

INTERIM STUDY REPORT

**Economic Development, Tourism and Financial Services Committee
Representative Randy McDaniel, Chairman
Oklahoma House of Representatives
Interim Study 11-011, Representative Leslie Osborn
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State funding and budget of State parks and golf courses under the Department of Tourism

Deby Snodgrass, Executive Director
Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD)
Deby.Snodgrass@OklaTourism.gov

- Oklahoma benefits from the state park system in several ways. The parks bolster Oklahoma's third largest industry, travel and tourism, and preserve natural resources, including land and water, that might be damaged without the park designation. The state's park system also encourages health and wellness among Oklahomans, which is important considering poor state statistics related to obesity and physical activity.
- Most state parks are leased, not owned, and Oklahoma will always be in the state park business as a result of an agreement with the federal government under which state park assets were built with Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF). These funds were provided to the state with a replacement requirement stipulating that if LWCF projects were removed from the park system and privatized, they would have to be replaced with assets of equal market value. As a result of the agreement and this arrangement, Oklahoma will never exit the park business.
- In order to improve the quality of life and health of all Oklahomans, there should be an assessment of park locations and distribution across the state. Every five years Oklahoma is required by the federal government to do a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Each SCORP has generated the same criticism that the state's parks are not distributed in accordance with Oklahoma's population.
- There are two ways to reach self-sufficiency in park system operations. The state can either reduce operating costs or raise revenue generated by certain fees, although an uncontrollable factor like weather also plays a role in the financials. OTRD is looking at each park individually to find ways to increase visitation and raise revenue. Most of Oklahoma's parks do not have one central entrance point. Therefore, the state cannot charge an entrance fee and generate income from park land. The lodges and golf courses associated with Oklahoma's parks underwrite the entire system. In Texas, state residents buy an annual card that grants entrance into any state park.
- The Oklahoma Legislature must authorize the transfer of park land. Next session, the Legislature will be asked to approve the transfer of title on land at Boggy Depot and Heavener-Runestone.

See presentation a.

Jonathan Small, CPA, Fiscal Policy Director
Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc.
jonathan@ocpathink.org

- There are core government services that should be provided by the state, but the government should not be providing a service that the private sector can or does provide already. Privatization of certain services should be considered.