

State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission
Basin Park Hotel, Eureka Springs
October 19, 2023, 9:00 a.m.
APPROVED 11/16/2023

Commissioners Present

Randy Wolfenbarger, Chair
Jim Shamburger, Vice-Chair
Mike Wilson
Austin Albers
Rebecca Baker
Ron Gossage
Kalene Griffith
Mike Gibson
Westen Lewey
Eric Jackson
Bob Connell

Commissioners Absent

Molly Houseworth-Jackson
Dr. Trey Berry
Blair Allen
Shash Goyal

Department Staff

Shea Lewis, ADPHT Secretary, State Parks Director
Elaine Lienhart, ADPHT Executive Assistant
Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff
Jami Fisher, ADPHT CFO
Justin Rotton, ADPHT Deputy Chief of Communications
Marty Ryall, Director, Division of Arkansas Heritage
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Director, Tourism via Zoom
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue Operations Manager, Arkansas State Parks

CJRW

Darin Gray
Jessica Frahm
Jill Joslin
Blake Bowlin
Madison Watkins

Miles Media

Susie Kardas

Guests

Gary Jones, Gary Jones Video
Chris & David Jones
Bill Ott
Jack Moyer, Basin Hotel
Richard Boyes
Mayor Butch Berry

Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Randy Wolfinbarger. Elaine Lienhart called the roll. Chair Wolfinbarger welcomed and recognized guests and thanked the Jack Moyer & the Basin Park Hotel, Eureka Springs A&P, VIP Tours, LeStick Nouveau, Thorncrown Chapel & Opera in the Ozarks. Mayor Butch Berry gave a brief history of the Springs and thanked the Commission for visiting Eureka Springs.

Approval of Agenda

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

Weston Lewey made a motion to approve the agenda. Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of September 2023 Minutes

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

Austin Albers made a motion to approve the minutes. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Shea Lewis congratulated the four employees recognized at the Arkansas Top 100 Women of Impact, including Suzanne Grobmyer, Katherine Andrews, Quantia Fletcher, and Colbie Jones.

Lewis reported on the annual Park Superintendents Conference held at Mount Magazine State Park. This was the 71st event and the first one a Governor attended and spoke. It was a successful and meaningful time for the Arkansas State Parks staff.

Secretary Lewis and Commissioner Mike Wilson met with the team at the Arkansas Hospitality Association about The Natural State Golf Trail. They discussed follow-through on ideas for the support, marketing and promotion of the trail.

Lewis reminded those in attendance that we are less than six months away from the Great North American Eclipse on April 8, 2024. Members of the Governor's Cabinet have been working together to identify what steps need to be taken to prepare and support the event. He reported that they are starting to see large amounts of information coming in from communities about events, activities, plans and overall awareness. Arkansas.com will be the hub for information for the eclipse.

November 1 will be John H. Johnson Day at Delta Heritage Trail State Park in Arkansas City. There will be a dedication event.

On Monday, October 23 at 10:00 a.m. a press conference will be held at the Old Statehouse to release the 2022 Tourism Economic Impact Report.

FINANCIAL REPORT – September 30, 2023

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2024 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the three-month period ending September 30, 2023.

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$9,761,395 an increase of 6.17%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$725,526 an increase of 82.28%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$11,857,992 an increase of 1.38%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$7,623,427 a decrease of 4.97%

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$28,831,832 an increase of 24.57%
- Tourism Division - \$3,567,285 an increase of 29.90%
- War Memorial - \$701,205 an increase of 31.99%
- Department Total - \$33,100,322 an increase of 25.27%

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

Mike Wilson made a motion to approve the financials; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Kristine Puckett invited the commissioners to attend the press conference to unveil the 2022 Tourism Economic Impact Report. She reported that the brand refresh is rolling out and can be viewed in the new ads that will drop in November. She mentioned that staff is in the final stages of proofing and editing the new Cycling Guide that will be released in November and the Arkansas Travel Guide which is scheduled for a December release.

Some of the upcoming events the Tourism Division staff are planning include the Travel South International Showcase in December in Memphis which will include pre-FAM tours of Northwest Arkansas, Fort Smith, Little Rock, Dyess and Wilson before arriving in Memphis for the showcase. The Tourism team is also planning for the Southeast Tourism Society Domestic Showcase that will be hosted in Little Rock in March and will include five travel trade and media post-FAM tours in the state.

Some of the more recent events that Tourism staff have attended were the TEAMS Sports Conference and Expo in Florida with six industry partners including Bentonville, Conway, Fayetteville, Little Rock, North Little Rock and Rogers. Representatives held 106 pre-scheduled appointments and sent out nearly 70 leads afterward.

In late September, members of the Welcome Center staff attended the Pilgrimage Music Festival in Tennessee and were joined by our partners at Arkansas State University Heritage Sites, representing the Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash. This was the perfect venue for them to promote their place in the Americana Music Triangle to over 60,000 attendees. Welcome Center team members also staffed a booth

at the Arkansas State Fair over the past two weeks. The highlight was when Governor Sanders stopped by the Arkansas booth.

This past week, members of our Communications team wrapped up our participation in the Brand USA Travel Week in London, where they conducted forty one-on-one appointments with international tour operators from the UK and Germany. There were over 600 attendees at the event.

The Welcome Center FAM tour in Central Arkansas was a success. The tour included visits to 26 businesses of industry partners and hosted for meals at 10 partner locations.

The dock at the Arkansas Welcome Center in Lake Village has been closed for a long time. Arkansas Department of Transportation is currently working with Arkansas Game and Fish to identify ways to replace it more sustainably.

In January, the Welcome Centers will begin a new certificate program for traveling kids to commemorate their first visit to Arkansas. These certificates will also serve as color sheets.

Puckett closed with a reminder that the Hery Award nominations will close on October 31 and encouraged the commission to nominate the leaders in our industry.

CJRW Report

Darin Gray (CJRW) introduced Jessica Frahm to provide the results of the Spring/Summer 2023 campaign. The campaign theme was “Near it all, but far away.” The key campaign objectives were to continue to target the feeder markets, to test the new opportunity markets, and to continue to strengthen the digital media support to maximize awareness through those layers of media to visitation to Arkansas through Arkansas.com. A little over \$7 million was spent on this campaign.

In paid media, impressions on digital went up 59% from this time last year. Streaming and search went up as well, but social media increased at the largest highest rate. These results confirmed that it is worth the money to continue advertising to the opportunity markets to gain more information on how effective these advertisements are going to be in the future by monitoring year-over-year results to increase brand awareness.

State Parks Division

Parks Committee Report

Jim Shamburger explained that a big part of the Parks Committee meeting was spent talking about the proposed change of the reservation system, property management system (PMS) and point of sale system (POS) for the Arkansas State Parks system. Staff has worked hard and gone through a detailed process to put together a presentation about the new system, named Itinio. Several other state parks (TN, AL, MS, SC) use Itinio and their staff are happy with the system. The Committee recommended moving forward and getting the full commission to vote on moving to Itinio system.

Jim Shamburger made a motion to recommend the Itinio reservation system; Bob Connell seconded and the motion carried.

Director's Report

Deputy Director Jeff King reported on the availability of the Centennial Status Report in a digital format for commissioners. The report has been added to the Box Link.

King reported that the annual Park Superintendent's Conference was held at Mount Magazine State Park from September 26-28. It was great to have Governor's office support at the conference. Governor Sanders and her family attended and the First Gentleman was able to celebrate the completion of Club 52, with visits to all state parks. King added that annual awards were presented to park superintendents from each region during the conference. The regional supervisors recognized them for outstanding service for the previous year. They included:

- Region 1 - Cheryl Vincent
- Region 2 – Monica Fuller
- Region 3 – Mary Buchman
- Region 4 – Davy Ashcraft
- Region 5 – Dru Edmonds

King reported that on November 1, a dedication event will be held for the John H. Johnson Commemorative Plaza at Delta Heritage Trail State Park in Arkansas City. Commissioners are invited to the dedication event, which will be held at 10 AM.

King and Secretary Lewis will provide a presentation to the Oklahoma Legislature on October 23. Oklahoma State Parks are working through an interim study process to find dedicated funding for their state parks system.

Agreements

Pinnacle Mountain – New Visitor Center Concession Lease Agreement *

Per Mr. King, the Visitor Center building is substantially complete, and a concession agreement has been drafted for the new visitor center's food and beverage operations; however, terms of the concession lease agreement have not been finalized. It is anticipated that a special meeting of the commission will be needed to finalize a concession lease agreement for this facility. Therefore, this approval item has been tabled for a future meeting.

Systemwide – Accessibility Across Arkansas Memorandum of Agreement *

Mr. King presented a MOA agreement for establishing a Trackchair program in Arkansas State Parks in conjunction with the non-profit Accessibility Across Arkansas. Terms of the agreement establish an initial pilot program for purchase of a Trackchair and placement of that equipment at Logoly State Park. Discussion ensued.

Rebecca Baker made a motion to approve; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

Park Policies, Rules & Directives A. Systemwide – Staff Recommendation Regarding the annual (CY24) Schedule of State Park Rates (Review Only – Final Rates to be Presented for Approval at the November Meeting)

Jim Shamburger noted the Parks Committee's review of this agenda item during the previous day's meeting and recommended approval. Jeannine Bruner added a memo to the box showing that Smith Travel Research is forecasting a 3% increase in ADR and 1% increase in occupancy moving forward in CY2024. Rate recommendations follow these trends and anticipate this growth level for 2024. The memo presented

numbers on inflation, which continues to affect pricing and expenses. Final schedule of state park rates will be presented for SPRTC approval during the regularly scheduled November meeting.

Real Estate Actions

Mount Nebo – Property Disposal 22-4-108 Initial Approval *

Jeff King presented the Commission with a request for approval of property disposal at Mount Nebo State Park to the Arkansas River Valley Amateur Radio Foundation (ARVARF). The ARVARF operates a tower on state parks property since the 1970's. The ARVARF desires to upgrade tower facilities and has worked with Senator Breanne Davis on facilitating a land transaction with Arkansas State Parks. An appraisal values the subject property at \$2,500. Discussion ensued.

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

Withrow Springs – Property Exchange 22-4-108 Initial Approval *

King presented a second land item for consideration. A property exchange with the Arkansas Department of Transportation was proposed for 1.6 acres of property at Withrow Springs State Park. Discussion ensued.

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

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

There were no public comments.

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

Kalene Griffith made the motion to adjourn; Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 11:12 p.m.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:

/S/ Randy Wolfinbarger 11/16/2023
Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair