

## History of the McCurtain County Tourism Tax

- In the late 1990's there were approximately 100 cabins in the Hochatown area. They were called Broken Bow Get United Now, BBGUN, and promoted around the Dallas area.
- The idea for the tourism tax came from two Kiamichi Owa-Chito Festival board members Quintus Herron and Jim Monroe. They approached Terry Walker asking him to work on getting legislation for a tourism tax. Terry was the driving force leading the efforts to ensure tax was enacted.
- It took two senators ten years to get legislation passed for the county tourism tax. They worked alongside key members from McCurtain County: Terry Walker, Michelle Finch, Dave Smulyan, and Chandra Rickey.
- McCurtain County was the first county in Oklahoma to have a county wide tourism tax.
- The original legislation stated that only counties that border two states could have a county lodging tax.
- The legislation for the McCurtain County Tourism Tax passed in 2002 for 10 years. This meant a 3% tax would be collected from guests staying in a furnished structure or room within McCurtain County. Excluding Broken Bow, Idabel, and Valliant city limits.
- The founders were diligent in keeping 90% of the funds to be spent on marketing McCurtain County. Of the 90%, less than 10% is spent on administrative purposes. The remaining funds went to the county general fund.
- The first McCurtain County Tourism Authority board members were Beavers Bend State Park Manager, Terry Walker, Chandra Rickey, Dennis Bailey, Terry Matlock, Sherri Julian, Jerry Speck, Dave Smulyan and Alternate Randy Coleman. Original county commissioners were Jim Freaney, Aubrey Thompson, and Jimmy Westbrook.
- The main goals of the original board were to use funds for advertising the area, build tourism to become year-round, help create jobs so that young people in McCurtain County wouldn't have to leave the area to find work, and to put McCurtain County on the map as a tourist destination.
- Some of the concerns of the board in the beginning included: county image, the attitudes of the community, trash and roadside care, people

being uneducated on the benefits of tourism, and lack of understanding by the locals of what the tourism authority is trying to accomplish.

- The tax began being collected in September 2002; Charity O'Donnell was hired in May 2003 to form the McCurtain County Tourism Authority. The very first year very little money was spent. So that the following year they could budget with the previous year's collections.
- Since the Broken Bow Chamber of Commerce was founded to promote the area, lake, and park, the MCTA board decided to partner together and run McCurtain County Tourism out of the same office and share expenses.
- The first advertising was done in print publications, State Guides, Oklahoma Today magazine, Dallas Morning News classified ads in the travel section, The Oklahoman, and the board promoted tourism here by attending trade shows.
- BJ Zimmerman started the cabin management concept here even before the tax was passed. In 2003, there were about 200 cabins.
- The first website for McCurtain County Tourism was [www.mccurtaincountygetaways.com](http://www.mccurtaincountygetaways.com). Beginning tag lines and campaign's early on were Oklahoma's Best Kept Secret or Southeast Oklahoma's Little Piece of Paradise.
- The Richland Group out of Ft Smith was the first Ad agency hired. Then the Renard Group out of Tyler Texas. Then Creative Options out of Grapevine Texas. Cubic Creative in Tulsa was next then Insight Creative Group.
- After the initial 10 years of the tax being collected, it was made permanent in 2012. To get legislation passed it was decided to keep the tax at 3%. The board felt it adequate and there was no need to increase the tax percentage.
- The county still received 10% of the 3% and from that point forward McCurtain County Fair Board began getting 5% of tax for fair ground upgrades.
- In July 2022, Advertising Grant funding became 100% reimbursable up to the first \$5,000. And a Special Tourism Development Grant program went into effect.
- In July of 2023, MCTA decided to rebrand to Beavers Bend Cabin Country.