

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

Wednesday, December 2, 2020
10:00 AM

(via web conference)

Alabama Trails Commission Attendees

Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair
Amy Rauworth
Sonya Baker
Grey Brennan
Greg Lein
Jonathan Hester
Jeff Pruitt, Vice-Chair
Allen Armstrong
Dr. John Kvach

Advisory Board Attendees

Nisa Miranda, Chair
Jim Felder, Secretary
Francesca Gross
Steve Newton, Vice-Chair
Jason Dockery
Dr. Mark Wilson
Odell Sanders
Josh Burnett (Bucky Edmondson proxy)
Tim King
Larry “Chip” Dixon
Maeci Martin Walker
Elizabeth Lawlor
Marie Bostick
Nathan Wright
Will O’Connor (Jeff DeQuattro’s Proxy)

Associates & Visitors

Brian Rushing – UACED
Cindy Ragland – Alabama Trails Foundation
Tom Carruthers – Alabama Trails Foundation
Jeanne Jackson – Alabama Trails Foundation
Debbie Quinn – Former ATC member
Greg Wingo – ROAM Projects

Richard Martin – Former ATC member
Jeff Rozycki – Birmingham Urban Mountain Pedalers

Welcome and Introductions

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was conducted via web conference. Dr. Graham Sisson (Chair) called the meeting to order at 10:00AM and a role was called. A quorum was present for both the Alabama Trails Commission (ATC) and Advisory Board (AB).

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Sisson asked for the ATC to make a motion for the approval of the August 26, 2020 meeting minutes (EXHIBIT A). Allen Armstrong made a motion for approval and Jeff Pruitt seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.

ATC Chair's Report

- Dr. Sisson reviewed the purpose and outcomes of the joint ATC/AB/ATF meeting on August 19, referring to Meeting Notes presented under Exhibit B. This joint meeting identified 3 goals: (1) Development of an inventory of existing trails (SCORP Process underway); (2) Facilitating the development of a conceptual plan for a statewide connected trail network (Lead Organizations: ATC and AB); (3) Completing a pilot project demonstrating best practices of enhancing long-distance trail development and operations and bringing the benefits of long-distance trail tourism to nearby communities (Lead Organization: Alabama Trails Foundation). Dr. Sisson reviewed the following general objectives relating to Goal #2, which the ATC and AB would undertake over the next 3 to 5 years.
 - **Objective 2A:** Incorporate Goal #2 into the overall Outdoor Recreation Strategy component of the SCORP to elevate it as a statewide priority.
 - **Objective 2B:** Research and report best practices in statewide trail system planning and development in other states.
 - **Objective 2C:** Define conceptual planning scope; Will likely be at planning region level, identifying opportunities for connectivity both within and between regions.
 - **Objective 2E:** Develop a communications toolkit with messaging, talking points, Power Point presentation, etc. to be used to engage Regional Councils of Government, local elected officials, and the general public in the effort.
 - **Objective 2F:** Engage Regional Councils of Government to examine how to develop such a plan, determine what trail / alternative transportation infrastructure planning has already been done in those regions (that can be incorporated), and how the ATC & AB can partner with RCGs in the process of developing a statewide plan.
 - **Objective 2G:** Identify planning funding sources and secure funding necessary to develop the plan(s).
 - **Objective 2H:** Engage professional planner(s) to carry out planning processes in each region.
 - **Objective 2I:** In concert with planners, ensure robust engagement of user groups and the general public in the process.

- **Objective 2J:** Develop an economic feasibility study to accompany the plan(s), demonstrating the direct and indirect consumer spending, tax revenue, property value, and healthcare savings benefits of developing the system.

After asking if anyone had any questions or comments about the goals and objectives identified in the meeting, Dr Sisson added that undertaking this work will likely necessitate additional funding to support the effort. Prospective sources include federal planning grants, private fundraising (possibly through the Alabama Trails Foundation), and enhanced support at the state level. Leadership among the ATC and AB will be key to securing the necessary resources, and that the Executive Committee may be calling upon each member over the coming months for help in this regard.

- *Action Item for the ATC:* Formal ratification of Goal #2 and associated Objectives as a general guideline for ATC work over the next 3-5 years and authorization to form a work group of the ATC and AB that will develop a work plan, timeline, budget, etc. and steer the process. Dr. Sisson asked for a motion to approve the action item. Greg Lein made a motion to approve and Grey Brennan seconded. With no discussion, the motion was passed unanimously by the Alabama Trails Commission.
- *Action Item for AB:* Formal ratification of Goal #2 and associated Objectives as a general guideline for ATC work over the next 3-5 years and authorization to form a work group of the ATC and AB that will develop a work plan, timeline, budget, etc. and steer the process. Dr. Sisson invited Nisa Miranda, Advisory Board Chair, to handle the action item on behalf of the Advisory Board. Ms. Miranda asked for a motion to approve the action item. Dr. Mark Wilson made a motion to approve and Steve Newton seconded. With no discussion, the motion was passed unanimously by the AB.
- *Initiatives Status.* Dr. Sisson asked Brian Rushing to review initiatives status (Exhibit C). Mr. Rushing reviewed developments with the Wiregrass Trail Project, where State Representative Mike Jones, the City of Andalusia, and the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission are working to get cities and counties signed on with the Wiregrass Trail Partnership. Other recently acquired rail corridors in Fayette and Gadsden are moving forward with planning. Mr. Rushing reviewed progress with the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge over the course of 2020 and program enhancements for 2021, which will involve mobile device integration. Given the ongoing pandemic, no public engagement events will be planned for 2021, but there will be an enhanced push for public engagement through social media.

Alabama Trails Foundation

Tom Carruthers, Chair of the ATF, shared recent activities of the organization. Mr. Carruthers reviewed the effort to renovate the Flagg Mountain observation tower and design and construct a new parking area and universally accessible trail to the tower. The Alabama Forestry Commission will provide in-kind services for the parking area and trail and the ATF is providing \$80,000 in funding. The ATF is providing \$175,000 for the tower renovation and The Conservation Fund is providing \$60,000. The Conservation Fund is also committing another \$350,000 to support repairs and enhancement of other facilities on Flagg Mountain. Both the ATF and The Conservation Fund

are working in close partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission, which owns the site within Weogufka State Forest. Work on the parking lot and trail will start in January 2021, and the tower work will start in mid-spring. The ATF has brought on an intern to survey the condition of the Pinhoti Trail. The intent is for the Flagg Mountain tower, parking area, and trail work to be completed by the end of the summer, and that the ATF and ATC would have a joint ribbon cutting. Debbie Quinn asked about the U. S. Forest Service grant for Pinhoti Trail enhancement in Clay County. Cindy Ragland responded that this section of the trail is having significant unauthorized motorized use and that the ATF is working to better assess it in order to ensure the best investment of the funds available.

Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan

Brian Rushing gave a brief review of the status of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) that the UA Center for Economic Development (UACED) and UA Center for Business and Economic Research are conducting on behalf of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. Currently, The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is reviewing the survey instruments the team has developed to capture an inventory of outdoor recreation facilities and outdoor recreation provider opinions, and a general public survey to inform the statewide Outdoor Recreation Strategy. The SCORP Team will be utilizing a research panel to obtain resident demand data, which represents a first for Alabama and among the first times in the country such a method has been used to update a SCORP. Brian invited the members of the ATC and AB to push out the announcement of public survey via social media and email once it is approved by IRB.

Presentations on Trail-Related Work

Dr. John Kvach (Singing River Trail) gave a review of the planning of a regional trail system in Madison, Limestone, and Morgan Counties. Dr. Kvach was named executive Director of the Singing River Trail on July 22. A regional collaborative group called Launch 2035 initiated the project several years ago. Marie Bostick was very involved in this process. Alta Consulting developed a master plan for a 70-mile greenway system. Beyond building the trail, Dr. Kvach is working to develop a trail culture in communities the system connects. Emphasis is on the system being for health, education, economic development, and a place where people can engage the natural world around them. Dr. Kvach is interested in incubating businesses along the trail system and is partnering with the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments to fund such an incubator. Dr. Kvach is getting a lot of interest from the Shoals area, Guntersville, and Scottsboro to be included. Singing River will soon announce that the scope will expand to include a 150-mile trail system ranging from the Shoals to Scottsboro and will include a water-based trail along the Tennessee River. Keeping local trail identity will be important as the trail is built through each community. The goal will be to create a regional trail spine, to which communities can connect their local trails.

Round Table Discussion About Current Events & Opportunities

- Will O'Connor, executive director of River Region Trails, reviewed how River Region Trails is working to do the same sort of regional trail planning and development in the Montgomery area as the Singing River Trail is in North Alabama.

- Greg Wingo reviewed the Great Alabama 650 kayak race in September. Organizers were able to still hold the race safely in spite of the pandemic, with 20 boats entering. The race had hundreds of thousands of online spectators from around the globe and secured great exposure for Alabama as a paddling destination.
- Bran Rushing announced the establishment of the SCORP website at www.alabamaoutdoorrecreation.org, where the public will be able to access the upcoming public survey. He also shared that the website could become a centralized resource for public information on outdoor recreation planning, development, and engagement after the SCORP update is complete.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday March 31, 2021 at 10:00AM via zoom.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian Rushing