

MINUTES

**State Parks, Recreation & Travel Commission
Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources
Smackover, Arkansas
June 18, 2009**

Commissioners Present

Danny Ford, Chairman	Montine McNulty, Vice-Chairman
Steve Arrison	Tom Schueck
Bill Barnes	Ness Sechrest
Darin Gray	Jim Shamburger
Debbie Haak	Cindy Smith
Mike Mills	

Commissioners Absent

Jay Bunyard
Jim Gaston
Bob Knight
Billy Lindsey

Department Staff Present

Richard W. Davies, Executive Director
Gloria Robins, Executive Assistant
Cynthia Dunlap, Director of Administration
Greg Butts, Director, Arkansas State Parks
Joe David Rice, Tourism Director
Nancy Clark, Assistant Tourism Director
Donna Perrin, Tourism Development Manager
Renee Robison, Group Travel Manager
Joanne Hinson, Research & Information Services Manager
Zoie Clift, Travel Writer
Mac Balkman, Operations Manager
Stan Graves, Planning & Development Manager
Joseph Jacobs, Marketing & Revenue Manager
Jon Brown, Region I Supervisor
Marcel Hanzlik, Region III Supervisor
Tom Stolarz, Region IV Supervisor
Kris Richardson, Administrative Assistant
Dottie Boyles, Administrative Assistant

Guests

Kathy Holt, Governor's Office
Jane Malton, Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau
John Ralston, Arkansas South
Rhea Roberts, Preserve America Community Agent
Elizabeth Eggleston, Historic El Dorado

CJRW

Shelby Woods
Karen Mullikin
Carrie Orahoad
Chance Woods
Ross Cranford
Brian Kratkiewicz

Aristotle

Marla Johnson-Norris
Jonathan Eudy
Leslie Greenwood
Yao Wang
Meredith Melody-Hubbell
Chere Schmidt

Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources Staff

Pam Beasley, Superintendent
Beth Hooks, PASC
Sherry Neely, Registrar
Shannon Weitzel, Curator
Sherry Frankus, Director of Education
Belinda Riggs, Museum Program Assistant
Rhonda Milkin, Exhibit Specialists
Sherry Odam, Gift Store Manager
Danny Endle, Maintenance Manager

Roll Call

Chairman Danny Ford called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. Thursday, June 18, 2009.
Gloria Robins called the roll.

Approval of Agenda

Mike Mills moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.

Presentation of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the Minutes for the May 2009 meeting. Mike Mills seconded and the motion carried.

Recognition of Guests

Tom Stolarz, Regional IV Supervisor introduced Pam Beasley, Superintendent at Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources, as our host. Superintendent Beasley explained the history of the museum and introduced the staff to the Commission.

Financial Report

Cynthia Dunlap presented the financial report for the fiscal year-to-date period ended May 31, 2009. Expenditures were: Parks Division, \$65,518,915; Tourism Division, \$14,113,726; Keep Arkansas Beautiful, \$485,576; Administration Division, \$2,724,120; and History Commission, \$1,502,360. Expenditures for the Department totaled \$84,344,697, which included construction and grants. Fiscal year-to-date operating revenue for the Parks Division totaled \$19,856,975, an increase of 1% over last year's total.

Steve Arrison moved to approve the financial report. Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Richard Davies reported on June 10, staff from the Arkansas Highway Department, US Forest Service, Governor's Office, and Parks and Tourism met with local county judges and the Phillips County Chamber of Commerce to discuss the issue of paving a county road between Bear Creek and Storm Creek at Mississippi River State Park. There was also a discussion about the Helena Welcome Center, which is scheduled for replacement.

Mr. Davies also reported on the Governor's Proclamation on Energy. A strategic energy plan needs to be in place by Oct 31, 2009. The plan calls for a reduction of energy consumption and the environmental impact by state agencies. Chairman Danny Ford appointed Montine McNulty, Jim Shamburger, Steve Arrison, Richard Davies and Gloria Robins to the Paperless Meeting Committee. The committee will report at the July meeting.

Rhea Roberts, Preserve America Community Agent from San Antonio, TX, reported on the program in the state. Preserve America is a federal program that supports community efforts to preserve cultural and natural heritage. There are sixteen Preserve America Communities in

Arkansas: Batesville, Blytheville, Dumas, El Dorado, Eureka Springs, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Helena-West Helena, Hot Springs, Little Rock, North Little Rock, Osceola, Pocahontas, Tyronza, Van Buren, and West Memphis. Texarkana, and Benton, will soon be added.

Tourism Division

Joe David Rice gave a report/update on S. 1023, the Travel Promotion Act of 2009. The legislation will create a public-private partnership in an attempt to attract international tourism to the U.S. The Act will add a \$10 fee to foreign visitors seeking visa waivers and matched monies from the private sector. Legislation is in the works and plans are to hopefully get the Act in effect by Oct. 1 of this year.

Communications Section Report

Dena Woerner reported the Web site work currently being done on Arkansas.com includes updating the Arkansas Kid's Web and the Wedding Web sites. The Communications Staff will attend the Arkansas Press Association convention in Rogers July 8-11.

Research & Information Services Section

Joanne Hinson, section manager, gave the Inquiry Report. The Information Services section processed 64,468 requests for information during May 2009. The year to date total is 234,074 which is up 28.5% compared to last year. Hinson also reported that the Blytheville Welcome Center has relocated to a new building. The grand opening will be in late July or early August. The Lake Village Welcome Center has also been rebuilt and will have a grand opening in August.

Aristotle

Marla Johnson-Norris, Jonathan Eudy, and members of Aristotle staff presented the 2010 Program and Budget, broken down into sections and goals, to the Commission. They include creating multi-media press releases that will include video, and continuing Facebook and Twitter for social networking strategies. Other topics discussed included creating a custom site for Arkansas.com on YouTube, an interactive lodging map of places to stay in Arkansas, and incorporating conversion studies and focus groups to research and track results. Driving traffic to Arkansas.com and its family of Web sites is the goal of the program. Arkansas continues to be number one in the search engine.

Mike Mills moved to approve the 2010 fiscal year Tourism Internet Program and Budget for the amount of \$909,604.00. Bill Barnes seconded and the motion carried.

Tourism Development

Donna Perrin presented information about the Tourism Attraction Feasibility Study Matching Grant Program to the Commission. The first deadline for applications for FY10 is July 31. The grant will be a 50/50 match.

Group Travel

Group Travel tracked 619 inquiries versus 489 in May of last year. They are now tracking motorcycle inquiries daily. The Travel Alliance Partnership (TAP) conference was held in Rapid City, South Dakota, May 31- June 3. The partnership includes tour operators who plan motorcoach travel across the nation. Tour operators were interested in Wal-Mart Tours, Ghost tours and 'true Southern' experiences. There was also interest in the new Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville. Itineraries are planned for 2010 and 2011 seasons. Tri-State Tours of Falena, Illinois is promoting a tour through Arkansas called "The music of America" which is scheduled for May 2010. There are also two separate tours published by U.S. Tours of Parkersburg, West Virginia. One into Fort Smith, entitle "Fun in the Fort" and the other in Hot Springs/Little Rock called "Dynamic Duo". The Group Travel staff attended the Group Travel Summit in Bentonville June 9-10, 2009. The summit's purpose is to network with statewide partners and develop a plan on how to market to motorcoach tradeshow.

Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods (CJRW)

CJRW presented the Fall 2009 (August-November) Online plan and creative. The Online Campaign consisted of General Consumer Sites, Outdoor/Niche Sites, Multicultural Sites, Local Market Web Sites, and Lead Generation Networks for a Media total of \$356,765. The Production Campaign consisted of Art Concept and Direction, Writing, Distribution/Tracking, and Analysis for a total of \$14,120.00. The new Let's Ride motorcycle brochures were distributed to the Commission.

Steve Arrison moved to approve the Fall 2009 Online Campaign Budget and Creative for the amount of \$370,885. Ness Shamburger seconded and the motion carried.

PARKS DIVISION

Petit Jean State Park – Croswell Use Permit Request

Stan Graves requested approval for a driveway and utility use permit for a residential property at Petit Jean State Park for a new real estate purchase. There is no evidence that Arkansas State Parks (ASP) has issued a use permit to any of the previous owners of this property. The driveway and utilities serving the property have existed for decades and if a permit has been issued to the previous owners, it did not transfer to the new owners, Jeff and Sarah Croswell.

Mike Mills moved to approve a use permit for a residential driveway and utility use at Petit Jean State Park to Jeff and Sarah Croswell, described as follows:

A 20' wide "use permit" across part of the Northeast Quarter of the Southwest Quarter (Pt. NE 1/4 SW 1/4) of Section 32, T-6N, R-18W, Conway County, Arkansas. The centerline (10' each side) being more particularly described as follows: Commencing at the Northeast (NE) Corner of the NE 1/4 SW 1/4 of said Section 32 and run thence N 89 deg.49'41" West for 550.12 feet to the centerline of an existing drive and the point of beginning of said "use permit"; thence run along said centerline of existing drive the following bearings and distances: S 24 deg. 53' 44" E 20.37 feet; S 08 deg. 35' 28" E 48.06 feet; S 14 deg. 39' 23" E 61.47 feet; S01 deg. 51' 06" E 92.25 feet to a point in the centerline of Conway County "Red Bluff Drive" and the point of termination of said "use permit."

Steve Arrison seconded and the motion passed.

Millwood State Park – Corp of Engineers Lease

Stan Graves reported construction of the new Millwood State Park Wastewater Treatment Plant is scheduled to replace the existing 1978 deteriorated plant in the near future. During the design phase it was discovered that there is insufficient property in the current Corps of Engineers (COE) Lease to concurrently operate the existing plant and build the new one. ASP is requesting approval to add additional acreage, .49 acres to the current COE lease. The COE has approved the lease amendment.

Ness Sechrest moved to add .49 acres to the current COE lease for the new Millwood State Park Wastewater Treatment Plant, described as follows:

A tract of land 175' x 120' in a rectangle running parallel to existing Power Line and including existing wastewater treatment Plant located in NW ¼ of Section 34, T-12-S, R-28-W in Little River County, Arkansas being more particularly describes as follows: From the Northwest Corner (NW Cor.) of said Section 34 run East 1349.67 ' and South 1136.96' to the Point of Beginning (P.O.B.) and Corner of Lease Area for Wastewater Treatment Plant; Thence run N 43 deg. 39'27" E for 175.00'; Thence run S 46deg. 20' 33" E for 120.00' to a Chain-Link Fence Corner; Thence run S 43 deg. 39' 27" W for 175.00'; Thence run N46 deg. 20' 33" W for 120.00' to the Point of Beginning (P.O.B.), Containing in all 0.49 acres.

Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.

Lake Ouachita State Park– Removal of Structures

Stan Graves reported Lake Ouachita State Park will be replacing four ca. 1975 existing cabins with four new cabins and is requesting approval to remove two of the four cabins: cabin #2 (Inventory Control # 37 / ASSIS # 120001353) and cabin # 5 (Inventory Control # 40 / AASIS # 120001356) from inventory. Cabins # 3 and # 4 will be relocated for seasonal staff housing.

Steve Arrison moved to approve the removal of two structures as part of a construction project at Lake Ouachita State Park from inventory as follows: cabin # 2 (Inventory Control # 37 / ASSIS # 120001353) and cabin # 5 (Inventory Control # 40 / AASIS # 120001356) with the remaining two cabins # 3 and # 4 to be relocated for seasonal staff housing. Darin Gray seconded and the motion carried.

Lake Dardanelle State Park – Removal of Structures

Stan Graves requested approval to remove two deteriorated structures at Lake Dardanelle State Park from inventory.

Mike Mills moved to approve the removal of two structures at Lake Dardanelle State Park from inventory as follows: one vault toilet (Building 07.02 / AASIS # 120004282) and one well house (Building 07.18 / ASSIS # 120002415). Darin Gray seconded and the motion carried.

Park Geocache Update

Joe Jacobs provided a park geocache update, advising there is a cache located in all 52 state parks and the program has been very well received. The program started last year and to date 3,211 caches have been found and logged with 17 visitors completing the entire cache project in all 52 state parks. A family from Dover, Arkansas reported completing the cache program with all 52 parks in seven days. Jacobs reported two caches are currently offline due to the ice storm damage and flooding. He noted several of the parks have seen an increase in visitation due to the geocache program including Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources (AMNR). AMNR has seen a significant increase in visitors with the current "GPS Adventure Arkansas" exhibit displayed at AMNR. The geocache program is proving exciting for visitors and successful for parks, with plans to continue and expand the program.

Miscellaneous

Greg Butts reported a successful opening and dedication with excellent media coverage for Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area Visitor Center on May 27, 2009, with over 400 people in attendance, including many local school children. Appreciation was expressed to Darin Gray and Montine McNulty for their attendance and contributions.

Two temporary cave closings in Devil's Den - Farmer's Cave and Big Ear Cave - as part of an effort to slow the potential spreading of a deadly bat fungus, known as white-nose syndrome throughout the eastern and southeastern U.S. No specific evidence has been found in Arkansas caves; however adventure-style caves were closed as a precautionary measure. On a bat related topic, Harry "Batman" Harnish has retired from ASP upon 30 years of service after receiving a nice farewell from ASP and great publicity from local media. Harry Harnish was the creator of "Bat-O-Rama" and responsible for bringing many visitors to Devil's Den and providing bat education and fun for visitors for many years.

An article in the Democrat- Gazette showcased various parks as excellent "staycation" options in Arkansas. Several positive comments were received from campers from Woolly Hollow, Lake Poinsett, and State Parks in general, complimenting great staff and facilities. An article also reported California is facing critical budget cuts and considering closing 220 California parks. Negative feedback in the form of over 100,000 letters was sent to the governor of California in protest. Richard Davies commented, in light of recent conditions, Congress is considering providing additional funding for parks, possibly through offshore oil and gas revenues.

A 1.11 carat diamond was found May 30, 2009, at Crater of Diamonds State Park by Tigger the dog.

Mr. Butts reported President Obama approved funding through FEMA for various flood damaged counties including Millwood and Moro Bay State Parks. Butts provided an update on the five new cabins under construction at Moro Bay State Park, advising the cabins look very nice and are 96% complete, with an anticipated mid July 2009 completion date. He invited Commissioners to join a tour of the new cabins and Moro Bay State Park on June 19, 2009, departing at 8:00 am.

Chairman Danny Ford thanked Pamela Beasley and her staff for their outstanding hospitality during the meeting at AMNR. Chairman Ford reminded the Commission to attend the 25th Anniversary Dinner of Arkansas South as the evening's activity.

After no further business, Chairman Ford adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m. on June 18, 2009, at the Arkansas Museum of Natural Resources.