



## Oregon Tourism Commission Meeting

October 6, 2020

Zoom Meeting and YouTube Live

**Commissioners present included:** Scott Youngblood, Don Anway, Nigel Francisco, Richard Boyles, Greg Willitts, Lucinda DiNovo, Maria Ponzi, Kenji Sugahara, and Mia Sheppard.

Chair Youngblood calls the Commission meeting to order at 9:03am.

### Chair Remarks

Chair Youngblood speaks to the impact of COVID-19, social unrest, racial injustice, and wildfires on Oregon's communities. Offers time for Commissioners to reflect on these events. Commissioner Sugahara reflects on driving home from Sisters, Oregon during Labor Day Weekend and the smoke he experienced then. Knows that our industry is strong and looks forward to what we as a state and as Oregonians can do to drive recovery. Commissioner Anway reflects on the heartbreaking experiences of community members in Southern Oregon. Speaks to the compassion and love that has come out of the wildfires. Had 12 employees lose homes and numerous friends in his community. Speaks to the opportunities we have as a state to help these individuals move forward. Expresses his appreciation in FEMA's assistance to fire survivors. Commissioner Sheppard expresses her condolences to all those affected by wildfire. Speaks to a relief fund she is involved in, Fires for Relief, that has mobilized the fly-fishing community and raised upwards of \$59,000. Expresses the inspiration that comes from difficult times. Commissioner Sugahara gives kudos to Travel Oregon staff in their personal efforts to help fire survivors. Commissioner Ponzi describes the effect of wildfire and smoke on the wine industry. Expresses the difficulties the wine industry has overcome during COVID-19 and the way in which the industry came together again during the wildfires. Notes that many winemakers will not be harvesting their grapes this year due to smoke and the closure of many tasting rooms for safety of guests and staff. Commissioner Willitts speaks to his experience during the outbreak of the wildfires and hosting fire fighters at the FivePine Conference Center due to the air quality. Notes the resilience and flexibility he has seen in Oregonians and his pride to be a part of the Tourism Commission.

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## Public Comment

Chair Youngblood describes the process of submitting public comment through the online form. One comment from the public was received in preparation for this meeting and will be part of the public record.

## Commission Business

Chair Youngblood asks if everyone received their Commission packets including the financials. The Commissioners confirm they received the noted materials.

Commissioner Francisco discusses the financial review and thanks Kathleen Stewart and Jeff Hampton for their time in reviewing the financials prior to today and the hard work in producing a financial update.

Kathleen Stewart, Accounting Manager, joins the meeting to provide a financial update. Acknowledges this is the first update of this fiscal year and will include details from fiscal year 2019-20 and 2020-21 up to today. Kathleen shares a PowerPoint presentation. November will be the first deposit at the reduced lodging tax rate of 1.5%. \$429,888 will be held for use in fiscal year 2021. Original budget for fiscal year 2021 was \$36,600,000 and has been revised to \$16,000,000. Quarter 1 actual to date is \$3,208,142. The largest expenditure to date was to the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program in July 2020.

Chair Youngblood asks if there are any questions for Kathleen. There are no questions from the Commissioners.

Chair Youngblood asks if all Commissioners have reviewed the meeting minutes from June 16 and if there are questions or comments. There are no questions or comments. Chair Youngblood asks for a motion to accept the June 16 Tourism Commission Meeting minutes. Commissioner DiNovo moves to approve the minutes and Commissioner Francisco seconds. The motion to approve the June 16, 2020 Tourism Commission Meeting minutes is approved unanimously.

## CEO Remarks

Todd Davidson states that the virtual Commission meetings continue to be the right choice due to COVID-19 but looks forward to the day the meetings can be held in person. Acknowledges the difficulties Oregonians have faced due to wildfires and COVID-19 and the resulting resiliency. Encourages all in attendance to read the [National Geographic article](#) detailing stories of fire survivors at the Best Western Horizon Inn in Medford.

Todd states that Travel Oregon has joined the Governor's Wildfire Economic Recovery Council. Describes the shifts in Travel Oregon staff's work through social media, virtual

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tradeshows, and the launch of the stakeholder survey to help inform Travel Oregon's 2021-25 strategic plan. Expresses the caring comments he has received from the global travel industry through this trying time and what a special place Oregon is.

## COVID-19 and Wildfire Emergency Response - Regional Partner Updates

Todd Davidson introduces Harry Dalgaard, Director of the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP). Harry speaks to the impact of the wildfires and resulting air quality which affected every region, in addition to the ongoing pandemic. Notes that Travel Oregon revised RCTP guidelines at the onset of COVID-19 so that regions can be responsive and adaptive in their work due to disasters of any kind. Travel Oregon has set up weekly calls with regions at the onset of COVID-19 and these increased to twice weekly at the onset of this year's wildfires.

Commissioner Sugahara asks if the regions are able to shift RCTP plans if the state returns to a baseline phase in reopening due to COVID-19.

Harry expresses that the regions are able to pivot their plans if this occurs.

Harry introduces Dawnielle Tehama, Executive Director of Willamette Valley Visitors Association; Brad Niva, Executive Director of Travel Southern Oregon; and Lizzie Keenan, Regional Coordinator for the Mt. Hood Columbia River Gorge Regional Tourism Alliance.

Harry asks Brad to describe the different impacts of this year's wildfires on Southern Oregon.

Brad expresses that in his four years in this position, he has spoken with the commission about wildfires every year. This year was the first that the wildfires affected cities in Southern Oregon and states that almost 80% of children in the Phoenix school district are now homeless. Expresses his concern about residents moving away due to homelessness and the impacts this will have on the tourism workforce.

Harry asks Dawnielle to describe how the wildfires have impacted tourism assets in the Willamette Valley.

Dawnielle notes that Willamette Valley Visitors Association is assessing how many businesses and tourism assets have been affected and this cannot be completed until active burns are out and it is safe to go to these areas. Expresses that world-class assets, like Opal Creek, have been lost for the near future. Expresses that the silver lining is the opportunity to improve infrastructure to more responsibly and equitably manage high-use destinations.

Harry asks Lizzie to share what has happened in the Mt. Hood-Gorge region.

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Lizzie expresses how unfortunate it is to be affected once again after the Eagle Creek fire in recent years. Notes that the city of Estacada was saved despite the fire being within a quarter mile. The cities of Estacada and the Clackamas River have been a key focus for tourism development as an alternative to the more highly used areas in the region. The full impacts to Estacada and the Clackamas River are not yet known. Speaks to the expansiveness of these fires and that it will be upwards of a year before these sites will be accessible to the public again. Mentions that power was shut off along Highway 26 for a few weeks due to the wind event and fire risk as well, which deeply impacted those communities.

Harry asks Brad to speak to response efforts in Southern Oregon.

Brad notes that Travel Southern Oregon has been helping and supporting as needed but also giving space to organizations of first responders. Expresses that their current goal is to revive the tourism economy when it is safe to do so.

Harry shares a slideshow of images from areas in Oregon affected by wildfire.

Harry asks Dawnielle to speak to response efforts in the Willamette Valley.

Dawnielle speaks to the quick response of the Willamette Valley Visitor Association staff by creating a wildfire response page on their website, activating their network daily during the crisis, sending critical information via e-newsletters and maintaining opportunities to help and support fire survivors on their website. Dawnielle speaks to Willamette Valley Visitor Association's strong PR response to counteract misinformation and misconceptions, highlighting positive stories.

Harry asks Lizzie to speak to response efforts in the Mt. Hood- Gorge region.

Lizzie notes that they had many learnings from the Eagle Creek Fire that have impacted their course of action for the recent fires. Expresses the importance of using social channels to share information regarding closures, where visitors can go and locations to avoid. Notes that the region had budget planned to support Estacada's tourism development this year but will shift those funds to support their recovery efforts.

Harry asks Lizzie what she expects for a timeline for recovery.

Lizzie expresses that there are key factors for recovery including the fires being fully out, and the land shifting and settling which will result in trees falling and landslides. Notes that there are still closures from the Eagle Creek fire which occurred three years ago and expects that while some assets will reopen within this year, many will take years to recover. Expresses that it will be key to revisit this conversation in the spring with land managers to set better expectations.

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Harry asks Brad about a timeline for recovery in Southern Oregon.

Brad notes that there were five large fires in Southern Oregon this year and multiple communities affected. Expects that recovery will take a few years and is grateful that this will be an ongoing conversation.

Harry asks Dawnielle about a timeline for recovery in the Willamette Valley.

Dawnielle states that we will not know the true impact of the fires until early 2021 at best. Notes that a few highways, like Highway 22, are closed with unknown opening dates.

Harry asks all three participants what is needed from the tourism industry to help our communities.

Dawnielle asks for continued active listening and states how important it is for each community. Highlights that actively listening will also lead to our ability to tell stories that can support and market these communities, as well as help in messaging what areas are able to accommodate visitors.

Lizzie echoes Dawnielle's sentiments. Notes that this is an opportunity to rebuild better than before. Asks for alignment between land stewardship groups as land managers cannot do all recovery work alone. Asks for Travel Oregon's leadership in managing the flow of visitation as closures can lead to over-use in nearby open areas.

Brad states that he is using this as an opportunity to create a strategic plan in the event this occurs again in future years.

Harry thanks the regional participants for their insights and on-the-ground efforts through this crisis.

Harry informs the Commissioners that the Travel Oregon team has been working on partnerships with Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, reanalyzing Travel Oregon's the timing of competitive grants, creating an inventory of lost tourism assets from the wildfires in partnership with each region, and assisting the Office of Emergency Management and FEMA in creating a database of lodging availability to house evacuees and fire survivors now and for future emergencies. Notes that FEMA has highlighted Oregon's efforts as a best practice.

Commissioner DiNovo asks Harry how Travel Oregon and the Tourism Commission can help rebuild infrastructure.

Harry notes her question and that answers will come as more information from affected communities becomes available.

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Commissioner Sugahara mentions the damage he has seen in each region. Asks Harry about what he expects the impact of highway closures will have on visitation to Central Oregon.

Harry notes that Travel Oregon is in weekly communication with Central Oregon and will continue to assess how to route visitors, including winter recreation visitors, during and after highway closures.

Commissioner Boyles mentions that his Bend property has felt effects due to the wildfires and closures. Speaks to his own family's experience in questioning whether or not to rebuild property and businesses. Highlights that any opportunity we as the Tourism Commission can have in assisting with the rebuilding process will be important as many may choose not to rebuild.

Commissioner Anway suggests that the tourism industry should thank first responders, possibly by offering discounted rates to lodging properties.

Commissioner Boyles notes that his hotel staff have become fatigued with the many requests for lodging availability and asks for increased streamlining between statewide efforts.

Commissioner Willitts speaks to the importance of air quality reading stations around the state.

Chair Youngblood thanks participants and provides a 5-minute break at 10:35am.

Todd Davidson welcomes Commissioners back to the meeting at 10:42am. In answer to a previous question by Commissioner Sugahara on how regions can pivot their plans due to COVID-19, Todd speaks to Travel Oregon's COVID-19 strategic plan, which is based around the Governor's county phases, and the status of which is described in Travel Oregon's most recent Strategic Plan Progress Report. In answer to Commissioner DiNovo's earlier question on how Travel Oregon and the Tourism Commission can assist with rebuilding communities, Todd notes that Travel Oregon's RCTP and Grant program will be an instrumental way for Travel Oregon to assist with recovery efforts.

## **Reports, Updates & Discussions:**

### **2020 Economic Impacts – Quarterly Forecast**

Todd introduces Ladan Ghahramani, Research Manager at Travel Oregon. Ladan states that Travel Oregon has partnered with Dean Runyan Associates to forecast travel impacts in Oregon for many years. Ladan introduces Jordan Bohlander, Project Manager at Dean Runyan Associates. Jordan presents Oregon's travel forecasts through a PowerPoint presentation. This report utilizes data as of June 30, 2020 and may not take into consideration the effects of social unrest and the wildfires on travel

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but is focused on the impact of COVID-19, which Dean Runyan Associates sees as the greatest impact to Oregon's travel economy. Shares three possible forecasted scenarios: a reference case, a high case, and a low case. Discusses forecasted impacts on international travel to Oregon, direct employment in the travel industry, state tax revenue, local tax revenue, and impacts on spend and employment by region. Todd thanks Jordan for his presentation and asks Commissioners if they have questions.

Commissioner Boyles asks Jordan when he anticipates Oregon returning to figures seen in 2019.

Jordan responds that Dean Runyan Associates focuses on short term forecasting, as they see it as the most effective. Addresses that he has seen data that suggests that Oregon will reach revenue levels similar to 2019 by 2024 but notes that there are too many variables in that time that it cannot be forecasted definitively. Todd reinforces that Tourism Economics also conservatively forecasts 2024 as a return to 2019 figures.

Commissioner Sugahara asks Jordan if their forecasts take into account the World Championships Oregon22 as a possible source of increased revenue.

Jordan states that 2022 is slightly outside of the scope of this forecast.

Todd thanks Jordan and Ladan for their presentation.

## **Public Affairs & Policy Update**

Todd introduces Sara Morrissey, Public Affairs Manager, to share a policy and public affairs update. Sara provides federal and state legislative and policy updates via a PowerPoint presentation. Shares federal advocacy efforts by U.S. Travel asking the federal government for another Coronavirus Relief Package. Shares efforts by Congressman Blumenauer to pass the RESTAURANTS Act, which stands for Real Economic Support That Acknowledges Unique Restaurant Assistance Needed To Survive. Shares state updates including a recap of the summer legislative sessions. Notes that removing the sunset on the state transient lodging tax was not included in the August special session agenda and the state transient lodging tax has dropped to 1.5% as expected. Shares that there is the possibility of a third special session in November, but that Travel Oregon does not plan to introduce new legislation about the state transient lodging tax at this time. Shares state revenue forecast provided in September by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis. Shares the recent establishment of the Wildfire Economic Recovery Council which focuses on providing counties with resources. On October 12, Oregon Destination Association will have a legislative update meeting and on October 13, Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association will have a public policy meeting. Topics that are likely to affect the tourism industry include Cocktails To Go, a concept being discussed but has yet to be successful due to current Oregon law, and Tourism Improvement and Tourism Recovery Districts.

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Todd asks Commissioners if they have any questions.

Commissioner Sugahara asks Sara to clarify if the attempt to reinstate the 1.8% transient lodging tax will move forward. Sara answers that Travel Oregon would need to introduce a tax increase and not a sunset removal, which makes passing very unlikely. This has led to the decision to not move forward with reinstating the 1.8% transient lodging tax.

Commissioner Sugahara asks Todd how tourism businesses and their workers are managing at-home instruction to children who are not able to attend school and the subsequent loss of workforce.

Todd shares that the Commissioners most likely have more direct answers to this question.

Commissioner Boyles states that it was challenging before COVID-19 to find workers and it continues to be difficult.

Commissioner Anway adds that due to the wildfires he is worried about a continued loss of workforce.

Commissioner Ponzi asks if there is any information on tasting rooms in the RESTAURANTS act proposal.

Sara notes that she will look into that question and will follow up via email to the Commission.

Commissioner Ponzi asks Todd to speak more to the Wildfire Economic Recovery Council.

Todd shares that the council, created by the Governor, will be meeting weekly. The group is looking at the needs in community, including housing for those that have lost houses to wildfire; assistance provided by FEMA; businesses that have been lost and resources for those businesses. The aim of the group is to provide resource and put together legislative concepts for recovery.

Commissioner Ponzi shares that agricultural workers were not able to work for weeks due to wildfire and asks Todd to keep this in mind as he works with the Wildfire Economic Recovery Council.

Commissioner Willitts adds to Commissioner Sugahara's previous question that providing instruction at home for school age children has been a difficulty for his employees but also an opportunity to connect as they experience the same situation.



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## **Communications & Visitor Management**

Todd introduces Katy Clair, Director of Marketing Services, Scott Bricker, Interim Vice President of Destination Development, and Sachie York, Manager of Content and Digital Community.

Katy Clair presents via a PowerPoint presentation on visitor management strategies realized through Travel Oregon's messaging campaigns. Shares that in August, the Travel Oregon marketing team paused any "travel now" messaging at the direction of the Governor's Office. Shares that Travel Oregon has shifted to a safe travel messaging campaign that is reinforced with paid advertising. Describes the target market of this messaging campaign: primarily Oregonians and secondarily likely travelers from Seattle, Northern California, Idaho, and the Tri-cities area ages 18-54. Describes the current circumstances that are driving this messaging campaign.

Sachie shares the messaging strategies to inform the public, influence visitor behavior, and instill community pride. Shares content examples on how these strategies are being shared via social media and on the Travel Oregon website.

Katy addresses the upcoming consumer messaging plan for October through December and their ability to shift messaging as new concerns arise. Shares the virtual events Travel Oregon is planning for media to help drive the narrative about Oregon.

Scott shares a PowerPoint presentation describing Travel Oregon's recovery plans through the Virtual Training, Engagement, and Assistance program and destination management engagements. Scott shares about Travel Oregon's Oregon Outdoor Recreation Summit ongoing virtually until October 19 and direct investments in the Oregon Trails Fund.

## **Welcome Centers**

Scott introduces Allison George, Manager of the Welcome Center Program. Allison shares a presentation via PowerPoint on the Welcome Center teams work sharing key safety messaging, impacting visitor decisions, correcting misinformation and misconceptions, and reminding visitors why they love Oregon. Four Welcome Centers have reopened: Seaside, PDX, Ashland, and Brookings. The remaining four centers are in discussions to reopen in spring 2021. Shares "Take Care Out There" campaign collateral that the Welcome Center staff are distributing as well as COVID-19 safety messaging. Allison thanks Travel Oregon's welcome center teams and all frontline workers in Oregon.

Todd asks the commissioners if they have any questions for Sachie, Katy, Scott, or Allison.

Commissioner Sugahara thanks the group for the presentations. Asks about drops in social media visitation and increases in website traffic and guide orders.

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Kevin Wright, Vice President of Global Marketing, states that Travel Oregon is filling a need on messaging to the public what they can and cannot do due to COVID-19 and wildfires. The Global Marketing team uses performance metrics on each article or post by Travel Oregon and can respond with more high-performing content accordingly. Kevin notes that Travel Oregon is watching marketing campaigns by neighboring states, like California, but continue to hold off on brand awareness campaigns until the time is right in Oregon.

Commissioner Willitts asks what Travel Oregon is doing to address the current perception of downtown Portland.

Kevin shares that he is in continuous communication with Travel Portland and aware of their marketing plans so that Travel Oregon can support their recovery. Katy shares that Top Chef in Portland will create room nights in the immediate future and drive a new perspective on the city when it airs spring 2021.

Commissioner DiNovo speaks to the misinformation around Portland at the national level and the rumors she hears in rural communities. Addresses that she would like to see Travel Oregon address this directly to inform rural Oregonians.

Katy and Kevin acknowledge that they have heard this feedback and will continue to work with Travel Portland to address this need.

## **Oregon Tourism Leadership Academy & Travel Oregon Partnership Update**

Todd introduces Teresa O'Neill, Vice President of Global Strategic Partnerships. Teresa shares a presentation via PowerPoint to discuss the Oregon Tourism Leadership Academy (OTLA). Discusses the live-broadcasted webinar presented at OTLA on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Describes ongoing trainings with RDMO partners on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Teresa introduces Jason Brandt, President and CEO of Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association. Jason presents on the Oregon Tourism Leadership Academy, including the strategic imperatives that drive the program, the first-year class schedule, and the selection process for new applicants.

Todd thanks Teresa and Jason for their work.

## **Other Business**

Chair Youngblood thanks all presenters and Commissioners for their time today. Chair Youngblood states that the economic impacts shared today are sobering and highlights the resiliency of our industry when faced with adversity. Chair Youngblood closes the meeting by thanking the entire team at Travel Oregon.

Chair Youngblood notes that the next scheduled Commission meeting is December 15, 2020. The meeting adjourned at 12:26pm.