

Alabama Trails Commission and Advisory Board Joint Meeting
Alabama Center for Commerce
Montgomery, Alabama
March 2, 2016

ATC Attendees

Debbie Quinn, Chair
Jeffery A. Pruitt
Phillip West
Rebecca Fulks
Amy Rauworth
Richard Guthrie
Greg Lein

ATCAB Attendees

Nisa Miranda
Richard Martin
Cindy Ragland
John Jensen
Jason Dockery
Jim Felder
Ike Lyon
Mark E. Wilson

Visitors

Brian Rushing
Phillip Darden
Pete Morris
Scott Stewart
Crystal Davis
Kim Martin
Maureen Neighbors

Introduction

Debbie Quinn called the meeting to order at 11:06 AM. The attendees then introduced themselves.

A quorum was present for the both the Alabama Trails Commission (ATC) and the Alabama Trails Commission Advisory Board (ATCAB).

Approval of Minutes

Debbie Quinn asked if anyone had any additions or suggestions to the minutes from the last meeting. No changes were recommended and the minutes from the previous meeting were approved unanimously.

Commission Chair Report

Debbie Quinn reported the following regarding legislation:

- SB54 updated the language of the existing bill. The legislation added nine slots to the ATCAB and split a couple of slots in addition to other changes.
- The legislation included two amendments. The Alabama Railroad Association expressed the desire to participate and will have a seat on the ATCAB. Additionally, the Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) recommended a change from the appointment by State Parks Division to DCNR.
- This is the third year the legislation has been submitted. The bill had previously passed the Senate and passed the House the morning of the meeting.

Jim Byard, Jr., the Director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs welcomed the group, spoke briefly, and thanked the members for their service on the Commission and Advisory Board.

Trail Tourism

Jim Felder and Philip Darden discussed the Tourism initiative.

- Jim distributed Alabama Top Trails brochure and discussed how it could be improved.
- Jim and Philip discussed Canada's Wild Outdoor Expo (largest outdoor show in the world) which he, Philip, and Grey Brennan attended in Ontario.
- Alabama had a 20 foot booth at the show which received at least as much if not more traffic than all the other states' booths combined. The booth showcased a banner that spanned the length of the booth.
- Visitors to the booth provided important and helpful feedback.
- The Expo seemed to be a magnet for the mountain biking community.
- Most people don't realize that Alabama is such a great outdoor recreation destination. Philip expressed the need for a marketing campaign and recreation trade shows to educate the public and increase tourism.
- The group distributed every Alabama Top Trails brochure they brought to the Expo.
- Jim explained that the proceeds from that show actually fund parks and outdoor recreation projects. He indicated that he would like to discuss the possibility of Alabama putting something similar together if anyone was interested. He indicated that he had mentioned the possibility of someone from Ontario Tourism coming to Alabama to share information on the subject.

Alabama Top Trails Brochure

Nisa Miranda asked about cost of printing the Alabama Top Trails brochure and how many were needed. Jim Felder discussed the cost of printing the brochures and the method used for printing. There was discussion of the inclusion of recreation resources provided by land trusts and Forest Service public lands in the brochure. Nisa mentioned that the public lands have resources and could possibly contribute to the printing cost. Philip Darden explained that trail users wanted detailed maps with information and that there should be a very robust website associated with the brochure. Brian Rushing mentioned the website listed on the back of the brochure. Jim mentioned that he would gladly send the document out to anyone that was interested but that it had to be presented in its entirety. Additional discussion on the topic followed.

Annual Report

Debbie Quinn presented the annual report and called for photos of handicapped and ethnically diverse users.

High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HETAP) Grant Implementation

Amy Rauworth discussed a grant awarded to the Lakeshore Foundation from The Curtis & Edith Munson Foundation for equipment, signage, and training related to the HETAP. The Lakeshore Foundation applied for and was awarded a Recreational Trails Program grant as additional funding was needed for the project.

- Assessment equipment was purchased and shipped to the Lakeshore Foundation.
- The pilot project included assessing and resigning all trails at Oak Mountain State Park using the HETAP.
- The pilot project also consisted of the training of 30-50 trail developers by Beneficial Designs on HETAP. The training is expected to occur in September.
- The assessment equipment will be available for utilization by other organizations.
- The purpose of the new signage is to inform the public of what they will experience on the trail so they can determine whether they have the ability to use it.
- The inclusion of the HETAP as an incentive criteria for the Recreational Trails Program has been discussed.

Pinhoti Trail/Appalachian Trail (AT) Initiative

Debbie Quinn discussed a conference call meeting of the Appalachian Trail task force. She explained that the AT stops at Springer Mountain in North Georgia. The trail actually extends to Alabama's Flagg Mountain but is not considered part of the AT. The task force is trying to research why it hasn't already been extended by Georgia already. The AT designation would have to be extended in Georgia before Alabama could connect to it. Ron Sparks will help facilitate developing a strategy and plan to present to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Brian Rushing discussed Georgia Pinhoti Trail. Brian explained that he had been researching websites to determine the current situation for the Georgia Pinhoti Trail. He indicated that some parts of the Pinhoti are designated multi-use. The AT allows hiking only. Further, he mentioned that the extension of the AT into Alabama is dependent on what happens in Georgia. This may mean we have to work with similarly interested groups in Georgia to find alternate areas where those activities can be done. In Alabama we can work with local resources to elevate the Pinhoti experience.

- Some sections of the trail are road walks and that is a concern of the Conservancy. Forever Wild purchased a missing link on Indian Mountain and was buying more. He recommended not limiting the thinking to the final goal.
- There is a need to create a plan and meet with the Alabama Forestry Commission and the U.S. Forest Service on how to create more of a gold standard.
- There is an opportunity as the southern terminus has already been extended five times.
- Tom Cosby's thinking was to take the Pinhoti and bring it up to AT standards even if the designation never happens. The ultimate vision for the AT was to end in Alabama.
- The use of Recreational Trails Program funding was discussed as a possible source for upgrading shelters, signage, etc.
- New marketing strategies for the Pinhoti were discussed.
- Get people on the Pinhoti and then the Conservancy will take notice.
- The condition of elements of parks located on forestry property was discussed.
- The Executive Committee decided not to do the Resolution discussed at the previous meeting but to wait and get a plan together.
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Debbie Quinn called for a motion to allow the task force to continue planning regarding Pinhoti's future goals. Dr. Guthrie made a motion. Phillip West seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Other Business

Brian Rushing mentioned the upcoming Alabama Recreational Trails Leadership conference at the Phelps Center in Tuscaloosa on May 14, 2015, focusing on partnerships. He added that they were considering holding the fall workshop in October in Mobile. They are working on getting Dan Burden, modern Johnny Appleseed of pedestrian and bicycle design, to come and speak at the next workshop.

The Alabama Recreation Trail website 2.0 will be released soon. The upgrade will have a tweaked visual design and be better on mobile devices. Brian Rushing will send out announcements soon.

Brian Rushing discussed how The 100 Missouri Miles is a big draw to state parks. It is an initiative to challenge people to get out on trails and walk 100 miles in a year. There is an app available. The app logs miles, issues badges and medallions, gives people information about trails and health, tracks activities, etc. and is available to any state that wants to use it. The ATC could take on this task for Alabama which could assist in gathering user data, economic data, provide information to trail users, and encourage people to use trails.

Other similar initiatives were discussed.

Greg Lein discussed State Parks and the legislative session. There was discussion on ways to encourage support for Alabama State Parks.

New Business

Nisa Miranda suggested using counters across all agencies and get good numbers to encourage it. Recommend laser vs. buried system. Also suggested using GoPro to help with marketing.

Phillip Darden stated that Auburn is currently making videos. Someone also suggested checking YouTube for amateur videos.

Richard Martin mentioned a dog at Elkmont that came in 7th in a marathon race and received national attention.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in Mobile on May 4, 2016.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Crystal Davis