

**EXHIBIT A**

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

Wednesday, December 6, 2023  
10:00 AM

Via Zoom

Alabama Trails Commission Attendees

Chris Blankenship  
Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair  
Dr. John Kvach  
Johnny Smith  
Marcus Campbell  
Nisa Miranda  
Phillip West

Advisory Board Attendees

Debbie Quinn  
Garrett Parker  
Jared Carter  
Jason Dockery  
Josh Burnette  
Lora McClendon  
Marie Bostick  
Natalie Norman  
Kim Wright (for Nathan Wright)  
Steve Newton  
Tim King  
Rep. Terri Collins  
Dr. Vini Nathan  
Will Collins

Associates & Visitors

Brian Rushing – UACED  
Jacob Richards – Alabama Trails Foundation  
Phillip Darden – SORBA  
George Steagle – Point Broadband (Opelika)  
Derrick South – TVA (for Jimmy Lemmond)

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Graham Sisson called the meeting to order at 10:00AM and called roll. A quorum was present for the Advisory Board (AB) but not initially for the Alabama Trails Commission (ATC).

### Approval of Minutes

After a quorum of ATC was achieved during the call, Dr. Sisson asked if there were any corrections or discussion regarding the August 16, 2023 meeting minutes. With no corrections or discussion, he asked for a member to make a motion for approval. Nisa Miranda made a motion for approval and Phillip West 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:

- A number of the ATC's & AB's recommendations to Innovate Alabama's (IA) Outdoor Recreation Round Table for enhancing outdoor recreation and recreational trails carried through to those ultimately adopted by IA, but some did not. These gaps represent an important opportunity for the ATC & AB to identify strategies for their implementation and ways the ATC & AB can facilitate this process. The Executive Committee recommends establishing an ad hoc committee to develop these strategies. According to the ATC's Bylaws, formation of such committees are subject to the approval of the ATC. The Executive Committee would like to form an ad hoc committee to develop strategies for the implementation of ATC's recommendations for enhancing outdoor recreation and recreational trails that are not currently being addressed by other organizations. With no quorum currently present for the ATC, this motion was tabled.

Chris Blankenship asked for a list of recommendations that were not adopted by IA to help evaluate what items an ad hoc committee may want to examine prior to the formation of that committee. Brian Rushing said he will come up with a list of those gaps and send it to him.

Debbie asked that the list be sent to the membership for them to better understand what may not have been captured up by IA's recommendations.

- There are 10 seats on the AB that need either re-appointments or new members to serve. Dr. Sisson asked that those whose term has expired or is expiring, and who would like to be re-appointed, should contact Brian Rushing by December 12. The Executive Committee will be meeting on December 13 to discuss candidates for these vacancies. Dr. Sisson also asked the members if they know someone they think would be a good candidate for consideration, to please send their name and contact information to Brian Rushing, again, by December 12.
- Trail funding announcements:
  - The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is currently advocating for full funding for the Active Transportation Infrastructure Program in FY 2024. Authorized for \$200 million in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, this new program only received \$45 million in its first year in FY2023. USDOT is currently developing its budget proposal for FY 2024, and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is asking supporters to sign a petition to the administration requesting full funding. Eligible projects under the program are led by local, state, and tribal governments and can receive funding of up to \$100,000 for planning and design and at least \$15 million for implementation. Dr. Sisson asked members is to have their organizations sign the petition if they are able. The petition is at the Rails-to-Trials Conservancy's website.
  - The U.S. Department of Transportation has released the FY 2024 RAISE Notice of Funding Opportunity. The FY 2023 RAISE round marked the program's most far-reaching commitment to connecting people and places by trails and other active-transportation infrastructure. Nearly \$400 million granted in FY 2023 is being invested to solely fund bicycle and pedestrian projects. For the 2024 round, the USDOT has highlighted the mandated minimum award amounts for capital grants: \$1 million minimum in rural areas and \$5 million minimum in urban areas. There is no minimum for planning grants. The

maximum for both capital and planning grants is \$25 million. There is a continued focus on racial equity, climate change and removing barriers to opportunity. **Application deadline is February 28, 2024.** For more information, visit USDOT's website.

- American Trails recently announced the application period opening for their Trails Capacity Grant Program. This program is targeted for projects on all federal public lands, as well as state, local, and private lands accessible to the public. Project applicants may include nonprofit organizations, businesses, or agencies at the state or local level. Funding awards will be between \$5K and \$10K per project. **Application deadline is January 15, 2024.** For more information, visit American Trails' website.
- Dr. Sisson congratulated Nathan Wright and his wife, Kimm, on the Business Council of Alabama and the Alabama Chamber of Commerce Association naming the Pinhoti Outdoor Center as the 2023 Alabama Small Business of the Year.

Dr. Sisson invited questions and comments from the group. No questions were asked.

### Election of Officers

- The Executive Committee recommended the re-appointment of the following ATC officers:
  - Graham Sisson to Chair
  - Nisa Miranda to Vice Chair
  - Phillip West to Secretary

With Marcus Campbell joining the call, a quorum was present for the ATC. Dr. Sisson asked for discussion and motion to approve this slate. With no discussion, Marcus Campbell moved to approve the slate and Commissioner Chris Blankenship seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously.

- The Executive Committee recommended the following members for appointment as AB officers:
  - Marie Bostick to Chair
  - Debbie Quinn to Vice Chair
  - Natalie Norman to Secretary

Debbie Quinn, as Chair of the AB, asked for discussion and motion to approve this slate. With Terri Collins joining the call, a quorum was present for the AB. With no discussion, Terri Collins moved to approved, and Tim King seconded the motion. Motion was approved unanimously.

### Innovate Alabama Update

Commissioner Blankenship provided an update on Innovate Alabama (IA) making the following points:

- Commissioner Blankenship is the Chair of IA's Council on Outdoor Recreation.
- He thanked members of the ATC & AB who also serve on council.
- IA has hired Big Communications to create new website and to create a brand for outdoor recreation.
- At the next Council meeting, they plan to set aside \$3 million to \$4 million for a competitive grant program for outdoor recreation maintenance and trails.
- IA is planning to hold an Outdoor Recreation Summit in 2024 and are looking to involve a variety of organizations including the ATC and AB and outdoor businesses.

- IA has made available several million dollars for funding high impact outdoor recreation projects that include:
  - Projects on the Alabama Pinhoti Trail
  - Improvements to mountain bike trails at Oak Mountain State Park and Coldwater Mountain
  - Boating access
- The Council is looking for ways to role initiatives such as Sweet Trails Alabama and information platforms such as OuterSpatial into the activities of IA.

Debbie Quinn asked if Commissioner Blankenship could provide an update on State Parks. Commissioner Blankenship reviewed a number of the many improvement projects underway at several State Parks, including accommodations and trail enhancements and \$38 million in water and sewer renovations at several parks. Forever Wild provided \$1million for trail access enhancements on Forever Wild lands throughout the state and that work is underway. Commissioner Blankenship thanked the Governor for the opportunity for ADCNR to do this great work.

#### Sweet Trails Alabama Update

Dr. John Kvach provided an update on the status of the Sweet Trails Alabama initiative, making the following major points:

- Conducted a listening tour in 11 cities this fall. Five hundred people attended these meetings. Sweet Trails gathered 900 contacts.
- They will be holding holding 9 in-person regional meetings soon and are scheduling several additional stakeholder meetings.
- They have received 600 public survey responses and about to push out announcements via social media, with the goal of securing 3,000 responses.
- Their 38-member steering committee has met.
- They are in the process of scheduling multiple focus groups meetings with trail user groups, agencies, universities, and waterways.
- They are also conducting meetings with national, state, and local organizations, including the Rails to Trails Conservancy.

Dr. Sisson invited questions. None were asked.

#### Alabama Recreational Trail Advisory Board Update

Debbie Quinn provided an update on the Alabama Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ARTAB), making the following points:

- ARTAB is a 9-member board representing diverse trail users.
- The board makes recommendations to ADECA for funding Recreational Trails Program (RTP) applications.
- Normally, RTP received \$1.2 to \$1.8 million each year in federal funds. Thirty percent us earmarked for urban projects, 40% for motorized projects, 30% for nonmotorized projects, and 30% for diverse use projects.
- In the latest round, ADECA awarded 11 applications and awarded 7 grants.
- No motorized applications were received, so that money rolls over to next year.
- In years past, ADECA would usually receive 20-30 grant applications each cycle, but the process is more restrictive now, which makes applying more difficult.

Brian Rushing asked if ADECA has updated their scoring process for RTP grants since the last Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan was published in 2021. She says they have not. Debbie doesn't

see this being updated until next SCORP and that it should be updated to better serve small towns and connectivity needs.

Nisa Miranda added that the ATC's gap analysis between ATC's recommendations for enhancing outdoor recreation and recreational trails and IA's adopted recommendations should include looking at an update of the RTP scoring process. It should also consider looking at financing across the state and how to better align/combine that funding. Commissioner Blankenship said that he sees need to serve organizations that may not be qualified to apply for federal funding and that IA is interested in providing resources to these organizations and streamlining the process for them.

#### Alabama Trails Foundation Update

Jacob Richards, GIS manager for the Alabama Trails Foundation (ATF), provided an update on the recent activities of the organization, making the following points:

- The ATF held 2 events at Flagg Mountain in partnership with the Alabama Council of the Arts and Alabama Forestry Commission. 150 visitors attended these events and exit surveys revealed that 50 were first-time visitors to Flagg Mountain.
- New stone stools and benches have been installed along the ADA trail on Flagg Mountain.
- They have submitted a proposal to Mainstreet Alabama to host a Trail Towns training event.
- Planning efforts are nearing completion for the project at Jogloma/Scott Lake and they have secured 2/3 of the needed project funds from Alabama Power.
- Talladega college is collaborating with the ATF on the Jogloma/Scott Lake project.
- They are continuing to work with Jacksonville State University on a Pinhoti trail signs program, which is collecting data along the trail.
- The ATF Board met at the Pinhoti Ridge Retreat and had a successful executive committee meeting there.

#### Round Table Discussion / General Announcements

- Will Collins shared an update on a number of trail-related projects underway at Alabama State Parks and that they will host a Trail Crew technical trail workshop soon with 18 spaces available. Trail counter data at Gulf State Park indicates over 500,000 people used the trails in the park between February and November 2023.
- Brian Rushing gave an update on the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge. In 2023 the program added another 700 users who logged over 60,000 new miles, suggesting that the program's integration with the Strava app is encouraging participation. Brian thanked the ATF and Blue Cross Blue Shield for their ongoing support of the program. If anyone on the call is interested in hosting public engagements events in 2024, to let him know. Brian also briefed the group on The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development's Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative, which is working with 20 underserved communities around the state to plan and develop ¼-mile crushed stone pathways and outdoor recreation amenities designed and fabricated by The University of Alabama's Sculpture Program.

#### 2024 Meeting Dates

Meetings were scheduled in 2024 for February 13, August 6, and December 10.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.