stays at State Parks, expand reach into newly added markets and elevate brand messaging.

Media Overview general state parks for FY24 will continue to target key feeder markets with expansion to add Illinois and Colorado, reallocate budget to strengthen digital media, reduce print strategy and continue in select directional outdoor advertising boards at DeGray Lake Resort State Park and Historic Washington State Park.

Digital tactics will consist of programmatic, contextual targeting, TV streaming direct site buys, and paid social/paid search.

FY24 Marketing for the Monument Trails will continue to target key feeder markets with targeted expansions in opportunity markets in collaboration with Tourism, reallocating budget to primarily digital media and continuing participation in the AR Cycling Guide.

Lodges for meeting and group sales are included in the marketing plan for FY24 and will reallocate budget to strengthen digital advertising efforts and get staffs input on planners and directories for the FY.

In addition, FY24 marketing plan initiatives will include strategic media targeting and partnerships for market expansions. This plan will include influencers, geotargeted paid searches, and Arkansas traveler's partnerships.

The statewide Smithsonian Event reported that ads reached 1.5 million users, 6,700 clicks on ads, and 600 campaign engagements.

Organic social media FY24 plan will be strategic in monthly social media plans developed in collaboration with AR Tourism and monthly reporting and research of latest social media trends creating a refreshed brand to highlight outdoor recreation offerings and inspire travel and visitation to State Parks.

Arkansas State Parks website will include a site refresh concurrent with reservation system updates, google programming, and email marketing program expansion for the FY24 Marketing Plan.

The FY Total Marketing Budget was presented for a total budget of \$2 million.

Commissioner Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve the FY24 Marketing Budget Plan; Bob Connell seconded; the motion carried.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Kristine Puckett, Tourism Deputy Director, presented the Tourism report beginning with an update from the National Geographic Food Festival in the UK. This event was a partnership with Travel South and Brand USA. More than 7,000 people were in attendance; attendees fell into our target demographic market. Leading up to the festival, our team had several media appointments with UK journalists. There were giveaways at the booth and Chef Scott McGehee was a hit!

Arkansas Tourism partnered with Experience Fayetteville at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Over one million visitors walked through the Washington, DC, Capital Mall in that two-week period. Thousands of people attended the festival daily and over 240 Arkansans that had no idea the festival was going on stopped by the Arkansas booth in the first three days of the festival. They were thrilled to see Arkansas being so well represented. It was a fantastic event that highlighted the Ozarks: Faces and Facets of a Region. Arkansas was well-represented with over 70 artists, musicians, chefs, herbalists, and business owners.

The call for bids for the 2025, 2026, and 2027 host cities for the Governor's Conference on Tourism went out at the end of June. Applications are due on August 1. We have already heard from Rogers, Little Rock, Bentonville, Fort Smith, Springdale, Searcy, and West Memphis expressing interest to bid. The presentations will be given at September's SPRTC meeting in Little Rock.

Puckett reported to the Commission that all Welcome Center staff are required to pass an exam to be U.S. Travel certified consultants. These tests are being administered this week; nine employees have passed the test so far and three more will take the test tomorrow.

Another certification that is required of Welcome Center staff is CPR training. Recently at the Texarkana Welcome Center there was an incident where staff had to use this training to help a visitor. Our staff went above and beyond to take care of the visitor, including guiding the family to the hospital and providing care for the family pet.

The tourism report was concluded with the request for a Certificate of Appreciation for Betty Ross, Welcome Center Manager at Siloam Springs, recognizing 15 years of outstanding service.

Commissioner Mike Wilson made a motion to approve the Certificate of Appreciation; Shash Goyal seconded the motion. Certificate of Appreciation approved.

Marketing and Research

Susie Kardas of Miles Partnership presented the quarterly report for Arkansas.com. We are amid the spring/summer campaign and have seen an influx of traffic on the website. New markets accounted for 15% of new users, which is twice as high as this time last year. 80% of site users were out-of-state in Q2 2023. Festival and live music were the top categories. There were 1.6 million sessions in Q2 2022, and we are at 1.9 in Q2 of this year for a 20% increase of visitors to the website. Referral rates saw an increase of 6%. There was a small decrease in conversion rates from last year.

Upcoming content of Arkansas.com is urban travel, agritourism, hunting and fishing, supernatural, and Trail of Holiday Lights. The "Outside the Ordinary" campaign has been promoted to our new markets. Two other email campaigns are going out this month to 6,000 new users.

Dalaney Thomas, Jessica Frahm, and Wade McCune of CJRW presented the FY24 marketing plan for Tourism. The goals are to generate travel to the state, enhance the image of the state, and grow the 2% tax collection.

A new initiative is to establish Arkansas as a year-round destination for outdoor recreation. Our unique proposition for Arkansas is that our trails are accessible year-round. As part of the new goal, we want to increase traffic to the website, overall social media engagement, and highlight the Arkansas experience. Some key initiatives this year will be testing the new markets, optimize, look at the data, highlight Arkansas outdoor recreation, targeted media expansion and leverage partnerships to expand reach and Arkansas' image.

The foundation of the marketing plans is research, enlisting the help of multiple data partners and data sets to indicate where to move and to show the effectiveness of advertising.

Dallas, Houston, and Austin made up the top three fly-in cities in 2022. As a result of the expansion into new markets, the western states are popping up with Denver being right behind the top three. This is an indicator that the ads are working.

Washington and San Francisco have emerged as hotel markets. They are closer to the bottom with Little Rock and Dallas remaining at the top of the list.

The shift from Voyage to Tourism Economics was made because it provides the same data sets plus more value add to include economic and demographic data across the US, air travel, Transportation Security Administration data, National Parks Service data, the Portrait of American Travel, US Travel trends, data, and economics forecasting.

The agency is excited about the approach to the creative messaging this year, along with further defining Arkansas's brand and positioning Arkansas as a world class destination. The plan will demonstrate a competitive presence in the outdoor recreation space and provide content targeted to drive action.

Commissioner Austin Albers made a motion to approve the marketing plan budget; Mike Gibson seconded the motion. Marketing plan budget approved.

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

Due to legislation, the Commission's two emeritus positions were eliminated. Commissioner Wolfinbarger will call a nominating committee meeting to recommend a new vice-chair.

There were no public comments.

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

Austin Albers made the motion to adjourn; Jim Shamburger seconded, and the motion carried.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:

/s/ Randy Wolfinbarger 8/17/2023
Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair