

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Ozark Folk Center State Park, Mountain View
June 15, 2023, 9:00 a.m.
APPROVED 07/20/2023

Commissioners Present

Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair
Austin Albers
Rebecca Baker
Dr. Trey Berry
Bob Connell
Mike Wilson
Ron Gossage
Shash Goyal
Jim Shamburger
Blair Allen
Kalene Griffith
Weston Lewey
Mike Gibson

Commissioners Absent

Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Montine McNulty, Vice-chair
Eric Jackson
Ness Sechrest

Staff Present

Shea Lewis, Interim Secretary, ADPHT
Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff
Shealyn Sowers, Chief of Communications, ADPHT
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
Travis Napper, Director, Arkansas Tourism
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
Ed Thomas, Emergency Services Manager
Mike Wilson, Parks Operations Manager, State Parks
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, State Parks
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, State Parks
Tracy King, Region 2 Supervisor, State Parks
Becky Bariola, Region 5 Supervisor, State Parks
John Morrow, Ozark Folk Center Superintendent, State Parks

CJRW

Darin Gray
Jessica Frahm
Dalaney Thomas
Blake Bowlin
Mark Raines
Jill Joslin

Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas
Kelly Parker

Guests

Norma Sims, Experience Harrison
Matt Bell, Experience Harrison
Gary Jones, Arkansas Travel Channel

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m. by Chairman Randy Wolfinbarger. Elaine Lienhart called the roll. Chairman Wolfinbarger welcomed guests and thanked the Ozark Folk Center staff, Committee of 100, and Ozark Gateway for providing refreshments.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Approval of the Minutes

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

Austin Albers made a motion to approve the minutes; Weston Lewey seconded the motion and the motion carried. Minutes approved.

Secretary's Report

Interim Secretary Lewis reported that he is honored to serve as interim secretary for the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. He emphasized that the department has been entrusted with some very valuable resources and the staff takes that very seriously. He commented that we have unprecedented support from the Office of the Governor.

FINANCIAL REPORT – May 31, 2023

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY2023 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the eleven-month period ending May 31, 2023.

FY 2023 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$28,996,138 an increase of 3.70%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$1,035,862 an increase of 1.59%

- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$42,781,690 an increase of 9.23%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$22,800,951 an increase of 11.29%

FY 2023 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$97,685,937 an increase of 30.59%
- Tourism Division - \$21,660,560 an increase of 9.78%
- War Memorial - \$1,389,862 an increase of 4.10%
- Department Total - \$137,610,042 an increase of 20.28%

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

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

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Travis Napper gave his final report as Director of Tourism. He reported that Tourism staff has officially moved to the 3rd floor of the Multi-Agency Complex building.

Discover Arkansas had a Focus on Ecotourism in May with six articles. There were five news releases. For industry relations, there were eight meetings attended this past month including Region board meetings and eclipse meetings.

Napper reported on tradeshow, conferences, and sales missions. Arkansas musical artists are performing this week at the Black Deer Music Festival in the UK. In July, Arkansas Tourism will partner with Experience Fayetteville in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. where the Ozark Folk Center will be featured on the National Mall. Following that event, the staff will attend the National Geographic's Taste of the South festival in the UK.

The North American Travel Journalists Association's annual conference went well. Staff had 20 formal media appointments and more than 100 connections with international and domestic journalists.

At IPW, staff had 84 scheduled meetings and 13 walk-up meetings.

The Canadian Media FAM was successful. We had good reviews and have already had a story published.

The satellite media tour at Pinnacle Mountain State Park was shared to an audience of 70+ million viewers.

Host city bids for 2025, 2026, and 2027 Governor's Conference on Tourism will be sent out at the beginning of July.

Napper requested a Certificate of Appreciation for Amanda McLelland, travel consultant at the Arkansas Welcome Center in El Dorado, upon her retirement.

Commissioner Rebecca Baker made a motion to approve the certificate; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried. Certificate approved.

Marketing and Research

Dalaney Thomas and Jessica Frahm reported on the 2024 fiscal year marketing and research plan for Arkansas Tourism. During the presentation they shared the focus on research-driven strategic decisions, outlined shifts in media mix, and shared tactics in each budget category.

Thomas pointed out a slight increase in the creative budget due to the creation of a Spanish language brochure. The media buy shifted to 97% digital, 1% print, 1% radio, and 1% TV. Digital media includes streaming TV (or CTV).

In FY23, new expansion markets were tested in the western part of the country with preliminary findings showing that the new media placement is moving the needle. Since Colorado was added as a market, it is now the #1 fly-in state. This aligns with one of the state's primary goals: to compete in the outdoor recreation space on a national level.

Frahm reported on group sales which shifted from 55% digital to 59% digital. Tactics are still being defined but the main target group is sports teams.

Guides and co-op marketing are a continued part of the plan which helps inspire interest and visitation to our state. The department will reprint the cycling guide and partner with a mountain biking organization to develop a new visual publication that showcases more imagery of the state. The outdoor adventure guide will be produced again, and the motorcycling guide will be reprinted every two years with a proposed shift to a road tripping guide to broaden the usage.

The international plan will continue to see partnerships with Brand USA and Travel South and the target markets have shifted to those who are most likely to visit and who find outdoor recreation activities appealing.

Public relations has the largest budget jump because of a recategorization to include satellite media tours, paid news content, market activations, and brand partnerships.

Organic social may see a budget increase as priorities shift to more influencer marketing. There is a continued focus on ways to elevate the Arkansas Ambassador program.

State Parks Division

Parks Committee Report

Committee Chair Blair Allen reported the following:

The Parks Committee meeting was held June 14, 2023.

The committee meeting included several topics of discussion:

- State Parks 2023 Action Plan with goals and objectives presented by Jeff King, Deputy Director.
- Jeff King presented PD2010 & PD2011 for recommendation to SPRTC. PD2010 and PD2011 will be presented today for approval.
- Memorial Day updates from Emergency Services and Revenue and Sales.
- Jeff King, Deputy Director presented the operations section CHM Report.
- Jeannine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, presented existing reporting and CY23 dynamic pricing.
- Chris Myers, Planning & Development Manager, presented the CIP Financial Overview and Construction Progress Report.
- Historic Washington Subcommittee Action Plan update was provided by Jeff King.

At the conclusion of the Parks Committee Report, Blair Allen expressed how pleased he is with the information discussed and knowledge gained during the Parks Committee meeting.

Director's Report

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

Jeff King presented the Arkansas State Parks Action Plan 2023, including details of the plan.

The Action plan included a high-level fiscal overview showing operating revenues up 3.7% for FYTD23 versus FY22. Petit Jean State Park showed the largest increase for FYTD May at \$92K with camping being up \$34K.

Operating Expenses also continued to rise and were up by 8.4% in May for the top 11 parks. Cabin occupancy from May 22 is down by 7.25%; however, overall revenue for cabins only slipped by 3.45%. Camping Occupancy was flat for May YOY, but revenues increased 9.7%. These were signs of success from the dynamic pricing strategy and revised rates approved by SPRTC for CY2023.

Petit Jean State Park reflected the highest increase for the month of May, which is a direct reflection of the upgrades and improvement projects the Planning and Development Manager and his team have completed.

Jeff King reported there are significant developments with the Monument Trails and grants.

On June 14, 2023, the Personnel Subcommittee of the Legislative Council recommended approval for four full-time positions for trail maintenance. These positions will help with the volunteer efforts and provide daily maintenance on the trails at Monument Trail Parks.

Jeff King reported that Planning and Development Manager, Chris Myers, and his team submitted a \$500,000 federal grant that's a part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The grant, if

awarded, would provide funding for parks to add Level II charging stations at five parks which include DeGray Lake Resort, Mount Magazine, Mount Nebo, Petit Jean, and Queen Wilhelmina State Parks. The Planning and Development Manager and team worked with the Governor's Office on review and approval prior to the submission of the grant. King expressed excitement about the opportunity to have electrical charging stations in Arkansas State Parks.

Jeff King announced the submission of a unique partnership grant. A grant application was submitted to bring the first track chair or all-terrain wheelchair to state parks. Other state parks throughout the nation are already doing this. The National Association of State Park Directors has partnered with the Bronco Wild Fund to support this initiative. The proposed location of the All-Terrain Track Chair is Logoly State Park. Accessibility Across Arkansas is a new non-profit agency wanting to partner with state parks to help with the all-terrain wheelchair system.

Jeff King provided an update on First Gentleman Bryan Sanders' tours of Arkansas State Parks. Over the past month the First Gentleman has made one-day trips to Cane Creek, Plum Bayou Mounds, and Plantation Agriculture Museum State Parks. Visiting the parks has provided great opportunities for the parks teams to meet with the First Gentleman and see the enthusiasm that the Governor's office has for what we're doing in state parks. On separate trips throughout the month, First Gentleman Sanders met with the park teams at Ozark Folk Center, Mammoth Spring, and Bull Shoals-White River State Parks. Commissioners Mike Wilson, Weston Lewey, and Ron Gossage, have all been able to join the First Gentleman on select visits. The First Gentleman has visited 24 parks with a remaining 28 to visit, which he plans to complete this summer/early fall.

Jeff King introduced John Morrow, Ozark Folk Center's State Park Superintendent.

John Morrow reported the following:

Ozark Folk Center is celebrating 50 years and held a jubilee event on May 26-27, 2023. During the Jubilee Event and over the course of the Memorial Day weekend there was a 67% overall increase in park visitation and 30% increase in the Craft Village during the Memorial Day weekend, YOY. John Morrow announced Ricky Skaggs will be performing at Ozark Folk Center July 15, 2023. The performance sold out in five days. The State Fiddle and Banjo Championships will be held the first weekend of August 2023. This is a very big event, and many people will attend from all over the United States. The 3rd Annual Bluegrass and Fried Chicken Festival will be held at the end of August 2023. The Music Roots Program has returned to the Ozark Folk Center. The program has created a huge success for young children and music. There will be a Music Roots ensemble concert with special guests performing the second week of September 2023. The Lavish Herbal Feast will be held the 1st week in October 2023 and Stringband Music & Arts Festival the 2nd week of October 2023.

In conclusion John Morrow reported that Loco Ropes remains closed. There are no updates as to when it will reopen. Discussion continues for options for the facility.

Jeff King provided a 2024 Eclipse Reservations Update. As of June 11, 2023, 1,374 individual overnight accommodation reservations are booked. Room revenue generated thus far is \$449,773 with an overall average daily rate (ADR) of \$79.59. Camping represents 76% of the room nights and 38% of the room revenue with the average daily rate of \$40.05. Cabins represent 11% of the room nights and 30% of the room revenue with an ADR of \$216.44. Lodges represent 11% of the room nights and 29% of the room revenue with an ADR of \$217.32. Unique Lodging represents 2% of the

room nights and 3% of the room revenue with an ADR of \$96.03. The top 5 states for eclipse reservations are Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Florida, and Missouri. Currently, 12 parks are sold out and 7 parks are over 75% reserved. Twenty-one parks are in totality, 12 of them are completely sold out and seven are 75% booked.

Jeff King covered a unique lifesaving experience that took place at Petit Jean State Park. A park visitor's 7-year-old grandchild drowned in one of the park's pools. Per a Facebook post by the family, "Every trained person that working at the park showed up. They had all the necessary equipment and knew how to use it. The park's lifeguard and a nurse named Ashley Thomas who was visiting the park and swimming with her children saved the 7-year old's life." The Commission recommended a Special Commendation for Ashley Thomas and thanked the staff at Petit Jean for efforts.

Ron Gossage made the motion to approve the Special Commendation for Ashley Thomas; Jim Shamburger seconded, and the motion carried.

Certificate of Appreciation

Jeff King presented for approval a Certificate of Appreciation for park employee Darice Nations in recognition of her 20 years of dedicated and selfless service to Arkansas State Parks and 22 years to the State of Arkansas. Her commitment to excellence and professionalism was reflected in the role of an administrative specialist for Region 4 of Arkansas State parks.

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

Policies, Rules, and Procedures

Jeff King presented for approval Revised PD2010 and New PD2011. The directives (PD 2010 Non-Group Sales & PD2011 Group Sales and Reservations) apply to all overnight facilities (including campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, group lodges, YURTs, rental RVs, and camper cabins) unless noted otherwise. The information contained in these directives provide guidance in processing and canceling a reservation as well as identifying rules during occupancy of overnight facilities, meeting rooms, and pavilions, and provide administrative guidance for implementation of Policy Statement 2000.

Mike Gibson made the motion to approve; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

Real Estate Actions

King presented for approval Lake Chicot-Property Removal Request for Campground Bathhouse F. Brandy Oliver, Superintendent of Lake Chicot State Park, has requested permission to remove the structure from the park's building inventory. Bathhouse F (**Building No. 61.19/AASIS No. 120006592**) is a 720 square foot wood frame structure with a concrete floor and asphalt shingles built in 1973 and renovated in 1999. Campground Area F is being renovated and a new bathhouse will be built to take the place of the current bathhouse due to its age and substandard condition. The building will be demolished and disposed of in accordance with all federal, state, and local regulations.

Shash Goyal made the motion to approve; Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.

Jeff King introduced CJRW Account Manager Blake Bowlin.

FY24 Marketing & Advertising

Blake Bowlin has been working closely with Parks on the FY24 CJRW Marketing & Advertising plan for the State Parks Division. The plan looks different than it has in the past 3-4 years with changes heading into FY24.

This year's budget has an additional funding; the total budget proposed is \$2 million. The additional budget will increase media specifically in the digital realm, adding some additional key marketing initiatives.

Media funds will be relocated across all 3 campaigns to a targeted digital and social media approach this year. This is the first year with a dedicated budget for paid social and paid search, which is more in line with what Tourism has been doing.

Blake Bowlin provided a high-level overview of the additional marketing initiatives that are new to the plan this year. The plan will include influencer partnerships, public relation initiatives, organic social media, and working with the staff at parks to boost a brand refresh. There will be participation in regional streaming programs offered by the state.

There's support to bolster up overnight visitation by promoting special events like the events held at Ozark Folk Center. The plan will align with consumer trends and reduce print strategies. Directional outdoor advertising at DeGray Lake Resort and Historic Washington State Parks will continue.

Bowlin reported a massive change in the FY24 media mix. Informed decisions and the fiscal year budget comparison continue to trend toward heavy use of digital paid media for lodges and group sales. Collaboration with Jeannine Bruner, Revenue and Sales Manager, and Professionals International is bringing in the right audience.

Another new addition to the FY24 plan is the influencers partnerships. There's an expressed emphasis on influencers at state parks. Influencers help tell the story highlighting key areas where Arkansas has a presence and seeks promotion.

Public relations initiatives will work in national and regional efforts with collaboration on tourism outreach. There will be a target to major broadcast markets to tell the family side of Arkansas State Parks story. Organic social media will be across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

In conclusion, Bowlin emphasized the refresh of the brand logo going into FY24. The Centennial 's been a big focus and it will continue to be throughout the rest of this calendar year. Moving forward, the brand looks like a very collaborative process working with the parks team. The brochure collateral production includes Club 52 rewards: from T-Shirts, to playing cards, and stickers.

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

There were no public comments.

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

Austin Albers made the motion to adjourn; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.

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