

**STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION**  
**Queen Wilhelmina State Park**  
**October 17, 2024, 8:30 AM**  
**APPROVED NOVEMBER 21, 2024**

**Commissioners Present**

Jim Shamburger, Chair  
Blair Allen, Vice-Chair  
Bob Connell  
Kalene Griffith  
Shash Goyal  
Eric Jackson  
Molly Houseworth Jackson  
Weston Lewey  
Mike Wilson

**Commissioners Absent**

Austin Albers  
Randy Wolfinbarger  
Rebecca Baker  
Mike Gibson  
Gary Vernon

**Staff Present**

Shea Lewis, Secretary, ADPHT  
Suzanne Grobmyer, Chief of Staff, ADPHT  
Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, Arkansas Tourism  
Clay Stone, ADPHT General Counsel  
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant, ADPHT  
Jami Fisher, Chief Financial Officer, ADPHT  
Susie Cowan, Industry Relations Manager, Tourism  
Kori Bull, Project Coordinator, Tourism  
April Kiser, Deputy Chief of Communications  
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Jeannine Bruner, Revenue & Sales Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Chris Meyers, Planning and Development Manager, Arkansas State Parks  
Darin Mitchell, Information & Innovation Manager  
Mike Wilson, Assistant Director  
Leah DiPietro, Tourism Deputy Director, Tourism

**CJRW**

Darin Gray  
Jill Joslin  
Wade McCune  
Katherine Vasilos

**MMGY**

**Guests**

Bill Barnes, Mountain Harbor / Tri- Pennant  
Alexis Hampo, Visit Hot Springs  
Kevin Sexton, Hot Springs Village  
Wayne Smith, Oaklawn  
Bill Solider, Visit Hot Springs

### **Welcome and Call to Order**

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 8:31 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. The Chair thanked Kevin Sexton with Hot Springs Village and Pastor Ronny Gilmore of First Assembly of God, Hot Springs Village, for their participation and investment in the Commission's visit. He also thanked Oaklawn Racing Casino Resort for hosting the meeting.

### **Approval of Agenda**

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**Shash Goyal made the motion to approve the agenda; Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Approval of September 2024 Minutes**

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

**Eric Jackson made the motion to approve the minutes; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Secretary's Report**

Shea Lewis, ADPHT Secretary, provided the following updates:

The listening session with MMGY at September's meeting was productive. He thanked the Commission for their contributions.

ADPHT leadership met with members of the Arkansas Department of Transportation about specific components of the welcome centers, HWY 600 roads and highway signs for department sites. It was a positive and open conversation regarding their partnership.

The Arkansas 250 Commission continues with positive momentum. Four committees have been formed: education, events, finance and outreach. Lewis and Heritage Director Marty Ryall met with the America 250 Commission and received seed money. A logo has been designed and a communications plan is forthcoming. The celebration will last from July 4, 2025, to July 4, 2026. The department aims to collaborate with Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art on an exhibit and elevate it to the national level.

The department is currently reviewing budget appropriations, which will be examined during the January session. The leadership team has been working closely with Parks and Heritage sites. Full budgets will be presented for approval after the beginning of the year.

A cycling industry mixer is upcoming in Bentonville; Kalene Griffith, Tom Walton and First Gentleman Bryan Sanders will speak.

Natural State Day at the Capitol is scheduled for February 4, 2025. Katherine Andrews has collaborated with the Governor's Office to promote outdoor recreation and tourism throughout the state. The department plans to host an event on the Capitol steps to highlight the industry to the legislators while they are in session. Shamburger asked if a Resolution would be needed from the SPRTC. Secretary Lewis noted that Andrews is leading these efforts, but a Resolution is a good idea.

## **FINANCIAL REPORT – September 30, 2024**

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2025 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the one (3) month period ending September 30, 2024.

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$9,607,103 a decrease of 1.58%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$629,613 a decrease of 13.22%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$12,085,065 an increase of 1.91%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$7,756,602 an increase of 1.75%

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$28,041,155 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.

**Kalene Griffith made the motion to approve the financial report; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **TOURISM DIVISION**

### **Director's Report**

Chairman Shamburger gave the Ad Committee report. The committee unanimously voted to provide a Resolution or letter in support of the continuation of the Advertising & Promotion Tax in Eureka Springs. After extensive deliberation on best practices, it was unanimously decided that a Resolution stating how tourism has positively impacted Carroll County and Arkansas is to be drafted by Chairman Shamburger and distributed to the mayor of Eureka Springs, the head of the Eureka Springs Advertising & Promotion Commission and Commissioner Randy Wolfinbarger.

**Eric Jackson made the motion to create a resolution from the Commission including tourism economic impact numbers for Carroll County in support of tourism in Eureka Springs and the State of Arkansas, without taking a stand on an election, to be sent to Commissioner Randy Wolfinbarger, the Eureka Springs Mayor and the head of Eureka Springs A&P; Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion passed.**

Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, began the director's report by sharing that the team is working to identify methods to define real time, shareable data.

Thomas stated that industry partners have given positive feedback regarding the advertising co-ops and travel guide transitions. She thanked Kevin Sexton of Hot Springs Village for hosting the commission reception and dinner.

Thomas gave an update on the partnership with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission on relocation promotion. The strategy is shifting to a public relations strategy, to combat negative media with positive editorials.

Thomas presented the Commission with printed copies of the Economic Impact Report, stating that the report will be rolled out to the public following the meeting. The overall economic impact was \$9.9B in tourism visitor spending in the state, a 7.5% increase over 2022. This generated \$574M in state taxes. The state saw 50.7M visitors, a 17.1% increase over 2022. \$20.7M was invested into media spend, resulting in an advertising impact of 4.6M hotel searches, 311K hotel bookings and \$68.1M in hotel revenue. County data is available in the report.

Thomas shared an update on the 2025 Governor's Conference on Tourism. The Hall of Fame and Henry Awards are being combined in an effort to retain attendance throughout the conference. The department is reviewing slight updates to the categories. One change is renaming the Rising Star Award to the Individual Innovation Award, to reduce the ambiguity on age and career length. Nominations are opening in the following week. Thomas requested that for the Tourism Person of the Year award, nominations be limited to individuals who are making a significant, real-time impact.

Thomas reported that a social media manager position has been posted as the department looks to build project-oriented teams to run alongside the CJRW team. A tourism staff conference focused on *Unreasonable Hospitality* took place in September.

## **STATE PARKS DIVISION**

### **Director's Report/Parks Committee Report**

Jeff King, Deputy Director, provided highlights to the financial report:

- Occupancy: Arkansas State Parks saw a drop year-over-year in occupancy on almost all overnight amenities for September in particular. Camping was down 4.9%, cabins down 6.4% and lodges were down 7.3%.
- War Memorial Stadium: Attendance for the Razorback game was down from 44,397 in 2023 to 40,127 in 2024. This year's game was on a Thursday night versus a Saturday night and attendance was down 10%. Revenue was down 13%. People are more likely to tailgate on a Saturday versus a Thursday, so reserve tailgating was down \$25,935 (34%). Beer sales were down \$14,724 (10%). New this year, the stadium provided three water refill stations in the concourse; that impacted some of the concession numbers.
- Salt Bowl attendance was also down. Attendance in 2023 was 20,150 and attendance in 2024 was 18,300, down 9%. One reason for the lower attendance was the schools decided not to sell tickets at the game this year, they only sold pre-sale tickets. (This decision was made by the administration and staff at the schools as a way to deter issues seen during previous years' games.)
- Chris Myers and the Planning & Development team are going to start tracking lost revenue when facilities undergo upgrades. The financials reflect that Lake Catherine is down and this is due to the marina being closed for renovations. Ten Devil's Den cabins are offline for renovations and the Lake Chicot bathhouse and campgrounds have been demolished ahead of renovations/rebuilding. All of this will affect revenue, but ultimately there will be a return on investment once the renovations are complete.



The first 10 Electric Vehicle Charging Stations have been installed: six at Mount Nebo State Park and four at DeGray Lake Resort State Park. Arkansas State Parks partnered with Entergy Arkansas and Adopt-a-Charger. A Memorandum of Agreement was signed, and the EV Charging Stations were provided free of charge. Parks will charge a small use fee to recover electricity costs. All the chargers are level 2 Tesla chargers that will work on any vehicle. Guests can get about 25 miles of charge in an hour.

King gave a brief update on the Petit Jean Airport concession. A prospectus went out in late summer and two people responded. Both respondents were interviewed and a recommendation was provided to Secretary Lewis, which was approved in September. State Parks is working through the lease terms with Milla Air, LLC to be the new airport operator. State Parks is excited about this opportunity to revitalize the airport. The lease agreement will be presented to SPRTC during the November meeting for review and approval.

The Capitol City Enduro is a project that Assistant Director Mike Wilson took the lead on. The event will take place October 26-27 at Pinnacle Mountain State Park and is part of a four-race series in Arkansas. A Special Use Permit was signed by the event organizer, the Ozark Foundation, who is coordinating with the City of Little Rock and using Stucky Field as their primary base. The event will use all the Monument Trails at Pinnacle Mountain State Park as well as some city trails.

The Trails at Mena Project working group includes SE Group (Snow Engineering out of Colorado). State Parks began bi-weekly consulting meetings with them in mid-August. The working group will meet at Queen Wilhelmina State Park next week. The group will be looking at how to utilize the base area in the most effective way, an infrastructure team, trails team, base development architectural team, resource and NEPA client's team and a business development envisioning team. There are some people on all the teams and others who specialize and are only on one or two teams. All the teams will take part in next week's meeting. There will be some on-site break outs to brainstorm and move the project forward. The NEPA project is still pending but the team is being proactive awaiting the final decision.

Several members of the Arkansas State Parks leadership team will be in Nebraska next week for the Midwest State Park Executive Committee (MWSPEC) Conference to learn more about some of the Midwest State Park partners. The following week, Deputy Director King will attend the Association of Southern State Park Directors (ASSPD) in Mississippi with the other half of the leadership team.

In addition to the above conferences, the annual Maintenance Expo will be held at DeGray Lake Resort State Park October 29-31, and the Park Superintendent's Conference will be held at DeGray Lake Resort State Park November 5-7. An awards presentation will be held on the evening of November 6.

The Park Interpreter's Conference will be held at Mount Magazine State Park November 18-19.

King asked that the Commissioners mark their calendars with these events and let him know if they would like to attend or need lodging.

The go live date for the Itinio/Brandt POS/PMS System is November 12. The Itinio/Brandt team will be at the Superintendent's Conference to share a test/go live in advance of the actual rollout to the public. Arkansas State Parks attended the legislative PEER Subcommittee earlier this week to request a

cash appropriation increase to pay for the system. It was originally in last fiscal year's budget, however, since the initial June rollout date was missed, a payment is being made on it after the go live.

State Parks has been working on a law enforcement assessment for several years. Ed Thomas and Darin Mitchell completed the assessment and brought in all the classification metrics in February 2024. This info helped identify where officers are most needed. State Parks is realigning and will no longer have administrative law enforcement officers. Future Superintendents will not be Law Enforcement officers; they will be park managers. This change ensures that one side of our organization is focused on law enforcement and emergency management. A deadline of June 30, 2027, was established for this change, giving people an opportunity to decide which side of the organization they have a passion for. This change will reduce the number of law enforcement employees and the cost for law enforcement vehicles and equipment.

**Certificate of Appreciation – B.T. Jones, Petit Jean State Park \***

Jeff King requested approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for B.T. Jones, who served 19 years with Petit Jean State Park as an interpreter.

**Eric Jackson made a motion to approve. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Policies, Rules & Directives**

**Systemwide – Policy Statement 2000 – Rates for Calendar Year 2025 \***

Jeannine Bruner, Manager Revenue & Sales, thanked everyone for providing recommendations for the rate changes that were presented at last month's Parks' Committee. The recommendations are moderate and conservative in nature and are geared towards leisure and medium income travelers. Occupancy trends are going down slightly. State Parks primarily caters to leisure travelers and Parks want to make sure to get the value to that leisure traveler and moderate-income persons as well. Where occupancy allowed, recommendations went a little higher. For example, occupancy is trending up in lodges and group lodging is trending up.

**Shash Goyal made a motion to approve. Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Real Estate**

**Pinnacle Mountain – Use Permit Agreement Amendment – Central Arkansas Water for the Ouachita Trail \***

Darin Mitchell, Manager Information & Innovation, asked for approval for an amendment to a Use Permit Agreement that's been in place since 2004 for management of a portion of the Ouachita Trail from Pinnacle Mountain to Highway 10. The original agreement was scheduled to expire in 2029 but, Central Arkansas Water (CAW) wanted to align this agreement's expiration with other agreements they have with Arkansas State Parks. Also, the original agreement allowed Arkansas State Parks to have primitive campsites through CAW's watershed, but CAW has finalized a new Recreation Management Plan for the lake and proposed enhanced overnight experience, including some utilities and more defined camping areas. Arkansas State Parks would no longer be responsible for maintenance of overnight accommodations along the trail; CAW would assume responsibility. The amendment will offer an enhanced experience for backpackers/campers along the trail.

**Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Petit Jean – Use Permit Agreement – Roman Holiday, LLC \***

Mitchell explained that this agreement has been in place and consists of private property access through State Park property. The property changed hands recently, so this is an approval of an agreement with the current property owner.

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

**Mount Nebo – Utility Easement - Entergy \***

Mitchell asked for approval for a utility easement at Mount Nebo State Park to a land-locked parcel of property.

**Weston Lewey made a motion to approve. Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Lake Catherine – Property Removal Request – Storage Building \***

Mitchell requested approval for the removal of an unneeded storage building at Lake Catherine State Park.

**Eric Jackson made a motion to approve. Shash Goyal seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Village Creek – Property Removal Request - Restroom \***

Mitchell asked for approval for the removal of the tennis court bathroom at Village Creek State Park for a capital improvement project which will renovate the existing tennis and basketball courts into a new tennis court, four pickleball courts and a full-size basketball court.

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

**Planning & Development**

**Historic Washington – Memorandum of Agreement – Division of Arkansas Heritage for Presbyterian Church & Stuart-Smith Properties \***

Chris Myers, Planning & Development Manager, requested approval of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Arkansas State Parks and Arkansas Heritage for two properties that Heritage purchased at Historic Washington State Park. The MOA gives State Parks use of the facilities and State Parks will maintain the facilities on a day-to-day basis. Major maintenance and capital improvements would be funded through Arkansas Heritage but managed by State Parks.

**Mike Wilson made a motion to approve. Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion carried.**

**Petit Jean – Master Recreation Plan**

Myers stated the Petit Jean Master Recreation Plan is being held for future consideration. The plan needs finetuning and will be presented to this Commission soon.

**CIP Quarterly Report**

Chris Myers explained the quarterly CIP report is informational. As of the end of September, State Parks maintained 41 open Methods of Finance (MOF) for design, construction and property acquisition efforts of the CIP, with approximately \$104 million of prior encumbered funds, over \$34 million funds spent on open MOFs and an open MOF balance of approximately \$70 million.

Through the first quarter of FY24 three MOFs were closed, totaling \$2,977,692.54. Since the passage of Amendment 75, Arkansas State Parks has utilized approximately \$240,512,891 million to complete system-wide improvements with ASP’s apportionment of the 1/8<sup>th</sup> Cent Conservation revenue.

**MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING**

Shamburger asked for a nominating committee with the last two chairs, Eric Jackson and Randy Wolfinbarger, to provide nominations for the next year’s chair and vice chair, with a recommendation to be made at the November meeting.

It was shared that the Economic Impact Study will be distributed to the public and every legislator. Commissioner Goyal asked if a legislative reception could be hosted to tell the legislative body the importance of the tourism industry. Thomas recommended looking into combining it with an activity such as the Natural State Day at the Capitol. Commissioner Griffith asked if digital infographics could be provided. Thomas explained that efforts were in place for the creation of infographics with overall numbers and county results that could easily be shared via social media.

Public comment: Bill Barnes extended his compliments and appreciation to the commission for taking a stand on Eureka Springs and the importance of the tourism industry.

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Shamburger at 10:46 a.m.

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**I acknowledge these minutes are approved:**

  
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Jim Shamburger, Chair

**11/21/2024**