



Ocoee River Recreation and Economic Development Fund Board September 26, 2019

Roll Call: Members Present: Chairman Mike Bell, Macy Brower, Drew Freeman, Ryan Cooke, Lamar Davis, Angelo Giansante, Robby Hatcher, Tim Henderson, Melissa Woody, Keith Jenkins, Rob Sherrill

Chairman Bell asked if any visitors needed introduction. Robby Hatcher shared that Walter Bates with Polk County Newspaper was in attendance.

Chairman Bell noted first item on agenda was introduction of Jim Bryson, Deputy Commissioner. He is not here today so Chairman Bell asked Will Kerby to address the group. Will Kerby shared that the new Deputy Commissioner came on board in March. He is currently on vacation out of the country. We look forward to him attending the next meeting.

Approval of the March 7, 2019 minutes: Chairman Bell entertained a motion to approve the minutes. A motion was brought forth by Tim Henderson, seconded by Melissa Woody, a verbal vote was taken and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Chairman Bell moved to next item on agenda, Status of ORRED Fund. Chairman recognized Angelo Giansante. He provided the fund balance is \$71, 861.59 as of August 31, 2019. Our fiscal year ends in July so the expenditure information is not complete at this time. Chairman Bell recognized question from Keith Jenkins. He asked where the fund balance comes from and if it was brought forward from last year or received this year. Mr. Giansante shared that there are some outfitters paying monthly and this is included in this balance. Will Kerby shared that more details regarding expenditures will be available at the upcoming March meeting.

Chairman Bell continued to next item on agenda, TDEC 2019/2020 Ocoee Park Budget. He recognized Ryan Cooke. Ryan Cooke directed question for Angelo Giansante regarding the park budget and where the funds go. He has spoken with Will Kerby and understood that this information is still being compiled. Mr. Cooke made a motion to table this until March meeting. Chairman Bell asked for motion to approve and it was approved by group.

Chairman Bell noted next item on agenda, TDEC 2019 Ocoee Park Expense Report though August. He recognized Ryan Cook. Mr. Cooke stated the expenditure information is part of the budget data being compiled so he requested a motion to table this until the March meeting. Chairman Bell tabled this without formality of vote since it is part of earlier topic.

Next item on agenda, Payment of TDEC Management cost. Chairman Bell recognizes Ryan Cooke. He requested clarification on how park is paid for managing the outfitters. Angelo Giansante responded

that we have separate line items and accounts for the Ocoee and we will be able to see a breakdown of the work hours, fuel, expenditures, etc. This is the first year that Ocoee is separate expenditures. Sometime soon, TDEC will be able to provide man hours, cost of work trucks, etc. Chairman Bell asked if anyone had questions. Mr. Ryan Cooke asked specifically who writes the check for the Ocoee. Will Kerby explained that this is done thru internal transfer, no check. By statute those cost come out of the Ocoee fund. He noted that the board can look at needs and request and determine if fund can support project.

Tim Henderson asked about the process the board would follow when they receive requests for improvements. How does the board provide input? Will Kerby noted the board would not necessarily approve but could pass a resolution urging the Commissioner of TDEC approve a project. Angelo Giansante shared that every visitor on river are our guests. Certain things like building structures are located in areas that are Forest Service property even though the park manages the property. These projects, such as widening or installing a take out, will require a series of approvals . The park will facilitate projects.

Chairman Bell shared that this board can act as conduit to the commissioner. Tim Henderson asked whether the board can exert pressure to Forest Service for projects.

Chairman Bell recognized Ryan Cooke on the Tennessee Vacation Guide pictures. He stated that the outfitters would like to work with Tourism to add more pictures of the Ocoee and the area to promote businesses. Rob Sherrill from Tourism had previously met with Ryan Cook and discussed free opportunities thru partner pages in vacation guide. There has been an uptick of outfitters that have updated information on these pages. Photographer was sent out and took pictures.

Regarding a TNvacation.com sponsorship, Chairman Bell asked how the outfitters could get pictures of the Ocoee added to a segment when used as sponsor on commercials? Rob Sherrill stated there are more photos and encouraged conversation between board and commissioner.

Chairman Bell recognized Melissa Woody. She was hopeful that the Ocoee would be more visible with the additional photos and outfitters participation in updating the partner page information. Rob Sherrill reiterated it is very important that outfitters update partner pages with more pictures and updated information. Internet searches are used a great deal planning vacations. The Vacation Guide is great, but the online information is used to plan vacations and it's key to provide pictures. He offered his assistance to those present to help get this information.

Angelo Giansante observed that people think of Gatlinburg and Nashville, and we need to add Ocoee as another recognized site to gain more recognition.

Chairman Bell recognized Robby Hatcher. Mr. Hatcher noted that tourism is an important thing in Polk County. He stated the importance of working on a showcase for Polk County and Ocoee. Mr. Sherrill stated there are opportunities to reach out of state co-ops for advertising. Melissa Woody noted the co-ops can help with cost on marketing. They can reach out halfway to cover costs. Ryan Cooke thanked Rob Sherrill for meeting with outfitters and assisting with helping getting word out.

Chairman Bell moved to next item, Release Schedule Changes. Ryan Cooke: thanked everyone from first meeting and Robin Peak with TVA for making schedule changes. For the 2020 schedule he noted that they wanted to propose the same changes: On the #3 recreational release schedule is to move last Saturday in September to first Sunday in June. Also #2 release schedule proposal to trade the first Thursday and Friday in August with the last Thursday and Friday in June. Also look at Sunday, September 6 and lengthening that release day on the middle. He noted for the outfitters association that this is what they would like to see.

Mr. Cooke continued as part 2, to start conversation with Robin Peak at TVA and drop some of the hours in August and move to shorter days in June and July. Chairman Bell asked Angelo Giansante and Tim Henderson if these changes affect scheduling and whether the private boaters would have any issue. Tim Henderson noted that he has not had opportunity to discuss with outfitters. He stated the importance of having a voice and being engaged. He felt like he would get some feedback from larger groups. Angelo Giansante noted that Hiwassee thru surveys keeps up with how many users on river, and they keep up with figures in August. There may be some adjustment but staffing can be dealt with.

Keith Jenkins previously looked up usage numbers. TDEC and outfitters provided the numbers, August was smaller numbers and he suggested to move this usage to June and July. Tim Henderson agreed with the transition of hours to June and July. Angelo Giansante commented that school hour changes affect the August numbers and they would be better used earlier in June and July. Chairman Bell noted that this can continue as internal discussion with TVA, Hiwassee and outfitters.

Chairman Bell continued to next item on agenda: drone footage. Keith Jenkins shared about several opportunities for companies to film footage but drone usage was denied due to FAA guidelines. Forest Service needs to come to conclusion to allow permits for drone usage. We need Forest Service to come up with resolution to allow. Chairman Bell asked if Angelo had spoken with Forest Service and he responded that the Forest Service has zero allowance. State Parks does not allow recreational drone, we are good with drone usage for advertising. There are specified areas within a park for drone recording. Angelo does not know Forest Service regulations. Visitors have to get permit from park office for drone usage, but for commercial use additional approvals have to be secured. Chairman Bell suggested that we get Congressman Fleischmann and Senator Blackburn to help facilitate discussion with Forest Service.

Keith Jenkins noted on the Forest Service website that they make allowances for drone and mechanical items and he sent to Forest Service and they had responded to him that they would have to review the content on their website.

Keith Jenkins asked are there areas in Forest Service property that allow this activity. Angelo Giansante stated that there are more remote areas where there is low population and drones are allowed. He did share that TVA regulations may be an issue regarding dams and Keith stated that he has discussed with TVA and they do not have issue. Melissa Woody suggested a video or photo pool, pick a day for outfitters and others using as marketing for usage of one permit on a given day.

Ryan Cook asked if the board should write a letter to Congressman Fleischmann to request assistance with Forest Service for commercial drone usage. Chairman Bell suggested that a phone call may work

better to start a conversation. Rob Sherrill agreed with Melissa Woody that one day a year be used for promo piece (30 minute) would be better received. She stated that out of 30 minutes of footage there would be adequate time to use for example an 8 second promo shot allowing everyone to use something different. She included the surrounding counties also being allowed to use footage for promotion.

Chairman Bell recognized Keith Jenkins on the next item for discussion, permits for river rescue. He shared that the permits are issued by Forest Service. There is currently only one permit to Tennessee Scenic River Association (TSRA). Keith had spoken with an outfitter in March and that outfitter said that they no longer had a permit. Angelo Giansante shared that there is a process when TSRA is training. TSRA does not have a lot of openings. Outfitters like to do thru the week.

Ryan Cooke noted that outfitters are held to certain standards for training guides. The outfitters need a specialized class for guides and the outfitters are asking for one outfitter in association to be permitted to teach the class. Chairman Bell asked Keith Jenkins why the Forest Service only allows one permit. Mr. Jenkins noted he never received an answer why an outfitter was denied a permit and it was explained that only one permit is allowed.

Chairman Bell recognized Angelo Giansante and he asked if we are charging money for training. Keith Jenkins explained that the outfitter pays to be certified and they are leaving their company to come out and teach other outfitters. Angelo suggested maybe the Board funds to invest in training to ensure the outfitters are getting the certification. We are paying for our guides thru board funds to ensure they are getting white water certification. We are not charging money in order to violate that permit. We are investing in the safety of our guests. It would be a worthy investment. Chairman Bell stated Will Kerby would need to review and see what proper uses of the board's monies are. It may need to be broadened.

Lamar Davis was concerned about what is allowed. One permit from the Forest Service is not adequate. Keith Jenkins shared that he could not get anyone in a class, the classes are full and it's important that the outfitters for safety of participants get training. Chairman Bell suggested a conversation with Forest Service, Congressman Fleischmann, or Senator Blackburn to share why a change should be made. He will make some calls to Fleischmann or Blackburn with outfitters to see if he can get a meeting with them and a representative from Forest Service so changes can be made on permit.

Chairman Bell moved to whitewater center picnic tables on the agenda. Keith Jenkins stated there are only two places for the outfitters to serve lunch: the whitewater center and near the dam. The facilities have not grown to meet the demand. Forest Service doesn't want them to use the pavilion, and does want them to use less parking at that area. 4000 rafters move to middle section and there are no tables in that area. Lamar Davis stated that Keith Jenkins was permitted to serve lunch using parking and pavilion for a long time with no issue. Melissa Woody stated that Forest Service wants to keep the center available for visitors, and these folks are visitors! Ms. Woody stated she believes the Forest Service should be more receptive at the whitewater center. Ryan Cooke shared that TVA was going to

donate 10 concrete picnic tables, but the Forest Service was unwilling to accommodate. Chairman Bell noted to include this in conversation when the meeting his held with the Forest Service.

Chairman Bell recognized Ryan Cooke on outfitter payment report. Mr. Cooke shared that everyone keeps their records differently, and the group was split between monthly or yearly fees. They would like a form to keep it uniform. Will Kerby has discussed with Fiscal and they have developed a form that is very simplistic to show gross revenue figure. We are leaning towards monthly reports. Ryan Cooke and Lamar Davis would request the form will have name and address to send payments to.

Chairman Bell recognized Ryan Cooke on advertising dollars for the Ocoee River. He addressed the question to Will Kerby of whether the outfitters association can use their surplus money to match advertising dollars with the fund. Will Kerby noted that the match question is possible; it would have to be a broadly beneficial. Assist multiple outfitters with matching dollars with broad reaching ad. Check with comptroller, sounds reasonable. Chairman Bell: clarified that it would be a generic ad not promoting a specific company. Rob Sherrill can assist with advertising and marketing.

Chairman Bell asked if there was any new business. None was brought forward.

Next board meeting will be in Nashville, March 19, 2020 1:00 pm. Everyone will be notified what room it will be in.

Chairman Bell recognized Connie Crenshaw for any travel claims. She brought forms if anyone had travel.

Meeting adjourned.