

## EXHIBIT A

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

Wednesday, March 31, 2021  
10:00 AM

(via web conference)

#### Alabama Trails Commission Attendees

Dr. Graham Sisson, Chair  
Amy Rauworth  
Dr. John Kvach  
Sonya Baker  
Grey Brennan  
Greg Lein  
Jeff Pruitt, Vice-Chair  
Johnny Smith, Secretary

#### Advisory Board Attendees

Jim Felder, Secretary  
Francesca Gross  
Steve Newton, Vice-Chair  
Jason Dockery  
Dr. John Jenson  
Odell Sanders  
Josh Yerby  
Jimmy Lemmond (Bucky Edmondson proxy)  
Nisa Miranda, Chair  
Tim King  
Larry “Chip” Dixon  
Maeci Martin Walker  
Marie Bostick  
Dr. Vini Nathan  
Nathan Wright  
Will O’Connor (Jeff DeQuattro’s Proxy)

#### Associates & Visitors

Brian Rushing – UACED  
Cindy Ragland – Alabama Trails Foundation  
Tom Carruthers – Alabama Trails Foundation  
Stephanie Matthes – Gulf Corps (Corps Network)  
Michael Rogers – Council on Substance Abuse  
Debbie Quinn – Former ATC member  
Greg Wingo – ROAM Projects

### Welcome and Introductions

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was conducted via web conference. Dr. Graham Sisson (Chair) called the meeting to order at 10:00AM and a roll was called. A quorum was present for both the Alabama Trails Commission (ATC) and Advisory Board (AB).

### Approval of Minutes

Dr. Sisson asked for the ATC to make a motion for the approval of the December 2, 2020 meeting minutes (EXHIBIT A). Greg Lein made a motion for approval and Jeff Pruitt seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.

### ATC Chair's Report

- 2019 Legislative Report. Dr. Sisson briefly reviewed the 2019 Legislative Report under Exhibit B. The Executive Committee will be circulating the report to the legislature via email and in person if pandemic conditions allow.
- Senate Bill 105. Introduced to the Senate in February to bar eminent domain for trail for biking or hiking. The Executive Committee did have concern about the wording of the bill, they recommend not issuing a position statement at this time. They want the ATC and AB members to be aware of the bill and that it passed out of committee. It still has to go through the Rules Committee before it can be scheduled for a vote. Debbie Quinn encourages user groups to examine the bill and issue a position statement either in favor of or against. A number of organizations are reaching out to their senators to express their opinion.
- Plan for Statewide interconnected Network of Trails. The trails Commission affirmed its intent to take the lead role over the next 3-5 years in creating a conceptual plan for a statewide connected trail network. This work will include defining a planning scope, determining cost, developing a communications toolkit, engaging Regional Councils of Government as core partners in the process, identifying funding sources, securing the needed funds, engaging one or more professional planning firms, and developing an economic feasibility study to accompany the plan. The Commission also approved the formation of a working committee to guide the process. Those who have joined this committee already are: Graham, Nisa Miranda, Debbie Quinn, Jeff Pruitt, and Jim Felder. Since our last meeting, we have had preliminary conversations with planning firms and have begun the process of developing a preliminary scope that we will use to issue an initial Request for Qualifications and Quote from planning firms. Early indications are that this plan will likely cost \$200,000 to \$250,000, which will be a major undertaking and will likely require multiple funding sources. As the working committee meets, we will update you on the progress. If you would like to join the working committee to guide this important process, please let Brian Rushing know.
- ATC & AB Appointments. EXHIBIT C includes a list of Commission and Advisory Board members with notes on the status of each member's term. The Nominating Committee is working through the membership list now to re-appoint or replace members who are

rolling off both bodies. If your appointment term is up and the Committee has not yet contacted you, they will be doing so soon.

- Initiatives Status. This report is presented in Exhibit D. Brian Rushing thanked Johnny Smith for his help in hosting the upcoming Wiregrass Trail delegation visit to Jacksonville to learn about the Chief Ladiga Trail. Currently the Wiregrass Trail partners are working to sign on additional partner local governments. Representative Mike Jones has become a major champion of this initiative and is leading the effort. Brian briefly reviewed the upcoming opening day of the 2021 season of the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge.
- Upcoming Trails Leadership Workshops. We are working to schedule two workshops this summer on developing regional trail networks and on legal considerations of rail-trail projects.
- Graham announced the upcoming Urban Trails & Real Estate Development Symposium taking place at Auburn University.
- Graham announced the need for the Trails Commission members to complete their Ethics Commission Statement of Economic Interest by April 30.

#### Alabama Trails Foundation Report (Tom Carruthers)

- Tom Carruthers reviewed the Flagg Mountain improvement project, which is currently undertaking replacement of the tower stairs and construction of a new parking area at the top of the mountain, along with a new ADA accessible approach trail to the tower.
- Have hosting a Student Conservation Association intern to conduct a GPS survey of the Pinhoti Trail.
- Hosted an OSHA and U. S. Forest Service chainsaw and crosscut training program for volunteers along the Pinhoti.
- Jacksonville State University and The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development are conducting an economic impact study of Flagg Mountain.
- Conducting a new five-year strategic plan for the Foundation.
- The Foundation issued a call for new board members and asked the ATC / AB membership if to send names their way if they know of anyone who would like to serve.

#### Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Update

Brian Rushing gave an update of the SCORP, relating that the project is a major focus for The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development. The survey process informing the supply and demand and analysis is underway. Brian thanked the state and federal agency partners for participating in the facility inventory process. Cities and Counties, along with commercial providers have been a bit slow in participating in the inventory process. The plan should be done by January of 2022. Brian may be calling on some members of the ATC and AB membership for help in reaching local governments. A resident participation and demand survey will be administered soon using a survey panel through the Qualtrics online survey platform. The SCORP also includes an update of the statewide outdoor recreation strategy. This process has been ongoing since last fall, including key stakeholder meetings and an online survey process to engage the general public. Over 60 organizations participated in the key stakeholder meetings and 876

members of the public participated in the survey. The process' website is at [www.alabamaoutdoorrecreation.org](http://www.alabamaoutdoorrecreation.org).

### Presentation of Trail-Related Work

- Alabama Bicycle Coalition. Will O'Connor gave a brief presentation. The Alabama Bicycle Coalition (ALABIKE) is a statewide grassroots not for profit organization advocating for cycling safety education and access that was incorporated in 2003. The initial focus was working with state and local officials to preserve improve and create bicycle friendly roads and policies throughout Alabama and was instrumental in the passage of the three-foot minimum passing law in 2015. Currently, the organization is working on developing tools that can be deployed by local municipalities and advocate advocacy groups to develop safe, confident, and knowledgeable cyclists. They are developing a template for bicycle co-ops and implemented several pilot programs. They are provide bicycle repair tools and education for libraries so that libraries can then lend out both the knowledge and the actual tools for repairing bicycles. They have also creating a "bike rodeo" that is a kit that can be deployed to so any organization or community to set up a replica street in a parking lot and do cycling safety training for kids. They are currently focused on completing the development of these programs as well as recruiting new board members and funding partners. Will also discussed his work with the Alabama River Region Trails organization, which is soon to release their first phase of a trail master plan for the Montgomery area.
- Alabama Hiking Trail Society. Nathan Wright, the organization's president, gave a brief presentation. As many organizations have experienced, AHTS didn't accomplish a lot of goals in the last year with Covid. However, they have gone through a board reorganization and are working on internal items such as new branding and website and they are looking forward to getting back to their "normal" work soon. The organization's main focus is to build and maintain short and long hiking trails throughout the state, working in partnership with a number of governments and other landowners. The Alabama Trail, planned for the western side of the state, is a major focus. They maintain the facilities at Flag Mountain under agreement with the Alabama Forestry Commission. Nathan also talked about his experience as a hiker hostel operator at the Pinhoti Outdoor Center. He said they are seeing significant growth in the number of hikers on the Pinhoti in the past couple of years. They are currently seeing over 200 hikers a month from all over the U. S., including Alaska, Wisconsin, Oregon, and Idaho. The Pinhoti is becoming known throughout the world through the outreach a number of social media influencers and people are coming from all over. One of the major influencers is Sunny Eberhart, who is the caretaker at Flag Mountain. Sunny (a.k.a. Nimblewell Nomad) is a legendary hiker and one of two people who have hiked all 11 National Scenic Trails. He has over 40,000 miles backpacking since the age of 59. He's now 82 and he's currently trying to set the age record on the Appalachian Trail. He started his 2,600-mile hike to Baxter, Maine

at Flagg Mountain recently and is logging his progress through September on his website at [www.nimblewellnomad.com](http://www.nimblewellnomad.com). Sunny has really been a promoter of the Pinhoti Trail and he's brought a lot of attention to the trail and to Flagg Mountain because of his presence and his draw for people. Nathan also shared that the app., "Guthook," has been a huge help in increasing awareness of the Pinhoti.

#### Round Table Discussion about Current Events, Challenges, and Opportunities

- Nisa shared that the ATC and AB would like to have additional liaisons with the Alabama Trails Foundation to enhance the collaboration and planning between the organizations. Nisa suggested Jason Dockery, with the Alabama Forestry Commission. Graham asked the group about their interest in joining the group. Jason Dockery and Johnny Smith both agreed to join the group. Nisa will send information about time required and structure. Nisa asked for anyone interested to let her know by the end of April. Sonya Baker asked for information.
- Debbie highlighted the Alabama Living publication, produced by Alabama's electric cooperatives. The most recent issue features three articles about trails.
- Will O'Connor asked if there is any Trails Commission activity with the federal infrastructure bill currently being negotiated in Congress. Brian highlighted the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's webinar today about the Transportation Infrastructure Bill, which will make some earmark opportunities available, and members of Congress are being invited to submit earmarks. This webinar will be a "how to" to engage with representatives. Brian posted the announcement today on the ATC website. Dr. John Kvach shared that he is meeting with the Congressional delegation regarding funding for the Singing River Trail.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 25 at 10:00AM.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.