

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

March 18, 2020  
11:00 AM

(via web conference)

**Alabama Trails Commission Attendees**

Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair  
Phillip West  
Debbie Quinn  
Sonya Baker  
Greg Lien  
Grey Brennan  
Jeff Pruitt, Vice-Chair

**Advisory Board Attendees**

Nisa Miranda, Chair  
Francesca Gross  
Steve Newton, Vice-Chair  
Jason Dockery  
Dr. John Jenson  
Odell Sanders  
Josh Burnett  
Tim King

**Associates & Visitors**

Brian Rushing – UACED  
Cindy Ragland  
Tom Carruthers – Alabama Trails Foundation  
Sundae Ragland – Alabama Department of Transportation

**Welcome and Introductions**

Due to the Covid-19 public health risk, this meeting was conducted via web conference. Dr. Graham Sisson (Chair) called the meeting to order at 11:00AM and a role was called. A quorum was present for the Alabama Trails Commission (ATC) but not for the Advisory Board (AB).

**Approval of Minutes**

Dr. Sisson asked for ATC approval of the November 20, 2019 meeting minutes (EXHIBIT A). Debbie Quinn made a motion for approval. Greg Lien seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.

## ATC Chair's Report

- Given the lack of a quorum for the AB, no vote was taken on the approval of new officers nor of the AB Bylaws changes (EXHIBIT B).
- 2019 Legislative Report. Dr. Sisson stated that this report (EXHIBIT C) will be circulated to the legislature as soon as possible. There were no questions from the ATC or AB regarding this report.
- 2020 Alabama Recreational Trails Conference Recap. Dr. Sisson stated that the conference took place Feb. 6-7 at Gulf State Park and had 160 attendees from around the state. He reviewed the conference presenters and presentation subjects:
  - Plenary Session:
    - **Jay Pigford** – Architectureworks / Gulf State Park redevelopment project with emphasis on the enhancement and expansion of the park's multi-use trails.
    - **Trevor Thomas** – Blind Hiker / shared his story about becoming a long distance hiker after losing his site and gave his views on accessibility provisions for long-distance hiking trails.
    - **Dr. Graham Sisson** (me) – Reviewed legal requirements and best practice information resources for providing accessible trail facilities.
    - **Sonya Baker** – ALDOT / Provided a summary Alabama's Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
    - **Tony Hull** (Keynote Speaker) – Benefits and critical importance of equitable connected bike-ped networks in creating healthy, vibrant communities.
    - **Britney Moore** – Florida Recreation and Parks Office of Greenways and Trails / regional connectivity, partnerships, trail tourism, and trail towns associated with the Florida Trail
    - **James and Shannon Smith** – Singing River Trail regional trail planning process in north Alabama.
    - **Dave Logan** – TreadLightly! / Responsible trail use through stewardship, education, and communication.
  - Concurrent Speakers
    - **Will McGarity** – Architectureworks / Alabama Pinhoti Trail enhancement planning process.
    - **Cherokee Ridge Alpine Trail Association Members** / Case study in creating a successful trail nonprofit that builds and maintains trails that provide impactful experiences to users in partnership with large landowners and public and private funders.
    - **Bobby Whaley** – Review of Alabama's equestrian trail facilities and opportunities for future development.
    - **Brian Rushing** – UACED / Cahaba Blueway planning and development process; best practices for developing regional water trails for economic development.
    - **Adam Sherm** – American Conservation Experience / Leveraging youth conservation corps to build and maintain successful trails in a cost-effective way.

- **Brad Collett** – University of Tennessee / Review of the Tennessee RiverLine planning process, which is helping communities along the Tennessee River envision how they can create segments of a continuous system of paddle-hike-bike experiences along the river’s 652-mile length.
- **David Tosch** – Southeast Trail Runs / How to organize successful trail race events to maximize economic impact, heighten awareness, and engage new users and stewards for trails.
- **Jack Terrell** – National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council / Available NOHVCC training resources for building and maintaining sustainable OHV trails.
- **Rob Grant & Ken Thomas** – Alabama State Parks / Highlighted trail development throughout Alabama State Parks, with an emphasis on accessibility and signage initiatives.
- **Liz Smith-Incer** – National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program / Africatown trail concept planning process and how RTCA can help your planning project.
- **Greg Wingo** – ROAM Projects / Technology tools for trail fun and safety and organizing events on your trails to heighten awareness and enhance economic impact.

Dr. Sisson gave a special thanks to Phillip West and his colleagues at the City of Orange Beach for their help with the mobile workshops and to the UA Center of Economic Development staff for shouldering the organization of the conference.

Dr. Sisson also thanked the sponsors for their generous support:

- Lead Sponsors
  - Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama (THANK YOU TIM KING!)
  - Alabama State Parks (THANK YOU GREG LEIN!)
- Partner Sponsors
  - Lakeshore Foundation (THANK YOU AMY RAUWORTH!)
  - Alabama Power Foundation (THANK YOU FREDDY PADILLA!)
- Supporting Sponsors
  - Alabama Outdoors
  - UA Center for Economic Development
  - Alabama Scenic River Trail (THANK YOU JIM FELDER!)
  - City of Orange Beach
  - City of Gulf Shores
  - Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism (THAN YOU PHILLIP WEST FOR SECURING SUPPORT FROM ORANGE BEACH, GULF SHORES AND THE TOURISM OFFICE!)
  - Dix-Hite Landcape Architects
  - Goodwyn, Mills & Cawood

- *Initiatives Status.* Dr. Graham handed this report off to Brian Rushing. Referencing an update in the board packet (EXHIBIT D), Mr. Rushing reviewed Andalusia’s acquisition of a 16-mile rail Corridor from CSX and Gadsden’s closing on their acquisition of a 2-mile rail corridor from Norfolk Southern. Mr. Rushing shared that the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is committed to helping communities in Alabama develop strategies to protect against legal challenges to rail-trail projects in that could be made vulnerable due to last year’s Alabama Supreme Court decision in the Monroe County case, which still stands. RTC would like to offer one or more web-based workshops with Alabama communities that already have operating rail-trails, are in the process of developing a project, or are contemplating rail-trail projects, and Mr. Rushing will be working with them to organize. Mr. Rushing also provided an update on the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge. The kickoff event scheduled for March 14 had to be postponed due to the coronavirus health risks. He shared that in addition to Birmingham, the cities of Mobile, Ozark, Talladega, Center Point, Winfield, Boaz, Scottsboro, New Market, Madison, Jacksonville, & Springville responded to a call for event partners through the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association. For now, those events are also postponed. Mr. Rushing said that these partners as well as State Parks and members of the program steering committee are pushing out the message that 100 AL Miles is a great opportunity for people to take care of their mind and body during the coronavirus outbreak. Mr. Rushing also thanked the Alabama Trails Foundation for their continued support of the program in 2020 and for Blue Cross Blue Shield’s commitment of continued support.
- *HB5797.* Dr. Sisson gave a brief review of the The [Coalition for Recreational Trails](#) has issued a *Call to Action* for trail organizations to sign on in support of the Recreational Trails Full Funding Act of 2020 (HR 5797) which will:
  - require completion of the non-highway recreational fuel use study at least every five years and reports to Congress on the results;
  - **increase RTP funding to \$250 million annually – from \$84 million currently – or to the new estimated amount from the mandated studies;**
  - establish new reporting standards for projects completed with RTP funds to provide increased transparency;
  - simplify and increase funding of administration of RTP by FHWA; and
  - re-establish the original formula for apportionment of RTP funds to the states.

American Trails’ Board of Directors is asking trail organizations to take the following primary actions:

- Use print and electronic communications channels to share news of HR5797
- Contact U.S. Representatives and those Members with strong relations to your organization and ask them to cosponsor HR 5797 and ask your Senators to support the similar Senate bill, S. 527.

Given the ATC’s duties of, in part, working to advance the Alabama Trail System through advocacy and intergovernmental cooperation and the potential for this legislation

to enhance the funding for recreational trails in Alabama, Dr. Sisson asked for a motion for the ATC to express its support for this legislation by contacting our Congressional delegation by letter. Debbie Quinn made a motion and Phillip West seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

### **Alabama Trails Foundation**

Tom Carruthers, Chair of the Alabama Trails Foundation, shared recent activities of the Alabama Trails Foundation (ATF). The ATF is looking for four additional Board members from around the state and asks the ATC to provide names of possible candidates to Mr. Carruthers, Cindy Ragland, or Brian Rushing. Mr. Carruthers thanked the ATC for their ratification of Maggie Cunningham's recent appointment to the ATF Board. Mrs. Cunningham lives in Piedmont, which helps to diversify the geographic representation of the ATF Board. Mr. Carruthers then reviewed the status of the ATF's work on the Pinhoti Trail Enhancement Project and its involvement in the effort (in partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission and Friends of Flagg Mountain) to enhance the trailhead at Flagg Mountain to accommodate more visitors and to restore the historic CCC structures there. He detailed the status of the Flagg Mountain project and the ATF's intent to help fundraise for that project.

### **Presentations on Trail-Related Work**

- **Steve Newton** (Cheaha Trail Riders Club) gave a review of his organization and their work to establish and maintain the Kentucky ATV trails on the Talladega Ranger District of the Talladega National Forest and their involvement with other programs and initiatives. He gave a review of the ATV trail facilities in the state. There are over 1,200,000 ATVs in Alabama and over 400 miles of ATV trails in the state. There are very few ATV clubs in Alabama. There are fewer than previously due to liability issues. Steve and NOVHCC is working to try to get clubs back in Alabama. Most riders have not had formal rider training and most accidents are due to poor safety practices. Safety training is a major need in Alabama. "A Trip Unplanned" is an online training video that they use to communicate ATV safety.
- **Marie Bostick** (Land Trust of North Alabama) gave an overview of her organization and their role in preserving open space and developing trails for the benefit of the public, mostly concentrated around Huntsville. They currently have an operating territory throughout ten counties in extreme north Alabama. All trails the LTNA operates are multi-use trails with some combination of hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. Ms. Bostick reviewed each of the trail systems in the Huntsville area. With only 1.5 staff members dedicated to trail stewardship, LTNA has a well-developed volunteer crew that helps to build and maintain trails. She shared LTNA's acquisition priorities that will create connected corridors throughout the Huntsville area – these are shared priorities with Madison and Limestone Counties through their greenway program. Madison and Limestone Counties contract with LTNA to conduct acquisition of properties and development and operation of trails on those properties. Ms. Bostick mentioned the Singing River Trail planning process, which envisions regional trail connectivity between Huntsville, Athens, and Decatur.

- **Jason Dockery** (Alabama Forestry Commission) gave an overview of the AFC properties with trails. The primary purpose of the state forests is to serve as demonstrations for how best to plant and steward forests for timber and most are smaller tracts, traditionally dedicated to seed orchard operations. Four forests are large enough to also provide trail recreation and Mr. Dockery reviewed the facilities currently available in each. He also reviewed the partnership AFC works with in the redevelopment of Flagg Mountain at Weogufka State Forest.

### **Round Table Discussion about Current Events & Opportunities**

- Sonya Baker announced that the 2020 TAP application period is currently open and the application deadline will be May 15, 2020. Brian Rushing will post that information on the ATC Face Book page.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on Wednesday August 26, 2020 at 11:00AM, and the location will be determined and confirmed via email.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Brian Rushing