

**State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission**  
**Statehouse Convention Center, Little Rock**  
**September 20, 2023, 9:00 a.m.**  
**APPROVED 10/19/2023**

**Commissioners Present**

Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair  
Blair Allen  
Austin Albers  
Trey Berry  
Ron Gossage  
Kalene Griffith  
Mike Gibson  
Molly Houseworth-Jackson  
Westen Lewey  
Mike Wilson  
Bob Connell

**Commissioners Absent**

Eric Jackson  
Jim Shamburger  
Shash Goyal  
Rebecca Baker

**Department Staff**

Shea Lewis, ADPHT Secretary, State Parks Director  
Elaine Lienhart, ADPHT Executive Assistant  
Daniel Faulkner, ADPHT General Counsel  
Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff  
Jami Fisher, ADPHT CFO  
Shealyn Sowers, ADPHT Chief of Communications  
Justin Rotton, ADPHT Deputy Chief of Communications  
Marty Ryall, Director, Division of Arkansas Heritage  
Katherine Andrews, Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation  
Kristin Puckett, Deputy Director, Tourism  
Susie Cowan, Project Coordinator, Tourism  
Jeff King, Deputy Director, Arkansas State Parks  
Yolanda Brown, Executive Assistant Arkansas State Parks

**CJRW**

Darin Gray  
Jessica Frahm  
Dalaney Thomas  
Blake Bowlin  
Jill Joslin  
Nancy Ferrara  
Wade McCune

**Miles Media**

Susie Kardas

**Guests**

Adam Berrios, Little Rock CVB	Gary Jones, Gary Jones Video
Cole Boardman, ACDI Energy Services	Kim Krutsch, Visit Bentonville
Daniel Breen, Little Rock Public Radio	Alison Nation, Visit Bentonville
Amy Jones, Fort Smith CVB	Wes Oliver, Springdale Chamber of Commerce
Brian Clark, Inuvo	Bill Rogers, Springdale Chamber of Commerce
Tristin Cripps, Little Rock CVB	J.R. Shaw, Destination Rogers
Gina Gimberling, Little Rock CVB	Bill Solleder, Visit Hot Springs
Luke Wiggins, Destination Rogers	

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:33 a.m. by Chair Randy Wolfinbarger. Elaine Lienhart called the roll. Chair Wolfinbarger welcomed and recognized guests and thanked the LRCVB for the meeting space.

### **Approval of Agenda**

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

**Mike Wilson made a motion to approve the agenda. Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Approval of August 2023 Minutes**

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

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve the minutes. Molly Houseworth-Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **Secretary's Report**

Secretary Shea Lewis extended his appreciation to the Arkansas Economic Development's Secretary McDonald and Commissioners for their participation in the joint commission meeting round table discussion for the outdoor economy. Lewis reported that the round table was a success providing many great ideas and ways to partnership.

The search for a Tourism Director continues. The interview process has been very competitive. Suzanne Grobmyer, ADPHT Chief of Staff, continues to be a part of the process in hiring the right candidate. The team is hopeful to announce a decision soon.

Traditionally, the Economic Impact Report is released during the Arkansas Hospitality Association Convention. We are waiting for all the county data to come in. As soon as all the data has been received and updated, the report will be released during a press conference that will be scheduled at a later date.

A SPRTC Finance Committee meeting will be scheduled soon to discuss updates and ideas for recommendations to be presented to commission.

The updated branding process continues. A meeting with the Arkansas State Parks team has been held discussing ideas of how the rebranding will connect to the branding of Arkansas Tourism and Arkansas in general.

The Opportunity Zones rules have passed and are live and active. Jeff King will provide more information in the Parks Director Report.

Daniel Faulkner, ADPHT General Counsel, presented the Alcoholic Beverage Permit Rule. The rule was presented for recommendation at the May 2023 commission meeting. The wait time for public comment has passed and all public comments have been forwarded to the commissioners. There have been no changes to the original recommendations based on the public comments. No comments were pertaining to the rule language. There were a few changes submitted to the Bureau of Legislative Research. The draft presented to the Commissioners includes those changes. There was a change in rule 2B to include the Deputy Director can make recommendations due to Secretary Lewis now also serving as Director of Arkansas State Parks. The update to the rule will omit recommendations being submitted and approved by the same person. Faulkner asked that the final Amended Rule submitted to Commission, be approved.

**Weston Lewey made a motion to approve; Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **FINANCIAL REPORT – AUGUST 31, 2023**

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

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$6,477,111 an increase of 3.46%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$220,576 a decrease of 16.39%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$7,850,734 an increase of 1.78%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$5,467,999 an increase of 9.88%

FY 2024 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$18,747,701 an increase of 18.34%
- Tourism Division - \$3,206,970 an increase of 34.03%
- War Memorial - \$354,394 an increase of 19.72%
- Department Total - \$22,309,065 an increase of 20.39%

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

**Kalene Griffith made a motion to approve the financials; Austin Albers seconded, and the motion carried.**

## **State Parks Division**

### **Director's Report**

Jeff King, Deputy Director, presented the Director's Report for the Parks Division.

Jeff King provided a 2023 Memorandum Labor Weekend Review. The memorandum provided a year-over-year comparison for the 2023 Labor Day Weekend. The dates reviewed were Friday, September 1, 2023, through Sunday, September 3, 2023, versus Friday, September 2, 2022, through Sunday, September 4, 2022. 4,781 unit nights for camping, lodge rooms, bed & breakfast rooms, cabins, and unique lodging were consumed in 2023. This is a decrease of four hundred thirty-five (435) unit nights from the prior year.

Overall occupancy for the three nights was 71.43%, which is a decrease of 6.09 points from the prior year. Occupancy declines were experienced in all accommodation types except lodge rooms. \$289,182 in unit revenue was produced for camping, lodge rooms, bed & breakfast rooms, cabins, and unique lodging units in 2023. This is an increase of \$6,458 over the prior year's revenues. Average Daily Rate (ADR) increased \$6.29 over prior year and RevPAR grew \$1.19.

The Dynamic Pricing Report was reviewed and approved by Legislative Council on September 12, 2023.

The CY2024 Fees and Rates plan will be presented at the October 19, 2023, Commission meeting.

The ASP Annual Superintendent's Conference to be held at Mount Magazine State Park, September 26-28, 2023. The Governor and the First Gentleman are expected to attend the conference on September 27, 2023, for dinner and to share remarks with the park superintendents.

The Arkansas State Parks Centennial Status report was presented. The report is a snapshot of the history of Arkansas State Parks. It depicts where Arkansas State Parks stand today as a division. The report will serve as a resource and reference guide. The guide provides a fact sheet for each Arkansas State Park.

The Pinnacle Mountain's Visitor's Center is very close to completion. Exhibit installations began early during the week. All exhibit installations are expected to be completed October 1, 2023, with a soft opening planned for October 23, 2023.

Arkansas State Parks has entered into a Proof of Concept with Whenever Watersports. The pilot will be for one year, placing kayaking "vending machines" at Pinnacle, Petit Jean, Mississippi River, and White Oak Lake State Parks.

Arkansas State Parks will have a new webpage that will be hosted on the Office of Outdoor Recreation website. This page will include Arkansas State Parks concessions opportunities for the new Economic Opportunity Zones.

Arkansas State Parks hosted Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation-Virginia State Parks, August 31 - September 1, 2023, at Lake Fort Smith, Hobbs and Devil's Den State Parks.

King attended the 2023 National Association of State Parks Directors Annual Conference in South Lake Tahoe, NV, with Secretary Lewis. There were 44 state park systems represented at the conference, along with representatives from Canada. The conference included vendors, exhibits, and provided essential resources for creating connections with state parks colleagues from across the nation.

A request for property for structure removal was presented by King. Superintendent Residence (**Building No. 61.47/AASIS No. 120006609**) is 2,600 square foot four (4) bedroom, two and one half (2.5) bath, two car garage brick structure on concrete slab with dry wall and wood paneling interior walls.

The building is located on a one-acre residential lot. Per the 2000 acquisition appraisal, the residence was estimated at 15-20 years old when acquired. The residence requires repairs exceeding the value of the structure, so it has been deemed more cost effective to remove the structure and build a new residence at the site.

**Bob Connell made a motion to approve; Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.**

A Certificate of Appreciation was presented by King for Tom Stolarz who will be retiring as the Arkansas State Parks Region 1 Manager at the end of October, after more than 41 years of service.

**Ron Gossage made a motion to approve; Trey Berry seconded, and the motion carried.**

Commissioner Blair Allen requested a cost per occupied room be provided in the upcoming presentation of pricing.

## **TOURISM DIVISION**

### **Director's Report**

The Tourism report was presented by Deputy Director, Kristine Puckett.

Puckett shared that the annual meeting of the Regional Tourist Associations was held at the ADPHT central office in Little Rock on August 24. Representatives from each association attended. Puckett and Secretary Lewis attended the biannual meeting of the Arkansas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus. The annual Tourism Staff Conference was held at Queen Wilhelmina State Park. It was a productive time that included instruction, focus on department core values and how they are represented in each position's job tasks, and a guided walking tour of downtown Mena to better familiarize staff with the tourism attractions of the town.

Tourism staff are preparing for the upcoming Welcome Center FAM tour which will focus on central Arkansas. Upcoming trade shows include TEAMS, Brand USA Travel Week, and the Arkansas State Fair. National media mentions this month include Eureka Springs being listed as one of Southern Living's best places to retire and Outside Magazine naming the Buffalo National River one of the ten best places to view the Great North American Eclipse in 2024.

Governor's Conference on Tourism host city bid presentations for 2025, 2026, 2027 were presented by Bentonville, Fort Smith, Little Rock, Rogers, and Springdale.

**Austin Albers made a motion for the Governor's Conference on Tourism to be held in Bentonville in 2025, Little Rock in 2026 and Rogers in 2027; Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.**

### **MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING**

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

**Trey Berry made the motion to adjourn; Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.**

The meeting adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

**###**

**I acknowledge these minutes are approved:**

/s/ Randy Wolfinbarger                      10/19/2023  
**Randy Wolfinbarger, Chair**