

FRIENDS OF SOUTH CUMBERLAND STATE PARKS, INC.

October 26, 2024 Board Meeting

Executive Director in attendance: Ned Murray

Officers in attendance:

Tom Sanders, **President**
Katy Morgan, **Vice President**
Deb Dreves, **Secretary**

Chairpersons in attendance:

Bruce Blohm, **Land & Strategic Plan**
John Collins, **Trails**
Raymond Nance, **Development**
Iva Michelle Russell, **Communications**

Directors in attendance:

Joe Gray
Gary Hawkins

Andrea Sanders
Deb Tucker

Absent:

Jenny Barsotti
Aaron Hendrickson, **Treasurer**
Dot Neale

Mary Priestley, **Education**
John Reed, **Engagement**
Leslie Watts

Others in attendance:

George Shinn, SCSP Manager
Aaron Reid, SGSP Manager
Bill Loewer, HOTC Manager

The first quarter 2024 meeting of the Board of Directors of the Friends of South Cumberland State Parks, Inc., was called to order by President Tom Sanders at 10:32a.m.

Consent Agenda and Prior Minutes

The Meeting Agenda for the day's meeting and Minutes from the previous board meeting were distributed to the Board Members via the on-line Advance Packet on October 16, 2024; no revisions were offered.

Motion: To accept the minutes of the prior meeting and today's agenda, as presented.

Moved: Deb Tucker; Seconded: Iva Michelle Russell; approved by voice vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT & FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Director Gary Hawkins asked for clarification on the income and expenses of the Cumberland Forest School. Director Murray clarified that the income and expenses were basically a "pass-through" and that the Friends neither received income nor covered expenses for the program.

***Motion:* To accept the Treasurer’s Report and Financial Statements as submitted.**

***Moved:* Deb Tucker, *Seconded:* Andrea Sanders; approved by voice vote.**

COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Committee Reports and reports from Park Managers were distributed to the Board via the Advance Packet on October 16, 2024 for review.

Trails Report

John Collins, Chair of the Trails committee after briefly recapped some of what was in his written report including:

- Ranger Jason Reynolds has begun work on the Foster Falls climber’s access loop.
- Progress is being made on the Meadow Creek Campground at Savage Gulf.
- November 3 will be a work day at Foster Falls.
- November 8 will be a work day at Savage Gulf.

Chair Sanders suggested John Collins and new Park Manager Bill Loewer should get together to discuss how the Trails Committee can assist with trail work at Head of the Crow State Park. Both agreed to find a time to meet.

Park Manager George Shinn mentioned that the next trail building class, offered by Mike Riter, Trail Design Specialists, and facilitated by Nate Wilson, would be in January 2025. Shinn suggested that the Friends make a brief “pitch” to the class participants to use their new skills to assist with trail building within the parks. Collins said he would reach out to Nate Wilson to coordinate with the upcoming class.

Education Report

In Chair Priestley’s absence, Director Murray highlight some issues related to the Education Committee.

There was a more than 50% increase in the number of 3rd, 4th and 5th graders who participated in the field trips to the parks.

The Education Committee is also working to develop program that includes information about the Cherokee who were indigenous to local area.

Over the Thanksgiving break Mike O’mara with High Point Climbing in Chattanooga will provide gear and be instructing Grundy County high schoolers in rock climbing. Ranger Reynolds will be be the co-instructor.

Director Andrea Baker complimented Ty Burnett who coordinates the South Cumberland chapter of the Tennessee Naturalist Program (TNP). Ty Burnett has expanded TNP to include additional classes that can be attended by past graduates of the program. Recently programs on local rock art and underwater photography were presented at the Blue Chair. Director Murray noted that these programs had been popular and might soon outgrow the current location.

Trails and Trilliums Report

Director and Trails and Trilliums co-chair Ned Murray addressed how next year's event is progressing. The steering committee has had its first meeting and is hoping to have on-line registration open by the end of January 2025.

Murray's priority is to deliver a high-quality Trails & Trilliums program that is efficient with significantly less stress to the volunteers. Additionally, Murray explained that he and President Sanders did not think Family Adventure Days was a good fit with Trails and Trilliums and that it should be allocated to a different time of year and location. Sanders added that if the Friends continued to offer Family Adventure Days it did not have to be tied to any one location within the Park. Trails and Trilliums would continue to be a family friendly event but should stand on its own. Director Gary Hawkins, interjected that he felt that a child-centric event was needed in Beersheba Springs because of the city's remoteness from the rest of the area.

Murray also addressed whether or not the Wine and Wildflowers (W&W) event fit with Trails and Trilliums (T&T). Murray and Sanders felt they needed to simplify the event and make it cost effective. After a more thorough analysis of W&W Murray plans to share a proposal with the Board. Director Deb Tucker has a meeting with representatives from the Beersheba Assembly on November 26th. Prior to that meeting Tucker would like to meet to with Sanders and Murray to discuss what the Friends needs are for T&T in 2025.

Lands and Conservation Report

Ad Hoc Board Member, Bruce Blohm who chairs the Lands and Conservation Committee offered some additions and revisions to the written report he submitted earlier.

- The State has closed on the 84 acre Clark tract in Savage Gulf.
- Blohm, Professor Bran Potter and Friends' member Alyse Getty are scheduled to walk the Woodland Preserve property, (above Foster Falls), with the developer.
- The State is very interested in purchasing a ten acre parcel in Savage Gulf referred to as the "Stockwell property," that includes 1,000 feet of frontage on the Collins River. The State has inquired if the Friends could assist with the purchase if the State is

unable to move swiftly enough. Ned Murray is scheduled to meet with the land owner next week.

- Blohm wanted to bring to the attention of the Board the importance of working cooperatively with other conservation groups such as cavers and climbers. These groups have goals in common with the Friends.

Strategic Planning was addressed by Vice President Morgan. She is optimistic about the plan that came out of the Board's strategic planning workshop earlier in the year. Morgan was complimentary of the "Impact 2030: Friends Step Up" paper that Director Murray developed based on the strategic plan. Director Murray reminded board chairs that they should be developing their detailed plans, and accompanying budgets.

Communications Report

Rebranding, addressed by Communication Chair Iva Michelle Russell, has been delayed due to the recent addition of Head of the Crow. Rebranding of the website and Friends merchandise will happen after Director Jenny Bersotti has finished work on the graphic look for T&T 2025.

Russell told the group about two recent occasions when the Parks received media exposure:

- A German journalist and podcaster spent a day climbing in the park with Ranger Reynolds and someone from the Climbers' Association. His podcast about his experience is targeted to German listeners.
- Also, Beersheba Market will be adding a mural that shows the trailheads of the Savage Gulf State Park.

Development Report

Chair Raymond Nance said he is working on laying the foundation for more robust fundraising in Spring of 2025. He is developing a case statement and is trying to build relationships with local businesses and individuals.

Director Murray added that the September fall party raised \$12,000.

Executive Committee Report

Motion to approve the revised Organizational Chart as presented in the Advance Packet.

Moved: Deb Tucker; Seconded Raymond Nance; Approved Unanimously

There was brief discussion about the 2025 board meeting dates but the consensus was to have the Executive Committee come up with a set of dates and present it to the

board members at a later time.

Executive Director Report

Director Murray reminded the board that he had now been with the organization for a full year. He expressed his appreciation for the board of directors and that said that he sees the work of the Friends accelerating next year. Areas of increased activities highlighted by Murray included:

- Friends involvement with conservation and land issues
- Friends engagement with The University of the South
- Volunteer involvement with the Friends
- Friends visibility within the community
- Coordination with other conservation groups and the State

All this growth also means more demands on the Friends volunteers and financial resources.

Director Murray wonders if there is a need for the Friends to offer “outfitter” or docent type services to visitors.

Park Manager Reports

Quarterly reports for South Cumberland State Park and Savage Gulf State Park were submitted prior to the meeting by Park Managers George Shinn and Aaron Reid respectively.

Bill Loewer, the first park manager for Head of the Crow State Park (HOTC), addressed the group. He is busy laying the ground work for the park and is actively working on administration and budget issues.

Most of Loewer’s time has been spent researching locations that have been identified as possible sites for the HOTC visitor center and the maintenance facility. He is waiting on the State to review the locations. Loewer hopes to post the first ranger position by next week and have the position filled within a month. Purchases for the new park include everything from office printers to a general maintenance trailer. Loewer hopes to get several box trailers shortly so that he can store the new equipment. Loewer is attempting to purchase as much of the necessary equipment locally as possible.

Director Murray made the observation and Manager Loewer agreed that everyone at The University of the South has been very supportive of the new park.

In answer to a question from Director Tucker, Loewer said that the Sherwood Trail Loop and Buggy Top Cave Trails had not yet been connected but would be eventually.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS

Director Hawkins recounted an experience he had leading a church group from Beersheba Springs to Stone Door. This positive experience prompted him to ask if the Friends had considered training Friends members to lead hikes.

Director Murray shared details of a docent program in Costa Rica that he was familiar with. Murray had discussed how a docent program might be beneficial to both the Tourism Partnership and the Friends. Brief discussion followed.

Chair Sanders shared that he had been working on applying for a federal grant that is being spearheaded by Vanderbilt University. The grant would fund the cost of making the CCC Loop ADA accessible. It would also provide funds for a part time education coordinator to expand the “Every Child In the Park” program. Funding for local school busses is included in the grant.

The big thrust of this grant is to create a lot of little town parks across the plateau. The hyper-local town parks would provide places where community members could go to get fit. The Friends education coordinator would work with the Grundy County town parks to create fitness programs. In several towns the local town parks would be connected to the Goat Trail. Director Murray expressed his hope that the town parks would act as “gateways” to the State Parks.

Director Russell gave a brief recap on the recent initiatives of the Tourism Partnership and specific events that are planned for the holidays. She mentioned that the towns that are close to the state park trails are promoting the park heavily. “Trail Towns” is a name sometimes used to describe these towns.

Manager Shinn explained the the State required parks to offer a certain amount of public programming each month. Additionally, the State issues private companies special use permits and commercial use agreements so they can offer programs within the parks. The State does not require those companies to be located in the local counties on the plateau. In fact, Manager Shinn informed the group that a company from Oregon would soon be offering climbing programs at Foster Falls. It was Shinn’s hope that local companies could provide these type of services.

Shinn said that some of the companies offering guided hikes were including them as part of day trip packages that included dinners out and hotel stays. These are all opportunities for the local counties to increase their own business but instead the tourism dollars are spent outside the local counties. Directors Russell and Gray shared some of the statistics of how local tourism dollars are spent and where there is room for improvement.

There was discussion about how to encourage local people to start businesses to provide services to day visitors. Director Murray suggested the Babson Center might be interested in doing a market study to determine the potential for some sort of local business. Vice President Morgan added that she also knew of a faculty economist who would be interested in doing the study.

Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the board meeting.

Moved: Deb Tucker, Seconded: Andrea Sanders; Approved by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 12:29pm.

The next board meeting will be on Saturday, January 25th at 9:30 am in the Tower Bank Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Dreves, FSC Secretary

