

MINUTES

**State Parks, Recreation & Travel Commission
Bull Shoals-White River State Park
James A. Gaston Visitor Center
Lakeview, Arkansas
October 19-20, 2006**

Commissioners Present

Jim Shamburger, Chairman	Jay Bunyard, Vice Chairman, Thurs. Only
Bill Barnes, Thurs. Only	Wade Williams
Debbie Haak, Thurs. Only	Billy Lindsey, Thurs. Only
Steve Arrison, Thurs. Only	Jane Christenson
Mike Mills, Thurs. Only	Jim Gaston
Ness Sechrest, Thurs. Only	Bob Knight
Danny Ford	

Commissioners Absent

Montine McNulty, Illness

Department Staff Present

Richard W. Davies, Executive Director
Larry Cargile, Central Administration Director
Greg Butts, State Parks Director
Joe David Rice, Tourism Director
Nancy Clark, Assistant Tourism Director
Cynthia Dunlap, Controller
Mac Balkman, Manager, Operations
Stan Graves, Manager, Planning & Development
Joe Jacobs, Manager, Marketing & Revenue
Joan Ellison, Public Information Officer
Donna Perrin, Manager, Tourism Development
Kristine Puckett, Tourism Development Consultant
Joanne Hinson, Research & Information Services Manager
Jana Greenbaum, Communications Manager
Melinda Hawes, Group Travel Manager
Amber Garrett, Group Travel Consultant
Jill Rohbach, Travel Writer
Jon Brown, Region I Supervisor
Tony Perrin, Region II Supervisor
Marcel Hanzlik, Region III Supervisor

Jim Cannon, Region IV Supervisor
Jay Miller, Program Services Administrator
Kelly Farrell, Field Interpreter
Lynn Warren, Landscape Architect
Tracy King, Superintendent, Bull Shoals-White River State Park
Grady Spann, General Manager, Ozark Folk Center
Gloria Robins, Executive Assistant
Sandy Burch, Administrative Assistant
Tammy Erby, Administrative Assistant

Agency Staff Present

Shelby Woods Wayne Woods Karen Mullikin Amy Frazier

Aristotle

Marla Johnson Norris Jonathan Eudy Jennifer Peper

Guests Present

Senator Jimmy Jeffress, Crossett
Representative Gregg Reep, Warren
Representative Monty Davenport, Yellville
Phillip Petty, Governor Huckabee's Office
Debi Barnes, Mt. Ida
Theresa Kyzer, Little Rock CVB
Barbara Wagner, Little Rock CVB
Lynn Berry, Eureka Springs CVB
David Haak, Texarkana
Beverly Blankenship, Eureka Springs Council
Richard Grinnell, Eureka Springs CAPC
Karen Trevino, North Little Rock Visitors Bureau
Doug Wilson, National Park Service
Ron Blome, Little Rock
Barry Travis, Little Rock
Terry Cook, Harrison Advertising and Promotion
Paul Harvel, Little Rock State Chamber of Commerce
Jim McCall, Executive Director, Arkansas Broadcasters Association
Glen Bell, Director, Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District

Call to Order

Chairman Shamburger called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and Gloria Robins called the roll.

Approval of the Agenda

Jane Christenson moved to approve the agenda. Danny Ford seconded and the motion carried.

Presentation of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Wade Williams moved to approve the minutes. Mike Mills seconded and the motion carried.

Recognition of Guests

Chairman Shamburger recognized guests in attendance.

Financial Report

Larry Cargile presented a financial report for the period ended September 30, 2006. The expenditures were: Parks Division, \$18,050,640, including construction and grants; Tourism Division, \$2,540,620; Keep Arkansas Beautiful, \$44,777; Administration Division, \$684,104; and History Commission, \$510,857. Expenditures for the Department totaled \$21,831,364. The Parks Division year-to-date operating revenue totaled \$6,532,827, an increase of 33% over the same period FY2006. The year-to-date operating revenue increase when adjusted for Mt. Magazine lodge was 12%.

Ness Sechrest moved to approve the Financial Report as presented. Billy Lindsey seconded and the motion carried.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Budget Hearing - October 31

Richard Davies said the hearing with the Joint Budget Committee will be held on October 31st. This hearing will be Governor Huckabee's recommendations and then in the next few weeks there may be recommendation from the new Governor and we will have another budget hearing.

PARKS DIVISION

Delta Heritage Trail State Park - Senator Jimmy Jeffress

Senator Jimmy Jeffress said he appreciated the Commission allowing Representative Gregg Reep and him to discuss the park's surplus rail for use in south Arkansas. Accompanying the Senator was Glenn Bell, Director of the Southeast Arkansas Economic Development District (SAEDD). Senator Jeffress said it is important to southeast Arkansas that the rail project moves forward and the availability of the rail not be lost. Representative Reep said he wanted to

emphasize how important the rail would be to south Arkansas. There are a lot of efforts in southeast Arkansas to improve economic conditions. Representative Reep said he and Senator Jeffress were representing Senators Jerry Taylor and Hank Wilkins, and Representatives Alan Maxwell, Randy Rankin, David Rainey, Johnnie Bolin, Jay Bradford, Stephanie Flowers, and Booker Clemons. Representative Reep said they were dealing with two issues – insure the trail is developed after the rail is removed and the conditions of the federal grant that purchased the rail be addressed. The Senators and Representatives listed have requested Arkansas's Congressional Delegation to work on getting a waiver to repay the federal grant. Representative Reep said he did not know what the results would be, as it is taking a long time to deal with the legalities and financial aspect of the project. Representative Reep said he thought some progress was being made and requested the Commissioners' patience because the rail is desperately needed for the economic development of southeast Arkansas.

Glenn Bell said at McGhee there is a main rail switch that connects to the rest of the rail system. From that point one line goes to Warren and one goes south to Lake Village. The SAEDD purchased the rail between Lake Village and the Louisiana state line. Once rail is removed, the property reverts to the original land owner which is why SAEDD acquired the rail. What is important now is to maintain the rail line from McGhee to Warren because 5,000 cars a year use the 85 pound rail that is in poor condition. One option is to move that rail line into the public sector; therefore a for-profit rail company was formed. Mr. Bell said the key element is cost and the surplus rail at the Delta Heritage Trail can be put to immediate use on the projects underway in southeast Arkansas.

Richard Davies said everyone wants the rail to go to southeast Arkansas. Mr. Davies asked what was the plan and time-frame for acquisition of the rail. Representative Reep said they felt they would have an answer on the federal grant repayment requirements around the first of 2007. Also there are two private companies that are interested in helping remove the rail and relocate it to other lines. Mr. Davies said the biggest problem is the federal requirement that if the rail is not disposed of through auction/sale, the department would have to pay the federal government back 80% of the present market value. Mr. Davies said if the federal government waived that and the department gave away the rail, we would lose \$2-\$3 million worth of trail work. Representative Reep said they understood and realized what the department wanted to do with the trail and know funds would be needed but don't have an answer yet. Mr. Bell said the line from Dermott to Warren is privately owned. They believe there is a good possibility that substandard rail on this line could be sold. If the Delta Heritage Trail rail was available, they could contract with Arkansas Midland Railroad to replace the lighter 85 pound rail with the heavier continuous weld Delta Heritage Trail rail. The 85 pound Arkansas Midland Railroad rail could then be sold. It would probably cost Arkansas Midland \$1 million to remove the 85 pound rail and replace it. They would establish a lease rate with Arkansas Midland for the use of the rail at an established rate per railroad car. Revenue would be waived until the money invested was recovered, which could take twenty years. Mr. Davies asked how the department would get either trail work or return for the value of the rail. Senator Jeffress said they realize that the department would have to be paid back. They are not expecting the department to give the rail away. There would have to be a transfer of dollars and the need to create an innovative way of putting the package together to make everybody a winner. However, nothing will happen

without the federal waiver. Senator Jeffress said they needed more time. Ness Sechrest asked if the Commission could give them the time needed. Wade Williams said he was disappointed that a plan has not been developed since the Commission was first approached about acquisition of the rail 2 ½ years ago. Mr. Williams said everyone wants it to happen, but the department has an investment, as well. The department is trying to invest funds from the sale of the rail into developing the Delta Heritage Trail. The Commission has delayed action for 2 ½ years to allow something to be put together. Mr. Williams said he is concerned about what pledge would be made that would guarantee the Delta Heritage Trail wouldn't be taken away legislatively. Representative Reep said everyone wants to help the department with what it needs to do and still make the sale work for southeast Arkansas. It has been very complicated and difficult. The federal grant requirements are what is holding everything up. Representative Reep said he appreciated the Commission's concern and wants the trail project to move forward, too. The economic development needs for the Delta Heritage Trail rail in southeast Arkansas is extensive and serious. Not trying to belittle parks and tourism and the good things the department does, but the rail is essential to keep southeast Arkansas viable economically. At this point, no one has come up with all the solutions. Mr. Williams said, if the Commission approves waiting, what assurance does it have that when the legislative session starts, there won't be a move to take the rail away from the department. What guarantees does the Commission have that this is not just a postponement?

Ness Sechrest moved to delay selling the rail at the Delta Heritage Trail until January 2007 to permit time for representatives in southeast Arkansas to develop a plan to acquire the rail. Debbie Haak seconded the motion.

Senator Jeffress said he would pledge that there would be no effort by him to acquire the rail through legislation. Representative Reep said he agreed with Senator Jeffress and they would communicate with the Commission to keep it updated on their progress. Richard Davies said the worse thing that could happen is that the department was directed to give the rail to a public entity without compensation and the federal government would then say the department owed them \$3 million. Those funds would have to be taken out of a park project in another district and there still would not be any trail funds available. Jim Shamburger said the subject would be placed on the January 2007 agenda.

A vote was taken and the motion carried.

Historic Washington State Park

a) Request for Use Permit

Stan Graves said a request had been received from Southwest Arkansas Telephone Company to install an underground telephone line in an existing utility easement to provide service to Jeremy Carroll, an adjacent landowner. Mr. Graves requested approval to grant the Use Permit.

Mike Mills moved to approve the Use Permit in the existing Utility Right-of-Way easement at Historic Washington State Park for the purpose of providing service to adjacent land owner, Jeremy Carroll. Bill Barnes seconded and the motion carried.

b) Removal from Inventory - May House

Stan Graves said the May House is in a deteriorated condition. It has significant termite damage and is beyond repair. Mr. Graves requested approval to remove the house from inventory.

Billy Lindsey moved to remove the May House (ID 38.39, AASIS #120002477) from inventory at Historic Washington State Park. Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.

Village Creek State Park - Removal from Inventory

Stan Graves said that since the park was connected to a public water utility, there are two water tanks that are no longer used or needed. Due to continued improvements and construction at the park, it has become necessary to have them removed. Mr. Graves said it will be recommended to Arkansas Marketing & Redistribution to advertise and sell the tanks and requested approval to remove them from inventory.

Mike Mills moved to approve removing two water tanks from inventory at Village Creek State Park. Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.

Woolly Hollow State Park - Request for Use Permit

Stan Graves said a Use Permit request was received from Carroll Kissinger for an easement to cross park property to gain access to his property. Mr. Kissinger owns land that would provide an alternate access to the site. Mr. Graves said that while the department appreciates the cooperation of Mr. Kissinger in previous years, the request does not meet the criteria outlined in Policy Directive 3185 which requires that the owner has no other alternative access to the property.

Ness Sechrest moved to deny the request from Carroll Kissinger for a Use Permit for access to his property adjacent to Woolly Hollow State Park because he has alternate access available. Jane Christenson seconded and the motion carried.

Petit Jean State Park - AT&T Right-Of-Way Easement Request

Stan Graves said AT & T had requested an easement to relocate telecommunication lines. The *Historic Davies Bridge* repair project has generated the need to relocate this equipment. Mr. Graves requested approval to grant the easement request.

Jane Christenson moved to approve the Right-of-Way Easement request from AT&T for relocating telecommunication lines at Petit Jean State Park that has become necessary due to the *Historic Davies Bridge* repair project. Mike Mills seconded and the motion carried.

Renewal of Grant Partnership Agreements

a) Arkansas Press Association

Greg Butts said APA wished to extend the grant partnership, and requested approval to renew the agreement. We will purchase up to \$75,000 in ad space and APA will contribute ads of equal value for each one placed (buy-one, get-one free).

Jay Bunyard moved to approve a one-year renewal of the Arkansas State Parks/Arkansas Press Association Grant Partnership Agreement. Danny Ford seconded and the motion carried.

b) Arkansas Broadcasters Association

Greg Butts introduced Jim McCall, Executive Director of ABA. Mr. McCall thanked the Commissioners for 19 years of a wonderful partnership and for putting trust in the ABA. The contract calls for a four-to-one return on \$75,000 spent for advertising spots. It is estimated that the ABA will exceed \$1 million in advertising value; which is approximately a 15-to-1 return.

Jane Christenson moved to approve a one-year renewal of the Arkansas State Parks/Arkansas Broadcasters Association Grant Partnership Agreement. Mike Mills seconded and the motion carried.

Pinnacle Mountain State Park - Conservation Easement Donation

Greg Butts said ASP had been contacted by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) regarding the possibility of a donation of a 278 acre tract of land near the park. A Conservation Easement and Management Plan for the Cedar Glen Tract of land was developed that included the following conditions:

- The Nature Conservancy would own the easement.
- ADPT would hold fee title after life estate expires (upon the death of estate holders).

- Approximately 40 acres were identified as the development area.
- The Management Plan does not apply to the development area.
- 238 acres would be managed by the management plan.
- After estate holders' deaths, ADPT would be grantor for the easement.
- The property would be a demonstration area for good conservation practices.
- The property would provide protection for rare plants and animals.
- Forested areas are not to be converted to open meadows; however, meadows may be allowed to return to forest.
- Timber stand rotation to be a minimum of 50 years.
- All of the undeveloped areas would be used as a wildlife habitat.

Mr. Butts said Don Barnes with the Attorney's General's office has reviewed and approved both the Conservation Easement and Management Plan and noted that there were no terms or conditions that would cause any concern for ADPT.

Mike Mills moved to approve the Easement Donation and Management Plan with The Nature Conservancy as presented for the 278 acre tract located near Pinnacle Mountain State Park (in township 2 north, range 14 west, Pulaski County, Arkansas, Section 9 NW ¼ containing 160 acres, NW quarter of the SW quarter (NW1/4 SW ¼) of Section 9 containing 40 acres, NE ¼ SW ¼ of Section 9 less and except the south 100 feet thereof (containing 37 acres). SW ¼ SW ¼ of Section 4 containing 40 acres, 50 foot sector of land in the Northeast corner of the Southeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter SE ¼ SE ¼ of Section 5 containing .9161 acres). Ness Sechrest seconded and the motion carried.

Ozark Folk Center - Plaque in Memory of Jack Thomas

Greg Butts said he had received a request from the park and friends of Jack Thomas to place a memorial plaque in his honor at the Blacksmith Shop. Prior to his death, Mr. Thomas had worked at the park and was an outstanding knife maker. Mr. Butts requested approval to grant the request.

Danny Ford moved to approve placing a memorial plaque at the Blacksmith Shop at the Ozark Folk Center in honor of Mr. Jack Thomas and his many contributions to the park. Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.

Cabin & Lodge Pet Survey

Greg Butts said the Commission had requested that staff research what other park systems' policies were regarding pets in cabins and lodges. Sixteen park systems allow pets in some or all of their cabins. Mr. Butts pointed out that what some park systems refer to as a cabin or cottage is very different from our cabins. Some of the other systems' cabins have concrete

floors and what we would refer to as a camper cabin. Some states have restrictions on cats and the size of dogs permitted, and non-refundable additional fees. Mr. Butts said there are advantages to permitting pets because of the growing number of people who travel with them. Some of the issues and disadvantages include: There is one three-bedroom cabin at Mt. Magazine and some cabins at some parks have ADA access. If these facilities are made pet-friendly, they restrict families with members who have allergies and don't want to stay in a cabin where pets have stayed. Also, housekeeping and maintenance staff could have allergies and they would have problems working in the cabins or rooms that are pet-friendly. There is always a potential noise issue and pets can cause damage to facilities and furnishings. Mr. Butts said pets can also carry fleas and ticks that could remain in the cabins and lodge rooms. Skunks live in parks and they can spray in or near cabins where dogs are staying. If this were to occur it would take weeks to remove the odor so the cabin could be rented again. Mr. Butts said he is not aware that ASP's revenue is being adversely affected because of the current policy that prohibits pets in cabins and lodge rooms. Occupancy rates and revenues continue to grow.

Danny Ford asked if there were lots of complaints from people who want to bring their pets. Mr. Butts said he had received a few e-mails and phone calls requesting permission to have pets in lodging facilities. Some of our parks have experienced problems when pets have been snuck in – feces piles has been left in cabins and not been cleaned up by the pet owner. There have also been problems with fleas. Jim Gaston said he understood everything Mr. Butts had said; however he had not experienced any of those problems at his resort. Mr. Gaston said he has experienced more damage from children than from any pet. There are potential guests who won't go to facilities that don't allow pets. Ness Sechrest said he would not mind paying an additional fee so he could bring his pet. Bill Barnes said his resorts are all pet friendly and have experienced very few problems. There has been far more damage, noise, etc. from human guests than from pet guests. Billy Lindsey said he does not permit pets in the cabins at his resort because of the problems Mr. Butts cited. The number of requests from people wanting to bring pets has "sky-rocketed" in the last five years. Mr. Lindsey said it has become big enough that he is reconsidering what has been the pet policy for twenty years. If it is changed there will be an additional charge to guests with pets – \$15-\$20. If ASP's no pet policy has not begun to effect occupancy; it will because of the growing trend of guests who want to bring their pets. Jim Shamburger said when he purchased the Holiday Inn in Bryant, pets had been allowed by the previous owner and there were a lot of guests who stayed there with their pets. Mr. Shamburger said he instituted a policy prohibiting pets and he lost the business from people who brought their pets but gained just as much business from new customers because of the no-pets policy. Mr. Shamburger said he does not have as big a concern about pets in cabins as with pets in a lodge. Danny Ford said guests who stay at a resort are different then people who stay in state parks. Mr. Shamburger said he felt ASP should try permitting pets and see what happens. Mr. Gaston said he felt strongly there is market ASP is missing by not permitting pets. Mr. Butts said if the Commission wishes, staff would develop a pilot program at a specific location for one-year. Mike Mills said his facility was not pet-friendly for 15-20 years and because so much business was turned down because of it, it became necessary to change the policy. Now there is a \$20 per night fee for pets. Mr. Mills said he has experienced several very costly pet problems. A guest's dog was sprayed by a skunk and it was six weeks before the odor was completely removed and the cabin could be rented again. A customer cannot be charged for six weeks of lost rental.

Mr. Mills said the public is demanding to be able to bring pets and it is a request that must be accommodated. It should not be done at Mt. Magazine, Queen Wilhelmina or the Ozark Folk Center. Pets should be permitted in more remote locations and there should be an additional charge. Mr. Shamburger asked Mr. Butts to come back to the Commission at the November meeting with a proposed pilot program to permit pets. Mr. Butts said the skunk population in parks is a concern and what could happen, as were Mr. Mills' experiences.

FY06 Park Awards

Greg Butts said it was his pleasure each year to recognize the "best of the best" of the Arkansas State Parks system. Mr. Butts thanked Vice Chairman Jay Bunyard for making the trip to speak at the annual Park Superintendents' meeting. The following parks are being honored for their outstanding achievements in FY06:

Volunteer Program of the Year	Bull Shoals-White River
Outstanding Park Maintenance	White Oak Lake
	Toltec Mounds
Outstanding Hospitality	Lake Catherine
Outstanding Interpretive Program	Bull Shoals-White River
Outstanding Special Event	Crater of Diamonds
	100 th Anniversary of the
	1906 Discovery of Diamonds in
	Arkansas
Outstanding Resource Management	Mammoth Spring
Park of the Year, Region I	Queen Wilhelmina
Park of the Year, Region II	Bull Shoals-White River
Park of the Year, Region III	Village Creek
Park of the Year, Region IV	Crater of Diamonds
Overall Winner	Village Creek

CIP Quarterly Report - July, August & September

Stan Graves said there is \$90 million in projects either completed or underway throughout the park system and \$113.3 million allocated in methods of finance at the present time.

Miscellaneous

Greg Butts said the new trenching project at Crater of Diamonds has been producing some great diamonds. A Texas couple found a 6.35 carat dark brown which was the eighth largest found since the Crater became a state park in 1972.

Referring to the new *James A. Gaston Visitor Center* at Bull Shoals-White River State Park, Jim Gaston said he had visited the project almost everyday during construction. Mr. Gaston said he wanted to share his sincere thanks with Stan Graves for the outstanding work he, his staff and the entire park staff did on the visitor center.

TOURISM DIVISION

Representative Monty Davenport briefed the Commission regarding the Tourism industry's impact on economic development in the state. Everyone has made money from increases in Tourism regardless of their business. Tourism is a real factor in helping to keep the Arkansas economic status high.

Internet Report: Aristotle

State Parks - Internet

Jonathan Eudy presented a PowerPoint update to include search engine optimization, the statistics for various state parks and lodges, and statistics of traffic for each type of park (adventure, 11,311; history, 9,018; and mountain, 4,687). Statistics for ArkansasStateParks.com show an increase of 50.9% in visitor sessions (184,282 in September 2006) compared to September 2005 (107,860), which resulted in an increase of 169% in page views. Most visitors to the Web site came from Arkansas (19.1%), Texas (15.3%), Oklahoma (3.6%), Missouri (4.5%), Louisiana (8.0%), Georgia (2.7%), Tennessee (3.5%), Illinois (2.4%), and California (2.5%).

Jonathan Eudy reported on the effects that optimized press releases can have in relation to visitors on Web sites. Due to the recent article released regarding the 6.3 carat diamond discovered at Crater of Diamonds State Park, the home page of ArkansasStateParks.com had 40,710 visitors, compared to the 41,410 visitors to CraterofDiamondsstatepark.com homepage.

Hitwise

Jonathan Eudy reported 3.5% of Internet traffic to ArkansasStateParks.com can be attributed to the search term Crater of Diamonds. ArkansasStateParks.com rankings increased in two Hitwise categories: Travel Category (768 of 11,156) and Travel- Destinations and Accommodations (381 of 6,988). ArkansasStateParks.com received 44.17% of traffic from search engines in September. Twelve of the top 20 sites visited after ArkansasStateParks.com were State Park Web sites.

ArkansasStateParks.com ranked number one when compared to surrounding states (Texas, Tennessee, Alabama, Missouri, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Mississippi) Tourism Web sites. When compared to all fifty tourism Web sites (there are no other State Park sites comparable to Arkansas), ArkansasStateParks.com ranks twenty-first of the fifty states.

Tourism - Internet

Production Overview

Jonathan Eudy reported the additional mountain biking content addressed the need expressed by commissioners for more content south of Interstate-40. Proof of work on Spanish translation of Web sites can be seen on the interior page using the words "En Espanol" (left hand navigational window); click on the words to open a new window. Google creates a translation of the same page in Spanish. After clicking the alternate language all subsequent pages will appear in the specified content; to remove Spanish content simply exit the window. Plans are being made to start working on a script of an overview in Spanish for virtual tours.

Optimized Press Releases

Jonathan Eudy summarized the results of optimized press releases using the recent publication (PR Newswire for Journalists) of the 6.3 carat diamond discovered at Crater of Diamonds State Park. Several news organizations (Chicago Sun-Times, Newsweek, Hoover's Online, MSNBC News, CBS News, etc.) picked up the article for additional publicity therefore increasing the exposure of the press release.

Stats Overview

Jonathan Eudy reported Arkansas.com had approximately 608,912 visitor sessions, and 5,154,244 page views in September 2006, as compared to 435,167 visitor sessions 4,476,460 page views in September 2005.

ArkansasHotDeals.com ranked 1,080 out of 6,988 Web sites in September 2006 resulting in 154,220 page views of industry detail pages and the referrals of 16,091 visitors from detail pages to industry partners Web sites. ArkansasHotDeals.com ranked in the top 5 with the most visitors in the following categories: Home Page (18,675), Lodging (3,889), Romance (3,227), Attractions (2,346), Spas (2,182) and Lakes & Rivers (1,619). ArkansasHotDeals.com is categorized in Hitwise under the Travel-Destinations and Accommodation category. Arkansas.com accounts for 72.73% of traffic to the site followed by Google and ArkansasStateParks.com, while the top 20 sites visited after ArkansasHotDeals.com included hotels and industry partners.

Jonathan Eudy reported the pay-per-click campaign for September 2006 included approximately 2,627,919 total impressions, with 38,521 total clicks at an average cost-per-click of \$0.53. The specialty E-newsletter mailing, *Autumn in Arkansas*, was sent to general database registrants, generating approximately 17,407 page views for Arkansas.com. Keyword rankings that referred visitors to Arkansas via search engines (Google, Yahoo!, and MSN) include: elopement, vacation Arkansas, spa packages in Hot Springs, Arkansas vacations, reunion packages, hot vacation deals, magic springs packages, Hot Springs Arkansas spa packages, etc.

Hitwise

Jonathan Eudy reported September data from Hitwise indicates findings that Arkansas.com rankings increased in three Hitwise categories: All categories (9,292 of 1,004,508); Travel Category (297 of 11,156); and Travel-Destinations and Accommodation (120 of 6,988). Search engines accounted for 51.81% of traffic to Arkansas.com (23.27% above industry standard). Arkansas Hot Deals received over 10% of the traffic from Arkansas.com.

MySpace

Marla Johnson Norris updated the Commission on new and important information regarding the Internet. MySpace.com has become the fastest growing online brand, increasing 183%, from 16.2 million unique visitors in July 2005 to 46 million in July 2006. The traffic to MySpace.com is actually higher than the traffic to Google.com. MySpace is a powerful program that allows people to create a private community where photos, journals, and interests can be shared with others.

Ms. Norris explained the creation of a personal (or business) page is relatively simple: sign up, create a user profile (your space on the Web, where you can describe yourself, hobbies, interests, upload photos and write journals) and invite friends to join your personal network. You can then view your friends' Web sites to create connections within your personal network. Due to international expansion (United Kingdom, Australia, France, Ireland, and Germany have MySpace programs in the starting phases), United States' 90 million active profiles, and the addition of a new program designed to deliver MySpace content directly to cell phones, the popularity of MySpace will become more pronounced. Current MySpace users are comprised of adults aged 35 and older (50%) and 12-24 year olds (30%).

Ms. Norris reported companies, organizations, cities, and tourism destinations are creating MySpace pages; these groups' (if any are advertisers of Google) ads have the ability to show up on a MySpace page through the use of banner ads and text links. Buyers are promoted on the site to other users with banner ads and text links. Many of the corporate faux profiles are paid deals; the cost ranges from \$100,000 to more than \$1 million. Other companies post profiles for free (the way any other user can), however, MySpace monitors unpaid commercial profiles and has taken some down. A firm policy of MySpace is the prohibition of directly selling products from the profile page. An example of a paid page would be the Marines' MySpace profile. Since its creation in February 2006, this profile has generated more than 50,000 click-throughs to Marines.com. As "official" advertisers of MySpace, one of the advantages includes no advertising by other companies and different designs and content are available for official advertisers. A couple of things to remember include: the goal of most marketing profiles is to draw in those coveted "friends" and build buzz; not all "buzz" will be positive; and corporate profiles need to be fun, funny and have a form of viral component to them (needs ongoing work), otherwise advertisers will not get the full benefit of the MySpace page.

As a defensive measure each domain name (example: CraterofDiamondsStateParks.com) should create a MySpace profile to block other users from using the names, while allowing Arkansas Parks and Tourism a form of control. Ms. Norris mentioned due to the rapid growth and the play in the media, MySpace will eventually have to deal with the legal issues regarding the use of URLs and official logos.

Focus Groups

Jennifer Peper summarized the results of the focus groups for Arkansas Parks and Tourism regarding the redesign of the Arkansas.com Web site. Two research firms in Memphis, Tennessee and Dallas, Texas were used. All participants recruited for both groups had to meet the minimum requirements: Internet connection at home; planned a leisure trip out of state in the past 12 months (including purchase of lodging); one half of all participants had to have taken a trip with kid or grandkids in the last 12 months; not participated in a focus group within the last 8 months; articulate; and able to pass a standard security screener. Recruitment results from Memphis included a total of 22 participants and Dallas had 23 participants.

At the beginning of the sessions, visitors were asked to fill out a survey after looking at several screen captures and live versions of Web sites. Those sites included: Florida, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Wisconsin and Michigan. From data and comments presented, the combined strengths of Virginia's Web site (strong photography and clear calendar) and elements of Arkansas's current site (clarity of navigation, simplicity of overall design, and extensive yet simple drop down menus), would create the most successful site. During the discussion, Aristotle asked a number of questions to help participants begin thinking about their online planning/booking patterns and needs. Most participants stated: the Internet was used for both planning and booking of travel; 4-8 weeks in advance for planning of trip; most participants did their research at work; sites used in planning/researching trips included: Vacations.com, Carnival.com, vacations2go.com, etc; very few participants knew what RSS feeds are (after explanation some expressed possible interest).

Generally the responses to the mini-sites were very positive. Birding Site Notes: Participants liked the highlighted words in copy; most participants noticed the E-newsletter and Hot Deals promotions. Fall Colors: Several mentioned liking the fall colors page and the leaf color change; after site was presented, some people wanted to be able to choose Arkansas activities by season. Fishing: Several people mentioned not liking the white box that appears on the mouse-over feature; many would prefer a color change. Water Sports: Most participants liked the site and asked if it would be linked to the main page.

Jennifer Morgan and Jonathan Eudy distributed a detailed copies of the September 2006 Focus Group Reports to Commissioners.

Big Dam Bridge Report

Joe David Rice reported 1500 runners and approximately 1600 bikers went over the Big Dam Bridge opening weekend. Credit should be given to Judge F.G. "Buddy" Villines and the Pulaski County Quorum Court. Jim Shamburger said the opening comments from Governor Huckabee could not have been better had the Commission written the words.

North American Travel Journalists Association

Joe David Rice informed the Commissioners the Advertising Committee asked Theresa Kyzer's (Little Rock CVB) to explain who and what the North American Travel Journalists Association (NATJA) is and allow the staff time to follow up.

Theresa Kyzer summarized the NATJA's mission is to support the professional development of its members, provide exceptional benefits and valuable resources, support high quality professional journalism, promote travel and leisure activities to the public, and honor the excellence of journalism throughout the world. The membership requirements include: legitimate, working, professional writer, photographer, or editor in the travel, food, wine, or hospitality industries. All journalists are required to submit ten clips or broadcast tapes from within the past twelve month period. Staff writers/editors of a publication would automatically qualify; an applicant must adhere to the mission and values of NATJA in their professional endeavors.

The media members of NATJA specialize in the following areas: soft adventure and the outdoors (everything from fishing and kayaking to hiking and wildlife), baby boomer travel, cultural, historical, culinary, romantic travel, spa getaways, luxury travel and family vacations.

Ms. Kyzer explained a proposed partnership with the Department of Parks and Tourism would be entitled to the following: two seats on the host committee; recognition on all host committee printed materials and programs; logo to appear prominently alongside the Little Rock CVB as Premier Partner on all signage and banners provided by the host committee; binder containing all media delegate profile forms in advance for your individual marketing purposes; up to six delegates to attend all host committee sponsored functions including meals, sightseeing tours, and marketplace events; the organization's printed materials would be provided to the delegates; and the cost of all pre- and post press/media tours would be included. Ms. Kyzer explained NATJA will bring in approximately 150 travel writers to the state. In March 2004, contributed \$8,000.00 to the SATW meeting in Little Rock. The analyses of finances are: \$1,000.00 on two dine-a-round groups; \$3,000.00 for duffel bags; \$1,000.00 break; and \$3,000.00 for media FAM tours for 55 travel writers. Ms. Kyzer told the Commission the NATJA would "Explore the Natural State" in May 2007, with an expected six pre- and post Press/Media Tours throughout the state, daily sight-seeing tours, guest speakers, etc. She distributed handouts about the NATJA.

Joe David Rice stated Theresa Kyzer came to him back in July, however, at that time not enough information was available to report to the Commission. As such, the Department of Parks and Tourism did not budget for this program and the funds (should the commission decide) would have to come from the advertising agency's budget at this time. Therefore, Mr. Rice recommends the Commission allow the staff time to review information and budgets.

Welcome Center Update

Joe David Rice reported the Blytheville Welcome Center reconstruction contract is expected to begin in January 2007. The plan is for the existing Welcome Center to remain as long as possible before moving to a temporary building to hold staff and literature until the completion of the new Welcome Center on Interstate-55.

The West Memphis Welcome Center location is still pending. The Highway Department is looking at a tract of land immediately west of the dog track. The issues under consideration are the safety of motorists getting on and off the ramps and where the extra money would come from for land purchase and the construction of entrance roads.

The Lake Village Welcome Center will remain on the lakeshore on the US 82 Business Route. The Highway Department is also constructing a new bypass for US 82 which will go west of Lake Village.

Advertising Agency Contract

Joe David Rice reminded the Commissioners the Department's professional services contract with Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods would expire June 30, 2007. There are two options available to the Commission as provided by the rules and regulations: the Commission has the authority to extend the contract for a two-year period (if the staff determines the agency's work has been satisfactory) or to put the account "on the street" and ask for proposals from interested parties.

Mr. Rice recommended the contract be extended for an additional two years. The past two fiscal years have been good ones when judged by collections of the state's 2% tourism tax. Focus groups have confirmed Arkansas is sending effective messages to the most likely audiences. Based upon ongoing research, the 2007 campaign represents another step forward. The industry seems reasonably content, and the relationship between CJRW and the Parks and Tourism staff is congenial and productive.

Jay Bunyard moved to approve the renewal of the Professional Services Contract with Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods for an additional 2 years. Ness Sechrest seconded and the motion carried.

Research and Information Services

Joanne Hinson reported the Research and Information Services Section processed 57,391 requests for information during September 2006, a decrease of 17.8% from September 2005. Arkansas Welcome Center visitation was 75,250 in September, up 16.8% from September 2005. September retirement/relocation requests totaled 4,127.

Ms. Hinson reported Eddie Fugatt led the Fall Welcome Center Familiarization Tour during the week of September 25-29. Eighteen various Welcome Center staff members toured the Western Arkansas' Mountain Frontier and Northwest Arkansas regions.

Ms. Hinson informed the Commissioners Welcome Center Managers Martin Reese (Lake Village) and Norma Sims (Harrison) would be staffing the Tourism Division booth at the Arkansas State Fair on October 13-22.

Ms. Hinson reported staff members were currently summarizing questionnaires being received from the Spring/Summer Conversion Study. The Spring/Summer Internet Conversion study has been completed.

Joe David Rice stated the attendance numbers at the new Welcome Centers are up 34% compared to 2 years ago, while the attendance at other Welcome Centers is fairly flat.

Richard W. Davies questioned if further contact has been made with Anthony Timber suppliers. The company went back to the El Dorado Welcome Center a year after completion to see how things were "weathering." Anthony Timber pointed out design flaws (allowing sprinklers to sprinkle the building, end of post on concrete pad in a ring holding water, etc.) that were forwarded to the Highway Department to help decrease the amount of costly flaws in future Welcome Center construction projects. Joe David Rice stated the architect for the second phase of the Welcome Centers has learned from those mistakes; the Welcome Center managers have been asked to comment on any design changes they might make.

Tourism Development

Donna Perrin reported the deadline for the Henry Award nominations would be October 31. To date only 21 nominations have been received. Ms. Perrin encouraged commission attendees to pick up a nomination form for the Henry Awards. Joe David Rice stated the Henry Awards winners would be announced at the Governor's Conference on Tourism held in Hot Springs, March 4-6, 2007.

Donna Perrin summarized details from the recent Agritourism meeting she and Nancy Clark attended. The meeting concentrated on an action plan. The group established the definition of Agritourism; a report on an inventory of approximately 460 business and events that are related to Agritourism was given. A list will continue to circulate across the state with the goal of

adding other businesses. The general research committee gave a report touching on the action plan and informed members the Agritourism group was the recipient of an 18 month grant (rural business opportunity grant); Johnson, Logan, Pope, Perry, Yell and Conway counties are the six counties involved.

Donna Perrin reminded Commissioners and attendees the United Way Auction will be held November 1. Donations for the auction will be accepted until the end of October 31, 2006.

Communications

Cache in with the Natural State Update

Jana Greenbaum stated a name for the geocache project has been chosen, "Cache in with the Natural State." Since the last Commission meeting, the number of geocache has been expanded from six communities interested in participating to 15. Currently two locations, DeGray and Mountain Harbor will host multi-cache sites including an educational component. Ms. Greenbaum stated she has been working with the Marketing Director of GeoCache.com to allow Arkansas an exception for listing geocache on the Web site, which would provide a national outlet to target information.

Arkansas.com

Jana Greenbaum summarized the addition the Mountain Biking Web site and noted various multi-media items and information has been added to Arkansas.com. Ms. Greenbaum encouraged Commissioners to visit the new Web sites including: food festivals and cook-offs, public art, and "Uniquely Arkansas."

Personnel Update

Jana Greenbaum reported the hiring a new travel writer for eastern Arkansas. Kim Williams, former marketing director for the Delta Cultural Center, will start November 6.

Miscellaneous Media Projects

Jana Greenbaum reported a BBC radio journalist is currently in Arkansas biking the Great River Road. He will be over-night in Blytheville, Osceola, West Memphis, Helena, McGehee and Lake Chicot State Park. The BBC radio will broadcast live from West Memphis on Wednesday, October 25th. Arkansas will receive two broadcasts covering his adventures along the Arkansas Great River Road.

Jana Greenbaum gave credit to Joe David Rice for stealing the idea of hotels creating an "Escape from the Relatives" package. For those individuals not wishing to visit relatives, the package would include overnight lodging, room service, breakfast for two, and a whimsical pre-printed list of excuses to pass on to relatives as reasons for not visiting for the holidays, and a \$50.00 gift card to help bail out individuals whose excuses were not taken well. Guests will have the ability to register under aliases.

Group Travel

Tour Operator Calls

Melinda Hawes reported Group Travel has been making sales calls to tour operators who recently visited Arkansas and/or surrounding states. Questions are asked regarding recent experiences in Arkansas, what could be done better, and if travel plans in 2007 include Arkansas. Follow-up to the conversations with the operators include targeted mailings of press kits containing releases (from Communications) on "What's New in Arkansas" and "Top Festivals and Events," and other relevant releases. First states targeted include: Missouri, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, Alabama, and Kansas. This also helps update Group Travel's portion of the Attractions, Lodging, and Dining database as well as making improvements to the database with regards to what information is requested.

Itinerary Development and Promotion

Melinda Hawes summarized the addition of new themed sample itineraries to the Web site, including motorcycle groups and motorhome clubs. Ms. Hawes reported she has been talking to surrounding states Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas for the creation of more sample regional itineraries; tentatively calling the region "Grand Central USA."

New Profile Form

Melinda Hawes explained Group Travel has teamed with CJRW to create a new profile form (the standard printed tool used at tradeshows). These profile forms feature a new collection of colorful photographs, are custom printable for the purpose/event, and have retained the writable map and helpful information on the back (for use during appointments). This form will be the only thing left behind as a reminder to visit Arkansas. Ms. Hawes passed the original prototype profile form around for Commissioners to examine.

Miscellaneous

Jim Gaston stated he felt Arkansas was missing out on the opportunity to facilitate more visitors to Arkansas by utilizing the "carp" angle. Melinda Hawes agreed and stated a new British fishing operator has expressed a strong interest in Arkansas, specifically in relation to carp. Mr. Gaston feels this could result in a "spin-off." Richard W. Davies suggested locating a carp guide could be the key to the success of carp fishing trips.

Report from Advertising Committee

Steve Arrison reported the results and recommendations from the Advertising Committee meeting on October 18, 2006. Mr. Arrison reminded Commissioners at the conclusion of the 2006 Fall Online Campaign Media and Creative recommendations the Commissioners asked for the font size of body copy and the calls to action to be enlarged; photography more representational of Arkansas; and the size and type of logo used on the vacation kits to be changed. CJRW has made the requested changes and the Advertising committee recommends accepting the changes.

Jim Gaston moved to approve the 2006 Fall Online Campaign Media and Creative Recommendations. Mike Mills seconded and the motion carried.

Miscellaneous

Joe David Rice reported the image book, *Picture Arkansas*, was progressing well and is expected to go to press Wednesday, October 25. Jim Shamburger inquired if the image book would be made available by the next commission meeting. Shelby Woods answered the book would not be available until the end of November.

Joe David Rice reported Paul Harvel asked Richard W. Davies to put together a program for the continuing series, "Leadership Group," to travel across Arkansas. Members of the group have various backgrounds (banks, utilities, restaurants, hotels, etc.). The group will be visiting six or seven locations to discuss education, tourism, transportation, etc. The Tourism part of the program will be held at Mt. Magazine in early November. An all day program is being planned by Debi Barnes and others. An update will be provided at the November Commission meeting.

Jana Greenbaum updated Commissioners about articles written regarding Crowley's Ridge debuting in the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and *Family Motor Coach Magazine*. These articles are a result of a FAM tour hosted for approximately \$300.00.

Special Order of Business

Report of the Nominating Committee for the 2007 Chairman and Vice Chairman

Committee members (Jane Christenson, Chairman; Danny Ford, and Montine McNulty) recommended the following Commissioners to serve as the 2007 Chairman and Vice Chairman: Jay Bunyard, Chairman; and Steve Arrison, Vice Chairman.

Jane Christenson moved to approve Jay Bunyard as Commission Chairman and Steve Arrison as Vice Chairman for 2007. Jim Gaston seconded and the motion carried.

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The State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission adjourned at 8:30 a.m. on October 20, 2006 at the James A. Gaston Visitor Center Bull Shoals-White River State Park.