

McCurtain County Tourism Authority Minutes

Held Tuesday, May 20th, 2025 - 10:00 AM

The meeting was held in the Broken Bow Area Chamber of Commerce at Broken Bow Public Library in the community meeting room at 404 N. Broadway in Broken Bow.

Chairman Dave Smyl an called the meeting to order at 10:01 A.M.

Board Members present: Dave Smulyan, Jerry Don Smith, Tommy Julian, and Ed Fulmer. **Absent Board Members:** Wenda Blankenship and Amy Keeling. *Amy Keeling sent in her resignation the day before this meeting.* Executive Director, Charity O'Donnell, and Communications Specialist Laura Lester were also present. The guests in attendance were Kristina Warta, City of Broken Bow; Tawsha Davenport, The Broken Bow Theatrical Society; Samatha Miller, The Broken Bow Theatrical Society; Jocelyn Howell, US Forest Service; John McQuaig, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife; Michele Rice, Choctaw Landing; Ashely Patel, Choctaw Landing; Brianna Reed, Forest Heritage Center; Haley Harris, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department; Alena McDaniel, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department; Shelee Buzan, Forest Heritage Center; James Smith, Broken Bow Theatrical Society; Jackie Lecrone, Idabel Chamber of Commerce; Stevie Steel, McCurtain County Fair board; Heather Barger, High Five Media; Clay Baker, High Five Media; Ryan Plankett, High Five Media; Earle Haggard, High Five Media; Todd Utz, High Five Media; Kregg Lee, High Five Media; Anna Mann, High Five Media; Lindsey Harford, High Five Media; Jess Crist, High Five Media; Katy Livingston, Madden Media; Rachel Miller, the Signal Factory; Kyle Stauffer, Madden+Signal; Wes Condray, Madden+Signal; Emilie Harris, Madden+Signal; Brett Gordon, Madden+Signal; Matt Farley, Insight Creative Group; Erin Acuff, Insight Creative Group; Kevin Murray, Insight Creative Group; Rusty Duncan, Insight Creative Group.

Advertising Grant Presentations: Haley Harris, Brianna Reed, Shalee Buzan, and Alaina McDaniel presented information about the Beavers Bend Folk Festival scheduled for November 14-16th, 2025. Haley stated this will be the 30th Festival and that last year they had just over 30,000 people attend the festival. She stated that she felt this advertising grant is the reason for it, stating that being able to advertise in more places brought more visitors to the festival.

Then Jackie with the Idabel Chamber spoke about their Fall Festival, which will be held October 4, 2025, she stated this past year the festival attendance was up and people were here buying things in downtown Idabel. They did a live remote with

East Texas Broadcasting and that they added a Texarkana station, she believes it helped boost visitors.

Jackie then went on to talk about Dogwood Days, scheduled April 3-4, 2026. She said this year's Dogwood Days was down due to severe weather and tornado warnings. She stated despite the horrible weather her vendors still came and set up and stayed. She said the sirens were going off and people were still standing in line at the food trucks. The vendors that came did wonderfully, they just did not have the usual foot traffic. This year The Idabel Chamber is looking to expand advertising to the OKC market. She wants to try to draw people from the area to the festival. She stated an advertising grant would be helpful in helping to achieve this goal. Jackie stated they are doing 4 festivals this year Summer Fest, Fall Fest, Dogwood Days, and Mingle and Jingle in December.

Kristina W. from the City of Broken Bow spoke about Fall in Love downtown, scheduled for October 11, 2025. She stated that this one increase from last year. Okie Gras scheduled for March 14, 2026, went from 3,000 to 4,600 people in attendance for the second year of the festival. Winter Wonderland happens all of December this year they plan to expand advertising to the Durant/Denison area, and this is what they plan to do with this grant and this grant will help tremendously in doing this.

McCurtain County Rodeo is scheduled for July 31-August 2nd. Stevie Steel got up and presented his grant, he spoke about their advertising plan for the rodeo and the McCurtain County Free Fair in September 3-6, 2025. He said the advertising paid off and they had more visitors this past year than in the past several years. This year they want to reach Dallas and do some advertising since they get rodeo contestants from the 4-state area, so they would like to market in those areas and try to pull more visitors from those areas.

Then Broken Bow Theatrical Society spoke about 4 plays upcoming they are the following: Little Women scheduled for August 22-24, 2025; A new partnership play with the VFW featuring Letters from War which will be held November 3rd (this will be a fundraiser for the VFW hall); A Christmas Carol will be held December 11-14, 2025; and Disco Deceptions which is a dinner theater style play which will be held April 16-18, 2026. Samantha Miller spoke a little about each.

Then Jocelyn Howell, US Forest Service; John McQuaig, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife spoke about the Red Slough Map, they were asking for help printing a new map. She stated that the last map print was in 2017, and they are now all gone, and more are needed with updates. They spoke about how unique Red Slough is and all the diverse visitors that come to visit. Jocelyn stated that visitors from 12 countries

visited Red Slough last year. The Red Slough averages 70 visitors daily. John spoke about the waterfowl hunters that utilize the map for hunting boundaries. And how necessary the maps are for them to operate.

Charity reported that she had heard back from Chantell Fuller on the Wright City Rodeo grant, she couldn't make the meeting however she is asking for the same amount as last year and sent in all the grant information prior to this meeting. Dave briefly went on the submitted grant explaining the annual event is July 1-4th.

Special Project Grant presentations: Kristina from the City of Broken Bow presented a proposal for Winter Wonderland, Kristina explained about last year's grant helped with the ice-skating rink which was a tremendous draw. This year they would like the grant to go toward more lights that they would like to stretch around the pond and add to the walking path. She stated that they increased visitation from the first year to last year to over 3,000 more people. Dave Smulyan cautioned people to check on tariffs for their grant quotes. Kristina stated that she doesn't think she will incur any because of it is a American Craftmanship company.

Jackie Lacrone spoke next on the Idabel Chamber of Commerce Outdoor Holiday Décor grant request, she explained that last year they were able to add last year a 18-foot tree, replace two missing wise men, and some smaller décor for the chamber office. Today she explained that she is asking for 3 foot trees to go in all the planters in downtown Idabel to enhance the downtown walking area.

Then Jackie Lacrone spoke about the City of Idabel Holiday Décor, she stated on behalf of Mayor Young, who was attending another meeting, the City of Idabel is wanting to put more décor in front of the Post Office and for new décor for the police and fire department.

Charity O'Donnell presented a grant for the Broken Bow Area Chamber of Commerce she stated previously that the city had always put lights at the main intersection with their tree. But last year they did not. So, she is asking for a grant to purchase the words a pre-lit Merry Christmas sign and a pre-lit train to put at the main intersection by the tree that is normally there. She also mentioned that she hopes to get some décor for that location. The chamber is wanting the train because the old engine 227 that the chamber decorates every year is becoming structurally unsafe to climb on and put lights on. Charity doesn't know how much longer they will be able to decorate the actual antique engine. She stated she picked a company in Dallas and the items are already in stock in the Dallas warehouse.

Next up were Brianna Reed and Shalee Buzan with the Forest Heritage Center, she presented a grant proposal for a Tree Bear Play Zone. She explained that the

Museum of the Red River has this great kids' area and that the Forest Heritage Center has nothing of the sort. So, they want to give the kids a safe, educational place for them to play and learn about the forest. It would go by the amphitheater at the Heritage Center by the picnic tables. They want to get interactive play equipment, made in America, forest themed play items and mulch to put down in the area. Brianna explained that they didn't utilize the previous request for this fiscal year for the ADA compliant exit ramp due to State Tourism learning of the situation. The state deemed it an emergency task and fixed everything without the help of the MCTA grant.

Dave thanked everyone who presented proposals and told them they were welcome to stay for the rest of the meeting if they wanted to. The following people left Kristina Warta, City of Broken Bow; Tawsha Davenport, The Broken Bow Theatrical Society; Samatha Miller, The Broken Bow Theatrical Society; Jocelyn Howell, US Forest Service; John McQuaig, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife; Brianna Reed, Forest Heritage Center; Haley Harris, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department; Alena McDaniel, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department; Shelee Buzan, Forest Heritage Center; James Smith, Broken Bow Theatrical Society; Jackie Lecrone, Idabel Chamber of Commerce; Stevie Steel, McCurtain County Fair board at 10:50 am.

High Five Presentation: Next ad agency finalist High Five entered the room. Their team was the following: Heather Barger, Clay Baker, Ryan Plunkett, Earle Haggard, Todd Utz, Kregg Lee, Anna Mann, Lindsey Harford, and Jess Crist. Their presentation began at 10:59 am. They thanked the board for making them a finalist. Highlights of their presentation included recommendation of Map of open cabins to be added to website, Biggie the AI bot on website, having someone actively responding to social media ads and posts as many are asking questions and wanted to interact, they say they feel it isn't being done. They explained we are posting and ghosting and for this type of information we need to post and interact with fans and follow up, so it leads to bookings.

High Five went over creative samples with us from every medium. They gave some great stats on how much the community has improved in the last 20 years. It was explained that we were a dying county and our population was decreasing. He explained he researched our area and what people were saying on social media extensively.

Clay stated that two things cause bad morality, failure and propaganda and everything leads back to those two things. Clay stated that, after analyzing all the numbers, we are far from failing. In fact, what we've accomplished over the past 20

to 25 years is incredible, and the progress we've made as a country is one of the most impressive stories yet. He said propaganda everyone is saying different messages because they think it is not always the truth, and it is important that MCTA and its community work to get past that and educate people on the truth.

He said if given this account he would flood the internet with good things to celebrate and all the positives. He states we need to be proud of what we have done for our county. In 2003 this county was struggling, the people were struggling. In 23 years so many jobs have been created. The average income has increased, and retail sales tax increase are unbelievable. He stated it was 3.1 million in 2010 to nearly 6 million in 2022. He said the crime rate dropped and we have more people coming here. He said 30 to 50 thousand strangers come to our county every week and every year our crime rate continues to decline yearly. He stated violent crime is down dramatically.

Clay also spoke about how income and wealth has doubled. Infrastructure advancements are happening, and if taxes were not increasing these would not be possible. He stated the graduation rate in 2003 was 79% in McCurtain County and last year it was 92%. He gave many more statistics to make his point. He said we created this opportunity, and we need to encourage people to be proud of our area and we need to educate them on how better off we are. Then they asked us for our business and exited the room at 12:15pm.

Madden + Signal Factory Presentation: Then the next ad agency finalist Madden + Signal Factory entered the meeting, the following entered the room and set up for their presentation: Katy Livingston, Madden Media; Rachel Miller, the Signal Factory; Kyle Stauffer, Wes Condray, Emilie Harris, and Brett Gordon. The board and guests took a brief break to get their lunch while they sat up. At 12:29 PM, Madden + Signal Factory began their presentation.

They introduced themselves and thanked up for the opportunity to present. Brett talked about flying in and driving here, and the pine tree smells and the laid-back vibe, they stated that is what they are wanting to use to get others to want to come here and experience. They showed this great video that showcased all their video production skills. It talked about creating a legacy a making others realize visitors won't want to leave and will keep coming back.

They talked about the partnership between Madden and Signal Factory; he explained that Madden is this big powerhouse agency that specializes in tourism development and promoting destinations and that Signal Factory will bring their world class production and creative along with the local link needed. He said even though Madden is based in Arizona they work remotely from all over and our team

would be regionally based in the 5 surrounding states. He explained that they are a combined effort and how both companies would work together to make our destination better.

Katy stated that we are poised for growth and that we just completed an awesome rebrand, so we want to make sure that it is always core to our messaging. She stated that you will see some messaging that creates a feeling of tradition. We want people that are passionate about our area to come here, stay longer, and keep coming back.

Brett explained about their tourism experience and that they have 200 destinations annually, which brings buying power and experience of how to handle things that we are experiencing because others have already tackled it. He spoke about the regional team and how it would make everything seamless interactions between the two agencies. He stated that they use data differently than others, that is what helps them stand out because they are not paying for those resources.

Wes spoke about the data they use. He mentioned that our core audience is DFW, OKC, Tulsa. He mentioned that Houston market isn't in our top three, however, the stats show they stay longer when they visit our area. Wes explained about different audiences the Family Traveler, the Girlfriend Getaway, and the Fishing Enthusiast. They did interviews with people who have visited here and their thoughts and experiences focusing on the human truths of our visitors.

They showed us multiple creative ideas with some different concepts implemented in samples of all media channels. They spoke about the media plan and how they would spend it. They spoke about interviewing locals and their thoughts, some residents talking to them said they know we need tourists, but we don't want them and some locals that get it and they are the most welcoming people to the travelers here. We must continue to drive positive messaging.

They then played a video of local business owners that they interviewed about our area. They also recommend Hospitality training and a local's day once a year for locals to experience activities so they can help speak better to others about these things. They also talked about the need for conservation and itinerary buildings to extend stays here. Then they went over budget plan. They played another video summing everything up that they presented. The board asked several questions, and they left. Their presentation and questions ended at 1:35 pm. They left the room.

Insight Creative Group Presentation: At 1:36 our current ad agency Insight Creative Group entered the room and began setting up. Matt Farley, Erin Acuff, Kevin Murray, and Rusty Duncan started the presentation at 1:50pm.

They gave brief introductions, then played a recap video. Matt spoke about our great partnership and the pivotal rebrand. Over the past three years, there has been a 25% increase in lodging tax revenue. In the past year alone, our social media following has grown by 34.3%. We also discussed that 1.4 million people have visited our website, and a total of 18,604 users have accessed our app.

Matt spoke about how video and media are the biggest parts of our account. He explained that this past year we were able to do a Tourism Economics study, and we are just now getting some of the results. In 2024, 2.8 million visitors, \$474.6 million in visitor spending, supporting nearly 4,000 jobs in the area, affected \$158.5 million dollars in personal income. \$32.4 million in state and local taxes that fund schools, roads, bridges etc. He stated that if you were to take away tourism each household in McCurtain County would need to be taxed an additional \$2,867 per year to replace the visitor generated tax revenue that is coming in. Finally, the total economic impact for McCurtain County is \$626.4 Million. He said this is what we have done so far, now it is time to discuss the plan. Goals to increase tax revenue, increase website visitation, target cabin inventory gaps, and support local businesses.

Erin Acuff went on to discuss some travel trends and why it is important. She stated that now 48% of people book travel plans within the month they plan to take the trip. US Booking lead times have been on the decline for the past couple of years. 73% of people prefer road trips to flying. 68% prefer to vacation to places they have been before. 53% of our visitors come from Texas. 55% want a new experience when they return to the same vacation destination. Most of our growth is repeated visitors to our area. Erin also spoke about our visitor demographics and our target audience. She stated that our geographic focus is Dallas-Fort Worth, OKC, Shreveport, and Tyler.

Kevin then went over creative concepts and plans for video for the next year. They also spoke about partnerships for the next year. Erin went over ad strategy and budget, and plan schedule, media mix, market mix, and video content plan. Matt discussed that they want to do even more video. He spoke about it being important to be local stewards of the brand. Matt spoke about the website and discussed the plan for the June business summit. ICG's presentation and questions session ended at 3:23pm. ICG then left the meeting.

Discussion and possible action to approve the ad agency for the 2025-2026 fiscal year: A motion was made by Ed Fulmer to approve Insight Creative Group (ICG) to be our ad agency. Tommy Julian seconded the motion, the motion carried

unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Consideration and possible action to approve the budget for July 1, 2025,

through June 30, 2026: A motion was made by Tommy Julian to approve the budget as presented. Ed Fulmer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion, consideration and possible action to approve the following advertising grant proposals and amounts for fiscal year July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026:

Beavers Bend Folk Festival \$5,850.00, Idabel Chamber of Commerce Fall Festival \$10,000.00, Idabel Chamber of Commerce Dogwood Days \$10,000.00, City of Broken Bow Fall in Love with Downtown \$5,000.00, Winter Wonderland advertising \$5,000.00, Okie Gras \$5,000.00, McCurtain County Rodeo \$7,600.00, McCurtain County Free Fair \$7,600.00, Wright City Rodeo \$6,000.00, Broken Bow Theatrical Society Little Women \$4,000.00, Broken Bow Theatrical Society Christmas Carol \$4,000.00, Broken Bow Theatrical Society Disco Deceptions Dinner \$4,000.00, Broken Bow Theatrical Society/VFW fundraiser Letters \$4,000.00, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Ouachita National Forest Red Slough Brochure/Map print request \$4,000.00. Charity was asked to let the Theatrical Society know we cannot reimburse for actual programs with advertising in them and because they are used the night of the play, so they really are not considered prior advertising. Ed Fulmer made a motion to approve them, and Tommy Julian seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Consideration and possible action to approve the special projects grants that were presented this morning:

The board members discussed that it is important to give back and help bring more people here with these projects. Ed Fulmer made the motion to approve the following special projects were City of Broken Bow Winter Wonderland \$24,999.00, Idabel Chamber of Commerce Holiday Outdoor Décor \$24,500.00, City of Idabel Holiday Outdoor Décor \$24,947.75, Broken Bow Area Chamber of Commerce Holiday Outdoor Décor for main intersection \$24,000.00, Forest Heritage Center Play Zone \$8,000.00. Tommy Julian seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion, Consideration and possible action to approve 2025-2026 meeting dates:

Charity explained there is a handout that lists the dates in their packets. Ed Fulmer made the motion to approve the minutes as presented. Jerry Don Smith

seconded; the motion passed unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion, Consideration and possible action to approve the board appointments for next fiscal year: Charity stated Tommy Julian and Jerry Don Smith's terms are up June 30th. Tommy Julain handed in his resignation from the board affective June 30, 2025. Jerry Don Smith stated he would continue to serve if allowed. Charity mentioned that Amy Keeling resigned yesterday via email. Ed Fulmer made a motion to accept Tommy and Amy's resignation and ask the commissioners to reappoint Jerry Don Smith for another 3-year term. Tommy Julian seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, abstained; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion and possible action to approve requisitioning officers and receiving officers: A motion was made to nominate Ed Fulmer for requisitioning officer. Jerry Don Smith seconded it. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes. A motion was made by Tommy Julian to have Dave Smulyan and Wenda Blankenship be receiving officers and Ed Fulmer and Charity O'Donnell as requisitioning officers. The motion passed 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion and possible action on DA answer on the HVFD UTV request: Charity stated that she had received an email from the DA since we last met. She stated a copy of email is in the board packets, he said, "This expense would not be in compliance with the lodging tax." Charity stated she let Cristal Joslin know and she thanked us for looking into it. No action was taken as this was an informational update item.

Discussion and possible action to approve the March minutes: A motion was made by Jerry Don Smith to approve the March meeting minutes as presented; the motion was seconded by Tommy Julian. The motion carried 4-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion and possible action to approve the financial report as presented: Charity O'Donnell presented the financial report Ed Fulmer motioned to approve the Financial Report as presented, seconded by Jerry Don Smith. The motion passed unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Purchase Order amounts for March and April were presented and reviewed: Charity pointed out that she canceled the purchase order for Dwight Bomer, she said the day before she was supposed to take him the audit files he emailed and said he

forgot to renew is auditor certification for this year and that he isn't going to renew it because he is retiring She stated she is in the process of looking for a new auditor. Ed Fulmer made a motion to approve the purchase orders and seconded by Jerry Don Smith. The motion passed unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

No new or unscheduled business.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Jerry Don Smith to adjourn the meeting, and the motion was seconded by Ed Fulmer. The meeting ended at 3:59 pm. The motion passed unanimously 4-0. Dave Smulyan, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Tommy Julian, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.