

**STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION**

Crater of Diamonds State Park

Murfreesboro, Arkansas

October 20, 2011

**Commissioners Present**

Bob Knight, Chairman  
Darin Gray, Vice-Chairman  
Steve Arrison  
Bill Barnes  
Jay Bunyard  
LeRoy Dangeau  
Jim Gaston

John Gill  
Debbie Haak  
Barbara Harvel  
Mike Mills  
Ness Sechrest  
Jim Shamburger  
Cindy Smith

**Commissioners Absent**

Danny Ford  
Billy Lindsey  
Montine McNulty

**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  
Marla Crider, Assistant Tourism Director  
Jon Brown, Operations Manager  
Stan Graves, Parks Planning & Development Manager  
Joe Jacobs, Marketing & Revenue Manager  
Joan Ellison, Public Information Officer  
Dena Woerner, Communications Manager  
Joanne Hinson, Research & Information Services Manager  
Tom Stolarz, Region I Supervisor  
Marcel Hanzlik, Region III Supervisor  
Shea Lewis, Region IV Supervisor  
Grady Spann, Region V Supervisor  
Kris Richardson, Administrative Specialist  
Dottie Boyles, Administrative Specialist

**Aristotle**

Jonathan Eudy

**CJRW**

Shelby Woods  
Karen Mullikin  
Joy Phillips

**Guests**

Justin Dorsey, Superintendent, Crater of Diamonds State Park  
Bill Henderson, Assistant Superintendent, Crater of Diamonds State Park  
Lacey Carter, Superintendent Trainee, Crater of Diamonds State Park  
Wayman Cox, Park Interpreter, Crater of Diamonds State Park  
Joe Buckley, Superintendent, Historic Washington State Park  
Caleb Howell, Superintendent, Daisy State Park  
Ralph Donnangelo, Chief Ranger, Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism  
Tom Larimer, Arkansas Press Association  
Doug Krile, Arkansas Broadcaster's Association  
Mary Smith, Murfreesboro  
Jane Terrell, Murfreesboro

**Roll Call**

Chairman Bob Knight called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, October 20, 2011. Gloria Robins called the roll.

**Approval of the Agenda**

**Cindy Smith moved to accept the Agenda as presented. Barbara Harvel seconded and the motion carried.**

**Presentation of Minutes from Previous Meeting**

**Mike Mills moved to accept the Minutes from the September 2011 meeting. Barbara Harvel seconded and the motion carried.**

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Cynthia Dunlap presented the year-to-date financial report for the period ended September 30, 2011. The expenditures were: Parks Division, \$17,958,331; including construction and grants; Tourism Division, \$3,341,070; Keep Arkansas Beautiful, \$69,489; Administration Division, \$865,086; and History Commission, \$426,844. Expenditures for the Department totaled \$22,660,821, an increase of decrease of .98% over the same period FY11. The year-to-date operating revenue Parks Division totaled 6,775,541, a decrease of 10% over the same period FY11; 1/8% Cent Tax \$7,016,147, a decrease of .3% over the same period FY11; and 2% Tax \$3,855,187, an increase of 2.4% over the same period FY11.

**Ness Sechrest moved to approve the financial report. Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.**

## **Welcome to Guests**

Justin Dorsey, Superintendent for Crater of Diamonds State Park, welcomed guests and gave a brief overview of the park. Mr. Dorsey explained that diamond searching is the theme for all interpretation activities. The first diamond was found in 1906. The property changed hands several times over the years and several unsuccessful attempts were made at commercial mining. In 1972 the property was purchased for development as a state park. Although diamonds are the chief attraction, other semi-precious stones and minerals can be found. During Fiscal Year 2011, the park reported 118,850 visitors, 624 diamonds found, and 62 school programs held. Recent improvements include: a water park, wildlife blind, and the camping facility was renovated. The park also received the Park Maintenance of the Year Award for FY11.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### **October 6 Legislative Agri Committee Meeting Report**

Richard Davies stated the Legislative Agriculture, Forestry and Economic Development Committee met at Mount Magazine State Park on October 6. An update from the Department of Parks and Tourism was given. The report was well received and Committee members appreciated the way the department handled and spent its money.

### **Legislative Audit Report**

In a report issued from the Legislative Joint Auditing Committee, the department was informed, “the Agency failed to establish procedures to adequately monitor resale of inventory. The Agency relied on ending inventory balances to compute sales and did not track sales in a manner to ensure that items removed from inventory were actually sold instead of stolen or removed due to spoilage.” Their recommendation was for the Agency to continue its efforts to establish internal controls over resale inventory to improve management oversight of these assets.

### **The TRIP Act**

Mr. Davies reported on the new Travel Regional Investment Partnership (TRIP) Act, introduced by Senator Mark Pryor and other U.S. Senators. The TRIP Act will promote tourism by partnering public and private dollars through a competitive matching grant program with the U.S. Department of Commerce.

### **HR 2112 Transportation Appropriations Bill**

Mr. Davies also reported on Senator John McCain’s proposed amendment to HR 2112, the Transportation Appropriations bill. The amendment would have prohibited using federal dollars on scenic byways and transportation enhancement projects. Letters were sent to Senators John Boozman and Mark Pryor asking they oppose the amendment. The proposed amendment was defeated.

### **TOURISM DIVISION**

#### **Arkansas River Flotilla**

Commissioner Cindy Smith reported on the Arkansas River Flotilla, an event created to promote economic development and recreational opportunities along the Arkansas River. Approximately 20 privately owned yachts, houseboats and cruisers will comprise the flotilla, scheduled to travel the length of the state’s portion of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System beginning October 20 and concluding on October 29. Stops along the way include: Pendleton, Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Russellville, Fort Smith, Clarksville, and Conway. The event also commemorates the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the system. Cities along the River promoted the flotilla and raised over \$150,000 to help sponsor the event.

### **2013 and 2014 Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism Bid(s)**

There was only one bidding city for the 2013 Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism. Steve Arrison, CEO of Visit Hot Springs, announced the City of Hot Springs would be happy to host the Conference in 2013. The proposed headquarters hotel would be the Embassy Suites Hotel, and the proposed meeting facility, the Hot Springs Convention Center.

**Jim Gaston moved to accept the city of Hot Springs as the host for the 2013 Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism. Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.**

### **Research and Information Services Section**

The Research and Information Services Section processed 8,246 requests for travel information during September 2011, a decrease of 32.5% from September 2010. Year-to-date inquiries for 2011 are 111,760, a decrease of 6.6% over 2010.

The Section received 856 requests for retirement and relocation information in September, down 15.4% from September 2010. Year-to-date requests for 2011 are 6,599, down 15.4% over 2010.

Arkansas Welcome Centers received 72,375 visitors during September 2011, down 3.7% compared to September 2010. January – September visitation is 646,917, down 7.3% over 2010.

Joanne Hinson reported Welcome Center employees are staffing the tourism booth at the 2011 Arkansas State Fair, October 14-23.

The weekly fall foliage update began September 22. The report is posted each Thursday throughout the fall color season on Arkansas.com.

### **Tourism Development Section**

Dena Woerner announced that Tourism Development Manager Donna Perrin and Tourism Consultant Kristine Puckett were representing Arkansas at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Sunbelt Ag Expo, held October 18-20. The Expo is an agricultural-based trade show held at Spence Field in Moultrie, Georgia. Arkansas is the spotlight state for this year's expo. Handouts and gifts for the VIP luncheon were provided by staff from Crater of Diamonds State Park. The event draws thousands of visitors each year.

The Best Practices meeting for the Arkansas Regional Tourist Associations took place September 14 during the Arkansas Hospitality Association Convention and Trade Show. A representative from each region shared at least one of their association's best practices. Guidelines may be found by visiting [www.arkansas.com/industryinsider](http://www.arkansas.com/industryinsider).

### **Communications Section**

Dena Woerner reported the Section was currently making plans for the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual, *Arkansas: The State of Fishing* event. A familiarization tour set for November 13–21, 2011, on Lake Ouachita at Mountain Harbor Resort in Mount Ida. The event includes travel writers, photographers, trade publications and fishing equipment companies.

The dining site of Arkansas.com has been redesigned and features a new video series highlighting chefs from restaurants located across the state.

### **Group Travel Section**

The Monthly Tracking Report indicated 899 inquires for September 2011 compared to 30 inquires for September 2010. Year-to-date inquiries are 1755 for 2011 compared to 745 for 2010.

Members of the Arkansas Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus and Group Travel hosted their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual tradeshow booth for TEAMS 2011, held October 3-6, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This partnership is a collaboration of conducting 60, ten-minute appointments with sports meeting planners from across the United States. More emphasis on sports marketing is being planned to further increase this niche for Arkansas.

### **Internet-Related Items**

There were 424,528 visitor sessions via desktop and 15,651 via mobile website during the month of September 2011, a decrease of 6.3% from September 2010, and 91,730 links to industry partners. The Arkansas.com website placed number three among all 50 state tourism sites and number one amid the contiguous state sites. The *Hot Deals and Packages* iPhone application had 3,735 downloads from March 1, 2010, through October 9, 2011, with 503 visits and 4020 page views. During September 2011, there were 50,730 visits from mobile devices to *Arkansas.com*, by way of 12 operating systems, an increase of 161% over September 2010.

Jonathan Eudy reported the home page of Arkansas.com had been updated with new autumn images. The Fall Color and Haunted Arkansas icons have also been added. Fall foliage reports are updated once a week. The Dining web page now features videos and interviews from Arkansas Chefs Abby Houseworth and Todd Gold.

### **Advertising/Marketing**

The *2011 Trail of Holiday Lights* brochure was distributed. There are 66 destinations featured throughout the state. The outside cover features a holiday hog. Wendy's is a partner again this year and the holiday hog will be featured on tray placemats of customers who dine in or stickers attached to bags for take-out. Brochure racks will have a button attached featuring the holiday hog with a blinking nose. CJRW will begin posting updates and photos on the Trail of Holiday Lights Facebook page in November.

Karen Mullikin reported on the Adventure in Arkansas TV segment currently airing on KATV, Channel 7. Reporter Chris Kane has been traveling throughout the state on different adventures. The segment has been well received; therefore the partnership has been extended into mid November.

Joe David Rice announced Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> year of business with a celebration on October 14, 2011, at the Little Rock State House Convention Center.

### **Tourism Miscellaneous**

#### **16<sup>th</sup> Annual Hillbilly Chili Cook-off**

The Bull Shoals-Lakeview Rotary Club held its 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Hillbilly Chili Cook-off on September 10, at the Bull Shoals-White River State Park in Lakeview. International Chili Society cooks competed for cash prizes, trophies, and the chance to be crowned the Arkansas State Champion, while local organizations cooked up pots of chili to raise money for their favorite community projects. Over 2,500 people attended the event. Commissioner Jim Gaston requested certificates of appreciation be presented to the Rotary Club and to Connie Coleman, coordinator for the event, in recognition for their efforts.

**Debbie Haak moved to approve Certificates of Appreciation for Connie Coleman and the Bull Shoals-Lakeview Rotary for their successful implementation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Hillbilly Chili Cook-Off. Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.**

### **Historic Baseball Trail in Hot Springs**

Commissioner Steve Arrison gave an update on the new Historic Baseball Trail in Hot Springs. In Spring 2012, coinciding with Major League Baseball spring training, Hot Springs will officially inaugurate The Historical Baseball Trail that documents Hot Springs: The Birthplace of Spring Baseball. More than 45 percent of the people in the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, either played baseball or were in some way associated with baseball training in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas.

### **Republic of Rwanda**

Shelby Woods, Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods, reported on the Arkansas connections to Rwanda and initiatives for import/export ventures between the two governments. Albert Nsengiyumva, Minister of Infrastructure of the Republic of Rwanda, met with Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe in Little Rock and had breakfast with Tourism Director Joe David Rice and Mr. Woods. He also spoke at the Clinton School of Public Service and Heifer International. Only two percent of the people in Rwanda are over the age of 65, the median age is 18.

### **Miscellaneous**

Commissioner Jim Gaston stated with the early opening of schools, the tourism market changes, and he proposed taking \$100,000-150,000 to work with radio stations during the time period beginning the last two weeks in July and the first two weeks of August. He said in his opinion the campaign creative during this time should be geared more to the mature market. Commissioner Bill Barnes said the "back to school" ad campaigns inadvertently sends a message that signals the end of summer. He also must reduce resort staff with the drop in visitation. Richard Davies said some of the surrounding states may have school opening dates later than Arkansas, and might be good target markets. A discussion ensued, and several commissioners agreed that the matter should be given serious consideration.

### **PARKS DIVISION**

#### **Arkansas Press Association Partnership Grant Agreement Renewal**

Greg Butts stated that Arkansas State Parks (ASP) has been in partnership with the Arkansas Press Association (APA) since 1988 and it has been a wonderful marriage informing Arkansas and visitors alike about ASP's programs and recreational facilities. Mr. Butts recommended renewal of the partnership. He introduced Tom Larimer, Executive Director of the APA. Mr. Larimer noted that the newspapers of Arkansas recognize the importance of tourism for the state of Arkansas and would be happy to enter into this agreement another year.

**Ness Sechrest moved to renew the Arkansas Press Association Partnership Grant for one year. Jim Shamburger seconded and the motion carried.**

**Arkansas Broadcasters Association Partnership Grant Agreement Renewal**

Greg Butts stated that ASP has been in partnership with the Arkansas Broadcasters Association (ABA) since 1987 and it too has been a successful relationship and recommended renewal of the partnership. He introduced Doug Krile, Executive Director of ABA. Mr. Krile stated he appreciates the opportunity to extend the contract with ASP; benefitting both organizations. He noted that the money spent last year helped to fund the underwriting of the EAS (Emergency Action System). In return, the ABA picked up many new member stations which should increase the percentages and ratios, bringing the total to 200 radio stations and 15 TV stations across the state. Mr. Krile thanked the Commission for the opportunity to renew the partnership.

**Ness Sechrest moved to renew the Arkansas Broadcaster's Association Partnership Grant for one year. Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.**

**FY12 Property Acquisitions (Final Approval)**

Greg Butts advised in accordance with ACA 22-4-106, that ASP has received favorable advice from the Governor's Office, the Arkansas Legislative Council and the Department of Finance and Administration to proceed with the acquisition of lands at the following state parks: Historic Washington; Mississippi River; Mt. Nebo; Pinnacle Mt.; Powhatan Historic; and Prairie Grove Battlefield. Mr. Butts requested final approval to proceed with the acquisitions.

**Jim Shamburger moved for final approval to proceed with the acquisition of lands at Historic Washington; Mississippi River; Mt. Nebo; Pinnacle Mt.; Powhatan Historic; and Prairie Grove Battlefield State Parks, described as:**

**Historic Washington: All of Block 88 and fractional parts of Blocks 55 and 119, Dixon Addition to the City of Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas, containing 2.70 acres, more or less.**

**Mississippi River: A fractional part of the Southeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 30, Township 2 North, Range 4 East, Lee County, Arkansas, containing 1.04 acres, more or less.**

**Mt. Nebo: The North Half of the Northwest Quarter of Section 5, Township 6 North, Range 21 West, Yell County, Arkansas, containing 80 acres, more or less.**

**Pinnacle Mountain: A fractional part of the Northwest Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 4, Township 2 North, Range 14 West, Pulaski County, Arkansas, containing 4.55 acres, more or less.**

**Powhatan Historic: The Northwest Quarter of Section 7, Township 15 North, Range 31 West, LESS and EXCEPT the North 264 feet thereof; AND the East Half of the East Half of the Northeast Quarter of Section 12, Township 15 North, Range 32 West, LESS and EXCEPT the North 264 feet thereof, Washington County, Arkansas, containing 184.42 acres, more or less.**

**Prairie Grove Battlefield: Lots 1, 2, 5, 6, and the north  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Lot 4, all in Block Five of the Original Town of Powhatan, Lawrence County, Arkansas, containing 0.400 acres, more or less.**

**Mike Mills seconded and the motion carried.**

### **Wildlife Observation Grant Request**

Stan Graves reported that the FY12 grant program that is funded by Arkansas Game and Fish Commission with funds coming from oil and gas shale leases is available to eligible agencies. Mr. Graves requested approval for a grant for Crater of Diamonds State Park in the amount of \$60,000 and for Lake Catherine State Park in the amount of \$100,000. Dependent on the level of funding available, staff recommends priority for Crater of Diamonds State Park.

**Jim Gaston moved to approve the Wildlife Observation Grant Request for Crater of Diamonds State Park in the amount of \$60,000 and Lake Catherine State Park in the amount of \$100,000. Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.**

### **Moro Bay –Structure Removal**

Stan Graves requested Commission approval to remove a deteriorated paint storage building from inventory as it no longer meets safety requirements.

**Mike Mills moved to approve removal of a paint storage building (Building No. 34.13/AASIS No. 120006029) from Moro Bay State Park inventory. Steve Arrison seconded and the motion carried.**

**FY11 Arkansas State Park Awards**

Greg Butts reported that the FY11 ASP awards have been awarded recently at the 2011 Superintendent's Conference with the Ozark Folk Center State Park (OFC) receiving Park of the Year. Congratulations to the superintendents and their staffs for being selected the best of the best. News releases will follow with complete details of each park award.

FY 2011 Park of the Year, Region I	Lake Ouachita State Park
FY 2011 Park of the Year, Region II	Ozark Folk Center State Park (Overall Winner)
FY 2011 Park of the Year, Region III	Davidsonville Historic State Park
FY 2011 Park of the Year, Region IV	DeGray Lake Resort State Park
FY 2011 Interpretive Program of the Year	Hobbs State Park
FY 2011 Outstanding Hospitality	Lake Ouachita State Park
FY 2011 Outstanding Park Maintenance	Crater of Diamonds State Park
FY 2011 Outstanding Special Event	Ozark Folk Center State Park
FY 2011 Resource Management	AMNR State Park
FY 2011 Volunteer Program	Hobbs State Parks

Mr. Butts advised that Grady Spann, Superintendent of OFC, has recently been promoted to Region 5 Supervisor, which will provide oversight and direction for the five lodge parks.

**CIP Quarterly Report**

Stan Graves reported \$27.2 million in Methods of Finance (MOF) currently underway. He reported \$10.4 million in projects were closed out in the third quarter. Graves reported that \$131.5 million in capital improvements have been completed system wide with the 1/8¢ Conservation Tax.

Stan Graves advised that renovation of Queen Wilhelmina Lodge is slated to begin in January 2012. Graves anticipates the lodge will close in December 2011 with an estimated construction time of 15-18 months. Petit Jean State Park is in the midst of a total renovation of Mather Lodge kitchen and restaurant. Construction is progressing with an anticipated completion date of March 2012.

### **Miscellaneous**

Greg Butts reported great feedback from the August Road Scholar trip at the Ozark Folk Center, formerly the Elder Hostel program. A participant had a wonderful experience with the Ozark program. "Hats off to the staff on creating a great program."

Greg Butts noted a happy occasion occurred at Pinnacle Mountain State Park (PMSP) when a young man proposed to his girlfriend during a fishing trip at PMSP and she accepted .... making memories!

Greg Butts advised that park fact sheets on major maintenance expenditures since FY1998 are available for the Crater of Diamonds, Daisy and Historic Washington State Parks, providing useful information for staff and Commissioners.

### **Special Order of Business**

Bob Knight announced the nominating committee had met and recommended Darin Gray as Chair of the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission for 2012 with Cindy Smith as Vice Chair.

**Steve Arrison moved to approve nominees Darin Gray as Chairman and Cindy Smith as Vice Chairman for the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission for 2012. John Gill seconded and the motion carried.**

### **Adjournment**

**Jim Shamburger moved to adjourn and Debbie Haak seconded and the motion carried.**

With no further business the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission meeting adjourned at 1:35 pm on October 20, 2011 at the Crater of Diamonds State Park, in Murfreesboro, Arkansas.