

# OREGON TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING

March 11, 2024

Salem Convention Center  
Santiam Rooms 4-6  
202 Commercial St. SE  
Salem, OR 97301

**Tourism Commissioners present included:** Chair DiNovo, Vice Chair Willitts and Commissioners Travis Hill, Harish Patel, David Penilton, Maria Ponzi, Erin Stephenson, David Gremmels and Scott Youngblood.

## Welcome and Introductions

Chair DiNovo opens the meeting at 1:32 p.m. and welcomes everyone to the March 11, 2024, Oregon Tourism Commission meeting.

Chair DiNovo thanks everyone that is here today in Salem, and those joining through Travel Oregon's Industry YouTube channel, noting that today's meeting materials, including the agenda and supplemental material can be found on the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Chair DiNovo acknowledges that in holding a meeting today, all Public Meeting notice requirements were met. She acknowledges that there is a sheet to sign up to provide public comment in the room.

The Oregon Tourism Commissioners and Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon, introduce themselves.

## Chair Remarks

Chair DiNovo speaks to the opportunity for the Commission meeting to be held in Salem, and thanks the Travel Oregon staff for their work preparing the Governor's Conference and its theme "Stewarding Oregon's Future".

## Local Welcome

Chair DiNovo states that in holding these meetings around the state, we have the unique opportunity to hear from local industry members. She introduces Dawnielle Tehama, Executive Director of Willamette Valley Visitors Association (WVVA), and Angie Villery, President & CEO of Travel Salem.

Dawnielle acknowledges the birthday of Travel Oregon CEO, Todd Davidson.

Dawnielle shares a PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit A & [handout](#)) regarding efforts happening in the Willamette Valley including:

- Accessible trails with Trail Keepers of Oregon
- Consumer facing assets
- McKenzie River travel project
- Adaptive mountain biking
- Transformational travel council
- Regional sports, events and partnerships.

Dawnielle introduces the Willamette Valley Visitors Association interns, Quinna Sypher, Regenerative Marketing intern, and Josh Oakley, Sports Coordinator, to share more about their specific projects in regenerative marketing and sports tourism.

Commissioner Ponzi states her appreciation of the agritourism economic study completed by WVVA and OSU Extension.

Commissioner Gremmels states his appreciation of regenerative tourism practices and the agritourism economic study.

Commissioner DiNovo shares her appreciation of the 'small but mighty' WVVA team and acknowledges Dawnielle's recent award as the National Tour Association's (NTA) Woman of Vision.

Dawnielle introduces Angie Villery, President & CEO of Travel Salem.

Angie shares a PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit B) regarding efforts happening in the Salem region (Marion and Polk Counties) including:

- New Travel Salem facilities
- Forbes names the Willamette Valley one of the top 50 destinations in the country
- New commercial air services out of Salem Airport
- Wine Country marketing campaign
- Third year of IronMan70.3 of Oregon and have just signed another 5-year contract
- Resilient Headwaters trail system
- Tourism Economic Development Consortium
- OSU interns efforts to support local tourism and cultural heritage organizations
- Resident engagement via street art and block parties
- Dine around in Salem during the Governor's Conference

Commissioner Penilton states his appreciation for the community work happening in the Willamette Valley and the Salem airport service.

Commissioner Patel asks about the status of resilient headwaters trails. Angie answers that many trails still have work to be completed before being deemed safe.

Chair DiNovo asks about the cultural heritage organizations that Travel Salem is supporting with interns. Angie answers that Deepwood Estate, Willamette Heritage

Center, Capitol Mall Visitor Services, and one more partner. All needed social media, content creation and website development work.

Chair DiNovo thanks the presenters for their work and the tokens of appreciation.

### **Stakeholders, Partners and Public Statements**

Chair DiNovo states that on Wednesday, February 28, 2024 the Commission Meeting notice was posted to the Commission Meeting webpage on Travel Oregon's industry website. Notice was sent via Travel Oregon's industry communications and the agenda and link to the livestream were also posted. Stakeholders had the opportunity to review materials in advance of today's meeting. She reminds the group that the public comment period is an invitation to the industry to inform the Commission of updates, information, and constructive thoughts about Oregon's tourism industry. She reminds attendees that a comment form lives continuously on the industry website.

Chair DiNovo states that one comment was received prior to the Commission meeting from Joann Gauer and has been distributed to the Commission. Chair DiNovo states that Travel Oregon will connect Ms. Gauer with the Oregon Department of Transportation for a possible solution.

Chair DiNovo welcomes Sue Densmore, Exec. Director of Friends of Oregon Caves and Chateau, to the dais.

Sue updates the Commission on the Chateau restoration and the historic furnishing plan. Sue acknowledges a book will be released soon about the history of the Chateau from 1874 to 2017. Sue states that a blue ribbon committee has formed, including Commissioner Gremmels, to forward the restoration work. Sue states that a funding gap for chateau renovation must be filled. A webinar will be held in late April to share project status and hopefully lead to a capital campaign. Sue states that there is support from National Parks Director Chuck Sams to keep the Chateau as an overnight lodging facility. Sue thanks the Commission for funding to support National Historic Landmark designation.

Commissioner Gremmels thanks Sue for her diligence, perseverance and passion.

Commissioner Patel asks that if the funding gap is met, what will be the total expected cost of completion. Sue acknowledges that is difficult to share one number but the project may need to be done in phases.

### **Commission Business**

Chair DiNovo confirms that the Commissioners received the Commission materials (Exhibit C) and had the opportunity to review the contents including the financials with Vice Chair Willitts, Todd Davidson and Kathleen Stewart.

Vice Chair Willitts reviews the financial information stating that:

- The fiscal year-to-date financials (FY2024) were included in our Commission materials and have been posted to the Industry Site.
- Looking at current FYTD, as updated during the financials call February 20th, through February we have received \$30.7M in Transient Lodging Tax (TLT), or 70% of the current \$43.7M budget.
- Year-over-year, TLT is down 3% compared to the same time frame FY2023. Please note that the TLT funds we receive are based on the Oregon Department of Revenue's timing and processing of the tax returns.
- Compared to FY2019, TLT is up 23% after adjusting for the change in the tax rate.

Todd provides some additional context as to how Travel Oregon will pause and/or postpone some program work along with some future employee recruitments to help bridge the gap of the current funding which is forecasted to be about 7.5% down in revenues for the biennium.

Todd states that because RCTP funding is based on the calendar year collection, there will be no changes to the amount of funding for FY25.

Todd states that there is no intention of touching the reserve fund.

Chair DiNovo asks that any changes to the budget will be brought to the Commission at the June Commission meeting. Todd acknowledges that the monthly financial meetings will continue to monitor expenses and revenues and should a budget modification be required, it will be brought to the Commission in June.

Todd acknowledges the work of Kathleen Stewart to ensure the financial information is digestible for Travel Oregon staff and Commissioners.

## Commission Action

### **Approval of Minutes**

Chair DiNovo states that in an effort to be responsive to the ever-changing technology available, staff is considering a new format to our minutes that will serve as the final public record (statutorily) while also meeting the needs of those who may want to reference our meetings and materials. The Commission looks forward to seeing this effort and will look to adopt the Dec. 2023 and today's meeting minutes at the June 2024 meeting.

### **Approval of Governance Documents**

Chair DiNovo states that in her first remarks as Chair, she committed to continue the good work that our previous Chair Richard Boyles had been focused on – to document and formalize Commissioner roles and processes in a way to establish a library, available for future Commissions to utilize. This work has been ongoing and several weeks ago, two documents were shared with the Commission for review:

- A draft role description for a CEO Evaluation Committee

- A draft role description for the Commission Financial Committee

Chair DiNovo asks for a motion of approval. Commissioner Stephenson moves to approve the CEO Evaluation and Commission Financial Committee Governance documents. Commissioner Gremmels seconds the motion.

Chair DiNovo asks all in favor to say aye. All Commissioners say aye.

Chair DiNovo states that the CEO Evaluation and Commission Financial Committee Governance documents are approved.

### **International Tourism Update & Forecast**

*Greg Eckhart, Global Sales Director*

*Aran Ryan, Tourism Economics*

Todd notes that today's first report is about Oregon's performance with international markets and a forecast of future years.

Todd acknowledges the influence of international visitation and the impacts of Portland as the international gateway to the state.

Greg Eckhart, Global Sales Director at Travel Oregon, and Aran Ryan of Tourism Economics, introduce themselves.

Greg provides the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation regarding current Global Sales efforts (Exhibit D) including:

- Vancouver Canucks and Air Canada media night
- Vancouver Outdoor Show
- Vankantiebeurs Tradeshow in the Netherlands supporting the Delta Air Lines Amsterdam to Portland air service
- Visit USA Switzerland and Holiday World Dublin
- Delta Air Lines Oregon Wine Destination Seminar
- Primary Markets: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Netherlands, UK

Aran continues with the PowerPoint presentation regarding the International Tourism '23 forecast update (Exhibit D).

Aran shares about the US inbound recovery – international visitor recovery is underway, but takes longer than on the domestic recovery. International inbound is gaining momentum – Canada and Mexico have shown favorable recovery. Asia Pacific is lagging in recovery. Despite the headwinds and challenges, Aran states that we are still seeing recovery.

Aran discusses the Oregon inbound forecast:

- Compared with a competitive set of states, Oregon is seeing strong growth and we expect it to continue into 2024.

- Global recovery inbound to Oregon will take time compared to 2019 numbers.
- Canada, Mexico, UK and India are particularly important origin markets.
- Canada, Asia Pacific and Western Europe offer long-term growth potential.
- Data on Canada and Mexico is more limited but should not cause concern with the competitive set
- UK travelers show resiliency and growth for Oregon. Direct air service is certain to impact positively.
- Germany has a strong leisure profile.
- India is showing up as a stronger inbound market than previously thought.

Aran states that they are forecasting more than \$800 million in international visitor spending, over 20% growth more than last year.

Todd acknowledges that these numbers reflect the fact that there is no current Asia Pacific air service into Oregon.

Greg acknowledges the competitive set Oregon compares to is Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Washington.

Commissioner Youngblood asks if there is any data about visitor sentiment during presidential election years. Aran states that he has not seen data to compare visitor sentiment to election years. Greg states that Brand USA does quarterly visitor sentiment studies but does not have specific data for election years.

Commissioner Youngblood is encouraged by the incremental growth from China.

Commissioner Hill asks what the main driver for Canada numbers may be. Aran acknowledges the land/drive market as important.

Commissioner Hill asks what the main contributors to India's growth in Oregon tourism are. Aran states that India is a growing market as well as holds strong connections to family and friends in Oregon.

Greg acknowledges the ten-year reciprocal visa with China and how using those visas may be impacting upcoming visitation.

Todd acknowledges the air lift between China and the US is down and causing more demand.

Commissioner Ponzi asks if there is more data to know what exactly draws the international visitor to Oregon. Greg states UK and German visitors desire space and culinary influences. Canadians may be influenced by tax free shopping. Overall, culinary and natural beauty are strong features. Tourism Economics offers broad data from 2022.

Commissioner Stephenson asks if the data takes perception of what is happening in the competitive set into account to guide decision making. Greg states that no data is

available. Greg states that he plans on requesting business to business sentiment information based on perception.

Todd thanks Greg and Aran for their presentation.

### Travel Oregon with Travel Oregon Campaign Update

*Katy Clair, Brand Stewardship Director*

*Michael Sturdevant, Brand Stewardship Strategist*

Todd introduces Katy Clair, Brand Stewardship Director and Michael Sturdevant, Brand Stewardship Strategist. Katy and Michael provide the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation regarding the current Travel Oregon with Travel Oregon (TOwTO) campaign update (Exhibit E) including:

- Brand awareness and brand ideas
- Marketing objectives
- Almost always on marketing approach
- Rollout timeline
- Campaign statistical results
- Optimizations to paid media buys
  - Evolution of campaign tracking to be actively managed
- Campaign tracking partnerships – Travel Oregon, Wieden + Kennedy, Sparkloft, and Logical Position
- Campaign reporting timeline
- Measuring data points
- Key performance indicators (awareness, traffic, conversion, and visitation)
- Learnings from data monitoring
  - Marketing vitals dashboard
- Native advertising with Taboola – test and learn
- Spring 2024 campaign outlook
- Spring 2024 channels
- Next fiscal year briefing and creative direction

Commissioner Patel asks how secondary markets are decided. Katy answers that budget and certain indicators, such as volume and yield, are factored into.

Chair DiNovo asks about video completions and how they compare to past campaigns – Michael will respond. Katy acknowledges that the past campaign must be compared to broadcast influence given the campaign work during the Oregon22 World Athletics Championships.

Chair DiNovo asks how quickly this new campaign can pivot. Katy answers that staffing has added capacity, campaign partners have added reporting, and staggered buys allows added flexibility.

Commissioner Hill asks about influencers. Katy answers that influencers increased the reach of the campaign.

Commissioner Gremmels appreciates the presentation and receiving the report in advance. Commissioner Gremmels asks if there is additional opportunity for more foreign language content. Katy answers that as international markets rebound, it is a goal to have more campaign exposure in foreign languages and markets. Michael adds that having the Global Sales team within the Brand Stewardship department is adding connectivity.

Chair DiNovo recesses the meeting at 3:39 p.m.

Chair DiNovo reconvenes the meeting at 3:45 p.m.

### **Competitive Grants Update**

*Michelle Woodard, Interim Stewardship Investment Director*

*Jennifer Piper, Exec. Director of Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce*

*Marlee Boxler, Economic Development Coordinator for City of Troutdale*

*Tori Middlestadt, Executive Director of Visit Grants Pass*

Michelle provides the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation updating on results from the most recent Capacity and Small Projects grants (Exhibit E) and introduces several grant recipients who speak to the projects that were completed by the grant award.

- Capacity and Small Project Grants program overview
- Capacity and Small Project Grants program results

Michelle introduces Jennifer Piper, Exec. Director of Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce, Marlee Boxler, Economic Development Coordinator for City of Troutdale, and Tori Middlestadt, Executive Director of Visit Grants Pass.

Jennifer describes how the grant funds impacted creating an employee handbook and strategic development process.

Marlee presents the development of a destination management strategy for the City of Troutdale.

Tori presents on the Cave Junction Main Street development and formation of Grants Pass Main Street.

Commissioner Stephenson discusses how important the Capacity grants are and the value to support local DMOs is to create a strong stable economy across the state.

Commissioner Penilton congratulates Marlee for the work to support and change Troutdale.

Commissioner Ponzi thanks Tori for the work she is doing.

Chair DiNovo states that when this kind of work starts, it is contagious and it becomes larger work than what was started.



## RARE Americorps Partnerships & Successes

*Alexa Carey, Destination Stewardship Strategist*

*Titus Tomlinson, RARE Program Manager*

*Arica Sears, Oregon Coast Visitors Association*

*Alana Carollo, Executive Director of Eastern Oregon Visitors Assoc. and former RARE*

Alexa provides the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation on previous and current RARE (Resource Assistance for Rural Environments) placements (Exhibit E) and introduces several current or former placements to hear about their experiences.

Titus shares the impacts of the RARE Americorps program and how these graduate-level students provide capacity to the areas that need it most.

Arica shares how the RARE placement at the Oregon Coast Visitors Association has impacted resiliency for the Oregon Coast through various programs.

Alana shares how the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association has leveraged the RARE program to build capacity and resources.

Vice Chair Willitts applauds the RARE program and the added capacity it has provided to the Sisters area.

## Preview of 2024 Oregon Governor's Conference on Tourism

*Lisa Itel, Industry Relations Director*

*Matthew Finn, Industry Relations Coordinator*

Lisa and Matt provide the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation on what the Commission and attendees can expect over the course of the next several days (Exhibit E) including:

- Content around the conference theme of "Stewarding Oregon's Future"
- Keynote speakers and breakout sessions
- Accessibility vendor showcase
- New additions to the conference – pledge wall, name badge ribbons, dine around, and mobile learning labs
- Night Out celebration
- Sponsors and exhibitors

Todd thanks Lisa and Matt for their role in the conference.

## Other Business

Chair DiNovo states that before we adjourn today, she would like to acknowledge the service of a Commissioner whose time on the Commission is coming to an end – Commissioner Maria Ponzi who has served on the Commission since 2018 will be leaving the Commission to pursue other endeavors.

Chair DiNovo states what a pleasure it has been to get know you over these last 5 years and thanks Commissioner Ponzi for the contributions she's made to this commission and the industry. Her family have been innovators and trailblazers in the wine industry. Commissioner Ponzi has also been an inspiration to young women aspiring to be bold and fearless leaders.

Todd thanks Commissioner Ponzi for her work in the wine and tourism industries.

Commissioner Ponzi states what a privilege and honor has been to serve on the Oregon Tourism Commission over the years.

Chair DiNovo congratulates Todd for his 30 years of service to the state of Oregon.

Chair DiNovo thanks Commissioners Stephenson, Penilton and Vice Chair Willitts for their role on the Commission Finance Committee. Chair DiNovo acknowledges that she and Vice Chair Willitts will participate in the upcoming RCTP RFP committee. Chair DiNovo thanks Commissioners Gremmels, Youngblood and Vice Chair Willitts for their upcoming participation at Destination Capitol Hill.

Chair DiNovo states the next Oregon Tourism Commission meeting will be in early June and more information will be posted on the Travel Oregon industry website.

Chair DiNovo adjourns the meeting at 5:06 p.m.