

**MINUTES OF REGULAR AND SPECIAL MEETINGS
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
9:00 AM Friday, June 5, 2020
Via Video Conference**

ATTENDANCE

Committee Members Present

Greg Jones – Acting Chair
David Childs
Mike Hood
Curt Malone
Cheri Nelson
Bob Pettey
John Paul
Diana Podawiltz
David Whitlow
Jim Zahnd

POA Board Members

Lloyd Sherman
Pamela Avila

Justices of the Peace

Keith Keck, Saline County
Larry Raney, Garland County (absent)

School District Liaisons

Dr. Michael Murphy, FLSD
Melissa Speers, Jessieville SD

Committee Members Absent

None

HSV Area Chamber of Commerce Liaison

John O'Brien, Executive Director – Absent

Ex-Officio Members Present

Bob Shoemaker

Press

Nicki Sherman, Village Voice

Other

Ella Scotty
Jerry Yerick

OPENING OF REGULAR MEETING

Call to Order: Acting Chair Greg Jones called a video conference meeting of the Committee to order at 9:03 AM.

Notified Absences: None

Agenda: The Agenda was approved as submitted.

Minutes: The minutes of the May 1, 2020 meeting were approved as submitted.

GUEST SPEAKER

Pat Fitts, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission, Director.

Mr. Fitts is the 18th Director of the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission. He started his 35 year career with the Commission in 1983 while still in high school and, other than

taking time to complete his degree at Arkansas Tech University, Mr. Fitts has been with the AGFC since that time.

While the pandemic has created some challenges from an administrative standpoint, the Commission still has a lot of resource management work going on around the State. Since most of the Commission's employees work in the field, there has been less impact on field work, such as habitat work on lakes or food plot work on water management areas, must be done during the summer even though the result of that work is not utilized until later in the year. The same is true for the Commission's moist soil management program, which is an important part that Arkansas plays in the Mississippi River Flyway bird migration program.

While most people think of hunting and fishing when they think of the AGFC, the Commission provides many other services and programs including the Enforcement Division. AGFC has 185 uniformed Game Wardens and has 2-3 officers in each County. Included among these Game Wardens are 12 K-9 units and a disaster response teams.

The Commission has biologists around the State to take samples and make recommendations to help maintain lakes in the State. AGFC operates 4 warm water fisheries and 1 cold water fishery that produce 10 million fish annually.

With respect to wildlife management, AGFC has over 400,000 acres that it owns and manages for public use and it also has another 3.2 million acres that is cooperatively manages for public use in the State. Over 80% of the land in Arkansas is privately owned, therefore, if you want to make a meaningful difference in providing habitat you have to work with private land owners. The Wildlife Management Division has 15 private land biologists that work with these owners to show how they can manage their property in a way that promotes habitat as well as allows private use. A large part of the habitat work at this time is focused on bringing back quail and turkey populations to the higher levels previously seen in the State.

One of the main goals of the AGFC Education Division is to expose the next generation of Arkansans to hunting and fishing The Education Division currently operates four nature centers and a fifth is being built. Hunting and fishing are tools to help manage game and fish populations and it is important to educate the next generation to show how important these activities are so they can continue the work after we are gone. Half of the schools in Arkansas offer the AGFC's archery in the schools program and 60,000 students participate annually. Another 6,000 students annually participate in the Commission's youth shooting programs, which is the largest program in nation to teach students 18 and under how to safely handle a gun. One student went on from this program to a college program and qualified for the 2020 Olympics. The Commission also offers hunter and boater education programs, family and community fishing programs, a mobile aquarium education program, over 200 fishing derbies attended by 200,000 people each year and conservation education teacher workshops.

All dollars that are generated by AGFC as a result of violations go back to school systems to fund outdoor education programs.

The Commission also has a Research Division that deals with fish and wildlife diseases, such as Chronic Wasting Disease.

Through its Communications Division, the Division publishes a magazine and produces a series of Wildlife Minutes that are aired on channel 7.

Outdoor activities are big business in Arkansas generating about \$9.7 billion in revenue, which puts outdoor activities in third place behind agriculture and tourism.

One of the biggest challenges facing the Commission is that it has a \$86 million budget that is wholly financed from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, federal excise tax and a conservation sales tax. As a constitutionally independent agency, the Commission receives no State funds. This presents a challenge because the revenue stream from hunting and fishing licenses nationally has decreased over the last five years. There has been a slight uptick in fishing licenses and Fitts hopes this carries over to hunting season.

In terms of infrastructure, the Commission maintains 350 miles of levees, over 100 fishing piers, 400 boat accesses, 40 dams and 50 green tree reservoirs designed for migratory bird habitat.

In response to questions, Mr. Fitts discussed prospects for the upcoming duck season, efforts to control Chronic Wasting Disease in the deer and elk population, the impact that the Hunters Feeding the Hungry program was having in providing protein for school students and the decrease in the quail populations, which Fitts said resulted from the loss of habitat.

REPORTS

- Acting Chair – Greg Jones (Announcements)
David Childs was commended for his work in bringing informative speakers to the GAC meetings.
- Member Updates & Reports – as needed
 - POA Board – Diana Podawiltz
A vote to approve the use of the Village’s GIS mapping capability for the internet survey was taken and passed by the POA Board. The Lakes Committee will be making a presentation to the Board at its next meeting. The transition period is going well and Diana will be on the Tri-Lakes Metro Plan.
 - POA GM – John Paul interim
Mr. Paul reported that he was in the GM position as an interim and that the Village had lost three people in three important positions due to resignations: the HR director, the CFO and the head of Real Estate. Some discussion ensued as to whether the last person was reconsidering. Mr.

Paul discussed current efforts to oversee and make observations and recommendations in the accounting department.

- **Broadband Service – Greg Jones**
Greg Jones and Keith Keck met with the POA Board to discuss the internet survey and a meeting is scheduled with the Technology Club to try and move the project forward.
- **Highways (Tri Lakes MPO) – Keith Keck**
MetroPlan met last week and put a Request for Quotation out for a regional consultant to come in and build the regional trails plan.
- **Census Subcommittee – Jim Zahnd**
Census was shut down for the pandemic, but census workers are back in the field to do follow-up. Currently the HSV response rate is about 60%. Ten years ago, the HSV response rate was 72%. Response time has been expended and will run for another couple of months.
- **Health Services – Cheri Nelson**
Good Sam Health Fair is on hold for now. It will try to make a decision in July regarding a health fair in October. Good Sam reports that it has not seen any corona virus cases in the Good Sam facilities.
- **Benton GAC and Hot Springs Downtown Association – David Childs**
In addition to the written report that is attached to these Minutes, it was reported that the Benton Government Affairs Committee and the Hot Springs Downtown Association are working on opening back up. There have been no ground breakings or ribbon cuttings during the lockdown and they are now trying to catch up. The good news is that there are ribbon cuttings and ground-breakings to be held. Downtown Hot Springs reopened May 15 and the reports are that merchants are seeing more visitors and customers from out of town compared to locals.
- **Website – Pam Avila**
The GAC website is still accessible through a link on the POA website.

JP COMMENTS

- **Larry Rainey (Garland)**
“There is not a lot to report, because there is not a lot going on.” JP Raney did say efforts were being made to get the county open again, but it appeared the County would be affected by some national companies who had announced store closings. While the Oaklawn track and casino appear to be doing well, officials are waiting to see what the next tax report looks like because tax revenues run a month or so in arrears.

- Keith Keck (Saline)
The big issue to be faced at the Saline County Quorum Court's next meeting will be declaring a vacancy in the Tax Collector position, which comes as a result of the current Collector's upcoming retirement. The Court will be interviewing the four candidates to fill the remaining term. JP Keck and Judge Arey are continuing to work on expanding broadband access in Saline County.

SCHOOL DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS

- Dr. Michael Murphy (Fountain Lake)
This was the first week in which Fountain Lake was bringing students back to campus. Dr. Murphy attended a webinar to learn about a Ready to Learn model, under which public schools moving forward must be able to pivot between on-site instruction, blended level of instruction and virtual education. Fountain Lake is scheduled to reopen on Aug 17, but has not been given details on requirements as to how that will be done. The State used some of its CARES money used to purchase digital curriculum that will be available to all schools for one year. After that, schools will have to figure out how to embrace that digital content in the event of school closings moving forward.
- Melissa G. Speers, Ed.S. (Jessieville)
No report.

OLD BUSINESS

- Economic Impact Study – Pam Avila.
This is on hold. Bob Pettey has volunteered to serve and we are looking for another committee member who has previously worked on this project. Funding will be made in the 2021 PAO Budget.
- Candidate Forums for 2020 Elections – Pam Avila.
Mike Hood and Curt Malone have volunteered to work on the Committee. It was suggested that the Republican and Democratic clubs on the Village should be contacted about being part of the committee.

- Health Services Directory status – Cheri Nelson.
The substance of the Directory is ready and work is now going forward on formatting. Board Chair Podawiltz noted that a POA employee has graphic design experience and might be a resource for work on the directory

NEW BUSINESS

- Jerry Yerick – Greg Jones
Several members of the Committee thanked Mr. Yerick for his long service on the GAC and noted that he had served as a mentor to many. As a parting thought, Mr. Yerick noted that he has known all 54 members who have served on the GAC and that 20 of those members had gone on to become POA Board members.

Regular Meeting Adjourned.

OPENING OF SPECIAL MEETING

Call to Order: POA Board Chair Diana Podawiltz called a video conference meeting of the Governmental Affairs Committee to order for the purpose of electing Committee officers for the 2020-2021 term.

- Election of 2020-2021 GAC Board Chair.
Chair Podawiltz opened the floor for nominations and Jim Zahnd nominated Greg Jones, who accepted the nomination. There being no other nominations, Chair Podawiltz called for a vote and Greg Jones was unanimously elected Chair of the POA Governmental Affairs Committee for the 2020-2021 term.
- Election of 2020-2021 GAC Board Vice Chair.
Chair Podawiltz opened the floor for nominations and Curt Malone nominated Bob Pettey, who accepted the nomination. There being no other nominations, Chair Podawiltz called for a vote and Bob Pettey was unanimously elected Vice Chair of the POA Governmental Affairs Committee for the 2020-2021 term.

Special Meeting Adjourned.

Reminders & Calendar: GAC election of the Chair and Vice Chair will take place

- Next POA Board Meeting: 9:00 a.m., Wednesday, June 17, 2020. Viewing Info TBD
- Next GAC Meeting: 9:00 a.m., Friday, July 10, 2020, location TBD.

COMMITTEE REPORTS FOR MEETING JUNE 2020

Tri-Lakes Metropolitan Planning Organization/Highway Report - David Whitlow

The Policy Board of the Tri-Lakes Metropolitan Planning Organization was held via a Zoom meeting on Friday, May 21, 2020. A quorum of voting members was present. The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) did not present a status report at the meeting.

At a meeting of the Tri-Lakes Technical Committee on May 5, 2020, however, ARDOT representatives reported the status of several highway projects. Those projects of interest to Hot Springs Village include that following:

- Widening of Highway 7 (Park Avenue) from Highway 7 Spur to the intersection of Highways 7 and 5 to three lanes and widening of shoulders: Right-of-way is being cleared and utilities are being relocated.
- Safety improvements on Highway 5 from Highway 6 7 to Deerpark Road center turning land widening with shoulders: Scheduled for summer of 2020.
- Safety improvements on Highway 7 North to Highway 298: Utility relocation is underway.
- Connection of Highway 7 North to Highway 70 (MLK Expressway): Right-of-way clearing underway.

There are eleven voting members on the Tri-Lakes Policy Board. Most voting members are elected officials. Mike Medica currently represents Hot Springs Village on this board. Since the HSVPOA has seated a new board of directors, an elected board member should be considered to sit on the Tri-Lakes MPO Policy Board in order to maintain the POA vote on this important planning and policy board. (See attached list of current members below and the email response from Emmily Tiampati to Mike Medica's inquiry about this opening).

Emmily Tiampati is the staff planner for Tri-Lakes MPO. She is housed at the offices of the West Central Arkansas Planning and Development District (WCAPDD) in Hot Springs. There are eight MPO's in the state of Arkansas.

Hot Springs Downtown Business Association: David Childs

Downtown Hot Springs businesses re-opened on May 15 and thus far business has been encouraging. It appears that there has been more business from visitors than from Hot Springs area residents. In the Association's June monthly meeting (by Zoom) they will discuss how to remind area residents that downtown is open for business.