

Arizona Trail Association
Board of Directors Autumn Meeting Minutes
August 12, 2023
Hart Prairie Preserve - Northern Arizona

Board Members Present: Ambika Balasubramaniyan, Bianca Salazar, Dana Ernst, David Rabb, Karen Gresham, Shawn Redfield, Vicki Levin

AZTA Staff: Matt Nelson, Wendy Lotze, Clay Showalter, Sara Sprague

Guests: Marcy DeMillion (AZNST Administrator for US Forest Service), Rebecca Rodriguez (Prospective Board Member)

Board Members Absent: Clark Tenakhongva

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Ambika welcomed everyone and introduced a prospective board member, Rebecca Rodriguez, to the board members, staff and other guest. The meeting was called to order promptly.

II. Approve March 5, 2023 Meeting Minutes

David made a motion to approve the minutes, Shawn seconded; passes unanimously.

III. Executive Director Report

Matt thanked Wendy for filling in for him during his sabbatical.

- Wendy worked with Marcy getting agreements approved.
- The association's website reorganized and highlights the board approved diversity, equity inclusion statement. There's a dedicated page for users to share stories about inclusion.
- Renee Stevens is the new Administrative Director. Renee has a strong background in finance and bookkeeping and has personal ties to the Arizona Trail.
- Zach McDonald has left his post as Trail Director and will be going to work for the Forest Service. Interviews will be starting next week for this position.
- Trail Tech seasonal position interviews taking place soon
- Donovan is resigning as Administrative Assistant but Julie Marshall has shifted to working in the office 2 days/wk to assist with retail and merchandise fulfillment.

Funding

- \$1.2 million in funding has been secured through USFS Agreements.
- A non-lapsing \$500,000 from the Governor's Office has no requirement to spend it within a specific timeframe unlike previous funding where we've lost unused funds after one year. We will use this funding to hire state-approved contractors to conduct priority trail construction and maintenance statewide.

Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument

- Matt and board member Clark Tenakhongva were invited by the White House to attend the designation ceremony where the President protected almost 1 million acres from uranium mining.
- Matt met the Governor at the designation ceremony. She stated she wants to hike the entire trail while in office.
- Designation does not change any access or usage allowances on the Arizona Trail.

IV. Development and Financial Report

- Board members did not have any questions about this report.

- A large deficit prior to July was due to pending grants from the Forest Service, those have come in and we appear to be on track.
- Ambika asked about the audit recommendations, Matt stated since the ATA does not have a financial or accounting staff we are always going to have this weakness.
- David elaborated, it doesn't mean anything we are doing is wrong based on his experience as an auditor. It's important for them to note this, regardless.
- Renee's experience in similar roles will assist with reflecting appropriate categories on received funds which should clean up our financials for our next audit.
- It is noted the ATA has never had an issue of mismanagement of funds.

BLM funding

- ATA applied for \$150,000 to address trail improvements on Passages 16 and 43.
- Additional funding from the Arizona Trail State Fund to will apply to these passages.
- ATA Seeds of Stewardship received \$5,000 from the Arizona Community Foundation - Flagstaff.

Lee Allen Donation

- a long-time volunteer and supporter of the ATA has requested his \$100,000 donation be applied to benefit the organization long term.
- There's a \$5,000 restricted donation to be used once the ATA establishes an endowment fund.
- Suggested to use Mr. Allen's donation to establish an endowment fund.
- David shared his personal relationship with Mr. Allen and their hike on the AZT.
- Brittany, David and Wendy met with the Arizona Community Foundation to discuss opportunities for this money, a working relationship with this organization would be a long-term networking benefit
- David suggested voting on the fund.
- Discussion regarding appropriate verbiage needed to properly pass a motion and determine which endowment option to select was held.
- Ambika suggested a broader motion at this time allowing time for the board to review and select the best option.
- David moved to use the \$105,000 to create an endowment; selection of a manager and plan option will be determined later and voted on. Karen seconded the motion. Passes unanimously. Matt and Brittany will research the best options for an endowment fund and report back to Finance Committee.
- Ambika requested a formal statement from the ATA to release to our members. Matt agreed to draft something to provide to Ambika for her signature as Board President. Then it can be sent out.

V. Trail Operations

- Temporal Gulch project nearly completed – 31 miles of new trail construction to avoid paved and dirt roads near Patagonia.
- The Santa Catalina Trail plan recently completed and will result in improvements to the AZT, including a reroute of the Oracle Ridge Passage to avoid private mining operations.
- Pigeon Spring on Passage 20 was restored (but trail angels continue to leave water at the trailhead).
- Eagle Scouts built drainages and made improvements along Passage 22.
- Extensive work completed on the Highline Passage but we don't have the exact mileage yet. Locals may have an event celebrating the reroutes and work completed which would be a good opportunity for members to be involved.

- The ATA has a Volunteer Agreement in place with Grand Canyon National Park for the first time as an organization. Hopefully, this will make volunteer work easier in the park and the ATA may be invited to do work below the rim.
- Volunteer Vacation on Passage 43 cleaned up flood damage at the trailhead.
- Community Kiosks installed in Kearny, Payson, Green Valley and Patagonia.
- Waiting for approvals for community kiosks in Flagstaff, Superior and Oracle, the grant deadline for completion is the end of November.
- Rerouting the AZT from Oracle Ridge to nearby Red Ridge has been in the planning phases due to the landscape and surrounding geology not being conducive to a reroute of Oracle Ridge itself. The ATA will work with USFS to update signage. David mentioned that this is a great opportunity for more Indigenous related signage (Babad Do'ag – Frog Mountain), and Matt said the USFS has been interested in this as well.
- David mentioned that ATA volunteers and USFS have been improving clearance along the AZT near Summerhaven since Jasmine the Donkey's folks reported her having trouble navigating this section of trail. It's now donkey friendly.

VI. AZNST Administrator's Report

- Marcy said the GIS data updates for the new national monument have kept her busy.
- Updating their GIS data to reflect proper miles will help with funding requests.
- USFS proposals need the proper legal description and GIS data to name and describe the area being addressed.
- USFS and ATA will work together to keep data and descriptions up to date.
- LIDAR information can be shared with the ATA if requested.
- Marcy discussed the ATA needs to be better about communication during the reroute planning process.
- USFS would appreciate discretion instead of sending every email but please keep them involved as things progress, especially quarterly for the trail administrator to report.
- Upcoming USFS budget cuts, these may not affect National Scenic Trail funding; the ATA has previously allocated funding which will not be impacted if there are cuts.

VII. Youth Program Report

- Clay and Sara introduced themselves.
- Programs are dedicated to outreach, adding schools and students being involved.
- Driven to pursue bilingual, low-income and Native American communities to bring a sense of belonging and awareness.
- Students are taken out five times during the school year on full-day field trips preferably on the Arizona Trail to provide a positive outdoor experience, connect students to the landscapes and instill a sense of stewardship.
- Over 330 individual students participated this past school year.
- A field manual covering policies was developed for the youth programs in Northern Arizona with input from Mackenzie Mabery, the Gear Girls coordinator.
- A draft of a Seeds of Stewardship staff manual has been given to Matt for review.
- 70 scheduled programs for the current school year.
- Established a program at the Star School which serves the Navajo Nation, they are planning an event to have their entire student population hike on the Arizona Trail.
- The program wants to provide more bilingual options (Clay is bilingual).
- They are working with a contact at the Murdoch Center and new schools to reach more minority and low-income communities.

- Their current wages fall into the low income to very low income categories for the Flagstaff area, and they are unable to commit as much time to the program as they would like to, due to the need to earn additional income.
- General board discussion about the need for central Arizona programs but the distance to the trail and resources is far.
- Board or staff can reach out to program leaders to be able to observe these programs or photography opportunities but there are generally not volunteer opportunities associated with the ATA's youth programs.

VIII. Board Development

- Board development committee only has two members currently.
- Board members are asked to always be looking for good candidates.
- Ambika's term expires in February, we will need someone to step up in the roles she currently serves (Board President and Chair of Board Development).
- Rebecca introduced herself to the board as a possible candidate. She did a campout in 2018 with the ATA and since then has completed numerous volunteer hours, completed the Trail Skills Institute, and two years ago was selected as an American Hiking Society's NextGen Trail Leader. She is involved in trail advocacy at all government levels and thinks she could apply these skills with the association. Background in aerospace engineering, just finished graduate studies in sustainability, and plans stay within the Phoenix area.
- Ambika shared her feelings on Rebecca's interest.
- Ambika asked if Rebecca had any questions for the board. She wanted to know what each person's favorite part of serving on the Board is. Board members shared their experiences. Rebecca reflected on the statements concerning sustainability and challenges being faced with a new perspective.
- Ambika acknowledged no original board members remain.
- Term limits: two three-year consecutive terms. Can apply later to return to the board.

IX. Open Discussion – Variety of Topics

GRO girl GRO

- Program focuses on girls mountain biking, hiking/trail running and trail work.
- Goal to retain participants so later they can be mentors.
- Matt discussed Jody's focus to reach young adults with developmental disabilities, for example Autism.
- Physical Disability access is less than .5 of 1% on the AZT. What could be made more accessible? What segments of trail can be built to be more accessible? Still less than 1%.
- The trail's design and nature and purpose means we will not be able to ever meet or accommodate physical disabilities. But that leaves great opportunities for engaging populations with other types of challenges.

Veteran's Program.

- Forest Service made a \$68,000 contribution to the program (including working with veteran contactors and volunteers).
- It appears no other trail organization is doing a veterans engagement program. Chappy has been sharing the program with other trail organizations at trail summits and other trail related conferences, events and gatherings.

- Warrior Hikes is now Warrior Expeditions (hike, bike and paddle). Most bike trips they organize are on road bikes. They are a small organization with a small staff, and only engage a few veterans each year on the AZT.
- Our volunteer program allows local veterans with limited time and availability to work on and with the trail.
- Chappy works with other organizations and attends conferences throughout the year to interact and spread awareness of the program.
- Having a veteran on staff allows us to have conversations with members of Congress, which helps us navigate the sometimes, otherwise, unavailable connections.

Trail Funding/Comprehensive Plan

- APS grants were discussed, a connection that works for APS may be able to get us on the right path for grants through their company.
- The Comprehensive plan should be out in September, there will be a 30-day comment period on the nearly 400-page document. It will be a lot of work in a short amount of time.
- Shawn discussed potential challenges related to the Great American Outdoors Act and Arizona Trail State Fund, since many young conservation corps members lack skilled and experienced workers who are able to work independently or unsupervised.
- Trail Technician position: would be good to have two Trail Techs once we have the funding to do so.

Membership conversation and ideas.

- Karen wants to discuss the membership report which reflects membership declining.
- Membership drives will be held in spring and fall.
- Finances are stable even with the lower membership numbers.
- Too early to see impacts of our changes to membership fees.
- During online donations there's a prompt to apply the donation as a membership.
- We don't want to make it an automatic membership but we may be able to make it clear there are no additional costs on top of the donation.
- Bianca suggested volunteers at booths to be directed to encourage membership while speaking to visitors.
- A free membership can be offered to participants in ATA running events.
- Membership is encouraged during the completion survey.
- Additional outreach through social media and discussions we have with friends, family, and trail users we interact with.

Gateway Communities

- Shawn brought up suggestions from a Trail Angel for an updated fold out map.
- Matt says we are out of maps and are working on a new, updated one.
- Local supplement maps need to be updated and allocated.
- Matt claims both projects are in the works but we need to pursue a grant to print them.

Trail Etiquette.

- Shawn discussed a program at a place he visited where guests pledge to follow rules, educate our new incoming hikers/inquiries. This is our home, respect it. Trail etiquette training and guiding.
- Possible options discussed among board members for things we could give to users to take with them or a type of digital version.

Trail Permits

- The comprehensive plan will identify how many people are using the trail and how many it can support (carrying capacity).

- The plan will likely lead to a future permit for thru hikers. It will assist with limiting how many people can start in one day and it's an educational opportunity for trail etiquette and helping remind trail users how to protect natural and cultural resources.
- Historically the association has been against the idea of permits, but with increased use and impacts, and the USFS managing the trail, a low-cost permit system is likely to be initiated.

Flagstaff Camping Ban

- Stretches 11 miles but as long as hikers plan, they should be able to navigate their hike without violating this new order, especially with a stop in Flagstaff being made by almost all thru-hikers.

Staff Policies

- The board will review large and impactful policies for employees and staff of the ATA. Less important operational policies can be managed by Executive Director and other staff.

Upcoming Board Meetings

- Next board meeting will be held on October 29th in Kearny, Arizona.
- February's annual meeting won't be at Botanical Gardens due to construction.
- Vicki suggested the Arboretum, Matt said he will reach out to them.

IX. Adjourn

David motioned to end the meeting and Dana seconded. Meeting adjourned.