

MRPC of Arkansas 2016-2017 Annual Report



Big River Crossing, West Memphis



2016 – 2017 Annual Report
Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas

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2016 – 2017 Annual Report Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas

Greetings from The Natural State! The Arkansas delegation of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission is pleased to present an update and overview of the activities and projects of the state's 10-county Great River Road region that proudly borders the Mighty Mississippi. This report covers the period from October 2016 to September 2017 and includes activities, events and attractions within the 362-mile Great River Road National Scenic Byway of Arkansas.

There is something special about the Arkansas Delta...and our guests to the area sense it when they visit. With a culture and history unlike any other part of the state, the Delta region of Arkansas offers an authentic experience for visitors. Whether it's paddling along the Father of Waters on a handmade canoe, walking/running/ biking across the longest public pedestrian/bike bridge across the Mississippi River, delighting in delicious cuisine or visiting one of the many historic sites or museums in the area, visitors recognize that Arkansas's eastern counties offer a unique, unscripted and genuine adventure. These visitors may be from a bordering state or a country across the globe...regardless, they will find tourism partners prepared to welcome them to their beloved Arkansas Delta and, before they leave, make them feel like they are part of the family. Because hospitality is a way of life in the Arkansas Delta...we take it very seriously!

Our Mission: The purpose of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas is to preserve, promote and enhance the scenic, historic and recreational resources along the Mississippi River; to foster economic growth and tourism development in the river corridor; and to develop the national, scenic, historic and recreational parkway known as the Great River Road.

Tourism continues to be an integral part of the economy of Arkansas's Great River Road region and the entire state. In March 2017, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson proudly announced at the Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism that the tourism industry had become the #2 industry in The Natural State. Preliminary statistics provided at March's Governor's Conference showed that during 2016, the Arkansas Delta Byways region (which contains 15 counties along the state's eastern border, including the 10 counties included in Arkansas's

Great River Road) welcomed nearly 3.3 million visitors with total travel expenditures of \$782,553,071.

In section two of this annual report, you will see examples of this year's media coverage of Arkansas's Great River Road.

Below is an update on several ongoing projects along Arkansas's Great River Road that continue to bring guests from throughout the state, the region and the world.

- On Oct. 22, 2016, the Governors of Arkansas and Tennessee proudly "cut the ribbon" on the Big River Crossing. The nearly mile-long boardwalk is located adjacent to the historic Harahan Bridge and is considered the longest public pedestrian/bike bridge across the Mississippi River. The project cost an estimated \$28 million, but it will continue to grow as a part of the Main Street to Main Street Multi-Modal Connector project that connects downtown West Memphis, Arkansas, to downtown Memphis, Tennessee. From Oct. 22, 2016, to Sept. 5, 2017, 215,737 individuals crossed the boardwalk. The Big River Trail, a 70-mile graded path atop the Mississippi River levees, can be accessed from the trailhead in West Memphis and allows bicyclists and hikers to travel along the levee to near Marianna, where they can continue along the existing Mississippi River Trail route to historic Helena. The Big River Trail is part of a cross-country route that utilizes the levee system from the headwaters of the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. Upon completion of the entire project, there will be over 1600 miles of trail in the Lower Mississippi alone.
- Work is ongoing on the Delta Regional Park, a part of the Big River Crossing project that will include park trails, views of the Mississippi River, outdoor spaces and as a refuge for wildlife.
- Historic Dyess Colony: Johnny Cash Boyhood Home in Dyess continues to be a major tourism attraction in the Arkansas Delta. As of Sept. 5, 2017, the JCBH had welcomed guests from all 50 states as well as 52 countries. On Oct. 19-21, 2017, the JCBH holds the inaugural Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, a three-day event honoring the Man in Black and the New Deal programs that shaped his childhood in Dyess, the nation's largest agricultural resettlement colony. The event includes a world-class concert in the field adjacent to the Cash Home (with performances by Rosanne Cash, Kris Kristofferson, Joanne Cash, Tommy Cash and Buddy Jewell), Arkansas roots music in the Colony Circle, public presentations, arts and crafts and food vendors, demonstrations, and tours.
- Lakeport Plantation in Lake Village celebrated its 10th anniversary with a reunion of descendants of the Johnson family who owned the plantation from the antebellum period until 1927. Lakeport is one of Arkansas's MRPC interpretive centers and tells a major story of how the Mississippi River played a significant role in moving landowners, enslaved laborers, building materials and other goods and services up and down the river, as

well as the strategic importance of the river in the Civil War, and the impact of natural changes in the river on plantations such as Lakeport.

- The town of Wilson continues its efforts to become a tourism destination. Most recently the historic downtown welcomed White's Mercantile. Owned by Holly Williams, granddaughter of the legendary Hank Williams and daughter of Hank Williams, Jr., she brought her immensely popular store to downtown Wilson, and the first time she has opened a store outside her home state of Tennessee. The store's website describes White's Mercantile as "a completely curated shop stocked with Holly's favorite items that she's found while spending much of her life on the highway playing music to adoring fans. Holly's style embodies a modern-day chic simplicity fitted for shoppers around the globe."
- The Delta Heritage Trail State Park (DHT), located near historic Helena, is being developed in phases under the national "rails to trails" initiative, where former railroad lines are converted to pedestrian and bicycle routes. The first 21 miles of trail at the north end of the park have been completed. The compacted, crushed rock trail leads through a shaded canopy of native hardwoods, alongside agricultural fields, and across streams. Wildlife viewing and birdwatching opportunities abound along the route, in the heart of the Delta and the famed Mississippi Flyway. It was recently announced that the Arkansas City trailhead of the DHT, located in Desha County on the southern end of Arkansas's Great River Road, is underway and will include development of a multi-use building designed in the style of historic rail depots. The building will house administrative functions for the park's southern operations, bathhouse facilities, and an open pavilion. Site development of the trailhead will include parking improvements, picnic areas, and two large tent pads for overnight camping, as well as interpretive wayside panels. Estimated completion of the trailhead is summer 2018.

The Arkansas Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association continues to serve as an important MRPC partner by promoting tourism throughout the Arkansas Delta's 15 counties, including the 10 counties that comprise Arkansas's Great River Road.

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson recently appointed two Commissioners to the Arkansas MRPC. Anna Grizzle, who has previously served on the MRPC, replaced Phyllis Stinson as the Monroe County representative. Stinson resigned her position for personal reasons. Tyler Dunegan replaced Steven Son as the Mississippi County representative. Son resigned his position in May 2017.

Ron Maxwell retired as assistant director of Arkansas Tourism in October 2016. Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism executive director Kane Webb later announced that Kimberly Williams, travel writer for the Arkansas Delta, would take over the role as director of Arkansas's Great River Road. Kim will continue her duties as travel writer for Arkansas Tourism.

Finally, Arkansas looks forward to welcoming members of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission to West Memphis in October 2018 for the annual meeting. The proposed dates are the week of Oct. 22-26.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe St. Columbia, Chairman

Kimberly J. Williams, Director

**MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION OF ARKANSAS
ROSTER 2017-2018**

<p align="center"><u>Chairman—Phillips County</u> Joe St. Columbia 112 Bernice Street Helena-West Helena, AR 72342 HM: 870-338-3991; CELL: 870-338-1632 FAX: 870-338-3991 E-mail: pasquale@suddenlink.net Term Expires: June 8, 2022</p>	<p align="center"><u>Vice-Chariman—Drew County</u> Carole Bulloch P. O. Box 535 Monticello, AR 71657 HM: 870-367-6686 CELL: 870-510-6686 E-mail: carolebulloch@sbcglobal.net Term Expires: June 8, 2018</p>
<p align="center"><u>Secretary-Treasurer—Crittenden County</u> Bobby Kennedy 502 North Missouri West Memphis, AR 72301 Work: 870-735-1795; Cell: 870-733-5908 Home: 870-735-5651 E-mail: bobby_kennedy@sbcglobal.net (underscore between bobby and kennedy) Term Expires: June 8, 2019</p>	<p align="center"><u>Arkansas County</u> Jim Craig 203 West 6th St. Stuttgart, AR 72160 Cell: 870-672-2460 Home: 870-673-7001 E-mail: jimcraig1347@gmail.com Term Expires: June 8, 2022</p>
<p align="center"><u>Chicot County</u> Dr. Terri Austin McCullough 1080 Grand Lake Loop Eudora, AR 71640 Cell: 870-355-1262 HM: 870-355-2020 E-mail: terrimccullough@gmail.com Term Expires: June 8, 2020</p>	<p align="center"><u>Desha County</u></p>
<p align="center"><u>Lee County</u> Pat Audirsch 241 Pearl St. Marianna, AR 72360 Home: 870-295-6510 Cell: 870-821-1403 E-mail: pataud@sbcglobal.net Term Expires: June 8, 2020</p>	<p align="center"><u>Mississippi County</u> Tyler Dunegan 111 East Greenbriar Osceola, AR 72370 Cell: 870-822-1166 E-mail: tyler@tylerdunegan.com Term Expires: June 8, 2022</p>
<p align="center"><u>Monroe County</u> Anna Grizzle 337 West Cypress Brinkley, AR 72021 Cell: 870-734-6494 E-mail: anna.grizzle.haxs@statefarm.com Term Expires: June 8, 2018</p>	<p align="center"><u>St. Francis County</u> Kem Merrell 255 SFC 406 Forrest City, AR 72335 Cell: 870-270-7241 E-mail: kmerrell@sbcglobal.net Term Expires: June 8, 2021</p>

MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION
MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History
Little Rock, Arkansas
Monday, November 14, 2016

Commissioners Present

Joe St. Columbia, Chair
Pat Audirsch
Carole Bulloch
Jim Craig
Dr. Terri Austin McCullough
Kem Merrell
Phyllis Stinson

Commissioners Absent

Sarah Dunklin
Bobby Kennedy
Steven Son

Technical Advisors

Kim Williams, Director, Great River Road
Erik Holbrooks, Administrative Specialist III, ADPT
Paula Miles, Assistant Director, ASU Heritage Sites

Guest

Ron Maxwell, Former Director, MRPC

Call to Order

Chairman Joe St. Columbia called the meeting to order at 10:30 am on Monday, November 14, 2016 and welcomed Commissioners and Guest to Little Rock.

Introduction of new Director of Arkansas's Great River Road

Ron Maxwell introduced Kim Williams as the new Director of the Great River Road. Williams currently and will continue to hold her title as Travel Writer of the Arkansas Delta for Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism.

Approval of Minutes from previous meeting

Carole Bulloch moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Terri Austin McCullough seconded and the motion carried.

Old Business

Carole Bulloch stated that the National MRPC meeting in Natchez, Mississippi was wonderful. Dr. Terri Austin McCullough shared that she attended a planning meeting regarding the National Geographic website. Both Bulloch and Dr. McCullough stated that Natchez was a wonderful host and there was so much to see and do. A reception was held in an old antebellum home called Rip Rap. Jim Craig stated he and his wife had a wonderful time. Bulloch stated she experienced excellent hospitality from the hotel. Pat Audirsch shared that she appreciated how close everything was to each other during the conference and how walkable the city is. Missouri and Minnesota had no representation at the meeting. Arkansas MRPC attendees included, Pat Audirsch, Carole Bulloch, Jim Craig, Bobby Kennedy, Dr. Terri Austin-McCullough, and Ron Maxwell. The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism paid \$4,674.61 for Commissioners to attend the National MRPC meeting, this included registration and travel expenses.

Chair informed the Commission that the WWII Japanese American Internment Museum in McGehee is now an official Interpretive Center. Dr. McCullough shared that the museum will fund new signage that needs to be added. This will make the 11th Interpretive Center.

Dr. McCullough stated that the MRCC Core Team is the group that is promotion the National Geographic website. Delta Regional Authority has been a main contributor. Dr. McCullough asked the MRPC Commissioners if she could be nominated as an official MRCC Core Team member.

Kem Merrell moved to approve Dr. Terri Austin-McCullough's nomination as an official MRCC Core Team member. Carole Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.

New Business

Dr. McCullough informed the Commission that the next Semi-Annual National MRPC meeting will be held in April of 2017 in Paducah, Kentucky.

Kim Williams informed the Commission that the 2017 Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism is scheduled for March 12-14, 2017 in Little Rock. Marriot is the host hotel. General sessions will be in the Marriot ballroom. All meals, along with the silent auction will take place in the Woolly Allen ballroom at the Little Rock Convention Center. Williams and Erik Holbrooks will register MRPC Commissioners who plan to attend. Commissioner's registration will be paid by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism; full registration cost is \$225. Commissioner's will make hotel reservations on their own and will be reimbursed via a TR1 by

the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. Ron Maxwell stated that the 2018 conference is scheduled for West Memphis.

Kim Williams is to attend a MRPC budget meeting on Tuesday, November 15, 2016.

Delta Heritage Sites

Paula Miles informed the Commission that the University of Arkansas is working on a project for Blytheville called SISTA (Students Involved with Sustaining Their Arkansas). It is still in the planning stages.

Miles shared that Dr. Ruth Hawkins traveled to DC to have to have a meeting with the National Park Service to discuss making Dyess and the general area a National Park. A study will be completed.

Miles reported the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival, formerly in Jonesboro, is scheduled for October 19-21, 2017 in Dyess. Roseanne Cash will attend and perform.

Report on recent events

Chairman St. Columbia reported that the 2016 King Biscuit Blues Festival saw beautiful weather. St. Columbia stated that attendance was some of the largest he had seen with many international visitors from Europe as well. Williams stated that it was a great festival. Sales were reported up across the boards for all vendors and merchants.

It was reported that Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism will focus on bicycling as part of their 2017 marketing campaign. The new Big River Crossing is the longest active pedestrian bridge across the Mississippi River. There are currently 84 miles of the Delta Heritage Trail, which is a rails to trails conversion. The International Bicycling Association (IMBA) was held in Bentonville mid-November 2016. Bicycling enthusiasts are now seeing Arkansas as a major destination for their hobby.

2017 MRPC meeting locations

February 13, 2017 – Parkin Archeological State Park, Parkin

May 8, 2017 – Delta Cultural Center, Helena

August 14, 2017 – Dale Bumpers White River National Wildlife Refuge, St. Charles

November 13, 2017 – Lake Chicot State Park, Lake Village

Kem Merrell moved to approve the 2017 MRPC meeting locations. Pat Audirsch seconded and the motion carried.

TR1's and Adjournment

Erik Holbrooks distributed TR1's to Commissioners for signatures and meeting was adjourned.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION
PARKIN ARCHEOLOGICAL STATE PARK
PARKIN, ARKANSAS
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2017

Commissioners Present

Joe St. Columbia, Chair
Pat Audirsch
Carole Bulloch
Bobby Kennedy
Dr. Terri Austin McCullough
Kem Merrell
Steven Son
Phyllis Stinson

Commissioners Absent

Jim Craig
Sarah Dunklin

Technical Advisors

Kim Williams, Director, Great River Road
Erik Holbrooks, Administrative Specialist III, ADPT

Call to Order

Chairman Joe St. Columbia called the meeting to order at 10:30 am on Monday, February 13, 2017.

Welcome

Superintendent Ben Swadly welcomed Commissioners to Parkin Archeological State Park and gave a brief overview of what the State Park has to offer its guest.

Approval of Minutes from previous meeting

Carole Bulloch moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Terri Austin McCullough seconded and the motion carried.

Old Business

Kim Williams asked who will be attending the 2017 Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism. Joe St. Columbia, Dr. Terri Austin McCullough, Pat Audirsch, Steven Son, and Carole Bulloch stated they would attend. Williams stated that those who attend may be asked to troubleshoot some of the sessions and help Arkansas Tourism staff when needed. Reservations may be made at the Little Rock Marriott. Commissioners will pay for their own lodging and will be reimbursed thru Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism. Erik Holbrooks will register all Commissioners who plan to attend, and cost will come directly from the Department. All meal expenses will be covered thru registration of the Conference.

Williams congratulated St. Columbia for his business, Pasquale's Tamales, being inducted into the Arkansas Food Hall of Fame.

St. Columbia announced that the semi-annual MRPC meeting will take place in Paducah, KY on April 19-21. Dr. McCullough stated that the group will stay at the La Quinta Inn, which is 3 blocks from the Ohio River. An out of state travel request from will need to be completed by those who attend to be reimbursed thru a TR1 by Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism. Columbia, Dr. McCullough, Audirsch, Kennedy, and Son plan to attend the semi-annual meeting.

New Business

Dr. McCullough informed the Commission that the Corp of Engineer's office provides a quarterly newsletter and curriculum entitled *Our Mississippi*. Dr. McCullough stated that these are filled with valuable information for teachers and students. The Interpretive Center at Lakeport Planation is currently distributing the newsletter to those who inquire.

Dr. McCullough shared that the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative, a 10-state collaborative, will be calling 2017 the "Year of Trails." A new logo was displayed for Commissioners viewing. Dr. McCullough stated that 2018 will be called the "Year of Arts, Music and Culture."

2017 MRPC Stipend

Pat Audirsch moved to keep the Stipend at \$60 per meeting for the 2017 calendar year. Carole Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.

Revision to MRPC bylaws/regulations

Williams informed the Commission that she met with Nancy Clark, former Director of the Great River Road at the beginning of February. Williams shared that Clark is a wealth of information and she is learning what the roles are of the Great River Road Director from her predecessor. Williams stated that she plans to update some of the bylaws/regulations in the coming year.

2017 MPRC meeting locations

May 8: Delta Cultural Center, Helena-West Helena

August 14: Dale Bumpers White River National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center, St. Charles

November 13: Lake Chicot State Park, Lake Village

TR1's

Erik Holbrooks distributed TR1 authorization forms to the Commission for millage reimbursement.

Adjournment

The February Mississippi River Parkway Commission meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION
Delta Cultural Center / Delta Eagle Room
Helena – West Helena, Arkansas
Monday, May 8, 2017

Commissioners Present

Joe St. Columbia, Chair
Pat Audirsch
Carole Bulloch
Jim Craig
Bobby Kennedy
Dr. Terri Austin McCullough
Steven Son
Kem Merrell

Commissioners Absent

Sarah Dunklin

Technical Advisors

Kim Williams, Director, Great River Road
Erik Holbrooks, Administrative Specialist III, ADPT

Guests

Kane Webb, Executive Director, ADPT
Kris Richardson, Executive Assistant, ADPT
Jimmy Williams, Mayor, City of Marianna
Jay Hollowell, Mayor, City of Helena
Paula Oliver, Delta Cultural Center
Thomas Jacques, Delta Cultural Center
Dawna Parker, Manager, Arkansas Welcome Center at Helena-West Helena
Joshua Glenn, Delta Heritage Trail State Park
Chris Ritchie, State Representative
Shane Williams, Executive Director, Main Street Helena
Betty Kennedy

Call to Order

Chairman Joe St. Columbia called the meeting to order at 10:30 am on Monday, May 8, 2017.

Welcome

St. Columbia welcomed Commissioners and guests to the Delta Cultural Center in Helena-West Helena.

Approval of Minutes from previous meeting

Carole Bulloch moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Terri Austin McCullough seconded and the motion carried.

Old Business

Joe St. Columbia stated that Arkansas was well represented at the Semi-Annual MRPC Meeting which took place in Paducah, Kentucky April 19-21. Pat Audirsch stated that Kentucky only has 4 counties along the Great River Road. Audirsch stated that the group was given several tours of the area. Audirsch informed the Commission that there has been a great loss of manufacturing jobs and that Kentucky is trying to reinvent and reinvigorate the small rural towns along the Mississippi river. Dr. Terri Austin-McCullough expressed that she had a wonderful experience and learned a great deal about Kentucky. St. Columbia added that Kentucky showed a great deal of hospitality.

St. Columbia reiterated that Commissioners must visit the Interpretive Center(s) in their county and evaluate the property each year. Arkansas has 11 Interpretive Centers along the Great River Road. Dr. McCullough reminded Commissioners that forms are available at mrpcmembers.com. Forms must be completed by September 2017 and turned into Kim Williams, and will be forwarded along to the national MRPC office.

New Business

Dr. McCullough discussed the MRCC -- Mississippi River Connections Collaborative. The organization consists of the Great River Road, Mississippi River Trail, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service. The website is Mississippiriver.natgeotourism.com. The MRCC's mission states that the organization "represents a new prototype for river-long resource restoration and protection that relies on a network approach to increase the depth and reach of individual parks, trails, and refuges in total and to monitor the relationship of human populations to these resources." The next meeting takes place in La Crosse, WI, in July.

St. Columbia reported that the MRPC National Meeting takes place in Marquette, IA, on September 19-21 at the Cobblestone Inn.

Kim Williams reported that the last MRPC National Meeting that was held in Arkansas in September 2011, and announced that Arkansas will host the MRPC National Meeting West Memphis in September 2018. Williams announced that one full day will be a FAM tour and will include a visit to the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home. Exact dates of the meeting will be determined later.

Miscellaneous

It was announced that the August meeting has been changed to the Mississippi River State Park in Marianna; Pat Audirsch will make arrangements. The November meeting will be held at Lake Chicot State Park in Lake Village.

Erik Holbrooks distributed TR1 authorization forms to the Commission for mileage reimbursement.

Adjournment

Carol Bulloch moved to adjourn the May Mississippi River Parkway Commission meeting at 11:30 am. Pat Audirsch seconded and the motion carried.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER PARKWAY COMMISSION
Mississippi River State Park
Marianna, Arkansas
Monday, August 14, 2017

Commissioners Present

Joe St. Columbia, Chair
Pat Audirsch
Carol Bulloch
Jim Craig
Tyler Dunegan
Anna Grizzle
Bobby Kennedy
Dr. Terri Austin McCullough
Kem Merrell

Commissioner Absent

Sarah Dunklin

Technical Advisors

Kim Williams, Director, Great River Road
Erik Holbrooks, Administrative Specialist III, ADPT
Ruth Hawkins, ASU-Heritage Sites
Paula Miles, ASU-Heritage Sites
Jeff Ingram, ArDOT

Guests

Jimmy Williams, Mayor, Marianna
Terry Sanderfer, Lee County Judge
Will McCullough, Chicot County
Betty Kennedy, Crittenden County
DJ McMickle, Courier Index Newspaper

Call to Order

Chairman Joe St. Columbia called the meeting to order at 10:35 am on Monday, August 14, 2017.

Welcome

St. Columbia recognized two new Commissioners, Anna Grizzle and Tyler Dunegan. Mayor Williams welcomed everyone to Marianna and to the Mississippi River State Park.

Approval of Minutes from previous meeting

Carole Bulloch moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Terri Austin McCullough seconded and the motion carried.

Old Business

Kim Williams reminded Commissioners that the MRPC National Meeting will be held in Marquette, IA, on Sept. 19-21, 2017.

Williams announced there has been a date change for the MRPC National Meeting for 2018, which is to be held in West Memphis. It was originally suggested for September; however, it has been moved to October 24-27 (pending national office approval). Williams stated the fall would be a better experience for guests to enjoy The Natural State. The Johnny Cash Music Festival will be held the week before and Williams hopes many visitors will come early to partake in the Festival. The last time a national MRPC meeting was held in Arkansas was 2011.

St. Columbia discussed MRPC interpretive centers. Once a year Commissioners must visit the Interpretive Center(s) in their county and evaluate the property. There are a total of 11 Interpretive Centers along the Great River Road. Dr. McCullough informed Commissioners that forms are available at mrpcmembers.com. Forms must be completed and turned into Kim Williams, along with the national office by September 1. St. Columbia stated that he would like to get a representative from each of the 11 Interpretive Centers to attend the national meeting in West Memphis in October 2018.

St. Columbia reported that the section of the Great River Road in Helena has been designated to move to the top of the levee. It will be more picturesque and bypass the less-scenic parts of the city. The local levee district will grade the top of the levee with gravel provided by the Corps of Engineers. According to St. Columbia, the Phillips County Judge has stated the possibility of the Great River Road through the St. Francis National Forest being asphalted.

New Business

Dr. McCullough presented the latest Great River Road brochure to Commissioners.

Dr. McCullough announced that the semi-annual MRPC meeting would be held in Quincy, IL, towards the end of April 2018; the exact date is still to be determined.

Dr. McCullough informed Commissioners that the November MRPC meeting would be held at Lake Chicot State Park, which is an MRPC Interpretive Center. Fourteen cabins are available at the park if Commissioners choose to stay overnight, along with South Shore Cottages Resort.

Dr. McCullough informed Commissioners that MRCC stands for Mississippi River Connections Collaborative. The collaborative consists of the Great River Road, Mississippi River Trail, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service. The MRCC states that they “represent a new prototype for river-long resource restoration and protection that relies on a network approach to increase the depth and reach of individual parks, trails, and refuges in total and to monitor the relationship of human populations to these resources.” The following is a list of the programming themes for the coming years; 2018: The year of Arts, Music & Culture; 2019: The year of the Great River Road (Exploration); 2020: The year of Paddling; 2021: The Year of Cycling; 2022: The Year of Geotourism; 2023: The Year of Fishing; 2024: The Year of Birding; and 2025: The Year of Hiking. Dr. McCullough stated the scheduling reinforces that future topics may directly impact MRPC committees, budgets and emphasis.

St. Columbia reported that Helena-West Helena is working on a planned reenactment of the De Soto crossing of the Mississippi River. The city has appointed a committee and plans to have a reenactment in July of 2018.

St. Columbia reported the King Biscuit Blues Festival would be October 5-7, 2017, in Helena.

Williams announced she would be attending a MRC (Mississippi River Country) meeting at the end of August in Minneapolis.

It was announced that the Sultana Disaster Museum would like to be nominated as an Interpretive Center.

Williams reported she is working with Jennifer Hoorstra, Tourism graphic artist, on plans to create an Arkansas Great River Road Passport, where tourist could visit locations along the GRR and get their passport stamped when they visit the attractions.

Williams reminded Commissioners that the Arkansas Governor’s Conference on Tourism is scheduled for March 11-14, 2018, in West Memphis. Planning is underway.

Miscellaneous

Dr. Ruth Hawkins reported that she has been in contact with a gentleman who plans to walk the entire length of the Great River Road, from Canada to the Gulf, and visit area attractions. He plans to write a book about his trek. It is estimated to be a total of 2,069 miles and take 160 days to complete by foot. A discussion ensued about how Commissioners and area chambers could become involved.

Dr. Hawkins reported the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival would be October 19-21, 2017.

Erik Holbrooks distributed TR1 authorization forms to the Commission for mileage reimbursement.

Future Meeting Location

Monday, November 13, 2017 – Lake Chicot State Park, Lake Village

Adjournment

Dr. Terri Austin McCullough moved to adjourn the August Mississippi River Parkway Commission meeting at 12:00 pm. Carol Bulloch seconded and the motion carried.