

**STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION**

**DeGray Lake Resort State Park**

**July 18, 2024, 9:00 AM**

**APPROVED AUGUST 15, 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

**Commissioners Absent**

Kalene Griffith  
Molly Houseworth Jackson  
Weston Lewey  
Gary Vernon

**Staff Present**

Shea Lewis, Secretary, ADPHT  
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  
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Marty Ryall, Director, Div. of AR Heritage & Legislative Affairs Director, ADPHT  
Katherine Andrews, Director of Office of Outdoor Rec  
Susie Cowan, Industry Relations Manager, Tourism  
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue & Sales Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
John Stewart, Operations Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Becky Bariola, Region 5 Supervisor, Arkansas State Parks  
Dru Edmonds, Superintendent, DeGray Lake Resort State Park  
Mike Sindelar, Lodge Manager, DeGray Lake Resort State Park  
Emilie Couch, Public Service Intern, Arkansas State Parks

**CJRW**

Lauren Euseppi  
Darin Gray  
Katherine Vasilos  
Brian Kratkiewicz  
Wade McCune  
Jill Joslin

## **Guests**

Matt Bell, Explore Harrison  
Neal Gladner, Arkansas Broadcasting Association  
Joe Jacobs, Arkansas Outside

## **Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. The Chair appreciated everyone coming to the meeting. Elaine Lienhart called roll. Shamburger recognized guests Neal Gladner, Joe Jacobs and Matt Bell. DeGray Lake Resort State Park Superintendent, Dru Edmonds, welcomed everyone to the park.

## **Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**Mike Wilson made the motion to approve the agenda; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **Approval of June 2024 Minutes**

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

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

## **Secretary's Report**

Secretary Shea Lewis provided updates on DeGray Lake Resort State Park regarding the fishery, programs tours, and activities improving and being booked at a higher level with an overall increase in occupancy. One of the department's goals is to improve the outdoor recreation experience and this lake is a perfect example of doing so.

Secretary Lewis shared that he was appointed by the Governor to the Arkansas 250 Commission. This commission will be working on the commemoration and anniversary planning and coordination of celebrations for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States on July 4, 2026. Marty Ryall and Dr. David Ware are also serving on the commission. Lewis explained that he sees opportunities for the SPRTC to overlap and work with the Arkansas 250 Commission, as well as educational departments.

Jami Fisher, chief financial officer, has been leading the efforts on the biennium process. Clay Stone, ADPHT General Counsel, has a draft list of potential legislation for 2025. They are going into the phases of review to determine next efforts. Some are to make corrections and some pieces are to develop further opportunities. The successful session in 2023 has created opportunities that the department is now seeing.

Three positions will be opening in the planning and development section specific to the Division of Heritage.

Work with Arkansas Forward and the McKinsey team has continued. This is to find opportunities for efficiencies across agencies and within departments. A list of recommendations for opportunities to be more efficient in operations is expected.

The Mena Trails draft for environmental assessment is out and available for public comment. A lot of momentum from the National Forest Service has been seen for this project.

### **Office of Outdoor Recreation Report**

The Office of Outdoor Recreation (OOR) Report was presented by Katherine Andrews. Director Andrews will give updates to the commission a few times a year. Her next update is expected at the November meeting.

Andrews gave an overview of the Office of Outdoor Recreation's purpose and operations. The main priorities for the office are connection, collaboration and promotion. OOR is working on the Maumelle Pinnacles Conservation Area Master Plan (MPCA), regional listening sessions and the Outdoor Economy Summit. Additionally, they manage the state's opportunity zones.

The office has conducted an economic impact study for the State of Arkansas and will present it at the next summit.

Andrews gave an overview of the MPCA Master Plan, which aims to connect downtown Little Rock and the Two Rivers Park area to Lake Sylvia through a multi-use trail.

The Hathaway Group worked with OOR to acquire proposals from potential concessionaires for the old Pinnacle Mountain Visitor Center. The internal team went through many interviews and is ready to move forward in the process. OOR plans to move into the negotiations portion with the prospect and will bring the final concept to the commission for approval. Andrews presented the concept for The Overlook, a multi-service café and bike shop.

The OOR is also working with the Hathaway Group to find a concessionaire for the Butterfield House.

Andrews gave a report on the Recreation Grants Program, where \$500,000 was granted this past year. There was \$1.6 million in ask across 21 applications. \$4.3 million was awarded for the Matching Funds Grant in March. OOR also distributes the land and water conservation funds. This year, the plan is to give \$5.3 million to state agencies, State Parks Division, and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for sizable projects.

The grant program has moved fully online and has resulted in a smoother experience.

Andrews gave a recap of Outdoor Retailer, a B2B expo. This was in collaboration with the Tourism Division. The five brands that Arkansas hosted were Lacaída Ropes, Eddyline Kayaks, FLPSDE Bottles, Livsn Designs and Adventure Trail Outfitters. It was considered a massive success for these brands to gain exposure to major retail buyers.

The OOR also serves as the liaison with the Department of Commerce. Andrews explained the shift in the view to quality of life in economic development over past years and how it is now a major component. The Division of Tourism shared persona research from a 2023 analysis in an effort to match marketing to a certain type of talent that the Arkansas Economic Development Commission is trying to recruit to the state.

Chairman Shamburger asked about the grant program funding and Director Andrews explained that one portion is from tobacco settlement dollars and the other is from a portion of the real estate transfer tax.

Commissioner Shash Goyal asked for clarification on the grants and incentive opportunities for the businesses in opportunity zones. Andrews explained that they are eligible to receive certain tax credits.

Commissioner Bob Connell asked what has been most successful for other states. Andrews explained that incentives and grass roots efforts have shown positive results in other states. She mentioned the office is working with the University of Arkansas and their Greenhouse Recreation Program to share these resources across the state.

Commissioner Mike Wilson asked if commissioners were allowed to encourage small operators around the state to call her. Andrews explained that although OOR staff do not provide direct mentorship, they have contacts they can share with business operators. She encouraged the commissioners to take her information and share it as needed.

### **FINANCIAL REPORT – June 30, 2024**

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2024 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the twelve-month period ending June 30, 2024.

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$35,838,906 an increase of 8.59%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$1,582,841 an increase of 22.34%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$47,561,042 an increase of 1.27%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$26,425,526 an increase of 4.64%

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$114,885,742 an increase of 5.30%
- Tourism Division - \$26,426,363 an increase of 9.24%
- War Memorial - \$1,619,863 an increase of 1.13%
- Department Total - \$142,931,969 an increase of 5.95%

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

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

### **TOURISM DIVISION**

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

Director Dalaney Thomas began with a high-level overview of the FY 2025 marketing and advertising plan and stated that Katherine Vasilos with CJRW would be giving more details about it.

Thomas discussed the continued primary goals for the department. The first being the continued growth of the 2% tax collections. There has been a calendar year average growth of 6%. By FY 2033, the goal is to double the 2% collections.

The next goal is to strengthen the perception of Arkansas as a premier travel destination and a nationally renowned destination for year-round outdoor recreation. More on this goal will be presented in CJRW's markets campaign report.

The department is also working to identify and activate opportunities to collaborate with the private sector. Thomas alluded to Katherine Andrews' presentation and their collaboration with other state agencies, such as the Department of Commerce and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. She explained that Arkansas Tourism is also trying to do this with the private sector. The goal is to collaborate with entities promoting themselves on national and international scales to make collective dollars work harder for shared goals.

Another primary focus is elevating experiences for Arkansans and visitors. Currently, this can be seen through the Arkansas.com revamp and the reimagining of welcome centers.

The final goal is to build a great team. Thomas commended the division and the changes they have faced over the past 18 months.

Thomas moved into key projects for the division. These include the Arkansas.com update, market expansions and trade show evaluations. She reminded the commission of the upcoming Governor's Conference and Outdoor Economy Summit on February 23-25, 2025, in Bentonville.

Another key project is making the grant process easier for the staff and applicants. Through these changes to the process there are no plans to cut the Regional Tourist Associations. She reiterated that it is all administrative changes at this point and encouraged the commission to reach out to her or Susie Cowan if they received any questions from their communities.

Adding in content priorities to the list of goals, Thomas explained the intent and importance of the Arkansas.com rebuild, itinerary creation, geo targeting and updating content to connect visitors to experiences.

The final priority is to strengthen partnerships. This includes partnerships with other agencies, regions, convention and visitors bureaus, and private sector partners.

In other updates, Arkansas' South is back on track after being defunct for the past few years.

Thomas reminded the commission that data and resources are available for speaking engagements and public use and encouraged them to request it when needed.

Economic impact information for 2023 is starting to come in and the county level data is expected in August. The report can be expected in late September of this year.

The division is working on two tradeshow, Connect Marketplace and TEAMS. These serve as an opportunity to support industry partners who are not able to attend tradeshow on their own. The partners attending include Bentonville, Harrison, Hot Springs, North Little Rock, Rogers and Springdale.

Katherine Vasilos, of CJRW, detailed CJRW's new partnership with MMGY and their strategic planning meeting. In August they plan to share paid media and market strategies and creative executions across channels for upcoming campaigns.

Website transition from Miles Partnership to MMGY is a 6-8 week process. The full process for both Parks and Tourism websites is anticipated to take 12-18 months starting in August.

Vasilos reminded the commission that the goal of activations is to capitalize on emerging markets, extend reach beyond media channels and promote engagement with destination partners. The results from the Chicago activation were outstanding. Influencer campaigns and media provided 6.7 million impressions. The efforts garnered more than 115,000 website visits, and the trip giveaway in partnership with Gearhead saw nearly 1,200 entries.

Vasilos discussed the Adara Media impact results, explaining that Adara is used as an indicator for campaign results and success. It represents 36% of market visibility. In this window of time, Illinois was the number two flight origin in May. Ads generated more than 6,700 hotel searches and more than 550 hotel bookings.

Vasilos transitioned the report to Brian Kratkiewicz with CJRW for the Snow Market campaign report. Kratkiewicz explained that this was an initiative to focus on northern states to see what the impact could be. Outdoor

enthusiasts in Denver, Idaho, Montana, the Dakotas and Utah were targeted. Denver, as opposed to the whole state, was targeted because of direct flights.

“Direct to Different” was used as the campaign theme for Denver. In the other state markets, milder climates were promoted. “Outside Everyday” was promoted from November to January and “Probably Not Snowing” ran from January to February. About \$135,000 was spent and generated almost 25 million impressions and nearly 15,000 new followers on social media. Increases were seen across all markets in web traffic, from 20-30% in the Dakotas to over 300% in Utah. Kratkiewicz showed an increase in hotel bookings year-over-year with visual graphs. “Probably Not Snowing” and “Direct to Different” saw the best results.

Commissioner Jackson asked if the campaign was successful overall and if it should be done again. Kratkiewicz explained that it needed to be done more than once to get the full effects, but a positive impact was seen from a small investment, and he would recommend doing it again. Secretary Lewis explained that there are key indicators within the results that can be used to dial in for more success. Thomas added that they saw Colorado markets, on average, were staying 5 days as opposed to weekends. This increased the overnight stays from this market.

Jessica Frahm with CJRW gave some brief insight to the age breakdowns of the campaign results.

Wade McCune gave the State Parks branding presentation. The goal was for everyone to coalesce around tone, language, fonts, color and visual direction in a way that sets Parks up for continued success. McCune played a video to give an overview of the brand development material. He described the change as “an evolution, not a revolution.” McCune’s presentation closed with positive comments regarding the parks and their socioeconomic accessibility from the commission.

Thomas closed the Tourism report by announcing Leah DiPietro’s promotion to deputy director of the Tourism Division.

## **STATE PARKS DIVISION**

### **Parks Committee Report**

Commissioner Blair Allen, Parks Committee Chair, gave an overview of the Parks Committee meeting:

- Jeff King, ASP Deputy Director, gave a report about Division goals and objectives that identified current status and plans moving forward.
- Chris Myers, Planning & Development Manager, delivered project updates on current and future planned projects.
- Commissioner Allen was excited to hear about the new Itinio Property Management Reservation System that State Parks is implementing. The new system will bring all the reservation activities into current time technology. It fills a gap that was identified as an opportunity during the manual implementation of Dynamic Pricing. It was pointed out that it was great to finally have the technology to utilize for the benefit of lodges, cabins, campsites, etc.

### **Director’s Report**

Jeff King, Deputy Director, thanked Commissioner Allen for his report which touched the high points of the Parks Committee meeting and conveyed a lot of the initiatives that have been in the making for years and starting to come together. King expressed that State Parks looks forward to moving ahead with these initiatives and added the following updates for State Parks:

**FY24 Results:** King pointed out that operating revenue for FY24 was \$2.5M, an 8.6% increase over previous year. State Parks had a record year which exceeded the \$35M number which was the highest in State Parks

history. This is a testament to the teams that run the parks every day. The work of Jeannine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, and her team were spotlighted due to their daily management of dynamic pricing. Their efforts have produced a proven model, which will be used within Itinio on the go live platform on August 6, 2024.

On the park level, Mr. King pointed out the following:

- Crater of Diamonds State Park was up \$612,000 (21%) for the Fiscal Year.
- Mount Magazine State Park was up \$575,000 (12%).
- DeGray Lake Resort State Park was up \$430,010 (up 10%) over last year.
- Petit Jean State Park was up \$360,008 (up 8%).
- Lake Catherine State Park was up \$328,000 (25%).
- Pinnacle Mountain State Park was up \$68,000 due to the new Visitor Center and Gift Shop.
- Camping revenue was up 8% but occupancy was only up 2% due to the implementation of Dynamic Pricing for camping midway through last year.
- Cabins were up 4% in revenue but down/or flat in occupancy.
- Lodge rooms were up 12% with occupancy up 1.2%.

4<sup>th</sup> of July Holiday update: The holiday was on a Thursday this year which gave guests an opportunity to extend their stays. We had an increase of 605-unit nights sold during the holiday. Occupancy was 64.6% across camping, cabins, lodging and unique lodging which is up 10.7% over last year. Revenue increased by \$47,000 for the weekend over last year. (Lodges up \$20k, cabins up \$6,600, camping up \$18K, and unique lodging up \$1,200.)

Accessibility presentation: On July 12, Secretary Lewis and Deputy Director King presented to the House Committee on Aging, Children, and Military Affairs regarding accessibility improvements in State Parks. Parks' efforts started in 2022 when Amanda Dessert from Accessibility Across Arkansas approached then Director Lewis about wanting to partner with State Parks to find ways to get people with mobility issues and limitations into the parks in different ways. There is a motorized chair at Logoly SP with plans to go live with it the first week of August. The department originally applied for a grant for a motorized chair but was unsuccessful; therefore, ASP purchased a chair. Accessibility Across Arkansas awarded a grant for a 2<sup>nd</sup> chair from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation and Chris Myers and team were awarded a grant for a 3<sup>rd</sup> chair through the National Association of State Park Directors, funded from Ford's Bronco Wild Fund. One chair will stay at Logoly SP, another chair will be at Pinnacle Mountain SP, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> chair will be at Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area.

Also covered during the presentation was the partnership with Becoming rentABLE, which is an online listing platform dedicated to advocating for accessibility in the short-term rental industry. Becoming rentABLE has also partnered with some brand ambassadors to create digital content for social media and created an inclusive language guide for State Parks. To date, 59 of the overnight properties and units are certified through Becoming rentABLE. CJRW is making changes to the website based on feedback received from Becoming rentABLE.

Lastly, Arkansas State Parks continues to have an accessibility stakeholder working group, which is why we were invited to speak to the Committee. Representative Julie Mayberry is a member of the working group and, along with members from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, discussions are ongoing about how to improve accessibility across the outdoor recreation spectrum in Arkansas.

Memorial Weekend Storm Damage update: Cleanup efforts are still underway at Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area. There are still several trail closures and piles and piles of debris to remove. An initial quote of \$803K would bring the trails back to open condition; some reroutes will be required to reopen a few sections. State Parks is currently working on a contract to get one of the most popular loops of the monument trail back up and running for around \$150K. Total reopening will require a phased approach. In addition to Hobbs, some trails are still closed at both Withrow Springs and Bull Shoals-White River State Parks as well; however, damages are not as extent as Hobbs.

My Arkansas Internship Program: Darin Mitchell, Manager of Information & Innovation, spoke briefly about the summer internship program his team benefited from this year. Emilie Couch, a Political Science major from the University of Central Arkansas, came to Parks on June 3 and will work through July 26. Projects she is assisting with are:

- Research for LWCF for Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park. Ms. Couch performed research into legal needs and property instruments to do battlefield protection on civil war sites, as well as similar research for a campground update project at Crowley's Ridge State Park.
- Ms. Couch was instrumental in the Arkansas State Parks land inventory catalog development which has been a work in progress for years.
- Ms. Couch assisted with the visitation data collection estimation program and researched some national and international standard practices for visitation reporting.

#### **Annual Report – Dynamic Pricing Strategy (pursuant to A.C.A § 22-4-305) \***

Per Deputy Director King, the following is the Annual Dynamic Pricing Strategy report. State Parks is required by legal code to present to this commission for review and, if approved, to take it to the Legislative Council for annual review. Recommendations for rates for 2025 will be brought before this Commission later in the fall. Overall performance for this year is as follows:

- Dynamic Pricing strategy for FY24 yielded \$1.38M over last year.

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

#### **Leases & Agreements**

##### **Systemwide – Concession Lease Agreement – Whenever Watersports\***

Deputy Director King requested approval to extend the contract for Whenever Watersports. Parks initially advertised this opportunity and only received one proposal from Whenever Watersports. State Parks did a pilot program at five parks with the concessionaire starting in 2023 and would like to proceed and “up” this program going forward to 21 parks.

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

##### **Mississippi River State Park – Participating Agreement – USDA Forest Service, Ozark-St. Francis National Forests\***

Deputy Director King requested approval for a partnership agreement with USDA Forest Service and Mississippi River State Park. It's been operating on a year-by-year basis in the past, but the new proposal is for a 5-year agreement.

**Eric Jackson made a motion to approve. Blair Allen seconded, and the motion carried.**

##### **Lake Dardanelle State Park – Supplemental Agreement – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers\***

Deputy Director King requested approval for an updated amendment that will allow State Parks to replace the fishing pier at Lake Dardanelle State Park and make needed ADA updates.



**Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Planning & Development**

**Crowley's Ridge State Park – Bench Donation and Plaque\***

Chris Myers, Manager Planning & Development, requested approval for a memorial bench at Crowley's Ridge State Park in honor of Larry Adams.

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

**Bull Shoals-White River State Park – Memorandum of Agreement for Jetty Repair Project\***

Chris Myers requested approval for an agreement to make jetty improvements at Bull Shoals-White River State Park. Baxter Health had funds they needed to use, and this MOA allows them to use the funds towards this project.

**Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Delta Heritage Trail State Park – Property Removal Request – Yancopin Residence\***

Chris Myers requested approval for removal of a derelict structure at Delta Heritage Trail State Park.

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

**Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Quarterly Report**

Chris Myers explained that this item is the quarterly CIP report, and it is informational. At the end of FY24, we had 41 open MOFs that totaled approximately \$75M. Out of the open MOFs, ASP had spent \$32M with an open MOF balance of approximately \$43M. ASP closed 4 MOFs that totaled more than \$13M. Since the passage of A75, we have utilized \$236,525,737 to complete Capital Improvement Projects.

**MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING**

There were no public comments.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:42.

###

**I acknowledge these minutes are approved:**

  
Jim Shamburger, Chair

08/15/2024