

Minutes of the Alabama Trails Commission  
and Advisory Board Joint Meeting

Wednesday, February 16, 2022  
10:00 AM

(via web conference)

Alabama Trails Commission Attendees

Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair  
Nisa Miranda  
Dr. John Kvach  
Chris Blankenship  
Jeff Pruitt  
Johnny Smith  
Mary Katherine Pittman  
Marcus Campbell  
Phillip West  
Sonya Baker

Advisory Board Attendees

Bobby Whaley  
Debbie Quinn  
Francesca Gross  
Josh Burnett  
Marie Bostick  
Dr. Mark Wilson  
Odell Sanders  
Jared Carter  
Lora McClendon  
Ronnie Davis  
Steve Newton  
Terri Collins  
Tim King  
Dr. Vini Nathan  
Will Collins  
Will O'Connor

Associates & Visitors

Brian Rushing – UACED  
Tom Carruthers – Alabama Trails Foundation  
Amber Willock – Birmingham Ultra trail Society  
Robby Cantrell – NARCOG  
Phillip Darden – SORBA  
Sandra Machen – Private Citizen  
Tami Reist – North Alabama Mountain, Rivers, & Lakes Tourist Association

Welcome and Introductions

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was conducted via web conference. 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 welcomed Mary Katherine Pittman (Governor's staff member) to the ATC and Rep. Terri Collins (Speaker of the House appointee), Debbie Quinn (ADECA appointee representing ARTAB), and Lora McClendon (representing Power South) to the AB. Dr. Sisson thanked Jonathan Hester for his service to the ATC as previously representing the Governor's staff. He also thanked Jim Felder for his many, many years of service on the AB in the seat Debbie Quinn now occupies.

#### Approval of Minutes

Dr. Sisson asked if there were any corrections or discussion regarding the December 9, 2021 meeting minutes (EXHIBIT A). With no questions or discussion, he asked for a member to make a motion for the approval. Terri Collins made a motion for approval and Dr. John Kvach seconded. With no discussion, a motion was approved unanimously.

#### Executive Committee Report

Debbie Quinn gave a brief presentation on the Activities of the Executive Committee. With the recent release of the Hoover Institution's report and the Alabama Innovation Commission working towards implement its recommendations, the Executive Committee met in January to discuss how best to position the ATC and AB to be able to have substantive conversations when called upon for input. The committee believes that establishing a handful of ad hoc committees to focus on preeminent issues of statewide trail importance and solutions for how to address those issues would be a good way to prepare for conversations with state leadership and a good way to bring those of you with particular expertise to the forefront of the discussion. The Executive Committee believes the following committees should be formed with the suggested general purpose:

- **Innovation** – Identify and promote best practices in trail planning and development that serves all Alabamians.
- **Underserved Regions** – Identify regions of need and strategies for helping those regions enhance the development and use of trails.
- **Trail-Type Focus** – Identify trail types that are currently underrepresented in Alabama and opportunities to advance planning and development of projects that close those gaps.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion** – Identify gaps in Alabama's delivery of recreational trail services to all Alabamians and design strategies to close those gaps.
- **Funding/Development** – Develop strategies and tools that will assist smaller communities in securing the necessary funding to plan and build trails.

The suggested general purpose of these committees is not prescriptive and committee chairs, along with their selected members, should develop their own purpose and goals statements. The Executive Committee encourages these committees to consult the 2021 SCORP (when released by ADECA) and other statewide planning documents when assessing their respective focus areas.

For the sake of consistency during this important time, the Executive Committee recommends that Dr. Sisson stay in the Chair position and that he work with the chairs of the ad hoc committees to tap individuals serving on those committees to also serve on an expanded Executive Committee. The purpose of this recommendation is to broaden the expertise on the body and to enrich the conversation with state leaders.

Dr. Sisson asked for any questions or discussion about the proposed establishment of ad hoc committees. With no discussion, he asked for a motion of the ATC members to approve formation of these committees. Jeff Pruitt made the motion and Chris Blankenship seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Sisson proposed election of ATC officers, with he remaining as chair, Nisa Miranda serving as vice chair, and Phillip West as secretary. Dr. Sisson asked for any questions or discussion about this proposed slate. With no questions or discussion, he asked for a motion of the ATC members to approve. Marcus Campbell made the motion and Sonya Baker seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.

With Nisa Miranda's recent appointment to the ATC, Steve Newton stands as interim chair of the AB. In this role, Mr. Newton proposed election of new AB officers, with Debbie Quinn as chair, Francesca Gross as vice chair, and Marie Bostick as secretary. Steve asked for any questions or discussion about the proposed slate. With no questions or discussion, he asked for a motion of the AB members to approve. Dr. Mark Wilson made the motion and Tim King seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.

#### Alabama Trails Foundation (ATF) Report

- Tom Carruthers highlighted the ATF's recent election of their officers: David Perry as first vice president, Paul DeMarco as second vice president, Ann Haas as treasurer, Maggie Cunningham as secretary, and himself as chair.
- Mr. Carruthers gave an update on the improvements being made to the Flagg Mountain tower, parking area, and approach trail. These improvements are nearing completion and the ATF and Alabama Forestry Commission hope to schedule a ribbon-cutting in the spring.
- The next phases of Flagg Mountain improvements will include the establishment of water service and building bathrooms.
- Lake Jogloma (Scott) is another improvement focus area along the Pinhoti. The ATF is working in partnership with the US Forest Service on a \$450-\$500k project to make improvements at this anchor site, including a pedestrian bridge that will lie along the Pinhoti Trail.
- The ATF is also working to prioritize and budget the implementation of further improvements along the Pinhoti that have been included in the Pinhoti master plan. This process will help the ATF to develop a funding strategy to raise \$3 to \$5 million.
- The ATF entered into an MOU with Jacksonville State University to develop a comprehensive management plan for the Pinhoti.
- The ATF is also working with consultants to develop a better brand and image for ATF, including logo and marketing materials.

#### Initiatives Status

- Brian Rushing gave a brief update on ATC initiatives (EXHIBIT B).
- The Wiregrass Trail Partnership continues to work on the acquisition of the 43.5-mile corridor from CSX. CSX filed for abandonment recently, unbeknownst to the Partnership. The Partnership did reach out to CSX, which expressed willingness to enter back into a NITU and the Partnership sent that request onto the Surface Transportation Board.
- The 100 Alabama Miles Challenge is entering its 5th year and the partners have integrating STRAVA into the mileage logging capability, which provides integration with wearable devices.
- The official virtual kickoff for the 2022 season will be March 26. Brian invited all meeting attendees to help promote the program in advance of the 2022 kickoff.

### Recreational Trails Program Update

- Debbie Quinn provided a brief update of the Recreation Trails Program. Alabama received \$1.6 million for FY 2022. For FY 2022, the grant program has received 26 applications, which underscores the insufficiency of the available funding. While communities are enthusiastic, seem to be focusing on pocket park projects with loop trails opposed to connecting important locations within and between communities.
- Steve Newton underscored need for applications for the ATV/OHV funding under TAP, which is a necessity in order to continue receiving the funding from the Federal Highway Administration.
- Chris Blankenship noted that ADCNR has been using the ATV/OHV funds for projects in state parks, which have been well-received.

### ALDOT Update

- Sonya Baker gave an update on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Transportation Alternatives Program, and ALDOT's statewide planning efforts.
- A total of \$7.2 Billion will be distributed to Alabama for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for FY2022 through FY2026.
- Changes to TAP:
  - Non-MPO areas will begin receiving 59% of TAP funding allocation, which is up from 50%.
  - MPOs with populations of less than 200,000 and any nonprofit entities will be eligible to apply for the first time.
  - Preliminary engineering will become an eligible funding item in the FY2023 cycle.
- 34 projects in FY 2022 were awarded a total of \$17.8 million.
- A call for FY2023 projects is coming up in March 2022.
- The TAP apportionment for Alabama in 2023 should be announced soon.
- ALDOT will update the Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2023 and is currently updating its Strategic Highway Safety Plan with an emphasis on non-motorist crashes.
- FHWA Grant Opportunities
  - FHWA is accepting applications for RAISE through April 14, 2022 for projects with significant regional economic impact. Total funding for Alabama will be \$1.5 billion.
  - The Eastern Federal Lands Access Program application period will be from April 1, 2022 to July 1, 2022 for projects providing multi-use public access to federal lands.

### ATV/OHV Update

- Steve Newton provided an update on Grand River Motorsports, which is a private venture in the early stages of planning and developing a very large land tract in Baldwin County just north of I-10.
- The development's focus is on ATV/OHV but there will also be a motocross track, hiking trails, river access for paddling and tubing, and RV and tent camping.
- All motorized trails will stay at least 200 feet from the bank of the Styx River and there is a high degree of emphasis on environmental sustainability and accessibility.

- Mr. Newton, as well as Amy Rauworth and Dr. Graham Sisson have provided guidance and input on trail planning – including accessibility – at the request of the project’s organizers.

#### Schedule for Next Meetings

The remaining ATC/AB meetings for this year are scheduled for August 10, 2022 and December 7, 2022 both at 10:00AM via zoom, unless otherwise communicated.

#### Additional Comments

- Dr. Mark Wilson wanted to make ATC and AB members aware of UAB’s Department of Preventative Medicine’s *Live Health Smart Alabama* program that is an effort to improve Alabama’s health metrics, with a major focus on physical activity. The program’s emphasis is on policy, built environment, systems, and programs. Dr. Wilson is chairing the policy committee and asks members of the ATC and AB to let him know of any statewide or local policy ideas they have that could support the enhancement of physical activity.
- Brian also shared that he has received notice that the 2021 SCORP is under review at the National Park Service and may be released soon. He notes that the document will be a helpful resource for Dr. Wilson and the *Live Health Smart Alabama* program by highlighting infrastructure needs and barriers to participation at the region level and statewide strategic goals and objectives that can inform policy.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.