

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION

Zoom

June 28, 2024, 10:00 AM

APPROVED JULY 18, 2024

Commissioners Present

Jim Shamburger, Chair
Eric Jackson
Weston Lewey
Kalene Griffith
Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Gary Vernon
Mike Gibson
Mike Wilson
Austin Albers

Commissioners Absent

Blair Allen, Vice-Chair
Rebecca Baker
Shash Goyal
Randy Wolfinbarger
Bob Connell

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
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Arkansas Tourism
Kori Bull, Project Coordinator, Tourism
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Sharon Allen, Administrative Specialist, Arkansas State Parks

CJRW

Darin Gray
Katherine Vasilos

Guests

Matt Bell, Explore Harrison
Gary Jones, Jones Video
Caleb Osborne, Capitol Consulting Firm
Bill Solleder, Visit Hot Springs

Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 10:02 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. The chair thanked everyone for attending and confirmed that there is a quorum.

Call to Order & Welcome

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. The Chair thanked Lindsay Midkiff, Forrest City A&P Commission, East Arkansas Community College including Dr. Cathie Cline, Adam O'Neal and Nikki Jones for the tours, social hour and dinner. Chair Shamburger thanked Village Creek State Park staff, Vicki Trimble and William Ward for refreshments and hosting the meeting space.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

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

Approval of May Minutes

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

Randy Wolfenbarger made the motion to approve the minutes; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Shea Lewis welcomed guests to the meeting. Konul Yonueva, from Baku, Azerbaijan was introduced. She is participating in the Global Ties program and is studying agritourism with a focus on females in the industry. The Tourism Division is identifying industry members to introduce to Konul during her visit.

Lewis also introduced Village Creek State Park Superintendent Vicki Trimble and presented her with an Arkansas State Parks Honor Coin in recognition of her years of service to the Department.

Lewis reported that he attended the Daisy Bates statue unveiling in Washington, DC. Each state has two statues. The Johnny Cash statue will be installed in September. Lewis also met with Congressman Bruce Westerman. Governor Sanders received the Outdoor Leadership Award, as Arkansas continues to raise the bar in the outdoor recreation arena.

Lewis also attended the Chicago activation. He shared that the event was very successful and deferred to Dalaney Thomas for further details.

Lewis gave an update on the advertising RFP process and noted that it is drawing closer to completion. It is currently in the review and protest period. Legislative review is anticipated to begin on May 28 to finalize the process. Companies that were reviewed include 4Media, Agency GWL, CJRW, Insight Creative Group, Miles Partnership, MMGY, Stone Ward, and others. CJRW's partnership with MMGY has created a best-of-both-worlds scenario for the Department. This partnership allows for the Department to maintain a relationship with CJRW, avoid a transition period, and elevate scale and creativity with MMGY.

Lewis stated his goal is to have an ad committee meeting to provide a fully detailed presentation in July. The website, currently provided by Miles Partnership, will undergo a transitional period. Lewis explained that this next year can be utilized as an opportunity to make the best website possible and allow time for the Department and Commission to define how Arkansas.com needs to function. Changes in reservations and point-of-sale for State Parks are also coming and will be detailed in the Parks report. Commissioner Bob Connell asked who is taking over the website. Lewis explained that CJRW will be working closely with MMGY on the website. Jim Shamburger commented that the purpose of the website is conversion.

Financial Report

The Financial Report was presented by Shea Lewis.

REVENUE

- Parks Operating revenue saw an almost 20% increase in April 2024 \$3.5 million over 2023 \$3 million. This was in large part due to the eclipse traffic. Total Parks FY24 operating revenue is \$28.2 million.
- Total Parks, Tourism & WMS revenue is up 3.27% or \$4.1 million increase over FY23.
- 2% Tourism collections for February (2 months in arrears) were \$1.7m or almost 5% over FY23.
- Conservation Sales Tax also saw a large increase in April receipts of \$4 million or 13.4% greater than FY23. The total for FY24 through April is \$39.6 million.

Expenses

- Parks Operating expenses through April were \$30.5 million.
- 2% tourism expenditures through April were \$17 million. Of that \$15.2 million have been for advertising and professional fees.
- Conservation Sales tax expenditures were \$35.9 million. This amount included \$10.7 million in construction and major maintenance.

Weston Lewey made the motion to approve the financials; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

TOURISM DIVISION

Dalaney Thomas reported that staff attended IPW, an international trade operator and journalist show. Partners from Bentonville, Fayetteville, Little Rock and Rogers also attended. There were over 5,600 registrants at this year's show. The Tourism team participated in approximately 100 meetings with tour operators and media professionals. Thomas reminded the Commission that the global strategy is currently focused on the UK, Germany and Canada.

Conversations have been had with Travel South and other organizations requesting opportunities for Arkansas to be able to host international media, journalists, and influencers with a focus on the state's pillars. Additionally, Tourism is looking at partnering with states that are not considered "southern," such as Oklahoma with its white-water rafting opportunities. Partnerships such as this will focus on travel from the western and northern borders of the state.

Chicago has also been identified as a primary market. Thomas explained that last spring/summer was the first time that Tourism approached the Chicago market outside of relocation initiatives. Data has shown that general traffic from this market continues to increase. She applauded the partners and the lessons learned from the previous year's activation in Denver. Thomas then showed videos from the activation. She explained that the goal of the activation was to take Arkansas to Chicago and its influencers. Along with partners from Bentonville, Fayetteville, Jonesboro and Rogers, came Arkansas-based James Beard nominee Chef Rafael Rios and musical artist Nick Shoulders. The activation was all encompassing including a Buffalo River wrapped elevator at the point of entry to truly immerse attendees in an Arkansas experience and to position Arkansas as an outdoor playground. Forty-five influencers and 40 guests attended. Thomas gave details on current insights from the social media impact. Shea Lewis and Kalene Griffith both commended the efforts and growth from first activations. Griffith expressed her interest in future opportunities for similar events.

The second part of the activation was in partnership with an Arkansas based company, Gearhead. There were giveaways, including five direct flights to Arkansas. The promotion to give away an all-inclusive trip to Arkansas in partnership with Gearhead, will run throughout the month. Thomas shared insights reflecting the success of the Chicago activation so far.

Listening sessions, as discussed in the April meeting, have been scheduled and will take place in the following week. Coraggio Group will facilitate. By the next meeting, results from these meetings will be available, and the recommendations for next steps.

Discussions have begun on rebranding of the Welcome Centers.

National Travel and Tourism Week is May 19-25. On Wednesday, May 22, Rogers will host an event at Top Golf. On Thursday, May 23, Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau is hosting a press event at Pinnacle Mountain State Park.

While data for the eclipse is still being gathered, some reportables have been communicated from our partners. Hot Springs reported that their 3% had the second highest all time collection.

Thomas presented a Certificate of Appreciation for Dorothy Lucas, assistant manager of the Welcome Center at Lake Village, who is retiring after 36 years of service.

Shash Goyal made the motion to approve the certificate of appreciation; Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

STATE PARKS DIVISION

Director's Report

Jeff King, Deputy Director, thanked the Village Creek State Park team for hosting this month's Commission meeting and providing refreshments. Mr. King shared updates on the following items:

- April Financial Report: The numbers on the April Financial Report are reflective of the April 8 Eclipse Event.
 - Bottomline numbers were up 19% year-over-year, over \$500K.
 - Crater of Diamonds saw a 52% increase in revenue, or \$72K.
 - Ozark Folk Center was up 52% year-over-year.
 - DeGray Lake was up 29%.
 - Mount Magazine doubled typical revenue for April.
 - Merchandise was up 39%.
 - Camping revenue up 19%.
 - Lodge rooms up 27%.
- 2024 is up 23% year-over-year over 2023. State Parks is on track to break \$36M for the fiscal year.
- Edge Factor Program: Josh Baker, Ranger, and Carrie Balkman, Interpreter, participated in the Edge Factor program a workforce development effort, in conjunction with Division of Workforce Services. A promotional video was shot at Pinnacle Mountain State Park to highlight what it's like to work at Arkansas State Parks.
- Alcohol Permit: In May, State Parks issued its first Alcohol permit to Mount Nebo State Park. The park can now issue secondary permits to vendors for special events. This permit was in preparation for the Big Mountain Enduro, May 4-5, 2024.
- The Big Mountain Enduro at Mount Nebo had 126 participants this year.
- Satellite Media Tour: On May 7, DeGray Lake Resort hosted a Satellite Media Tour to promote Arkansas State Parks. The Communications team worked with CJRW on the event. Jason Parrie, Ranger and Acting Sergeant at DeGray, and Kayla Gomance, Assistant Chief of Interpretive Programs, were speakers. The total broadcasts were viewed by over 8.2M people.
- ARTA Annual Conference: Deputy Director King gave a keynote speech at the annual Arkansas Retired Teachers Association Conference earlier this week.

- Action Track-chair update: State Parks is working with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) team on a partnership where AGFC's Track-chairs can be used at state parks when not in use by AGFC during hunting season. ASP's first Track-chair was delivered to Logoly State Park. ASP has partnered with Accessibility Across Arkansas to get this chair. Improvements are under way on the Logoly trails and bridges to accommodate the Track-chair. ASP was notified by the National Association of State Park Directors of an award of another Track-chair and Accessibility Across Arkansas has received a grant from the Christopher Reeves Foundation for a third Track-chair for State Parks.
- ASP Night at the Travs: Arkansas State Parks Night at the Travs is taking place Friday, May 17. It's a great way to promote State Parks and appreciate employees. Over 300 tickets have been spoken for, so far, by employees.
- ANCRC: State Parks will present their ANCRC application for a total of \$16M on May 22.
- Petit Jean Airport: A concession lease opportunity at Petit Jean Airport will be published next week. A prospectus has been developed and will be advertised for about 30 days. ASP will work with the Division of Aeronautics to notify interested parties.
- Arkansas Enduro Series: Jeff King and Mike Wilson had a meeting with the Ozark Foundation about bringing Capital City Enduro to Pinnacle Mountain State Park in the fall. Another on-site meeting will be held next week.

Real Estate, Leases & Agreements

South Arkansas Arboretum – Lease Renewal*

- Deputy Director King requested approval for an extension of the lease and operating agreement for the South Arkansas Arboretum.

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

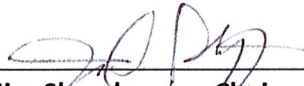
MISCELLANESOUS/CLOSING

There were no public comments.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 am.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:



 Jim Shamburger, Chair

06/28/2024