

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Queen Wilhelmina State Park
September 19, 2024, 8:30 AM
APPROVED OCTOBER 17, 2024

Commissioners Present

Jim Shamburger, Chair
Gary Vernon
Eric Jackson
Randy Wolfinbarger
Shash Goyal
Kalene Griffith
Rebecca Baker
Mike Wilson
Molly Houseworth
Bob Connell

Commissioners Absent

Blair Allen, Vice-Chair
Mike Gibson
Austin Albers
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
Jami Fisher, Chief Financial Officer, ADPHT
Susie Cowan, Industry Relations Manager, Tourism
Britney Young, Tourism Marketing & Development
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
John Stewart, Operations Manager, Arkansas State Parks
Becky Bariola, Region 5 Supervisor, Arkansas State Parks
Casey Hines, Assistant Superintendent, Queen Wilhelmina SP

CJRW

Darin Gray
Katherine Vasilos
Wade McCune

MMGY

Marie-Josée (MJ) Legault
John Entwisle

Guests

Mitchell Allen, Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation

Welcome and Call to Order

Chair Jim Shamburger called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. Elaine Lienhart called roll. Casey Hines, Assistant Superintendent of Queen Wilhelmina State Park welcomed everyone to the Park. The Chair thanked Visit Mena, The Ouachitas, Little Italy and the band Shades of Gray for their participation and investment in the SPRTC's visit. Chair Shamburger acknowledged Queen Wilhelmina State Park staff for hosting.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Shamburger asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

Shash Goyal made the motion to approve the agenda; Kalene Griffith seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of August 2024 Minutes

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

Rebecca Baker made the motion to approve the minutes; Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT – August 31, 2024

Chief Fiscal Officer Jami Fisher presented the FY 2025 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the one (2) month period ending August 31, 2024.

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$6,512,029 a decrease of .54%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$113,727 an increase of 48.44%
- 1/8 Cent Conservation Tax Revenue - \$8,061,015 an increase of 2.68%
- 2% Gross Tax Collections - \$5,541,005 an increase of 1.34%

FY 2025 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$17,900,142 a decrease of 4.52%
- Tourism Division - \$3,581,606 an increase of 11.68%
- War Memorial - \$330,677 a decrease of 6.69%
- Department Total - \$21,812,426 a decrease of 2.23%

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

Eric Jackson made the motion to approve the financials; Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion carried.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Dalaney Thomas, Tourism Director, began by giving an update on the Arkansas.com website, stating that the team is approximately one month into the 12-month rebuild process. Surveys will be sent to stakeholders in the coming weeks to gain a better understanding of what is important to the industry regarding the website.

Thomas reminded the Commission of the upcoming Governor's Conference on Tourism taking place February 23-25, 2025, in Bentonville. The conference will be co-located with the Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit. Both offices have engaged with an event planner to assist in coordinating the events.

Thomas gave an update on the co-op offerings. To better align with the partners' budgeting calendars, the office is recommending rolling out programs in a tiered structure. They are also recommending moving to only one printed publication, the Arkansas Travel Guide, and finding other ways to directly reach visitors. Further details will be provided at the ad committee meeting in October.

Chairman Shamburger restated the importance of the change in number of publications and opened the floor for questions. Commissioner Wolfinbarger asked if this change would result in an increase in the number of guides printed. Thomas explained that quantities are expected to stay the same.

Commissioner Griffith inquired about the advertising rates for partners. Thomas explained that rates will not be raised for the publication and that new opportunities, such as influencer marketing and content production partnerships, will be added. Chairman Shamburger recommended that remaining questions be brought to the October ad committee meeting. Secretary Lewis added that the State Parks division will also be updating its guides.

Thomas moved to the Economic Impact Report, noting that they have received positive preliminary data from Tourism Economics. The data will be released in the upcoming weeks. Work is being done to ensure that the report is received more quickly in the future.

Thomas introduced Britney Young, the new Marketing Manager. Susie Cowan, Industry Relations Manager, gave an update on the changes being made to the Regional Tourist Association grant program. Cowan thanked leadership for allowing updates to the process to make it more efficient and effective for the Regions. General Counsel Clay Stone presented the changes for legislative review the week prior.

Thomas opened for a motion and a vote to recognize Arkansas' South as a regional association again. She noted that the funding has already been budgeted and this recognition will not require additional funding. Chairman Shamburger asked if there are rules requiring representation from every county in the region. Cowan explained that while these rules currently exist, this is a rule that will be changing. Chairman Shamburger gave the option of finding someone that did not live in the county, but could represent on behalf of the county, an exercise done in the past. Cowan is actively working to find a representative in Bradley County. Chairman Shamburger asked when the updated rules will be ready for review. Cowan's goal is to have the rules for the Commission to review by the October 2024 meeting. She reminded the commission of the 60-day public comment period after approval.

Kalene Griffith made the motion to recognize Arkansas' South as a Regional Tourist Association; Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion passed.

Secretary Lewis gave commentary on the listening sessions that were conducted by CJRW, MMGY and Origin over the past week. He stated that he was overall encouraged by these sessions and the work that is being done in the Department. He encouraged the Commission to share their thoughts and ideas. He then introduced Origin's Marie-Josée Legault (MJ).

Legault opened with sincere gratitude for the hospitality she and her team have been shown during their time in Arkansas. Legault shared that there were five recurring themes from the week of listening sessions: (1) the accessibility to nature and adventure, (2) welcoming locals, (3) most of the incredible experiences are free, (4) year-round nature and (5) variety and diversity across the state. She then turned the floor over to the Commission for an open forum discussing what differentiates Arkansas from a tourism perspective.

The Commissioners echoed these themes throughout their conversation and added the authenticity of an Arkansas experience.

STATE PARKS DIVISION

Director's Report/Parks Committee Report

Jeff King, Deputy Director, recognized the great job Casey Hines, Assistant Superintendent at Queen Wilhelmina State Park, did in preparing the facilities for the Commission meeting. He thanked Hines for filling in while the park has been without a Superintendent for several months. He also thanked the staff for their preparations for the Commission.

King provided additional highlights to the financial report presented by Jami Fisher earlier in the meeting:

- Revenue was up 10% in August due to the 5th weekend in the month as opposed to the 6% decrease we saw in July.
- Crater of Diamonds is up \$54K (9%) year-to-date as the result of the rate increase the Commission approved last year where rates went up \$2 a person.
- Village Creek was up \$18K (9%) for the year. Golf and cabins are performing well.
- Devil's Den is down 17% and it will continue to stay down due to 10 out of 17 cabins being offline for renovations. There is a second renovation phase planned for next year.

Labor Day weekend was a big weekend at many State Parks. When comparing FY23 and FY24, there was a decrease in 212-unit nights (-4.2%), all in camping. Overall occupancy was 76.6%, a decrease of 3.5%, but revenues maintained. State Parks brought in just over \$305K for the weekend, an increase of \$9400 over last year.

War Memorial Stadium hosted the Razorback vs. UABP Lions and the Salt Bowl Game leading into Labor Day weekend (September 28-29). Preparation for the games was outstanding, but an unforeseen issue with a failed water valve outside the stadium cut off part of the water supply to the press box floors (especially the media floor) during the Razorback game. Overall, the issue was corrected the next morning and was resolved before the Salt Bowl.

Deputy Director King and Secretary Lewis attended the National Association of State Park Directors Conference (NASPD) at Gulf State Park in Gulf Shores, Alabama, last week. There were just under 400 attendees including 45 State Park Directors, and a lot of exhibitors presenting everything from merchandise to reservation systems.

Updates were given on national trends that State Park systems are seeing. King attended a session that discussed how to prioritize and handle Project Management of maintenance at parks. Another working session addressed how to handle capacity in parks.

Arkansas State Parks received an award at the NASPD dinner banquet. ASP Planning & Development planner, Jacob Evans, submitted an application for a \$20K grant to help with storm damage at Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area. This is a direct cash award to help with recovery efforts.

At Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area, Memorial Day Storm damage recovery continues. Per Mark Clippinger, Superintendent at Hobbs, two more trails will open back up effective September 21,

Bashore Ridge Loop and the Dutton Hollow Loop. Both trails are multi-use for hiking, biking and equestrian activities. That makes seven more miles of trails that have been reopened in addition to what was already open.

Chris Myers, Manager of Planning & Development, provided additional updates on contracted work for Memorial Day storm damage recovery efforts:

- Rouge Trails was contracted for \$326K to clear trails and remediate damage on Karst Loop at Hobbs. (Estimated timeframe for the work is 6-8 weeks.)
- 33 miles of trails will require repairs after Karst Loop is completed. A bid package has been submitted to the trail companies.
- At Withrow Springs, State Parks contracted with a company for \$40K to clear two miles of storm damage from trails.
- At Bull Shoals, State Parks contracted with another company for \$30K to clear trails for reopening.

King stated Progressive Trail Design was awarded a contract to expand the Oak Ridge Mountain Bike Trail at Bull Shoals-White River State Park by 4.25 miles. State Parks started work on this project in early 2023 and recently received approval from the Corps of Engineers (ASP leases the property from the Corps of Engineers). Work on the expansion will start September 30 and should be completed by end of December. The project will cost \$240K.

New POS/PMS System: King stated State Parks will not meet the goal of bringing the POS/PMS systems online October 1. The date has been pushed to November 12 to realize a joint working of arkansasstateparks.com with the reservation system. State Parks is in the process of updating and “reskinning” its website. Most functionality remains the same, but there will be a new logo, new colors and new brand imagery, which is being developed by CJRW and MMGY. State Parks doesn’t want to launch something and then have to turn around and immediately update its desired look and feel.

The Itinio team will give their final presentation on the POS/PMS system at the Superintendent’s Conference the first week of November.

CY25 Rates & Fees Recommendations: Deputy Director King said the CY25 rates and fees recommendations were covered during the Parks Committee meeting. The proposal has been added to “the Box” for all Commissioners to review. If anyone has feedback or recommendations, they are asked to provide feedback or suggestions. The final draft will be presented to the full Commission for approval at the October SPRTC meeting.

Historic Washington State Park – Grave Marker Requests *

Chris Myers, Manager Planning & Development, requested approval for placement of grave markers for (3) Revolutionary War graves and (1) War of 1812 grave in the Pioneer Cemetery at Historic Washington State Park.

Mike Wilson made a motion to approve. Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.

Pinnacle Mountain State Park – Bike Fix-it Station Donation *

Myers asked for approval for the donation of a Bike Fix-it Station at the Pinnacle Mountain State Park Visitor Center. The Station is being donated by Charlie Hart with “Recycle Bikes for Kids.” Concerns

were raised about the size of the corporate sponsor's logo on the station signs. A request was made to adjust the size of the logo to make the "Recycle Bikes for Kids" the larger of the logos.

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

Final Divestment of Property Formerly Known as Old Carrollton State Park *

King requested approval for the final divestment of Old Carrollton State Park. The State Legislature had designated it as a State Park in 1959 (Act 79). The SPRTC voted to divest the park in 1975, and it was approved by the Governor. Only the 3.07-acre roadside park remains of the original property and State Parks is seeking approval to transfer the property to ARDOT pursuant to Arkansas Code §22-4-108.

Bob Connell made a motion to approve. Rebecca Baker seconded, and the motion carried.

SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation – Billy Nations, Historic Washington State Park *

Deputy Director King requested approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for 30 years of service for Billy Nations, Assistant Superintendent at Historic Washington State Park.

Shash Goyal made a motion to approve. Molly Houseworth seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Shea Lewis, ADPHT Secretary, provided the following updates:

The partnership with Commerce continues. Commerce is working with CJRW and mhp.si on a collaborative contract with the two agencies. A new program called Life Works is currently going through focus groups and will be presented to this Commission next month. The goal is to attract and retain talent. Tourism will use part of its budget for ad placement. More details to come.

ADPHT went through a website discovery for both the Tourism and State Parks websites with CJRW and MMGY. CJRW and MMGY want to define who the stakeholders are and conduct a current site analysis to identify the good and bad components of each website. The discovery will continue, and the Commission will review the concepts behind the changes to the website in the upcoming months. Arkansas.com is expected to take about a year but Arkansas State Parks won't take as long.

Secretary Lewis, Suzanne Grobmyer and Dalaney Thomas attended a meeting at Crystal Bridges to discuss the Museum's 100,000 sq. ft. expansion which is scheduled to open in the Summer of 2026. Crystal Bridges wants to partner with ADPHT in promotion of the expansion.

- The expansion will house galleries for craft and indigenous art related to Arkansas specifically.
- The museum wants to have 100K students tour the galleries in 2026.
- There will be a 14K sq. ft. temporary exhibit space, a ceramics lab, a community gathering space and expanded grounds to include a splash pad and trails outside the museum.
- The museum is working on a music festival and a content creator ambassador network that ADPHT can partner with as well.

The NEPA process for the Mena Trails Project is still in progress. A decision is expected sometime in December 2024. The momentum is moving forward and over 250 public comments, mostly positive, have been received. (79% positive for full development/10% positive for reduced/partial development.) Separate meetings have been held with various groups to fulfill partnerships and work with them on concerns.

Arkansas State Parks signed a \$1.35M contract with SE Group to complete the draft EA, manage development on the project, site analysis, concept development, predesign work and resource survey. Gravity Logic is doing the trail design and operations planning. The plan is still in a conceptual phase and SE Group will help to solidify it over the next few months. All seem to be aligning and will be ready for the Capital Project review at the beginning of the year. \$20M has been tied to this project but it won't come back to the full Commission until final decisions on where the funds will be allocated.

The Trails at Mena will include over 8,000 acres added to Queen Wilhelmina State Park, running from the edge of Rich Mountain to the City of Mena. State Parks is looking for a partnership opportunity to help fulfill the services needed for the additional territory; Katherine Andrews' team created an RFI which will go out as soon as next week to ask for feedback from the trail community, lift services and other parks related industry to help define the process forward. State Parks will collect information and make the best-informed decisions based on what is learned from the industries' subject matter experts.

A Parks Committee will be held before October SPRTC to discuss the Mena Trails Project further and what enhancements will be needed to the existing infrastructure at Queen Wilhelmina State Park.

MISCELLANEOUS/CLOSING

There were no public comments.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Chairman Shamburger at 11:05 a.m.

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I acknowledge these minutes are approved:


Jim Shamburger, Chair

10/17/2024