

Alabama Trails Commission and Advisory Board Joint Meeting
Oak Mountain State Park
Pelham, Alabama
November 9, 2016
11:00 am

ATC Attendees

Debbie Quinn
Amy Rauworth
Richard Guthrie
Greg Lein
Jeffery Pruitt
Allen Armstrong
Phillip West
Johnny Smith

ATCAB Attendees

Jim Felder
Francesca Gross
Steve Newton
Nisa Miranda
John Jensen
Jason Dockery
Mark Wilson
Brandon Glover
Josh Burnette for Frank Edmondson
Ken Thomas

Visitors

Maureen Neighbors
Crystal Davis
Kim Martin
Tatum Smith
Cheryl Morgan
Richard Martin
Brian Rushing

Introduction

Debbie Quinn called the meeting to order at 11:07 AM. She then announced that the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Lakeshore Foundation Recreational Trails Program project would take place after the meeting at 1:00 PM and invited everyone to attend.

She explained that photographers and the media would be present. Debbie introduced herself and explained that the nominating committee would discuss officers. Ms. Quinn stated that she would be stepping down from the position as Board Chair but she would be remaining on the ATC. The attendees then introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes

Debbie Quinn asked if anyone had any additions or suggestions to the minutes from the last meeting. Maureen Neighbors asked for a head count of members. A quorum was established for both the ATC and the ATCAB. Brian Rushing requested a correction on page 3 of the minutes to the length of the Wiregrass Trail. Crystal Davis said that change had been made and the minutes from the previous meeting were approved unanimously.

Commission Chair Report

Amended Bylaws

Debbie Quinn mentioned that since the revised Bylaws were not sent out the week prior to the meeting they could not be voted on. One of the changes added a level for emeritus members and that she would like to move Richard Martin to that position. It was stated that the number of meetings per year would be reduced from four to three. Further, the amended bylaws would be sent out prior to the next meeting and would be voted on in March. There was discussion regarding the appointment letters, where they should be sent, and who should be copied. ADECA should be copied on all appointment letters.

Nominating Committee Recommendation of New Officers

The nominating committee's recommendation of new officers was as follows:

Amy Rauworth – Chair of ATC
Phillip West – Vice Chair of ATC
Nisa Miranda – President of ATCAB
Steve Newton – Vice President of ATCAB
Jim Felder – Secretary/Treasurer of ATCAB

With no objections, the new officers were approved unanimously.

Consideration of Underrepresented Federal Agencies and User Groups

Debbie Quinn explained that there are three spots open for underrepresented user group organizations. Debbie stated that the Executive Committee had a phone call to discuss possible organizations to choose from and that the Board would need to vote on which organizations those would be. The Executive

Committee discussed trail runners and mountain biking groups, which had a large representation in the state. The Alabama Hiking Trail Society was also discussed by the committee. Debbie asked if anyone had any other ideas or suggestions. The group mentioned rock climbers/cavers, wildflower and bird watchers, etc. Greg Lein asked what an appropriate group would be. Debbie recommended the Executive Committee discuss the vacancies and the subject could be discussed again at the March meeting. She asked that any other recommendations be forwarded to her.

The new legislation also provided for underrepresented federal agencies. Healthcare organizations, state parks, Health and Human Services, the National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife were discussed as possible organizations from which to request member appointments. Debbie recommended this be revisited at the next meeting and that any recommendations be forwarded to her.

Amendment 2 Status

Greg Lein announced that Amendment 2 passed with 80% majority vote. He believes the approval of the amendment speaks to the strength of the park system and its role in our communities. Educating the public about the amendment and encouraging individuals to vote helped tremendously. Due to the uncertainty of the financial future of the parks system, there grew a huge backlog of projects. Now the trails systems which are unrealized assets can be improved. Mr. Lein thanked the group for its support. A discussion among members on the subject followed.

Recognition of Outgoing Members

Cindy Ragland, who couldn't be present, and Richard Martin were recognized as an outgoing members. He was presented with a walking stick from Blackbelt Treasures, hand-made in Alabama, for his service. Richard was described as a pioneer for rail-trails in Alabama for his work on the 10 miles of diverse-use rail-trail in Elkmont. Mr. Martin also serves on the Alabama Recreational Trails Advisory Board, a board mandated by the Recreational Trails Program legislation, under the oversight of ADECA.

Alabama Trails Foundation Status

Cheryl Morgan gave a report on the status of the Alabama Trails Foundation. A small group identified to form a steering committee held a productive meeting with a focus on wealth, wisdom, and workers. The first meeting will be tightly facilitated. The goal of that meeting will be to come away with a list of board members for the foundation.

Conservation Fund Conference in Review

The conference is sponsored by an organization based in Virginia. Cheryl Morgan and Debbie Quinn attended the conference in Pensacola. Cheryl gave a presentation at the conference and answered questions. She discussed connections across state lines, talked about Orange Beach and the Backcountry Trail, and gave a highlight of what the city of Birmingham is doing. Cheryl said the conference was very informative and the audience was amazed by what Alabama is doing. There was lots of outreach and discussions included Oak Mountain, the Chief Ladiga Trail, and trails and transportation. The NPO for southern Alabama is located in Pensacola. Jim Felder mentioned that the Alabama Scenic River Trail just established an interstate project to place signs 30 miles into Florida on the Choctawhatchee River. Cheryl also mentioned the ATC and ATCAB now has a twenty minute presentation that can be uploaded easily to a website and available for use in future presentations.

UTAP/HETAP Training in Review

A handout was provided to the attendees. Amy Rauworth stated that 54 people were trained in the UTAP/HETAP training sponsored by the Lakeshore Foundation and the Recreational Trails Program. She mentioned that a third day was added to the training event. A tremendous amount of information was provided to trainees. The Lakeshore Foundation would like to bring Beneficial Designs back and allow those 54 people to use the equipment to get certified. She hopes some will actually complete the Master level training so that they can then train others in Alabama. Brian Rushing mentioned that it was an intensive day with a compressed curriculum. He explained that the trainees first learned about the UTAP method and then the HETAP method which is significantly more efficient in regard to the level of detail that can be recorded. Brian believes the training is valuable for stewardship and communicating to the public what to expect on the trail. He hopes that it will expand and become the standard on public trails in Alabama. Steve Newton added that the training included a high-level of detail. Can be used on any level of trail system and a great asset for the state. Ken Thomas went on to mention that the end result of the assessment is the sign which is produced to provide information that allows trail users to decide if that particular trail is right for them. The format of the information is user friendly and it puts the power into the users' hands. Additional comments by training attendees followed.

Recreational Trails Program and Lakeshore Foundation funds were used to purchase the equipment. Discussion followed on where the equipment would be housed, how often training would be conducted, the length of time anticipated for the completion of the Master level training, etc.

Debbie Quinn reminded of the ribbon cutting and lunch and thanked ADECA for making the Recreational Trails Program grant happen and thanked Amy for heading up the project.

Initiatives Updates

Rail-Trails

Wiregrass – Brian Rushing discussed the 43.5 mile long Wiregrass corridor. The ATC is working through the NEPA process. They have concurrence from four federal agencies. According to ALDOT, the project did not qualify for categorical exclusion. Forever Wild will be fronting the cost of the trail and will be reimbursed from grants. Richard Martin will be speaking with the Forever Wild boards about rail-trails. Mayor Smith spoke previously. The reports have been very helpful.

Gadsden – The ATC is working with city staff in planning. The city is being encouraged to make an offer to purchase in two sections. The corridor would connect downtown Gadsden with Noccalula Falls. The city has indicated that it will be making an offer to Norfolk Southern. It appears that the acquisition is moving forward.

Other Projects

Mobile Greenway Initiative

The Mobile Municipal Park along the river will eventually connect to the Dauphin Island Parkway. The project was initiated by neighborhoods and then the city decided to take over the movement. The ATC is working with the city of Mobile to provide resources, ideas, and opportunities. A goal is to connect the two sides of the river through a bridge funded by ALDOT so that there is some guarantee it will be permanent. Closing the old tunnel and allowing bike/pedestrian use all of the time has been discussed. The bridge over the Mobile River could include a bike path on one side or on both sides of the bridge. There has also been some discussion about the installation of elevators.

ARTL Workshop at Five Rivers Delta Resource Center on December 15

Brian Rushing discussed the ARTL workshop scheduled for December 15, 2016, at Five Rivers Delta Resource Center. He mentioned that these smaller workshops were replacing the previous biannual workshops sponsored by the ATC. The purpose of the workshops is to educate the public and engage trail operators, planners, and user groups. He went on to mention some possible speakers/topics.

Alabama Recreational Trails Website

Brian Rushing gave an update on the status of Alabama Recreation Trails website. Improvements are being made such as expanding the search

functionality and adding additional parameters and a difficulty rating. They are looking at other state sites for ideas. The site currently includes 150 trail records and they are working to get them all updated. The goal upon completion of the site is for it to include at least 3,000 trail records. Brian asked the group to help out by providing any trail data records that already exist.

Trail Counters/Economic Impact Surveys

Brian Rushing discussed the economic impact of trails and assessing that information. He stated that money has been set aside to purchase infrared trail counters. The counters do not distinguish between users but it does give a total count. The University of Alabama has a kit to deploy to obtain trail counts, complete surveys for recreation and trails which would be administered on the trail, complete a rapid assessment and complete a study to obtain the economic impact of the trail. This is currently in the development stage. Brian mentioned that he would provide the information on the company from which they are purchasing the trail counters.

Pinhoti Trail Initiative

On September 22, 2016, Cheryl facilitated a meeting at Oak Mountain State Park to discuss working with key stakeholders to drive resources into the Pinhoti. Bringing together individuals from State Lands, NPS, and the Forestry Commission are key to this endeavor. The project does have merit. A list of needs moving forward was derived. The list included:

- Economic impact
- Engaging in outreach with key potential partners
- Creating a project plan (evaluating existing standards and developing new standards)
- Outreach and promotion
- Fundraising strategies

The key items for discussion at the next session are outreach to potential stakeholders and economic impact and what it means. The session will be held on November 22, 2016, in Birmingham. The venue has not yet been confirmed.

100 Alabama Miles Challenge

Brian discussed the 100 Alabama Miles Challenge, the fact that it could be a big draw to state parks, and its potential in Alabama. The challenge is an initiative to encourage people to get out on trails and increase the use of recreational trails throughout the state.

The group watched a video from 100 Missouri Miles. The 27,000 active users there logged 5 million miles in a year. The challenge is kicked off each spring. Missouri has been very cooperative and has agreed to lend the website to other states interested in copying the initiative.

Brian hopes the program will improve public health, increase traffic to recreation locations, and that people will use local facilities to stay healthy.

There was some discussion regarding the Long Leaf Trace and any available economic impact numbers. Brian mentioned that Southern Mississippi University was working on that. The trail is 8-10 years old and the study has not been completed. The trail starts at the University of Southern Mississippi. They have a tax to build and maintain the trail.

Maureen Neighbors discussed the Recreational Trails Program application workshop scheduled for November 2016. ADECA was combining two fiscal years of funding and increasing the grant ceilings. She mentioned the motorized funding requirements and asked the group to notify any motorized trail operators of the funding opportunity.

Debbie Quinn gave an update that David Dionne had left Red Mountain Park since the previous meeting there.

The American Trails Conference will be held in Ohio in May. Debbie also mentioned that she would be nominating Steve Newton for an award in OHV trail work and that the Cheaha Trail Riders were helping her prepare the nomination.

2017 Meeting Schedule

Debbie Quinn asked if there were any other questions or comments and then discussed Amy Rauworth's role and the next meeting. The next meeting will be held the first part of March. Amy will be responsible for determining the date in her new role as Board Chair.

The meeting adjourned at 12:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Crystal Davis