



2018 Annual Report

Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas

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.*

Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas Overview for 2018

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas and Arkansas Tourism realizes the importance the Great River Road of Arkansas plays in the potential for international visitors, and continues to promote the region at international and national travel shows throughout the United States, such as IPW in Denver, CO, and Travel South International in Nashville, in 2018. Arkansas Tourism has recently partnered with Peter Hannaford to serve as an international representative for Arkansas, and Peter, along with U.K. journalist Steve Hartridge, toured portions of Arkansas's Great River Road in September 2018. We look forward to sharing Arkansas's Great River Road with an expanded European market in the years to come.

Tourism in Arkansas continues to grow. Collections of Arkansas's 2% tourism tax set a new record of \$16.428 million in 2018, with a 3.34% increase from 2017. Crittenden County (West Memphis) was in the top 10 counties in terms of collection the 2% tourism tax, up an amazing 20.26% from 2017.

Arkansas was thrilled to serve as host for the fall meeting of the National Mississippi River Parkway Commission this past October. We appreciate all our partners who helped make the event successful.

We will continue to promote Arkansas's Great River Road throughout 2019, through social media, the Arkansas.com website, travel shows, and working closely with our partners in the 10-county region of eastern Arkansas.

HIGHLIGHTS

Trails and Bridges

The Big River Crossing (BRX), the nation's longest pedestrian-bike bridge across the Mississippi River, has experienced another quarter of tremendous growth in visitor engagement based on annual data since its October 22, 2016, launch. Since its grand opening in 2016, Big River Crossing has welcomed over half a million (nearly 515,000) visitors from across the world. The bridge's Quarter 4 data reveals 55,113 visitors between October and December of 2018, and of those visitors, 42,231 (88%) were pedestrians and 16,685 (12%) were cyclists. While the bridge experienced a slight decrease in total visitors from Quarter 3's 57,060 visitors, the data also reveals a significant increase of cyclists, welcoming over 5,000 more bikers this quarter than Q3's 11,465. These numbers bring the total number of visitors in 2018 to 214,711.

The Arkansas City Trailhead of the Delta Heritage Trail State Park now includes a multi-use building designed in the style of historic rail depots, an administrative building, bathhouse facilities and an open pavilion. Site development of the trailhead also includes improved parking, picnic areas and two large tent pads for overnight camping, as well as interpretive wayside panels. When the rail-to-trail project is complete, it will be an astounding 85-miles long. Currently the completed northern portion is 21 miles between Lexa and Elaine, with an additional 14 miles on the south end from Arkansas City to Rowher. Eventually, the trail will cross the White and Arkansas rivers. There are currently six trailheads, and you can experience different sights and sounds at each one. This park provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy the Delta by foot or bike.

Hampson Archeological Museum State Park

An updated and expanded Hampson Archeological Museum State Park opened in fall 2018. This new state of the art facility provides visitors with many opportunities for hands on experiences as well as visually stunning displays. Additionally, the museum now has spaces for much more research to be performed on the collection. Hampson Archeological Museum State Park exhibits a nationally renowned collection from the Nodena site, a 15-acre palisaded village that once thrived on the western bank of the Mississippi River. Hampson Archeological Museum interprets the lifestyles of this farming-based civilization that lived there from A.D. 1400 to 1650. Artifacts and exhibits share the story of an early aboriginal population of farmers who cultivated crops and hunted native game. The community that once lived there also created its own art, religion, and political structure. A thriving trading network also played a role in their way of life. This remarkable collection owes its preservation to the late Dr. James K.

Hampson and his family. The new museum, an MRPC interpretive center, is 8,580 square feet and more comfortably welcome guests to view the amazing collection of objects and interpretive exhibitions that shine light on this ancient culture.

Arkansas Delta Byways Partnership

The Arkansas Delta Byways Regional Tourism Association serves as an important MRPC partner by promoting tourism throughout the Arkansas Delta's 15 counties, with 10 of those counties containing portions of the Great River Road.

The work by the ADB continues to be an important marketing tool for both the Great River Road National Scenic Byway and Crowley's Ridge Parkway National Scenic Byway. The tourism association is represented with members from all 15 counties of the Arkansas Delta, who take active roles in promoting places, events and things to do up and down Arkansas's Great River Road. From the ADB website, to the Facebook page, to regional travel shows, the Arkansas Delta Byways is a pivotal part in Arkansas's Great River Road promotions.

McCullough begins term as Pilot

The Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas is pleased and proud of our long-time Commissioner, Dr. Terri Austin McCullough, who will serve as the MRPC Pilot for 2019. Terri has been an active and truly committed member of the Arkansas group for years...and we know her hard work and commitment will be an asset to the national Mississippi River Parkway Commission.

Dr. Ruth Hawkins Retires

Long-term technical adviser, and crucial contributor to Arkansas's Great River Road, Dr. Ruth Hawkins will be retiring at the end of June 2019. Ruth has been a vital part of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission of Arkansas and Arkansas Delta Byways for several decades, and her retirement, although well deserved, will leave a void. Nancy Clark, longtime deputy director of Arkansas Tourism and director of Arkansas's Great River Road, will step in as technical adviser beginning in May 2019.