

Minutes

**The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas
Statehouse Convention Center & The Peabody Hotel
3 Statehouse Plaza
Little Rock, Arkansas
March 9, 2011**

Commissioners Present

Garland Hayes
Bobby Kennedy
Taralou Dunklin
Phyllis Stinson
Carole Bulloch
Joe St. Columbia
Terri Austin McCullough
Lois Boyd

Commissioners Absent

Eva Hollowell
Molly Houseworth Jackson

Technical Advisors/ Department Staff/Guests Present

Nancy Clark, Great River Road Division Director
Dr. Ruth Hawkins, Executive Director, Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association
Paula Miles, Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association
Beth Wiedower, Director, Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative

Call to Order

Chairman Garland Hayes called the meeting to order, and thanked everyone for taking time from their busy schedules to participate in the 37th Annual Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism and the meeting of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission.

Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Joe St. Columbia moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Carole Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.

Special Order of Business

Chairman Garland Hayes said there was a special order of business in that our Technical Advisor and friend Dr. Ruth Hawkins received a very special honor at the Henry Awards at the Governor's Conference. She was inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame, and received the recognition she so richly deserves for all her accomplishments in the promotion of the Delta and the State of Arkansas. Everyone congratulated Dr. Hawkins.

Per Diem Rates for 2011

Nancy Clark explained that Arkansas Statute sets the per diem rate for the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas at \$60.00 per meeting day. Ms. Clark said that a vote must be taken at the first meeting in the calendar year to re-establish the per diem rate for each commissioner for 2011, and to authorize travel reimbursement not to exceed the rates established for state employees. Ms. Clark said the Commission could vote to lower the rate of per diem, but not to raise it.

Terri McCullough moved to establish the per diem rate at \$60.00 per commission meeting, and to authorize the reimbursement of travel expenses for each board member performing official duties with the reimbursement not to exceed the rate established for state employees. Carole Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.

Planning for 2011 National Meeting in Arkansas

Nancy Clark reported the dates for the meeting are September 29—October 2, 2011, and the location is Little Rock with lodging at the DoubleTree Hotel. Ms. Clark presented several ideas she had which included renting motor coaches to take delegates to Stuttgart to see rice being harvested, visiting the Dale Bumpers National Rice Research Center, the Harry K. Dupree Stuttgart National Aquaculture Research Center, lunch and visit at the Museum of the Grand Prairie, a visit to Scott Plantation Agricultural Museum and dinner at Marlsgate Plantation. Clark asked the Commissioner to think of activities of interest—a trip to Stuttgart would provide a good idea of what a traveler would see as they travel the Great River Road in Arkansas.

SE Arkansas Economic Development Project Report

Nancy Clark reminded the Commission about the copies of the executive summary from the Economic Research Associates/Longwoods Report which was commissioned by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism to provide strategic recommendations on how to strengthen and expand the successful state tourism program. One of the findings of the report suggested that a couple of pilot projects be implemented to initiate more tourism in the SE part of the state. One of those pilot projects would be the development of a marina on the Arkansas River, perhaps in the Pendleton area near Dumas. The other pilot project is a SE Arkansas tourism project within the two counties of Desha and Chicot. A coalition of state and federal agencies and private institutions organized by Governor Beebe has developed a long-term strategy for sustained economic development in the area. Much has been done including the inventorying of all tourism related assets in Desha and Chicot counties, and along the Arkansas River from Fort Smith to Pendleton. Seven projects were identified as key opportunities for sparking long-term revival of the region. A brochure has been developed to be used as a sales piece, and copies were distributed to the Commissioners.

One of the short-term projects planned for Southeast Arkansas is geocaching along the Great River Road in Desha and Chicot counties. The event planned for April 1-2 includes 120 new “treasures” hidden along the southern stretch of Arkansas’s Great River Road National Scenic Byway. It is entitled “April Fools and April Goulds: Geocaching Along Arkansas’s Great River Road”. The event will kick off with a “meet and greet” at the Bear Claw in Arkansas City, and later in the evening participants will gather at the historic Desha County Courthouse for a

“haunted” tour. The purpose of this event is to attract visitors to geocache, and see what the Delta has to offer in the area.

Delta Byways Update

Dr. Hawkins said that four individual grant proposals and one joint proposal have been submitted for National Scenic Byway funds: (1) to develop a biking trail along Crowley’s Ridge, (2) to continue Phase II of the West Memphis Gateway Project, (3) restoration of Pickens Baptist Church for an Arkansas Delta Gospel Institute in Dumas, (4) a feasibility study/engineering survey for paving the route through the St. Francis National Forest and part of the Mississippi River State Park, and (5) the joint application (Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana) for marketing the Civil War heritage sites in all three states.

Dr. Hawkins also reported that Arkansas State University is working on restoring some of the buildings of the Dyess Depression-era farming colony. Negotiations to purchase the boyhood home of Johnny Cash which is located within Dyess are underway. A music festival to raise funds for the restoration of the boyhood home will take place on August 4 at the ASU Convocation Center with members of the Cash family including daughter and musician, Roseanne Cash performing. Other stars include Kris Kristofferson and George Jones among many others.

Dr. Hawkins said she was still working with the information on the cemeteries located within the Delta Byways region which Commissioners help to gather. It is voluminous, and she is researching the best method in which to present the information in a brochure.

Second Special Order of Business

Chairman Hayes stated that he had appointed a nominating committee to present a slate of officers for election for the Arkansas Commission. On behalf of the committee, Dr. Terri Austin McCullough presented the following names for consideration: Joe St. Columbia, Chairman; Carole Bulloch, Vice Chairman and Bobby Kennedy, Secretary-Treasurer.

Phyllis Stinson moved to accept the nominations as presented by the Committee. Lois Boyd seconded and the motion carried.

Chairman Garland Hayes reminded Commissioners to return their TR1s to Nancy Clark for processing.

A discussion ensued as to the next meeting date, and newly elected Chairman Joe St. Columbia suggested a meeting in Helena-West Helena in early June.

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Garland Hayes, Chairman
Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Nancy Clark, Director
Great River Road Division

