

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION

Harrison, Arkansas

November 21, 2024, 8:30 AM

APPROVED JANUARY 16, 2025

Commissioners Present

Jim Shamburger, Chair
Austin Albers
Rebecca Baker
Bob Connell
Mike Gibson
Kalene Griffith
Gary Vernon
Randy Wolfinbarger
Mike Wilson

Commissioners Absent

Blair Allen, Vice-Chair
Shash Goyal
Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Eric Jackson
Weston Lewey

Staff Present

Shea Lewis, Secretary, ADPHT
Suzanne Grobmyer, Chief of Staff, ADPHT
Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, Arkansas Tourism
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT
Katherine Andrews, Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation
Jami Fisher, Chief Financial Officer, ADPHT
Leah DiPietro, Tourism Deputy Director
Susie Cowan, Industry Relations Manager, Tourism
Kori Bull, Project Coordinator, Tourism
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Mike Wilson, Assistant Director, Arkansas State Parks
Ed Thomas, Chief of Emergency Services
Mackenzie McMath Coronel, Keep Arkansas Beautiful Director

CJRW

Darin Gray
Jill Joslin
Katherine Vasilos

MMGY

Guests

Matt Bell, Explore Harrison
Joe DeVito, DeVito's Restaurant / Ozark Mountain Region

Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 8:32 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. Shamburger thanked Explore Harrison, Townhouse Café and Creekside Community Center for their participation and investment in the commission's visit.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

Mike Wilson made the motion to approve the agenda; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of October 2024 Minutes

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

Austin Albers made the motion to approve the minutes; Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Shea Lewis, ADPHT Secretary, echoed gratitude for Harrison's team and provided the following updates:

The ADPHT leadership team attended the Arkansas Hospitality Night in Bentonville, a mountain biking event hosted by The Runway Group.

Meetings were held at Queen Wilhelmina State Park as part of the National Environmental Policy (NEPA) process. On November 11, the drafted decision will be posted. A 45-day public period will follow for public comment. This is a big step forward for the project.

Sec. Lewis hosted Governor Sanders Senior Staff and Cabinet Retreat at Petit Jean State Park. It was a two-day retreat and planning session and was a great opportunity to have the group in a state park. Mount Magazine State Park has been booked for next year.

The biennium budget is set to start on July 1. As of now, most of the budget has been approved as presented.

Governor Sanders is presenting her balanced budget to the legislature. A large portion of the budget is the pay plan. The goal is to reduce 2,200 job titles to 700. The most recent job title count is 831. This results in a reduction of middle management. The concept is to bring people up to labor market rate and then work through the merit system. Pay plan groupings for GS, executive, law enforcement, medical and IT have been created.

Capitol for a Day took place in Pocahontas. Mike Wilson and Sec. Lewis attended, and visited Davidsonville Historic State Park and Powhatan Historic State Park.

There was a site visit at Delta Heritage State Park. The Yonkapin Bridge is 99.9% complete and development is coming along beautifully. Commissioner Gary Vernon commented on the Delta Heritage Trail's uniqueness and beginner-friendly terrain.

ADPHT continues to work with Arkansas Forward for the finalization of the strategic plan.

Office of Outdoor Recreation

Director Katherine Andrews opened with reminding the commission of the OOR's mission to grow the outdoor economy in Arkansas by serving industry and community. The main priorities are connection and collaboration.

Upcoming events include the Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit co-locating with the Governor's Conference on Tourism, Natural State Day at the Capitol, SHOT Show in partnership with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), Great Arkansas Duck Hunt in partnership with AEDC, Sea Otter and Big Sugar.

Regional listening sessions have been conducted and a report will follow detailing feedback from these sessions.

Becky Flynn, deputy director, is spearheading the Delta Heritage Trail State Park Network to strengthen and prepare communities along the trail to maximize economic and tourism output.

Five interested parties have responded to the trails at Mena Request for Information. This will hopefully lead to a Request for Proposals after trail details have been defined.

The office is working with the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas Development Finance Authority on a concept to create access to capital in the outdoor industry through a venture fund.

Guide Vetting Programs are in the works to promote guides that are properly certified and vetted. Guide categories include fishing, cycling, hiking, climbing, paddling and hunting. Dalaney Thomas is helping to define ways to promote the program. Multiple commissioners commented that their organizations and communities have given feedback in the past regarding struggles with dishonest and lightly regulated guide services.

Arkansas' Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is being submitted soon. Every state must have a plan updated every five years in order to receive Land and Water Conservation Funds.

Andrews walked through the value added in the outdoor economy. Arkansas is leading the country in trail development. The state is third in the nation in hunting, shooting and trapping. Cycling is sixth in the U.S. These numbers include activity, production and rental of items.

The Office of Outdoor Recreation and Division of Tourism continue to work with the Department of Commerce on their talent attraction and retention strategy. 75 Strong Initiatives works to provide economic developers training on providing technical support for small businesses. Kalene Griffith and Jim Shamburger encouraged these efforts for connecting communities to resources such as these.

The floor was opened for questions. Commissioner Wolfenbarger asked if topics in listening sessions covered how to work with private landowners. Andrews said that these are case-by-case situations and can greatly vary. She recommended chatting more outside of the meeting. Wolfenbarger asked about the office's SHOT Show attendance. Andrews explained that this is the second time for OOR to attend with AEDC, but AEDC has been a long-time attendee. Commissioner Connell asked about all-terrain vehicle usage growth at Greers Ferry. Andrews explained that the growth shown in the presentation is also from the industry. Commissioners commented on other private trails, the U.S. Forest Service and ancillary accessories.

FINANCIAL REPORT – October 31, 2024

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2025 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the one (4) month period ending October 31, 2024.

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$13,870,594 an increase of 1.49%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$733,220 a decrease of 13.42%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$16,065,792 an increase of 1.79%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$10,008,844 an increase of 1.44%

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$38,129,629 a decrease of 2.74%
- Tourism Division - \$3,925,015 an increase of 10.03%
- War Memorial - \$819,379 an increase of 16.85%
- Department Total - \$32,785,549 a decrease of .95%

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

Randy Wolfinbarger made the motion to approve the financials; Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Director Dalaney Thomas led with an update on activity from the previous month. The Department has been able to champion numbers from the economic impact data released after the October meeting. Ten local media sites have shared the report, and copies were delivered to the legislative body.

Thomas attended the Mountain Home Advertising and Promotion Commission meeting. Simmons Bank celebrated its 25th anniversary and the Clinton Library is heading into its 20th anniversary. Industry Relations Manager Susie Cowan is working to make grants more accessible for Regional Tourist Associations. The National Cold War Center gave a presentation at the Little Rock Rotary Club with updates on this tourism attraction. Thomas and Katherine Andrews visited the Mountain Home area.

Thomas gave an update on staff interviews, sharing that Klein Mitchell accepted the website coordinator position and Montoya McGruder accepted the consultant position.

Many promotional partnerships are underway. The Simmons Championship is a five-year commitment for the City of Little Rock and saw a successful first year. Thomas reiterated that the goal of partnerships is to set an event up to be successful so that it eventually becomes self-sustaining. Sec. Lewis commented that there was roughly three days of coverage on the golf channel, and it was a great representation of Arkansas.

The Arkansas Graveler has begun announcing their plans for the 2025 race. It has been moved to the first week of June. The hope is that the race comes to the Delta Heritage Trail in 2026. The 2025 route goes through Mena, Glenwood, Hot Springs, Morrilton and Heber Springs.

GovCon 2025 is co-locating with the Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit. Thomas called for nominations for Henry Awards and stated nominations could be submitted via the website or directly to Kori Bull. Commissioners may also notify Bull on their plans to attend by the end of calendar year for staff to manage their registrations.

Welcome Centers plan to remove brochures for hotels and restaurants that do not provide experiences due to lack of demand from partners and space limitations.

Katherine Vasilos with CJRW gave marketing updates for the Department. Production took place throughout the fall in multiple locations, most recently at Gaston's Resort and the White River. The Snow Market Campaign 2.0 will target Denver, CO; Boise, ID; Billings, MT; Missoula, MT; and Salt Lake City, UT.

The Public Relations program has secured 37 national media hits since July and many media placements for fall foliage with a value to date of \$6.6M.

The influencer program is planning winter trips, including one for climber Matt Segal. Outdoor influencers are planned to compliment the snow market campaign. Spring will bring a family and leisure focus. Influencers are also being partnered with for special events.

Website updates include the Parks Division reskin. The discovery phase is complete and Arkansas.com is now in the definition phase. The current target launch is set for October 2025.

Thomas discussed promotional partnerships, including Arkansas Cinema Society, the Arkansas Country, Blues and String Band Festival, Peacemaker Festival, Harrison Hot Air Balloon Festival, Little Rock Food Truck Festival and Big Sugar. Kalene Griffith updated the commission on the successful National Mountain Biking Championship hosted in Bentonville on November 14-17, 2024. With only 3.5 weeks of planning, they hosted 42 colleges and 307 athletes. The event resulted in an estimated \$1.2 million economic impact.

The floor opened for questions. Commissioner Connell inquired about cinematic incentives. It was answered that these incentives live within the Department of Commerce and a feature film is being shot at Pinnacle Mountain.

STATE PARKS DIVISION

Parks Committee Report

Commissioner Mike Wilson filled in for committee chair Blair Allen. Wilson explained that there were three main agenda items for the Parks Committee meeting:

1). The new POS/PMS System: Commissioner Wilson encouraged all Commissioners to spend time learning about the new system and explained that it's far superior to the previous system and ADPHT will benefit greatly from both an operational and user-friendly standpoint.

2). CIP Program: Wilson stated that Chris Myers provided updates on the current Capital Improvement Program as well as details regarding proposed projects for FY26. The Parks Committee passed a motion and resolution to approve the proposal, and it will be brought to the full SPRTC in January for approval. A full list of proposed projects will be added to the BOX for all Commissioners to review.

3). Emergency Services and Law Enforcement Update: Assistant Director Mike Wilson and Chief Ed Thomas gave a detailed presentation about the changes that are underway with the State Parks Law Enforcement program. This process is necessary to meet the reorganizational goals of transitioning all law enforcement activities to the newly developed Emergency Services Section. These goals include the creation of dedicated enforcement positions; the separation of personnel duties (enforcement and administration); shifting supervision and management of enforcement officers from the Operations Section to the Emergency Services Section; the improvement of career paths for all staff members; and the proper allocation of Division and Agency resources.

Director's Report/Parks Committee Report

Jeff King, Deputy Director, provided additional information on the Parks Committee agenda items, as well as his director's report.

The new POS/PMS System went live for users at all state park locations on November 12 and online reservations went live on November 19. King applauded the outstanding team effort for making this a successful launch and thanked Revenue & Sales Manager, Jeannine Bruner, for leading the Central Office efforts and all superintendents and park office managers who've led the charge in the parks. King also thanked Jami Fisher and her finance team for their efforts to make sure numbers and taxes are calculated correctly. Brandt/Itinio had three team members deployed across the state for troubleshooting and support as well as a software developer who could assist with adjustments as needed. There are still improvements that need to be made but everyone is pleased with the results so far.

The "reskin" of the website corresponds with the rollout of the POS/PMS System. Arkansasstateparks.com and the reservation site have a seamless look and feel so users won't know they have moved from one website to another. In addition, the additional information that's available in the new system will help to better inform the guests on what parks have availability and which sites are available and thus cut down on calls directly to the parks.

King provided additional information on the October Financial numbers. October was the first month of this fiscal year where there was an apples-to-apples comparison because of the number of weekends in the month.

- Camping was up just under a percent, cabins were up about the same, and lodging was up 2.5% month over month.

The numbers looked pretty good compared to previous months.

Year over year highlights included the following:

- Petit Jean was up \$65k (12%), Mount Magazine was up \$51k (7%) and Queen Wilhelmina was up \$45k (15%).
- The camping bucket was up \$92k (11%), cabins were up \$93k (14%) and lodging was up \$82k (20%) year-over-year.

The Capital City Enduro was hosted at Pinnacle Mountain State Park October 26-27. The event was part of a 4-race series put on by the Ozark Foundation. Last year the event sponsors partnered with the City of Little Rock but this year they partnered with the City of Little Rock and Pinnacle Mountain State Park, which helped to draw extra attention to the event. There were 125 riders this year representing 11

states. 60% of the riders had never ridden the trails at Pinnacle Mountain State Park before. 79% of participants were from outside of the Little Rock area.

King attended the Association of Southeast State Parks Directors Conference (ASSPD) in Flowood, MS, along with Chris Myers, Darin Mitchell, Jeannine Bruner, Mary Buchman and Walt Reding. Eleven southeastern states were represented at the conference. Mississippi State Parks recently received funding that passed through their legislature to assist in improving their infrastructure. King pointed out their director told everyone they had called Arkansas a few years ago because they are trying to bring their park system up to that same level. The conference was great, and the team took away a lot of good information.

Arkansas State Parks had several internal conferences recently.

- The annual Superintendent's Conference was hosted at DeGray Lake Resort State Park two weeks ago. The superintendents heard from Secretary Lewis, the leadership team and all the division leads about all the significant changes taking place in year 101. King told everyone that "we are making strategic changes to the way we do business but, fundamentally, we aren't changing the business." The team visited the visitor center at Hot Springs National Park where they heard about partnership efforts the National Park has with the Northwoods Trail System in Hot Springs, along with Superior Bath House Brewery (concession operation). The setup is similar to what State Parks is trying to do at Mena and other State Parks where there are public/private partnerships working together to elevate the guest's experience. There were also two speakers. Ky Harkey (former director of Interpretation for Texas State Parks, who now owns his own business) spoke about the stairsteps to stewardship. The former Game & Fish Commission Director Jeff Crow spoke at the awards dinner where one superintendent from each region was recognized for their outstanding efforts over the past year.
- The Annual Interpretation Workshop (AIW) was held earlier this week at Mount Magazine State Park. Some of the direction specific to Program Services was laid out to participants at this conference. Ky Harkey spoke at this conference as well with a little bit different message.

The first bike ride across the Arkansas River occurred at the Delta Heritage Trail State Park earlier this month. Arkansas State Parks is in the final four phases of trail development:

- The Yancopin Bridge is at about 99% completion, and we are in the last 15 miles of trail development. The total spent so far is \$59M.
- ASP hasn't received a bid for the bridge over the White River yet, but it's expected to be approximately \$30M.
- Of the \$59M, only \$8.3M is state money. The Walton Family Foundation grant was able to fund matching funds which totaled \$40M. \$6.2M in ARPA funds were used. \$4.1M in TAP Grants as well as several other small grants.

The grand opening for ASP's Trackchair program will be held at Logoly State Park tomorrow. There are two chairs at the park right now; one will be permanently located there and the other will be located at Pinnacle Mountain State Park where trail improvements have been made to accommodate it. An announcement will be forthcoming regarding the rollout at Pinnacle Mountain and another Trackchair will be housed at Hobb State Park-Conservation Area once trail improvements are completed.

Keep Arkansas Beautiful

McKenzie McMath-Coronel, Director of Keep Arkansas Beautiful (KAB), explained that KAB receives 1% of the 1/8 percent conservation tax which is about \$1M per year. The KAB team operates on a fixed

budget and doesn't receive any general revenue. The team is housed at the Central Office in Little Rock but works with 13 affiliates around the state.

KAB supports Arkansas' Natural State Initiative by leveraging the state's image, enhancing quality of life, building intentional partnerships and expanding education throughout youth. The team is in the process of being integrated into the State Parks Division and is currently undergoing rebranding efforts with CJRW. KAB supports education in the classroom that helps students to learn about natural stewardship, encourage outdoor recreation, to build a volunteer base and offer students the experience in participating in initiatives across the state. KAB is aligned with the LEARNS act which requires that all students complete 75 hours of Service-Learning to graduate from high school.

The thread that holds everything together is eco-restoration, defined as "practical, community driven projects that are hands on with the ultimate goal of bettering and improving natural spaces." KAB is best known for encouraging Arkansans to organize cleanups in their local communities. KAB provides the materials that groups need to make the clean-ups successful, including gloves, trash bags, t-shirts, safety vests and stickers. There were just over 23K volunteers in 2023 gathering over 636 tons of trash and for the 2nd consecutive year in a row all 75 Arkansas counties have participated in both the spring and fall clean-up seasons. Objectives for FY25 include getting 25K volunteers, having more student volunteers and cross-cultural engagement and more wildflower plantings.

State Parks provide a unique community hub where students, outdoor enthusiasts and everyday Arkansans across demographics can come and participate in KAB activities without having to organize the events themselves. State Parks give people trusted places to go and enjoy participating in clean-up events.

KAB has partnered with ARDOT in the past on Operation Wildflower and this relationship is being resumed. The KAB Foundation, a non-profit, purchases seeds for companies who want to sponsor stretches of highway and lower the price of buy-in due to the Foundation being a non-profit. Starting in 2025, smaller seed packets will be offered to clean-up organizers as well. When organizers sign up on the website for a cleanup, they may select what kind of supplies they need and seed packets will be an option. A guidebook for how/when/where to plant is in the works as well, to track the success of the plantings. This effort supports pollinators, natural environment, beautification and giving back to the community.

KAB is involved in the Arkansas Recycling Coalition and many recycling initiatives statewide. Recycling is a complex topic and the issues around it is different from region to region. KAB hopes to empower Arkansans through education, aiding in the establishment of comprehensive recycling options, and promoting and supporting towns with local recycling efforts. KAB reaches out to make relationships with communities and push conversations forward.

KAB has bilingual education materials that are up to state standards of literacy, social studies, science, career and technical education. Materials are aimed at helping youth develop good habits, environmental stewardship and encourage youth to take initiative and ownership of their environment. Materials are free of charge and are distributed regularly to groups like Arkansas Children's Hospital, Game & Fish and the Little Rock Zoo, as well as to individuals and libraries. All these educational materials are created in partnership with groups like Game & Fish, Department of Education and PBS.

Grants have been reorganized for 2025. Going forward, KAB will offer 16 KAB Mission Grants in the amount of \$2500 which will go to support community projects. The grants are available for affiliates and large groups to support recycling events. A total of \$40K is allocated towards these grants.

The Keep America Beautiful State Conference will be held in Little Rock in July 2025. This conference is an opportunity to show off Arkansas to the rest of the country. Participants will be taken to view a trash boom on Fourche Creek that KAB helped fund via a grant, and will tour different local facilities such as the high-tech Entergy building.

Arkansas Broadcasters Association – Partnership Grant Agreement *

Jeff King requested approval for a renewal of a long-term relationship with the Arkansas Broadcasters Association.

Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Herman Davis – City of Manila – Memorandum of Agreement *

King requested approval for a maintenance agreement for Herman Davis State Park. State Parks made an agreement with the City of Manila in 1977 for \$100 a month for the city to upkeep the park. The agreement was updated to \$250 a month in 2004. The new agreement settles upon \$5,000 per year and Arkansas State Parks assumes responsibility for any capital improvements such as sprinkler system improvements using major maintenance budget.

Randy Wolfinbarger made a motion to approve. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

Petit Jean – Master Recreation Plan *

King requested approval for a new master recreation plan for Petit Jean State Park which centers around how users traverse the park, how to steward resources, and how to continue to attract new users to the park and have new recreational offerings at the park.

Austin Albers made a motion to approve. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Various State Parks – Property Acquisition Final Approvals per A.C.A. § 22-4-106 *

Deputy Director King requested approval for the last step for several property acquisitions. These acquisitions have already been brought before the Commission, then approved by the Governor, and the Legislative Council. The last step is to gain final approval from this Commission for the purchase. The acquisitions include 80 acres at Devil's Den State Park, 3 properties at Historic Washington State Park, a donation at Crowley's Ridge State Park and a donation at Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area by Friends of Hobbs.

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

Jacksonport State Park – Certificate of Appreciation – Sandra Jones *

Deputy Director King requested approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for 31 years of service for Sandra Jones, Office Assistant at Jacksonport State Park.

Austin Albers made a motion to approve. Randy Wolfinbarger seconded, and the motion carried.

Crater of Diamonds State Park – Property Removal Request, Equipment Shed *

Deputy Director King requested approval for removal of the old equipment shed at Crater of Diamonds State Park. The structure is being demolished and will be replaced by a new equipment shed.

Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

2025 Meeting Dates *

Secretary Shea Lewis requested approval for a proposed SPRTC meeting schedule for 2025.

Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

2025 Vice Chair *

Randy Wolfinbarger, on behalf of the nominating committee, requested approval of Austin Albers as Vice Chair for 2025.

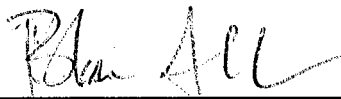
Mike Gibson made a motion to approve. Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.

Chairman Shamburger expressed that he enjoyed serving as the Chairman this year and thanked the Commissioners whose terms expire in January (Weston Lewey and Mike Gibson) for their time and tenure.

There was no public comment.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Chairman Shamburger at 11:19 a.m.

I acknowledge these minutes are approved:



1/16/2025

Blair Allen, Chair

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