

EXHIBIT A

**Minutes of the Alabama Trails Commission
and Advisory Board Joint Meeting**

Wednesday, August 16, 2023
10:00 AM

Lake Guntersville Chamber of Commerce, Guntersville, AL

Alabama Trails Commission Attendees

Amy Rauworth
Chris Blankenship (via zoom)
Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair
Grey Brennan
Dr. John Kvach
Johnny Smith
Nisa Miranda (via zoom)
Phillip West

Advisory Board Attendees

Debbie Quinn
Garrett Parker
Jared Carter
Jason Dockery
Jimmy Lemmond
Josh Burnette
Dr. Mark Wilson
Natalie Norman (via zoom)
Steve Newton
Tim King
Dr. Vini Nathan (via zoom)
Will Collins
Will O'Connor (via zoom)

Associates & Visitors

Brian Rushing – UACED
Cindy Ragland – Alabama Trails foundation (via zoom)
Wendy Jackson – Alabama Trails Foundation
Anna Clem – Singing River Trail
David Brewster - TVA

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Graham Sisson called the meeting to order at 10:00AM and called roll. A quorum was present for both the Alabama Trails Commission (ATC) and Advisory Board (AB). Dr. Sisson thanked TVA for hosting the meeting and for providing lunch and offering a tour of Guntersville Dam following the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Sisson asked if there were any corrections or discussion regarding the February 15, 2023 meeting minutes. With no questions or discussion, he asked for a member to make a motion for approval. Phillip

West made a motion for approval and Johnny Smith seconded. With no discussion, the motion to adopt the minutes as written was approved unanimously.

Executive Committee Report

Dr. Sisson presented this report, which included the following main points:

- Announcement of Dr. Mark Wilson's retirement from the Jefferson County Department of Health and stepping down from the Advisory Board (AB). Dr. Sisson thanked Dr. Wilson for his service to the ATC and AB and for everything he has done for public health in Alabama.
- Brief review of the history of the development of the ATC & AB's *Recommendations to the State for Enhancing Outdoor Recreation and Recreational Trails in Alabama*, which were intended to provide assistance to Innovate Alabama (IA) as it considers how best to support outdoor recreation development to attract and retain high-tech and innovation workers. The *Recommendations* are more broadly intended to articulate to state leadership how the ATC & AB feel our state can effectively institutionalize outdoor recreation and recreational trail development and operation to maximize their economic and quality of life benefits to both urban and rural areas. Nisa Miranda and Brian Rushing presented these recommendations to IA's Outdoor Recreation Roundtable on February 22nd of this year. Commissioner Blankenship chairs that body, and Dr. Sisson, Dr. John Kvach, Amy Rauworth, and Phillip West serve on the Roundtable. The Roundtable subsequently submitted its recommendations to IA's Council on Outdoor Recreation and the Council then submitted recommendations to IA's Board, which adopted them. A number of the ATC's & AB's recommendations carried through to those ultimately adopted by IA, but some did not. The Executive Committee thinks these gaps represent an important opportunity for the ATC & AB to identify strategies for their implementation and work will be done on this in the future.
- Congratulations to the Freshwater Land Trust for their recent recognition in the Spring/Summer 2023 edition of *Rails-to-Trails* magazine, which featured an article on implementing Jefferson County's Red Rock Trail System master plan.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation recently announced that the City of Birmingham was awarded a \$21.6 million RAISE grant to build 3.2 miles of multi-use paths, sidewalks, streetscape, and bicycle lane enhancements, focused on underserved communities and the Civil Rights District.
- ADECA is currently accepting applications from local governments and state and federal agencies for Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funding through noon on September 6. A total of \$1.6 million in federal funds is available, with a \$200,000 funding maximum for non-motorized single-use trails and \$400,000 for non-motorized diverse-use trails. \$524,937 is available for motorized diverse-use trails and \$87,489 is available for education programs promoting safety and environmental protection associated with recreational trails. Debbie Quinn, Francesca Gross, and Steve Newton, who are on the AB, sit on the Recreational Trails Advisory Board, which scores these applications. They should be able to answer any questions if anyone has any about the funding opportunity.
- New ATC & AB officers will be appointed for 2024. The Executive Committee will make recommendations to the ATC and AB for members to fill these positions. If you would like to be considered, please contact Brian Rushing.

Dr. Sisson invited questions and comments from the group.

- Steve Newton shared some information about the RTP Education Grant and encouraged anyone interested in applying to contact ADECA for information how to do so. This funding source has not been used over the past 5 years. Projects must be implemented within one year of the award.
- Amy Rauworth recommended using the RTP Education Fund to support another ATC conference. Jared Carter says that Alabama's Mountain, Rivers, and Valleys RC & D would be happy to assist

with organizing a conference. Brian Rushing said that it may be possible to organize a conference later in 2024. He also shared that reinstating the trails leadership workshops was a goal for 2024.

Innovate Alabama Update

Commissioner Chris Blankenship reviewed the following recommendations adopted by Innovate Alabama's Board of Directors:

1. Develop a comprehensive inventory of Alabama's outdoor recreation assets to identify facility gaps.
2. Create a central hub digital platform for public information on outdoor recreation.
3. Develop a brand for outdoor recreation in Alabama and marketing plan.
4. Engage state governments to streamline access to outdoor recreation funds.
5. Establish a permanent Outdoor Recreation Council within Innovate Alabama with 10 members, chaired by the Commissioner of ADCNR.
6. Hire a state outdoor recreation coordinator within Innovate Alabama.
7. Identify ways to cooperate with other states to boost awareness of Alabama's outdoor recreation assets.
8. Organize an annual outdoor recreation conference or summit.
9. Develop a competitive analysis of other states to identify best practices.
10. Leverage existing studies to guide planning and implementation efforts.
11. Ensure economic developers have the communication assets they need for technology and innovation industry recruitment.
12. Identify high impact outdoor recreation development opportunities and offer incentives for development.
13. Advocate for long-term, dedicated, and sustainable state funding for outdoor recreation.

Commission Blankenship thanked the ATC for its input in the process of developing recommendations and invited any questions or to send questions to him via telephone or email.

Sweet Trails Alabama Update

Dr. John Kvach gave a presentation on the development of the Sweet Trails Alabama initiative and the forthcoming planning process, making the following major points:

- Idea was an initiative of a small group of legislators who approached Dr. Kvach to apply the master planning and fundraising model of the Singing River Trail to the rest of the state.
- Singing River Trails wanted to create a platform at the state level to fund the development of a trail master plan and to create a program for implementation that all communities could access.
- Senate Bill 298 was drafted, in part, to allay fears of adjacent landowner liability and security, with the buy-in of groups traditionally opposed to long-distance trails.
- The Singing River Trail has partnered with Jacksonville State University and Alabama A & M University to develop/expand outdoor recreation degree and certification programs and to fund scholarships and fund a graduate research assistant that will aid the planning process.
- A series of promotional and listening sessions will take place around the state October 1 through 6. ATC & AB members will receive invitations to these sessions.
- The planning process will take place within 1 year, starting October 1, 2023 and will local and regional governments.
- The end product will be a master plan that will include a manual for implementation including landowner incentives for donating easements and identification of 10 high-priority projects.
- Sweet Trails Alabama will be seeking \$20 million each year from the state to fund implementation.

Dr. Kvach invited questions:

- Amy Rauworth asked about the role of IA's forthcoming outdoor recreation coordinator. Dr. Kvach said that Singing River Trails is directing the planning process and once the plan is developed, it would be handed off to them for coordinating implementation.
- Wendy Jackson asked about the stakeholder engagement process. Dr. Kvach shared that the funded graduate research assistant at Jacksonville State University will oversee stakeholder engagement around the state.
- Steve Newton asked whether motorized trails would be included in the plan. Dr. Kvach clarified that motorized trails are not included.
- Brian Rushing asked if bike-ped uses would be components of all trails, since this was the stated intent in SB 298. Dr. Kvach clarified that all potential trail routes would be identified and uses clarified through the process.
- Nisa Miranda stated that it makes sense to identify projects already in progress and to do studies around those to maximize feasibility. She also expressed concern about using an out-of-state firm to do the planning process and the need to cultivate expertise in-state. Dr. Kvach said that the three people from Alta are from Alabama and that Alta is the most qualified firm available, with 26 statewide projects completed around the country. Regarding existing projects, they will be collecting data from the COGs and want to represent those projects in the plan and avoid duplication.
- Debbie Quinn encouraged the process to invite partnerships with people on the ground with lots of experience and not "telling them what to do." Dr. Kvach emphasized the intent to work with those people at the local level and rely on their expertise.
- Dr. Sisson emphasized the need to incorporate universal design.

Alabama Trails Foundation Update

Wendy Jackson, Second Vice President of the ATF Board, gave a presentation on the recent activities of the organization, making the following major points:

- Hired a professional photographer to provide updated images of Flagg Mountain to support promotion of the site as a tourism destination.
- Board approved funding for rest areas along the ADA trail on the summit of Flagg Mountain, responding to expressed public need.
- Held a Celebrate Trails Day event along the Chief Ladiga Trail in partnership with the NE Alabama Bicycle Association and the towns along trail. It was a great public outreach opportunity and well-attended.
- Met with the USFS to review Jogloma/Scott Lake project due diligence. This project is moving along well.
- Organizing an *Arts on the Mountain* gathering at Flagg Mountain for September 24, incorporating arts, education, and conservation discussions.
- Held a successful outreach event in partnership with the local outdoor recreation retailer, Alabama Outdoors.
- Met with corporate partners in June about the Alabama Pinhoti Trail improvement project and anticipate good support from these partners.
- Held a webinar on the cultural significance of Jogloma/Scott Lake with the University of Alabama.

Debbie Quinn asked Jason Dockery to provide a quick update on Flagg Mountain from the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) perspective. Mr. Dockery shared that delivering water to the mountain is a priority, along with renovations of the cabins. He also shared that they are working to form a group to provide shared maintenance for the Pinhoti Trail along its entire length and across the diverse landowning

agencies and that there is a new caretaker on Flagg Mountain. Improvement of the access road to the top of the mountain is also a high priority for the AFC.

Member Presentations

Phillip West gave a presentation on Orange Beach's trails development activities, making the following major points:

- In partnership with Alabama State Parks, the city has worked on the development of the Hugh S. Branyon Back Country Trail for 20 years.
- The trail system started in Gulf State Park, pieced together with grants over the years. It is now a 28-mile system and they are looking to extend it to 34 miles – all ADA accessible.
- Funding is currently available to extend the trail another 16 miles west to Fort Morgan.
- A recent economic impact study found that the system has a local annual economic impact of \$16 to \$20 million from day-trippers and \$25 to \$30 million from overnight guests.
- Trail-related local private business investment has gone up over 2,000% in the last few years.
- Private investors are buying commercial properties near the trailheads to establish trail-related businesses at strategic locations.
- Earlier this year, USA Today announced that the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail is the #1 Reader's Choice recreational trail in the United States.
- There are future plans to connect to Foley and points north and west from Orange Beach.
- Orange Beach sees the positive economic and health impacts of the trail system.

Will Collins gave a presentation on trail use data collection at Gulf State Park and made the following major points:

- Due to interconnection of trails and the multiple access points, it is challenging to determine exact attendance numbers due to people passing multiple counters in a single visit.
- Twelve counters along trails in Gulf State Park highlight the frequency of trail use and the timing of that use.
- State Parks conducts manual counts periodically as well.
- State Parks is working with Jennifer Green at Jacksonville State University to look at geofenced cellular data to determine the types of visitors using the trails.
- State Parks is also conducting intercept surveys to determine user needs.
- Survey data suggests that 51% of users are on bicycles, 18% are on e-bikes, 18% are pedestrians, 8% use share bikes provided in the park, and 5% are on other forms of rolling transportation.

Jimmy Lemmond gave a presentation on outdoor recreation and trails on TVA land, making the following major points:

- TVA operates both developed and dispersed recreation areas on 293,000 acres of reservoir property.
- There are 320 commercial recreation operators on TVA lands who have leases or easements and pay rent to TVA.
- Partnerships with local government and state and federal agency operators make developed parks available to the public.
- TVA operates some developed recreational assets, including 180 miles of trails for hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders.
- Cooperative agreements with local volunteer groups are essential to the management of TVA trails.
- TVA is partnering with the Scenic River Trail and Tennessee River Line on their planning and development efforts.

- A recent economic impact study of the Tennessee River found that the river currently generates \$11.5 - \$12 billion each year in economic impact.

Next meeting is scheduled for December 6.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.