

EXHIBIT A

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

Wednesday, February 15, 2023
10:00 AM

Home2Suites, Prattville, Alabama

Alabama Trails Commission Attendees

Chris Blankenship
Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair
Johnny Smith
Marcus Campbell
Mike Jones
Nisa Miranda
Phillip West
Sonya Baker

Advisory Board Attendees

Bobby Whaley
Dr. Mark Wilson
Francesca Gross
Hon. Terri Collins
Garrett Parker
Jared Carter
Jason Dockery
Lora McClendon
Marie Bostick
Natalie Norman
Ronnie Davis
Steve Newton
Will Collins
Will O'Connor

Associates & Visitors

Anna Catherine Roberson – Alabama Power
Amber Willock – Birmingham Urban Trail Society
Bob Sims – Birmingham Ultra Trail Society
Brian Rushing – UACED
Cindy Ragland – Alabama Trails Foundation
Phillip Darden – IMBA / SORBA

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).

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Sisson asked if there were any corrections or discussion regarding the December 7, 2022 meeting minutes (EXHIBIT A). With no questions or discussion, he asked for a member to make a motion for

approval. Mike Jones made a motion for approval and Sonya Baker seconded. With no discussion, the motion to adopt the minutes as written was approved unanimously.

Executive Committee Report

Dr. Sisson opened a discussion of the *Draft Recommendations to the State for Enhancing Outdoor Recreation and Recreational Trails in Alabama*. Brian Rushing reviewed the history of the development of the recommendations by an ad hoc committee of the ATC & AB and called for questions and comments. The following summarizes these questions and comments:

- Will O'Connor asked about the relationship of these recommendations to the Alabama Innovation Commission (AIC). Dr. Sisson said that the ad hoc committee developed the recommendations to support the work the AIC is undertaking. Chris Blankenship confirmed that he has been sharing the work of the ATC/AB with the AIC's Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, of which he is chair.
- Nisa Miranda said that the IAC is seeking to attract innovation talent to Alabama and that one aspect of that effort is outdoor recreation. The ATC & AB are interested in seeing outdoor recreation as an opportunity to spread the economic impact of the innovation sector to more rural areas and that funding for outdoor recreation needs to go to rural areas more than it has. She mentioned that there are several members of the ATC that are serving on the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. She also emphasized the need for providing resources for trail and outdoor recreation maintenance.
- Mr. O'Connor asked if this guidance can be used to "actively discuss" funding at the state level. Dr. Sisson stated that the ATC cannot "lobby" but can provide information and make recommendations, and that this document provides that input. Commissioner Blankenship said that state level outdoor recreation and trails funding will be important and that ADCNR is working with the Governor and Legislature on this. Mr. Rushing pointed out that other states such as North Carolina and Arkansas have sustainable funding mechanisms that can serve as models, but that the recommendations highlight that additional work is needed to determine what mechanisms will work best here. Steve Newton recommended also looking at Texas as a model for funding mechanisms given their funding of motorized trails. He also shared that Alabama Recreation Trails Advisory Board will be recommending to ADECA that the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) application form be changed to accommodate use of RTP funds for maintenance.
- Phillip Darden asked if there is an initiative to create a state office of outdoor recreation, as several other states are doing. Commissioner Blankenship responded that such a position could be created within ADCNR.
- Rep. Terri Collins asked about funding for the ATC through the University of Alabama. Ms. Miranda said that this funding is now being directed to the Alabama Trails Foundation (ATF) through Alabama Commission on Higher Education. Rep. Collins says that there is a lot of attention being paid to outdoor recreation funding in the Legislature.
- Marie Bostick recommended that nonprofits not be left out of receiving funding. Ms. Miranda said that structure and organization is key to success and that a trails funding plan should be developed as part of an outdoor recreation funding plan and should encompass all kinds of trails in different settings. She asserted that there are many funding sources that Alabama has not pursued in a thoughtful way and that a coordinator can maintain access to those funding sources and maximize Alabama's use of federal funding.
- Discussion followed regarding the administration of federal funds for trails and outdoor recreation, what agencies are best suited for that administration, and questions were raised (but not answered) regarding if such re-programming would require legislative or administrative action.

With the absence of Debbie Quinn, Chair of the Advisory Board, Vice Chair, Francesca Gross, made a motion to approve the recommendations with references to the Alabama Trails Foundation removed. Will O'Connor made a motion to approve the recommendations with this caveat, and Natalie Norman seconded. With no discussion, the motion was approved unanimously. Dr. Sisson called for a vote of the ATC to approve the recommendations with references to the Alabama Trails Foundation removed. Johnny Smith made a motion to approve the recommendations with this caveat, and Phillip West seconded. With no discussion, the motion was approved unanimously.

Alabama Trails Foundation (ATF) Report

Cindy Ragland stated that the previous conversation was very helpful and that the ATF supports a lot of what is in the recommendations entail. She said that the ATF has had questions regarding the document's use and how the messaging would be managed. She added that the ATF has to consider its current work with state agencies and fundraising efforts and needs to examine its position through that lens before it can formally support the recommendations. She said the ATF hopes to be in touch soon with next steps.

Mrs. Ragland provided an update on behalf of the ATF, making following points:

- ATC & AB created the ATF to support the work of the ATC & AB, with the initial task assigned being to develop a master plan for Alabama Pinhoti Trail improvements and an inventory of the existing trail assets. The ATF completed this work in 2019 and then initiated a fundraising effort in partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission.
- The ATF is now working with the US Forest Service on a project in Talladega County on the Talladega National Forest.
- The ATF has a particular niche is fundraising with businesses and leveraging corporate dollars. Alabama Power has made a significant contribution to the Talladega County project and Honda is reviewing a funding ask from ATF as well.
- The Alabama Pinhoti Trail is in rural Alabama and offers a great opportunity for economic development through outdoor recreation tourism.
- The ATF anticipates a fundraising campaign to implement 10-12 good investments for social and economic connectivity between the trail and nearby communities.
- The ATF is also currently working on some safety issues at road crossings.
- The ATF has partnered with The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development (UACED) to sponsor two Americorps Vista volunteers who are serving to build capacity and share information in communities near the Pinhoti.
- Volunteers currently maintain the majority of the trail but about 20% of the trail is in need of additional stewardship resources. The ATF is working with state and federal agencies to address this gap.
- With the support of the state legislature, the ATF has developed a good financial structure, serving as a fiduciary for the Cahaba Blueway, the 100 Alabama Miles challenge, and it has served as a passthrough for state funding of the Singing River Trail.
- The ATF board now has 12 very active members with David Perry serving as the current president, Paul DeMarco as first vice president, Wendy Jackson as second vice president, Maggie Cunningham as secretary, and Ann Haas as treasurer. Representatives from both Alabama Power and Honda are on the board.

General Announcements

Dr. Sisson invited the membership to share general announcements. The following summarizes those made:

- Phillip West announced that the Hugh S. Branyon Back Country Trail is in contention for the USA Today's Readers' Choice Award. An announcement of the winner is forthcoming this Friday.
- Ronnie Davis and Jared Carter shared that the RC&Ds in Alabama are enthusiastic supporters of local trail projects, offering regional grants of \$5,000 and \$25,000 grants that affect three or more RC&D regions.
- Will Collins said that Alabama State Parks recently hosted and NOHVCC training workshop at Bucks Pocket State Park to help State Parks improve their ATV/OHV trails. State Parks has also initiated an all-terrain (tracked) wheelchair program to enhance accessibility for wheelchair users and seeks to have at least 1 chair available in each of the 21 Alabama State Parks. State Parks is hosting two AmeriCorps groups to support trail maintenance at Gulf and Cheaha State Parks. State Parks also partnered with the Birmingham Urban Mountain Pedalers, which provided 1,525 volunteer hours at Oak Mountain over the past year. State Parks has recently opened five new trails in the system. Extension of the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail to Fort Morgan should go out to bid this spring, possibly in phases, depending on budget. State Parks is also evaluating the use of drone technology to assess trail conditions and is implementing a new trail survey program in a number of parks to identify needed improvements that will enhance user experiences.
- Mr. Newton said that NOHVCC has an excellent series of videos that highlight trail construction and maintenance best practices that are applicable to all types of trails. He invited the membership to view these on NOHVCC's website. Mr. Newton also shared that the RTP has \$100,000 available each year for trail education and for last 5-6 years, this funding has not been used. He encouraged the membership to utilize these education funds so that they do not have to be returned to the federal government.
- Mr. Collins said that 30% of the RTP funds are for motorized trails and these funds need to be used as well. Mr. Newton added that there is a need for maintenance at all 5 ATV/OHV parks in Alabama and that these funds can be used for that purpose, underscoring the importance of ADECA needing to change the RTP application to accommodate this potential use.
- Mr. Darden shared that the International Mountain Biking Association recently opened two new trails in North Alabama and that there is a Southern Off-Road Biking Association summit on April 10-16 that will provide training for volunteer trail stewardship leaders.
- Mr. Rushing shared that UACED is beginning to publish an electronic newsletter focused on outdoor recreational developments in the state. This newsletter will be emailed out to a wide distribution list and archived at www.alabamaoutdoorrecreation.org. He invited the membership to contribute ideas and content regarding anything they would like to publicize. He also shared that the 2023 Season of the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge will kick off later in the spring and events will be taking place around the state. He thanked the membership in advance for pushing the announcements out through their channels. He also announced a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) webinar scheduled for March 23 to promote awareness of SCORP and how to use the document for outdoor recreation planning, development, and operation.
- Mr. O'Connor shared that River Region Trails is publishing their Montgomery area master plan on their website at www.riverregiontrail.org. While the plan focuses on Montgomery, it also starts the conversation about larger regional connectivity throughout the Black Belt.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.