

Arkansas State Parks, Recreation & Travel Commission
Hot Springs Convention Center
Hot Springs, Arkansas
January 21, 2010

Commissioners Present

Montine McNulty, Chairman
Bob Knight, Vice-Chairman
Steve Arrison
Bill Barnes
Jay Bunyard
Danny Ford
Darin Gray

Debbie Haak
Jim Shamburger
Cindy Smith
Ness Sechrest
Mike Mills
Tom Schueck
Jim Gaston

Commissioners Absent

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
Mac Balkman, Operations Manager
Stan Graves, Parks Planning & Development Manager
Joe Jacobs, Marketing & Revenue Manager
Joan Ellison, Public Information Officer
Dena Woerner, Communications Manager
Renee Robison, Group Travel Manager
Donna Perrin, Tourism Development Manager
Joanne Hinson, Research & Information Services Manager
Jon Brown, Region I Supervisor
Tony Perrin, Region II Supervisor
Marcel Hanzlik, Region III Supervisor
Tom Stolarz, Region IV Supervisor
Dottie Boyles, Administrative Specialist
Kris Richardson, Administrative Specialist
Zoie Clift, Arkansas Travel Writer
Chuck Haralson, Chief Photographer

CJRW

Shelby Woods
Karen Mullikin
Carrie Orahoad
Chance Woods
Ross Cranford
Chuck Robertson
Brian Kratkiewitz
Brian Jones
Lyuba Bogan
Jennifer Morgan

Aristotle

Jonathan Eudy

Guests

Jim Kunau, Director of Marketing at Magic Springs
Marla Crider, Marketing Director Garvan Woodland Gardens
Charlie Gocho, *The Sentinel-Record*
Chad Rasmussen, *The Sentinel-Record*
Gar Eisele, General Manager of Washburn's Home Furnishings, Mena
Tim Kiser, Mena Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee
Phyllis Cunningham, Wolfpen ATV Campground & Cabins, Inc.
Greg Goss, Vice President First National Bank, Mena
Joey Cathey, President, Mena Chamber of Commerce
Shannon Harris, North Little Rock Visitors Bureau
Jane Malton Mages, Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau
Dennis Tracy, Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau
Marilyn Koehler, Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau
Anna Smith, The Peabody Little Rock
Sara Beth Christian, Tourism Director, West Memphis Advertising & Promotion Commission
Don Christian, City of West Memphis
Allyson Twiggs Dyer, Fayetteville Visitors Bureau
Allison Cider, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*
Chris Snodgrass

Roll Call

Chairman Montine McNulty called the meeting to order at 8:38 a.m. on Thursday, January 21, 2010. Gloria Robins called the roll.

Approval of Agenda

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Bob Knight seconded and the motion carried.

Presentation of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Steve Arrison moved to approve the Minutes from the November 2009 meeting. Bob Knight seconded and the motion carried.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Cynthia Dunlap presented the financial report for the fiscal year-to-date period ended December 31, 2009. Parks Division expenditures totaled \$34,710,566; Tourism Division, \$6,469,559; Keep Arkansas Beautiful, \$291,808; Administration Division, \$1,630,131; and History Commission, \$832,964. Expenditures for the Department totaled \$43,935,028, which included construction and grants. Fiscal year-to-date operating revenue for the Parks Division totaled \$12,768,387 an increase of 2% from last year's total.

Bob Knight moved to approve the Financial Report as presented. Jay Bunyard seconded and the motion carried.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Commission Per Diem

Richard Davies stated that, by law, the Commission must approve its per diem rate at first meeting of calendar year. The per diem maximum is \$75.00 per day and the per diem that had been approved in 2009 was \$65.00.

Ness Sechrest moved to set the per diem at \$65 per day, plus all expenses incurred on Wednesday for early arrival for the remainder of the calendar year 2010. Danny Ford seconded and the motion carried.

Miscellaneous

Gar Eisele of the Mena Chamber of Commerce spoke to the Commission about U.S. Forest Service ATV closures and the effect on the 31 miles of Wolf Pen Gap trails near Mena. Eisele explained that in 2005, the Forest Service issued a Travel Management Rule, which called for each of the nation's 155 national forests to designate a travel system for motorized vehicles, including Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs). The rule was established to limit environmental impacts associated with unregulated OHV use on national forest land. The decision of the Forest Service concerning trails in the Ouachita National Forest was announced the week of Jan. 4. Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) for the Ouachita National Forest are scheduled to be released this spring and once the maps are published it will be legal to ride only those national forest roads, trails, or areas shown on the maps.

Eisele stated Wolf Pen Gap would be affected upon the implementation of the new enforced trail guidelines. At Wolf Pen Gap, the 31 miles of loop trails will be designated as open routes on weekends and holidays between May 15 and Sep. 15. Other changes include a maximum of 5,000 OHVs will be allowed at Wolf Pen Gap for the year. Once the maximum is reached, Wolf Pen Gap will be closed the remainder of the year. According to Forest Service data, around 17,000 guests visited and rode the trails last year. Eisele said the Forest Service built the Wolf Pen Gap trails and the community built an industry around it. He presented letters to the Commission from Senators Lincoln and Pryor and Congressman Ross which documented a request for an extension of the current plan for a three to five year period. The Commission discussed passing a resolution requesting a delay in implementation, an economic impact study, and time to look into possible mitigation measures. The resolution, letter, and recommendations will be sent to the Arkansas congressional delegation and Governor Mike Beebe.

Debbie Haak moved to draft a resolution requesting the Ouachita National Forest give the local tourism and trail user interests the time and opportunity to explore the possibilities of environmental mitigation measures that could allow continued regular ATV use on specific forest trails and the Ouachita National Forest concurrently conduct economic impact studies on the effect of this rule on jobs and businesses in the area of the forest. Jim Gaston seconded and the motion carried.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Travel Management Rule by the Ouachita National Forest severely restricts popular ATV and other traditional off-road use with the forest, and

WHEREAS, many businesses surrounding the forest have been established to service the off-road users and visitors of the USDA Forest Service trails, and

WHEREAS, the closure of these trails and even the uncertainty of availability of them due to weather or time frames can severely impact the attraction of them to users and visitors which would in turn, adversely affect these local businesses, their livelihoods and employees, and

WHEREAS, there has been limited opportunity for interested users and trail supporters to discuss forest and watershed environmental issues and how they might be mitigated as they relate to specific trails or portions of trails, and

WHEREAS, the rule will take effect in a relatively short length of time, now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission respectively requests that the Ouachita National Forest give the local tourism and trail user interests the time and opportunity to explore the possibilities of environmental mitigation measures that could allow continued regular ATV use on specific forest trails, and that the Ouachita National Forest concurrently conduct economic impact studies on the effect of this rule on jobs and businesses in the area of the forest, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution be sent to the Governor of the State of Arkansas and to the Arkansas Congressional Delegation.

This RESOLUTION adopted by the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission on this 21st day of January, 2010, at the Hot Springs Convention Center in the City of Hot Springs, Arkansas.

STATE PARKS, RECREATION & TRAVEL
COMMISSION

/s/Montine McNulty, Chairman

ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS &
TOURISM

/s/ Richard W. Davies, Executive Director

TOURISM DIVISION

Economic Research Associates Strategic Plan

Tourism Director Joe David Rice and Executive Director Richard Davies gave an update on the Economic Research Associates Strategic Plan. Mr. Rice stated the purpose of the report was to take information about what consumers and tourism officials thought of the industry and make improvements from there.

Advertising Contract.

Joe David Rice and Assistant Tourism Director Nancy Clark reported that the current contract with Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods (CJRW) will end June 30, 2010. Ms. Clark stated the Commission has the option to put the contract on the street, requesting proposals from interested advertising agencies or to extend the current contract for one year beginning July 1, 2010. The Commission previously voted to extend the contract for two years. State contracts are now limited to one year.

Ness Sechrest moved to renew the Advertising Contract for Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods for the fiscal year 2011. Danny Ford seconded and the motion carried.

36th Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism

Assistant Director of Tourism Nancy Clark gave an update and preview of the program for the Governor's Conference on Tourism scheduled for March 7-9 at the Best Western Inn of the Ozarks in Eureka Springs. Ms. Clark stated that packets would be mailed on January 22 and the early bird event would be held at the 1886 Crescent Hotel and Spa.

Research and Information Services Section

The Research and Information Services Section processed 6,765 requests for information during November 2009, a decrease of 31.9 percent from November 2008. The December total was 5,198, a 24.3 percent decrease from December 2008. The year-to-date inquiry total is 429,137 – down 11.7 percent compared to the same period in 2008. Arkansas Welcome Centers received 68,302 visitors in November 2009, up 9.7 percent from November last year. December visitation totaled 55,409, up 11.6 percent from December 2008. The final calendar year total for 2009 was 874,133, an increase of 11.2 percent over 2008.

Research and Information Services Manager Joanne Hinson reported on the grand opening of the Lake Village Welcome Center, which was dedicated on January 12. The event was well attended with over 150 in the audience. The facility includes a 3,700 square foot multi-level fishing pier and observation deck.

Tourism Development Section

Tourism Development Manager Donna Perrin reported that the Henry Awards finalists are posted on arkindustryinsider.com.

Ms. Perrin also reported that the city of Waldron requested a one-month extension study for a Waldron Event Stadium. The grant amount is \$8,750 toward a \$17,500 feasibility study. The city of Arkadelphia has been approved for a \$13,838 Tourism Attraction Feasibility Study Grant for a Caddo Nation Cultural Center study.

Communications Section

Communications Manager Dena Woerner reported that Arkansas is a spotlight destination on TripAdvisor.com.

Ms. Woerner also stated that Whrrl.com has created an Arkansas branded page on the Whrrl social networking site. Arkansas is the first tourism destination to receive a branded page. VisitmyArkansas.com will launch on January 28 during a Little Rock TweetUp event.

Ms. Woerner gave an update on the Little Rock Channel 11 KTHV segments. Since October, Arkansas Tourism has been featured monthly during the 6:30 news.

Nancy Clark presented a copy of *Ocean Life* magazine to the Commission. An article featuring Arkansas was in the January issue and was the result of a visit by two journalists from Tokyo, Japan, who toured the state in October 2009. Mississippi River County USA created the tour for Mr. Norio Konno and photographer Mr. Yasutake Ito who started their journey in Hot Springs. Other spots they visited while in the state included Bull Shoals-White River State Park, Gaston's White River Resort, Little Rock and Helena-West Helena.

Group Travel Section

Group Travel Manager Renee Robison, stated that the year-to-date inquiries for 2009 were 975.

Ms. Robison reported that Group Travel prepared itineraries for the new flash drives that will be given to tour operators for the upcoming motorcoach tradeshows. The flash drives feature one, two and three day itineraries consisting of attractions and lodging in Arkansas.

Ms. Robison also gave an update on the Motorcycle Cannonball Run. The 3,320- mile transcontinental ride, on vintage motorcycles, is scheduled to start September 10 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina with participants riding through Arkansas on their way to Santa Monica, California. Ms. Robison has been working with Motorcycle Cannonball Course Master John Classen with logistical information for their routes through Helena-West Helena, Stuttgart, Pine Bluff, Hot Springs, Danville and Fort Smith.

Joe David Rice congratulated Renee Robison on becoming a Certified Travel Industry Specialist. Ms. Robison received her certification from the American Bus Association and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Graduation ceremonies were held on Monday, January 18, 2010 at Gaylord National Resort, National Harbor, Maryland.

Aristotle

Jonathan Eudy gave an update in regards to Arkansas.com. Mr. Eudy reported there were 6,184,550 visitor sessions to the Web site. December figures had the Web site ranked #6 in "All 50 State Tourism Sites." It is ranked #1 in "Contiguous States Tourism Sites."

Updates were given about the new VisitmyArkansas.com and the Historical Arkansas Anniversaries site. A new administrative page was created for Travelin' Arkansas.

Mr. Eudy and Ms. Woerner presented an update regarding the Hot Deals and Packages iPhone Application. Aristotle will submit the App to Apple in approximately two weeks. Once approved, Apple will make the official launch.

CJRW

Spring/Summer 2010 Online Advertising and Marketing Campaign

Karen Mullikin introduced the staff who worked on the Spring/Summer campaign. Ms. Mullikin stated that the Fall campaign spending was at \$355,495. She also stated that the primary objective of the Spring/Summer Online Campaign included driving traffic to Arkansas.com. New elements for 2010 included targeting online, anchor ad units, heritage and cultural sites, blogs and Spongecell banner technology. Ross Cranford presented sample animation ads that were an extension of the Road Trip campaign. Around 150 different ads were created including a mix of indoor and outdoor locations. The total budget for Spring/Summer Online Campaign is \$773,619.

Jay Bunyard moved to approve the Spring/Summer 2010 Online Campaign Media and Creative. Bill Barnes seconded and the motion carried.

Ms. Mullikin gave an update on the Interactive Arkansas Tour Guide. She also reported that circulation has decreased in the newspapers selected for inserts; therefore the state's share of the expense has been reduced.

Governor's Conference Bid Presentations

Presentations and bids were made by Little Rock, West Memphis and Fayetteville to host the 2011 and 2012 Governor's Conferences on Tourism.

Steve Arrison moved to accept the Little Rock Governor's Conference bid for the year 2011. Tom Schueck seconded and the motion carried.

Ness Sechrest moved to accept the West Memphis Governor's Conference bid for the year 2012. Jim Gaston seconded and the motion carried.

Miscellaneous

Chairman Montine McNulty recognized former Chairman Danny Ford as an exceptional leader and presented him with a plaque for his leadership and service to the Commission.

PARKS DIVISION

FY 2011 ANCRC Grant Request

Stan Graves presented the Arkansas Natural & Cultural Resources Council (ANCRC) grant recommendations for approval. He advised Arkansas State Parks (ASP) began with \$65 million in requests from parks and staff has narrowed requests to \$9.5 million in projects for submission. The request contains a mix of renovation, restoration, and improvement projects. With a long list of projects for consideration, Graves noted there will be a focus on priority projects, i.e. health and safety issues, building renovations, wastewater treatment, ADA issues, etc. Staff noted with declining real estate tax revenues, ASP will be fortunate to receive 50% of its request. Graves commented this grant program began in 1989 and \$77.7 million in state park projects have been completed.

Jay Bunyard moved to approve the recommendations for the FY 2011 ANCRC Grant Request. Bob Knight seconded and the motion carried.

Petit Jean State Park – Request for Utility Easement from the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas

Stan Graves advised that Petit Jean State Park is planning to install an electronic gate on Stout's Point Road, which provides access to the Petit Jean Gravesite and barrier-free overlook. The gate, controlled by an automatic timer, will help deter vandalism and deviant activity at this popular unsupervised scenic overlook. Once the gate is locked, guests can exit but cannot enter, as currently used successfully at the Louisiana Purchase State Park. ASP currently has an easement from the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas (EDA) for the 49 acres encompassing the overlook and the new easement would be an addition.

Ness Sechrest moved to approve an utility easement from the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas at Petit Jean State Park, as follows: A 10' Wide Utility Easement across Part of the NE1/4 NW1/4 of Section 31, T-6-N, R-17-W, Conway County, Arkansas the Centerline (5' Each Side) being more particularly described as follows: Commencing at the Northwest Corner (NW Cor.) of the NE 1/4 NW1/4 of said Section 31 and run thence N 89°31'12" E for 322.69'; Thence run South for 34.43' to a point on an Existing Utility Line Easement and being the Point of Beginning (P.O.B.) of said 10' Wide Utility Easement; Thence run along the Centerline (5' Each Side) of said Utility Easement the following Bearings and Distances: S 24°17'36" E 135.64'; S 10°59'54" E 260.56'; S 10°24'07" E 204.41'; S 09°29'48" W 92.81'; S 02°12'11" W 128.27'; S 00°50'30" E 184.68'; S 00°02'00" E 178.47' to the Point of Termination (P.O.T.) of said Utility Easement, Containing 0.27 Acres and being Subject to all Other Easements, Public or Private which may exist thereon. Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.

Petit Jean – Request for Use Permit Agreement

Stan Graves requested permission for a use permit agreement at Petit Jean State Park, noting there is a use permit agreement in place (signed in 1996). The property owner, Tom Courtway, is in the process of selling property and would like to have a clear title for potential buyers. The use permit agreement would allow the buyer to have legal ingress and egress to the property which lies south of Campgrounds "B" and "C." The park road which runs between the two campgrounds is already in use by four property owners, including Mr. Courtway.

Jim Gaston moved to approve the use permit agreement at Petit Jean State Park for a potential property owner to access property as follows: A Fifteen (15) foot strip of land, lying 7 feet 6 inches either side of the following described line: Commencing at the SE Corner of SW/4 NE/4 of Section 33, Township 6 North, Range 8 West, Conway County, Arkansas, run thence N 89 deg. 20' 55" W 178.71 feet, thence N 88 deg. 02' 46" W 49.36 feet, thence N 89 deg. 18' 00" W 399.85 feet to the Point of Beginning of the centerline of a 15' wide Ingress-Egress Use Permit Agreement, run thence N 02 deg. 20' 00" W 205.60 feet, thence N 03 deg. 39' 15" E 278.70 feet to a point in the centerline of Arkansas Highway 154 and the Point of Termination of said 15' wide Ingress-Egress Use Permit Agreement, containing .167 acres, more or less. Jim Shamburger seconded and the motion carried.

Request to Remove Assets from Inventory: Mt. Nebo State Park and Millwood State Park

Stan Graves requested approval for removal of two wastewater plants in disrepair that are being replaced with new plants: Mt. Nebo wastewater treatment plant built in 1977; and the Millwood wastewater treatment plant built in 1976, both being replaced as they no longer meet the needs of the parks.

Jay Bunyard moved to approve the removal of the following substandard structures from inventory at Mt. Nebo State Park and Millwood State Park: Mt. Nebo wastewater treatment plant (AASIS asset number 500011267) and the Millwood wastewater treatment plant (AASIS asset number 500011236). Bob Knight seconded and the motion carried.

Ozark Folk Center – Firing Range Interpretive Plaque Request

Greg Butts reported ASP was contacted by Dr. Kenneth L. White requesting the rifle range at the Ozark Folk Center (OFC) be named the “Jack Wesley Thomas Memorial Rifle Range” in honor of Jack Thomas, one of the founders of the Stone County Muzzle Loaders Association and dedicated crafter at the OFC. The request was presented to the Ozark Folk Cultural Center Commission (OFCCC) November 23, 2009 for their consideration and recommendation. After considering options, the OFCCC recommended placing an interpretive plaque at the rifle range in honor of the late Jack Wesley Thomas for his dedicated service and contributions, with the final decision resting with the SPRTC. Butts noted with a few rare exceptions, the SPRTC’s practice was not to name state park facilities after individuals and concurred with the OFCCC recommendation.

Cindy Smith moved to approve placing an interpretive plaque at the OFC rifle range in honor of the late Jack Wesley Thomas for his dedicated service and contributions. Bob Knight seconded and the motion carried.

Museum/ Historic Sites Entrance Fee CY 2009 Report

Following discussions at the November 19, 2009 commission meeting regarding waiving museum admission fees, Greg Butts presented a report analyzing the museum admission and resale (gift shop) income for ASP in FY 2009. Results showed the admissions revenue of 10 museums totaled \$55,653 and the gift shop revenue totaled \$104,934. In consideration of \$4 million in FY 10 budget cuts, Butts recommended now is not the time to waive museum admission fees, noting a previous fee waiver program of one day a month did not increase gift shop sales. He noted he did not believe the minimal cost of admission was the deciding factor for visitation, according to the spending habits of the average citizen. Butts did recommend trying some form of discount again in a contest format, heavily promoting attendance with incentives and/or prizes to increase visitation.

Bill Barnes moved to retain current museum admission fees and offer a promotion to increase visitation. Ness Sechrest seconded and the motion carried.

Lake Chicot Lodge Feasibility Study Analysis

Greg Butts provided an update on the proposed Lake Chicot Lodge project. He presented a report with the estimated construction and operating costs for the proposed lodge and education center with costs based on experience with similar facilities and projects, and incorporated Capital Hotel Management Government Service's (CHMGS) projections. CHMGS suggested there is not sufficient market demand to support development and the profitable operation of a 60 room lodge. The report verified that a 60 room lodge or a revised 30 room lodge would have to be subsidized. The report estimated a 30 room lodge would cost approximately \$12.2 million with an estimated time of three years to construct. Staff advised economically, this is a very difficult time to take on a project of this magnitude with a recession and significant budget cuts. Butts advised he had forwarded information with the estimated construction and operating costs to Representative Robert Moore and Mayor Joann Bush for review. The commission discussed the promise that was made to the community for the proposed lodge in exchange for the passing of the 1/8 cent Conservation Tax. Discussion ensued regarding the options available for the proposed lodge as promised, the feasibility of the project, and possible revised options of the original project. Greg Butts commented that these are very difficult economic times for the lodging and resort industries and the operation of the subject facility would have to be heavily subsidized. Butts noted this information was presented for update purposes, not for a final decision on the project or approval.

CIP Quarterly Report

Stan Graves provided an update on the Capital Improvements Progress Report (CIP), reporting \$54 million in projects underway and \$143,220 had been closed this quarter.

Miscellaneous

Greg Butts referred to the Diamond Statistics Summary (1972 - 2009) providing statistics of stones found (size, weight, etc.) at Crater of Diamonds offering an overview of the past 37 years reporting 28,745 diamonds found and 2,807,004 visitors recorded.

Joe Jacobs reported that ASP has launched a new blog at arkansasstateparks.com/blog offering stories from staff posted weekly providing an inside view of what it's like to live and work in ASP. This blog provides informative and entertaining park pieces, creating interests in the parks and at a minimal cost.

Butts reported more troubles from Arizona State Parks, with proposed closing 21 of 30 state parks. Others too, such as Iowa State Parks are experiencing grave problems with a 25% reduction in general revenue.

Joan Ellison reported the ASP "Making Memories" documentary has been expanded into a 30 minute video and AETN will run the documentary periodically. Ellison advised that in conjunction with the Ken Burns' broadcast "National Parks: America's Best Idea" a six-episode series, AETN has created an 18-month calendar that showcases all of Arkansas's 52 state parks and six national parks for distribution. In appreciation of the collaboration, commissioners and staff will receive a calendar in the mail.

Special Order of Business

Chairman Montine McNulty appointed Darin Gray, chairman of the Advertising Committee and Cindy Smith, chairman of the State Parks Committee.

With no further business, The State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission meeting adjourned at 4:07 pm on January 21, 2010 at the Hot Springs Convention Center.