

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Horseshoe Bend
November 16, 2023, 9:00 AM
APPROVED JANUARY 18, 2024

Commissioners Present

Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair
Jim Shamburger, Vice-Chair
Rebecca Baker
Bob Connell
Mike Gibson
Ron Gossage
Shash Goyal
Blair Allen

Commissioners Absent

Mike Wilson
Austin Albers
Trey Berry
Kalene Griffith
Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Eric Jackson
Weston Lewey

Staff Present

Shea Lewis, Secretary, ADPHT
Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, Arkansas Tourism
Justin Rotton, Deputy Chief of Communications, ADPHT
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT
Jami Fisher, Controller, ADPHT
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Arkansas Tourism
Susie Cowan, Project 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
Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Ed Thomas, Chief of Emergency Services, Arkansas State Parks

CJRW

Darin Gray
Jessica Frahm
Jill Joslin
Wade McCune
Blake Bowlin

Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas

Guests

Gary Jones, Jones Video/Arkansas Travel Channel
Kevin Sexton, Hot Springs Village
Pat Behrndt, Owner-Crown Point Resort

Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Wolfinbarger called the meeting to order at 9:01 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. Wolfinbarger welcomed guests and congratulated Dalaney Thomas on her new role as the director of Arkansas Tourism.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Randy Wolfinbarger recommended Agenda Item 17 be moved to follow Item 11 and asked for a motion to approve the agenda with that change.

Shash Goyal made the motion to approve the agenda with the recommended change; Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion passed.

Approval of October 2023 Minutes

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

Jim Shamburger made the motion to approve the minutes; Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of Special Meeting Minutes November 3, 2023

Chairman Randy Wolfinbarger asked for a motion to approve the November 3, 2023, minutes.

Blair Allen made the motion to approve the minutes; Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Shea Lewis thanked the commissioners for their willingness to make the special virtual meeting for the vote on the partnership with Loblolly for the new Pinnacle Mountain State Park partnership. He reported a successful event at the Arkansas City trailhead of the Delta Heritage Trail for the John H. Johnson Commemorative Plaza dedication. There approximately 200 people in attendance, and overwhelming support.

Secretary Lewis recapped the press conference for the 2022 Economic Impact Report, stating that Arkansas Tourism is stronger than ever. He provided an update on the Governor's new initiative, Capital for a Day. There have been three events so far and Walnut Ridge was hosting one later in the day. This has given Governor Sanders and her staff the opportunity to engage with the tourism industry. There was a tourism roundtable in Bentonville and one in Hot Springs bringing key members of the industry together.

Secretary Lewis closed his report with a brief update on the Eclipse planning. NASA has confirmed that they will be in Russellville for the eclipse. The Weather Channel, USA Today, Fox News, and more will all be in Arkansas. He reiterated that ADPHT is working with the Governor's Office for statewide branding and [Arkansas.com/eclipse](https://arkansas.com/eclipse) will be the landing page for information on a statewide level.

Ed Thomas, Chief of Emergency Services, gave a brief update on the public safety aspect of the eclipse. Thomas recently met with the Arkansas Department of Transportation to identify parks in need of signage and supplied them with a GIS map to identify parks across the state. In this meeting, they also confirmed that Arkansas State Parks will have a representative in the emergency operations center during the event. He also met with the National Guard to identify medical needs that need to be assessed, such as landing zones and action plans to get to people around the anticipated traffic.

FINANCIAL REPORT – October 31, 2023

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2024 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the four-month period ending October 31, 2023.

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$13,666,316 an increase of 6.29%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$846,865 an increase of 45.82%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$15,783,232 an increase of 1.01%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$9,866,817 a decrease of 4.81%

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$38,155,490 an increase of 20.66%
- Tourism Division - \$3,911,220 a decrease of 45.18%
- War Memorial - \$994,608 an increase of 45.46%
- Department Total - \$43,061,318 an increase of 9.20%

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

Mike Gibson made the motion to approve the financials; Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Commissioner Mike Gibson gave a report on the recent ad hoc finance committee meeting. Jim Shamburger suggested making the finance committee a permanent standing committee.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Dalaney Thomas stated that she hit the ground running, and today was her twelfth day on the job. She joined Secretary Lewis at the Capital for a Day in all the different cities except Mena. One of the main priorities moving forward will be determining how the Division can best support the tourism industry. There will also be a priority for the staffing at central office. There are several vacant positions that are being assessed to build a lean and productive staff.

Key projects happening this upcoming month are Travel South International Showcase and Familiarization Tour with 14 tour operators primarily from the UK touring Arkansas. They will visit Rogers, Bentonville, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Little Rock, Dyess, and Wilson.

The 50th Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism is coming up February 25-27 in Jonesboro. The Jonesboro steering committee has been fantastic to work with for the conference. There have been around 150 nominations for the Henry Awards.

Commissioner Shamburger proposed having the March State Park, Recreation and Travel Commission meeting the day after the Governor's Conference in Jonesboro. All agreed.

The last priority Director Thomas mentioned was to continue the marketing expansion.

Tourism Marketing Report

Jessica Frahm and Wade McCune from CJRW presented the new Snow Market Campaign with a media overview. One of the key markets is Denver due to the direct flights. The other states that were focused on for this campaign include western states with a colder winter climate. This campaign began running November 1 and will continue through the end of February.

2024 Meeting Dates

Secretary Lewis thanked Elaine Lienhart and Susie Cowan for the work they do to arrange each month's commission meetings and events. The 2024 Commission meeting dates and locations were presented for approval. Lewis commented that we had invitations to hold meetings in Hot Springs Village and Rogers.

Commissioner Goyal asked if we knew about how many man hours are spent on Commission planning each month and if we should consider holding more meetings in Little Rock which would be more productive for the staff and would incur less expense. Other commissioners commented they believe it is beneficial to hold commission meetings in different cities as a way of showcasing the state, allowing the Commissioners and ADPHT staff experience different parts of the state they normally wouldn't visit, and providing inspiration to different cities to expand their tourism efforts. In addition, having commission meetings at park locations was expressed as a benefit for PR and allows Park Superintendents see how involved the Commission is in the decision-making process. Discussion ensued.

Secretary Lewis and Commissioner Shamburger had discussed the proposed schedule and part of the goal was to get out into some of the state parks for onsite commission meetings. Other suggestions were to have a rotating travel/ZOOM meetings or moving meetings around as needed if travel prevents specific meetings from having a quorum.

Commissioner Randy Wolfenbarger asked for a motion to approve the 2024 Commission Meeting Dates as presented.

Jim Shamburger made a motion to approve the proposed dates and locations for 2024 as presented. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

STATE PARKS DIVISION

Parks Committee Report

Commissioner Shamburger explained that the Parks team went over a lot of information during the previous day's meeting. He stated that the Division appears to be on the right path overall and with specific projects.

Deputy Director Jeff King said the listing of proposed capital improvements has been provided and are available for commission review. Also, a draft new Cost Per Occupied Room report, requested by Commissioner Allen in September was provided at the Parks Committee meeting.

Director's Report

Jeff King, Deputy Director, shared the following with the Commission:

- Firstly, he and Secretary Lewis provided testimony for an interim study by the Oklahoma State Legislature and the Oklahoma State Parks system. The Oklahoma State Parks system is currently underfunded and are interested in possibly modelling after either Arkansas (Amendment 75) or Texas to help fund their park system.
- Since the previous Commission meeting, State Parks held a Maintenance Expo and an Office Manager's Conference, both at DeGray Lake Resort State Park. Mr. King and several division leaders spoke at the conferences.
- A new regional supervisor has been hired for Region 1 to replace Tom Stolarz. Walt Reding has been selected and will perform dual roles as DeGray Lake Superintendent and Region 1 Supervisor until year end.
- The John H. Johnson Commemorative Plaza and statue dedication was a successful event held on November 1, 2023. Over 200 people attended, including John H. Johnson's daughter and granddaughter. Delta Heritage Trail received lots of positive media coverage, including some from Chicago news outlets.
- Several people attended the Midwest State Parks Executive Conference in Oklahoma. ASP attendees included Shea Lewis, Kelly Farrell, Jeannine Bruner, Jeff King, Becky Bariola, and John Stewart. Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager, gave an hour-long presentation on behalf of Arkansas State Parks. States represented included Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, Illinois, Nebraska, and Iowa. Each state system also provided updates on new developments and specific challenges from the prior year.
- King reported that Suzanne Grobmyer and Marty Ryall presented the rules for state park alcohol permits on November 16 to the ALC Rules Subcommittee. Once this rule is approved, state parks will be able to move forward with its alcohol permitting process. It is anticipated that additional rules will have to be passed by the Alcohol Beverage Control before state park's first permit is issued.
- Invitations were reiterated for the grand opening of the Pinnacle Mountain Visitor Center. The Grand Opening will be held on Tuesday, November 28 at 10 am. Governor Sanders and the First Gentleman will be a part of the event. The current Visitor Center will be closed beginning Friday, November 17 to allow for ample moving time for the staff at the park. Restrooms at the current Visitor Center will remain open for public use.
- Lastly, Christmas in Candlelight is forthcoming at Historic Washington State Park on December 8-9 and the department wide Employee Recognition Luncheon is scheduled for December 12 at Mosaic Templars Cultural Center.

Parks Policies, Rules & Directives

Systemwide – Policy Statement 2000 – Calendar Year 2024 State Park Rates

Jeff King stated the policy was presented to the Parks Committee last month and no changes have been made. In summary, select rate increases were made to lodging and cabins but no increases were made to camping rates. Minor modifications were also recommended to further standardize rates across all parks.

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

Donations, Agreements & Certificates

Systemwide – Arkansas Broadcasters Association – Partnership Grant Agreement

King said under this partnership agreement, state parks allocate \$75,000 in advertising and it's matched by the Arkansas Broadcasters Association. Justin Rotton, Deputy Chief of Communications, added that spots are sent out through radio and television. The return on investment is significant and far exceeds the one-to-one guaranteed amount.

Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Jim Shamburger seconded, and the motion carried.

Systemwide – Arkansas Press Association – Partnership Grant Agreement

Jeff King stated this is an additional partnership agreement that is 1:1 but without a specific minimum budget allocation. For each advertisement paid by state parks, an additional advertisement is provided at no cost.

Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

War Memorial Stadium – City of Little Rock Lease Agreement

Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager, presented a renewal of the lease for the special events grounds (golf course, area around stadium, and lot 5) around War Memorial Stadium. State Parks Division held a meeting with the City of Little Rock leadership on August 3 to adjust the lease language and extend the lease authorization until December 31, 2025.

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

Petit Jean – Tree Donation and Memorial Plaque

Mitchell stated the family of Linda Fuller Kirtley would like to donate a white-flowering dogwood tree behind the Petit Jean visitor center overlooking Lake Bailey. The family is donating \$500 to cover the costs associated with the purchase, delivery and planting of the tree and a plaque that would be mounted on the tree.

Blair Allen made a motion to approve. Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.

Lake Dardanelle – Certification of Appreciation

Jeff King requested approval for a Certification of Appreciation for Kathy Webb who served 28 years with Arkansas State parks.

Shash Goyal made a motion to approve. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

Marketing Update Report - CJRW

Blake Bowlin gave a brief marketing snapshot of what has been running from July through October for Arkansas State Parks general, Monument Trails, and lodging and group sales. He explained that marketing is targeting Arkansas and key feeder markets as well as testing Colorado and Illinois. CJRW will continue to strengthen digital media support with the key objective to drive visitation to Arkansas State Parks. He added that paid social and paid search are new to the FY24 plan. Through Meta (Facebook) and Instagram the advertisements were able to deliver 7.2M impressions to 2.7M people from July through September for fall lodging. Going forward, marketing will focus on promoting the multi-use function of Monument Trails, which are available to both extreme sports enthusiasts and hikers alike. Bowlin also provided organic social media marketing results and upcoming marketing initiatives for the rest of the year and early 2024.

Bowlin said a “brand refresh” concept reveal meeting is scheduled for early December and a new look for Arkansas State Parks branding and advertising will be rolled out in early 2024.

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

Old Business/New Business

Jim Shamburger thanked Randy Wolfinbarger for chairing the commission this year.

There were no public comments.

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

Ron Gossage made a motion to adjourn. Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 11:34 am.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:

/s/ Jim Shamburger 01/18/2024

Jim Shamburger, Chair