

Alabama Trails Commission and Advisory Board Joint Meeting
The Red Caboose, Elkmont, Alabama
August 6, 2015
11:00 am

ATC Attendees

Debbie Quinn, Chair
Phillip West
Jeff Pruitt
Rebecca Fulks
Greg Lein
Amy Rauworth
Dr. Richard Guthrie
Dr. Wayde Morse

ATCAB Attendees

Jim Felder
Brian Rushing
Richard Martin
Terry Ezzell (proxy for Jason Dockery)
Dr. John Jensen
Cindy Ragland
Ike Lyon

Guests

Doug Coates
Teresa Todd, Chamber of Commerce
William Marks, Mayor of Athens
Nancy Robinson, TARCOG
Kevin Bernard, TARCOG
Steve Newton, Alabama Power
Mike Nave, Limestone Parks & Recreation
Tonnice Wallace
David Seibert
Candi Williams, AARP Alabama
Sandy Thompson, Alabama Veterans Museum
Sonya Anthony, Limestone County
David Cyber, Limestone County
Bernice Lockett, Elkmont City Council
Stanley Hill, Limestone County Commission

Rebecca Foley, ALDOT
Christy Porter, Alabama Horse Council
John Witt
Billy Sandy
Doug Gates

ADECA Recreation Staff

Crystal Davis
Scott Stewart
Carol Sposato

Debbie Quinn called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m., and Commission and Advisory Board members and guests were introduced. Ms. Quinn welcomed all present and said that in spite of the 95 degree weather, there were six people from the group who came to Elkmont on Wednesday and made a kayak trip. Ms. Quinn, calling first on Candi Williams, then opened the floor for presentations from other guests.

American Association of Retired Persons

Candi Williams, Associate State Director from AARP Alabama, discussed AARP's Livable Communities program which promotes active living for the 50+ population. Activities such as cycling and walking are encouraged to keep seniors active and possibly make for a less stressful transition when the driver's license must be relinquished. Ms. Williams stated that at the present time Birmingham is the only City in Alabama that has signed up for the program, but she encouraged other communities to apply. She added that AARP can be a partner in this and other community activities by providing data for surveys, support letters, etc.

Limestone County Parks & Recreation

Doug Gates, President of the Limestone County Parks & Recreation Board, said the County has done extremely well recruiting businesses. He added that their County is a great place to live and work, and it is their goal to assure that Limestone County continues to offer and to develop great places to play also.

Elkmont Success Story

Richard Martin provided a brochure listing all the trails and points of interest in the Elkmont area. He explained that through the years they took existing assets and created trails, including rails to trails and bicycle trails. The process started in 1989 with the creation of a 501(c)3 organization to make fund-raising possible. In this endeavor, they got kids involved raising \$16,000 in pennies, and they sold limited edition prints raising about \$100,000. They have also involved Boy Scouts, churches and even prisoners who have done much of the work. A trail

was named after “Noah”, generating another \$88,000. With the ability to convince funding agencies of the community’s support for the project, a substantial amount of grant money has been raised for the projects also. Mr. Martin explained that none of it has been easy, but it has been very worthwhile and they are continually seeking additional opportunities. He said the area has attracted as many as 2,500 people in a day for events such as the “Goat Run”.

Mike Nave, Director of Limestone County Parks & Recreation, said that it takes a powerful advocate like Mr. Martin to get a successful recreation and trails program going. He stated that their trail is 10.1 miles, but maintenance is not immense. The area has four covered bridges and ten miles of trees which provide a natural canopy, but the trees can also generate additional work during a storm. Mr. Nave said there is someone at the trail all the time, and Parks & Recreation rides the entire trail at least once a week. Phillip West asked whether, in hindsight, the preference for the trail would be to pave it or to use crusher run as they did. Mr. Nave said they chose crusher run because a paved surface is not good for horses.

Limestone County Commissioner Stanley Hill thanked the Board and Mr. Martin for his persistence in developing the trails. He added that the trail is for a variety of uses including pedestrian, bicycle and horses. On August 7 & 8, 2015, there will be some 50 antique tractors that ride the trail. The mule train also comes through. Commissioner Hill said that County Commissioners are consistently called when problems arise in the County, but they have never had a call regarding the trail.

Other Guests

Nancy Roberson, Executive Director of the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG), stated that her agency has been pleased to prepare grant applications for funding assistance for the trails and other recreational venues. She added that the trails have had a tremendous economic impact in the area.

Teresa Todd with the Athens Limestone Chamber of Commerce welcomed the group to Elkmont and further discussed Heritage Day on August 7 & 8 which was mentioned by Commissioner Hill. She said they will have a skillet toss, fish fry, rodeo in Ardmore, and the Veteran’s Museum will be open each day from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with no admission charge. Ms. Todd also mentioned several other community events scheduled in the near future.

Bernice Lockett, a member of the Elkmont City Council, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming to Elkmont.

Gary Compton, owner of The Red Caboose at 25483 Railroad Street in Elkmont where the meeting was being held, welcomed the group in attendance and discussed the history of the building. He said that it was built in the late 1800’s, later burned and was reconstructed preserving as much as possible including some of the plaster on the walls. The building goes from the days of the railroad, and various uses through the years have included a cotton office, grocery store, general mercantile, drug store, church, and café. The facility seasonally hosts

musical events, and since opening in 2008 has hosted numerous Grammy winners. The Red Caboose can also be rented for special events.

Athens Mayor William Marks expressed his appreciation for the Recreation Trails Commission and said that recreational expansion has been essential to building their community. He thanked the group for their participation.

Commission Business

At this point Debbie Quinn called the Commission meeting into official session. Crystal Davis stated that if everyone had signed in, there was not a quorum present for the Alabama Trails Commission Advisory Board so no votes could be taken. The meeting moved forward with a discussion of the minutes of April 2, 2015; no changes were made.

Chairman Quinn said that no new appointments to the Commission have been made at this time. She stated that Dr. Don Williamson has announced his retirement from the Alabama Department of Public Health and he may not have the opportunity to appoint Dr. Mark Wilson from Birmingham before he leaves.

Legislation

According to Debbie Quinn, legislation for changes to the structure and operation of the Commission did not pass in the last session. She said it got to the Senate and had a third reading, then the session ended. It will be presented again at the next regular session in March.

Ms. Quinn further stated that Senate Bill 38 (SB 38) passed the Senate unanimously except for the vote of Senator Cam Ward who is a member of Alabama Trails Commission Advisory Board. She said that Senator Tripp Pittman voted against recreation. There will be a vote in March to change Forever Wild into a land trust strictly funding state parks, and if this happens all funding for State parks may be removed from the General Fund Budget. That would mean no new lands, trails or maintenance. It is a unique time in State government, and we can't take anything for granted. All commission members need to communicate with their legislators. Members of the House of Representatives need to hear from their constituents. They have given us money from Forever Wild, but they take the funding back from our other funds so the result is no net gain. The money going into State Parks is no longer earmarked for that purpose.

Greg Lein, State Parks Director from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, stated that it has been disappointing and frustrating for Conservation and State Parks as this is the fifth year in a row that dollars have been transferred out of those budgets into other agencies. Mr. Lein said there is no more money to take and there are no more ways to get creative. The population continues to grow and demand for recreational lands does not stay static.

Debbie Quinn suggested that she would write a letter of support on behalf of the Commission for State park funding. It was also determined that some supporting information should be put on the Alabama Trails Commission Facebook page. Ms. Quinn stated that, "We all need to be paying for State parks."

Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant

Rebecca Fulks with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) discussed the TIGER grant. She explained that ALDOT is embarking on a 2015 pedestrian and biking plan and suggested that interested applicants look at federal and state routes, get information from planning commissions, and look at routes that would pair with county routes. Public meetings will be held at various regions throughout the State, and ALDOT is encouraging Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) to participate. Ms. Fulks offered her business card and requested that attendants provide her with their email address so that they can be contacted with future information. Her email address is fulksr@dot.state.al.us.

Transportation Alternative Program (TAP)

Amy Rauworth discussed the TAP program administered through the Federal Highway Administration. One of the requirements of TAP is to establish a State Recreation Trails Advisory Commission representing both motorized and non-motorized recreational trails users. Amy is following changes on TAP and said there will be a debate making it to the end of October.

Committees

Cheryl Morgan stated that she has been working with the committees and committee structure. A written report is provided under Tab 2 in the notebook that was distributed. She also stated that the Foundation Committee and the Outreach Committee are both in search of a Chairperson. Amy Rauworth is Chairman of the Policy and Advocacy Committee. According to Ms. Morgan, the Commission is pushing for some good work by the end of this work year.

Website

Brian Rushing provided an update on the Recreation Trails website. The format is finished but Mr. Rushing said the site is not searchable at this time. However, it will be soon and will have thousands of records to search. Mr. Rushing encouraged everyone to go onto the site at: alabamarecreationtrails.org and let him know by email what improvements they would like to see. He is working with ADECA to send out an email blast publicizing the website.

Foundation

Brian Rushing said that the Steering Committee is working on planning a retreat hopefully in September to define the purpose, goals and objectives of the foundation. Cheryl Morgan mentioned an intensive one-day workshop to talk about a variety of topics, i.e., what can groups do to help with funding. What do we need to make our projects happen?

One Day Workshop on Rails to Trails

The target date for this meeting is October 15, 2015 and the City of Anniston will host. There will be fieldtrip opportunities, and this is an opportunity to invite state and federal agencies.

State of Alabama Accounting & Resource System (STAARS)

Crystal Davis, Recreation & Conservation Program Manager, explained that the State of Alabama is now using the STAARS program for fiscal management which is intended to increase automation and information access. She added that Commission members will need to submit their travel request through the new system and if they have not received information regarding use of the program they should contact her office on Monday. Each member will have to be registered in order to claim reimbursement, and that process has to come through the Finance Department.

Identification Cards

Crystal Davis said that ADECA will provide identification cards to Commission members to assist them in getting State rates for hotel rooms, etc. Each Advisory Board or Commission member who would like to have an ID card should send Ms. Davis a headshot along with the correct spelling of their name as it should appear on their card. It will probably take 30 days to get the card back from ADECA. Ms. Davis email address is crystal.davis@adeca.alabama.gov and the telephone number is 334-353-2630.

Next Meeting & Adjourn

The next meeting of the Trails Commission is scheduled for December 3, 2015, but Debbie Quinn said it may be necessary to re-schedule. No final date was announced, but Ms. Quinn said she will let the membership know as far in advance as possible.

The meeting adjourned at 12:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Sposato