

LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES ADVISORY BOARD SUMMARY OF MEETING

September 24, 2024

The Land Between the Lakes (LBL) Advisory Board (Board) convened at 9:00 A.M. on September 24, 2024, at the Forest Service Administrative Office Building, 100 Van Morgan Drive, Golden Pond, Kentucky, 42211.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public, and it was also made available through a virtual USDA approved meeting tool. To view the recording of the meeting visit: <https://landbetweenthelakes.us/advisoryboardpastmeetings>

Board Members Present:

| | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Walter Battle | Patrick Lemons | Abigale Smith |
| John Zimmer | Johnny Wall | Susan “Ski” Witzofsky |
| David Nickell | Mark Turner | De’Etra Young – Virtual |
| Melissa Parker | Nancy Dawson | Brian Clark |

Board Staff Present:

Rick Lint, Chairperson
Jim McCoy, Designated Federal Officer
Christine Bombard, Administrative Liaison

Facilitators: Jordan Crain and Chris Thornock

Forest Service Staff Present:

Jared Baker, Acting Deputy Area Supervisor
John Westbrook, Special Project Manager
Scott Raymond, Public Affairs Officer
Greg Barnes, Acting Strategic Administrative Services Staff Officer
Jamey Thweatt, Recreation & Engineering Staff Officer
Andy Mowrey, Acting Natural Resources Staff Officer
Russell Harris, Fire Management Staff Officer
Shane Brady, Partnership Coordinator
Chip Littrell, Safety & Occupational Health Officer
Emily Cleaver, Visitor Information Specialist
Abigail Wright, Public Affairs Apprentice

Others Present for all or a Portion of the Meeting:

Randall Kot, Donnie Holland, Risa Perry, Shara Parish, Della Oliver, Stan Humphries, Morgan Alvey-Virtual, Austin Wetherington-Virtual, Jaime Smith-Virtual

Chip Littrell, Safety Officer gave a brief overview of designated exit routes, meeting places, and proper safety protocols.

Jim McCoy, Designated Federal Officer, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He shared that the National Recreation Area (NRA) has been very busy since the last meeting, and there will be much information to present and for the Board to discuss.

A moment was taken to recognize Scott Raymond, Public Affairs Officer for haste and professionalism in assuming command of the LBLNRA Public Affairs Office.

Rick Lint, Chairperson, shared his hope with the group is that they would leave the meeting feeling refreshed and excited about the future. He encouraged everyone to be open about their wishes and concerns and to keep engaging in a dialogue where thoughts are built upon with curiosity.

Old Business, Updates, Questions & Answers – Jim McCoy and Line & Staff

New Maintenance Contract:

Currently, there are three separate contracts all held by Tipton FSI that are set to expire at the end of fiscal year 2025. All of these contracts have now been combined into one large contract, which will increase efficiency and make it easier to manage. Bids are due at the beginning of January 2026 with the selection/award process to follow.

It was noted that the expiring maintenance contract was one of the top five priorities mentioned at the previous meeting, and that the contracting officer was able to extend the contract for another fiscal year, which allowed for more time and space to work through the new contract.

New Land Between the Lakes Association (LBLA) Agreement:

Work is currently being done on the new agreement with LBLA. The new agreement must be in place by January 1, 2025, and lasts five years. This is the biggest partnership in the Southern Region. The hope is to have a working copy of the agreement ready for finalization by mid-October. This agreement is also one of the top five priorities mentioned at the previous meeting.

Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR):

Use of LiDAR will allow better monitoring of LBL in ways that are useful for many projects. This also provides an avenue for partnerships with university students who are learning the technology.

Website:

Currently, our website is in a rebuilding phase. There have been some issues with links being broken and maps not being present. A new partnership was recently entered into with a new contractor who is going to rebuild the website, but it will be a slow process to ensure it is done correctly. There will also be a new application (app) to pair with the new website. The overall goal is upgrading and expanding the visitor experience at LBL.

Point of Sale System:

The same contractor for the website has also taken over the reservation contract for the campgrounds. The contracts with this company have led to a savings of roughly \$600,000.00 annually. The company has experience in 30 states.

Tornado Salvage Sale Environmental Analysis:

The impacts of the tornadoes have had potential impact on how environmental assessments are done. The environmental assessments completed before the tornadoes are being reviewed to ensure that they are still workable moving forward.

There are also species, such as the tricolored bat, that are going to have an impact on projects moving forward. The staff is reviewing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to make sure that all projects with an environmental impact are being completed within the guidelines. So far, none of the projects have required publication under a Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) report.

Chestnuts:

Over half of the chestnuts that were planted are still alive. Staff continue to monitor and water them.

Reburials:

Under the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act, all museums, universities or anyone who receives federal funds are required to sort through their collections and return any burial materials to Native American Tribes. Locally, LBL works mainly with the Chickasaw and Eastern Band of Cherokee, as this is their ancestral grounds.

The heritage department works with the Tribes to find a suitable reburial space and then assists them in reburying the remains. Last year, the Eastern Band of Cherokees reburied 200 boxes and the Chickasaw reburied 400 boxes.

Organizational Reorganization:

The work chart of the office was realigned with the intent to streamline the way work was managed. It was felt that due to the disconnect, certain departments were not benefitting from the bigger network they could be a part of. Overall, the process took roughly four months and was mostly led by staff dialogue. Leadership was also restructured to a line group that focuses on vision and intent of the team.

Woodlands Nature Station Funding:

The building that houses the Nature Station was built over 60 years ago. The last animal enclosure was constructed in 1995, so it is a very dated facility. This fiscal year, \$500,000.00 was received specifically to be spent on the Nature Station, and there is an anticipated \$4.5 million coming in fiscal year 2025 with the same purpose.

LBL has partnered with the National Forest Foundation (NFF) to facilitate the Nature Station back yard renovation. NFF is a congressionally designated partner of the Forest Service and will assist with project management, funds development, and public engagement. Earlier this year, a team visited the Western North Carolina (WNC) Nature Center which is similar to the Nature Station and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Their facility is currently under construction while they are making updates/improvements.

Brandon Spring Group Center Cost of Food Increase:

The proposal is a \$1.00 increase per meal served. The proposed prices are as follows: \$7.00 breakfast, \$8.00 lunch and \$9.00 dinner. The cost of food has increased significantly (i.e., a \$20.00 case of eggs now costs \$40.00). The kitchen staff was recently given a \$2.00 raise to make the position more desirable and competitive. The Board agreed with the proposed fee increase.

Intersession:

It was asked if the Board was satisfied with the current way and frequency that information was being delivered to them. The Board feels the emails are beneficial, but they really appreciate/benefit by being able to view the weekly Operations and Planning meetings. It gives them a better sense of the day-to-day work happening at LBL.

Fishing Derby:

This year over 175 children participated, and 5 different community organizations were represented. The event helped make a name for LBL in the local community.

Wildland Fire:

LBL helped support the Western fire season this summer. There is currently a lack of resources, including people and equipment, to respond to fires. LBL provided over 400 personnel days in support of the fires.

This year, 15,548 acres were burned including the single largest burn in LBL history. Every burn is now documented with photos to show the effects of regrowth. Fire staff also responded to wildfires, abandoned campfires, burn scars and storm cleanup around LBL. There are over 170,000 acres planned to be burned during fiscal year 2025.

There was a core area burned this year. Core areas were created as biosphere reserves under the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Forest Service had chosen to honor the decision not to burn in those areas. It was explained that there was a small area on one side of a road in the burn area that was core area, however there was nothing to distinguish it and in some cases, safety concerns make it difficult to not include certain areas. It was also discussed that a better understanding of why we do or do not burn core areas is needed.

Fiscal Year 2024 Accomplishments:

The siding on the Golden Pond Visitor's Center along with the roof on the Planetarium and Observatory have been replaced. The double pen at the Homeplace 1850s Working Farm was reroofed through an agreement with HistoriCorps, and they plan on working to replace some log siding. Four trail bridges are being replaced. Two new bathhouses were installed at Hillman Ferry and the trail path from the parking lot at the Golden Pond Target Range was paved as well as the area cleaned up.

The large culvert on road 214 has been replaced and we partnered with Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to replace the bridge on Forest Service Road 134. The engineering survey for the Golden Pond Overlook is also complete. Talks with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet have started regarding building an access road to that area.

There is also an official plan of action in place for improvements to Piney campground.

Discussion was had about the possibility of creating a designated hiking/biking trail along the Trace, which is a National Scenic Byway.

Tennessee State University (TSU) Presentation – De’Etra Young, PhD

Dr. Young provided an overview of the college of Agriculture at TSU, sharing they focus on academics, extension and research.

After the presentation, there was discussion about how LBL could better partner with the university to provide opportunities for the students. It was discussed that it would be beneficial for students to be on the ground working and having a chance to see their research in action.

The question was also raised about how to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds feel comfortable and accepted during their time at LBL, which is a predominantly white community and workforce. Suggestions included sending students down in groups and connecting them with local community centers to help combat isolation.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Feral Hog Update - Nathan Klopmeier, Wildlife Specialist, APHIS-Wildlife Services and Brad Robbins, District Supervisor, APHIS- Wildlife Services, Jackson District Tennessee and Kentucky

APHIS first began to catch hogs on LBL in 2014. In 2018-2019, they realized that the population was increasing. In fiscal year 2024, the organization provided 245-person day visits in Tennessee and 227-person day visits in Kentucky.

There are multiple trap styles being used around LBL to capture feral hogs. Aerial gunning has also been used since 2020, and the eastern region has now made a commitment to provide an aircraft for most of the winter gunning season at LBL. The hope is that this will significantly lessen the population of feral hogs on the property.

Why is hunting the hogs independently less effective than the methods APHIS is using? These two methods would actively work against each other, making the hogs harder to eradicate.

Are the hogs a significant factor in the lessening of farm production at LBL? Yes. Because of the type of farming that is happening at LBL, farmers are having to use smaller equipment due to access and types of fields. Farmers are struggling with the decision of if farming here is financially viable.

Preserving the History/Culture of Land Between the Lakes – Board Members and Line & Staff

What does it mean to preserve the culture of Land Between the Lakes? What is culture? It is the shared experience of a group of people rooted in things like food, language, work, etc. There have been multiple cultures on LBL, and it is important that all of them get their stories told. Do we share the good along with the bad? Yes. Facts are facts. We should ensure it is people from

the culture telling the stories.

LBL is currently working on the development of a land acknowledgement statement that hopefully covers the complete history of the land.

There was discussion about using signage to share the names of places used by the previous cultures in LBL. The new technology being used for virtual, interactive signage can also be used to allow displaced people to share their stories and experiences.

Different ideas were discussed for how to best share these stories, including creating a film to be shown at the Planetarium and using the interactive signage at places where certain events happened so people can have a more immersive experience as well as an interpretive glass panel similar to the one at the Golden Pond Overlook that displays the location of the former communities.

Some members brought up concerns that the Homeplace 1850s Working Farm was not an accurate depiction of life in this area at the time, so it may be misrepresenting the culture. Jim shared they are considering a name change of the facility that will not tie it to a specific time period.

The following are 7 practical steps created by the Board to increase cultural awareness:

- Reach out to different groups
- Share the history
- Improvements at the visitors center to tell the story
- Acknowledgement of communities as shown on kiosks and other areas
- Maps of communities that can interpret where they were
- Signage at springs
- Films dedicated to LBL culture

Improving Wildlife Habitat – Board Members and Line & Staff

Are we referring to improving the wildlife habitat for game species, such as deer and turkey, or viewing species, such as birds? Both experiences are important at LBL.

The question of species such as Bob White quail that were once abundant at LBL. What can we do to help reintroduce these species. A member of Kentucky Fish and Wildlife shared that it will be difficult to help increase the population, but one option is to create more diversified areas in LBL. These quail used to inhabit the edges of farmlands, which aren't as prevalent anymore.

It was also mentioned that currently, LBL has one person on staff for biology and wildlife management, and that individual cannot realistically cover every single avenue and issue posed. It was asked what other avenues of support might be available. The tenant farmers that LBL works with were suggested as a possibility.

Another suggestion was to focus on fighting all non-native species. However, the point was made that some non-native species are important for heritage reasons, such as rose bushes at

certain locations. The clarification was made that the language in official documents clarifies non-native and non-preferred species, so some judgement could be executed.

Another thought is to create a map that highlighting all the different types of habitats at LBL, so it is easy for people to view the specific ones they wanted.

There were various opinions on how best to manage the habitats at LBL. Some suggested increasing the prescribed burns to help manage areas and improve viewing, while others advocated for a more hands-off approach, allowing the forests to grow and decay naturally and create habitats that way.

Jim asked how the group would ensure going forward that different opinions were heard and being considered while still maintaining a working, helpful conversation. The recommendation was made to try a variety of options, with no project being the same as the last to ensure that many different suggestions were tried.

The Board was in favor of the actionable item of decreasing the number of people allowed to hunt turkey in next year's quota hunt due to the decreasing trend in the turkey population. Increasing the price of the hunt and also lengthening the amount of time individuals were allowed to hunt on each pass was also discussed.

It was suggested that LBL work to be more accessible. Also, concerns were raised about the Loblolly pines. However, some may be historically significant or difficult to remove.

Public Forum - Questions Received in Response to the Federal Register Notice:

1. Is the Forest Service at LBL still using and following the Sustainable Recreation Plan, which was developed through a multi-year, public input process? The Sustainable Recreation Plan contains many environmental education and natural resource management elements. Response: Yes, Jim McCoy became aware of this document several months ago and specified that it is a working document, so it is meant to help inform plans made at LBL and can be modified if need be.

A. If the Sustainable Recreation Plan is still being used, what tasks or portions of tasks have been accomplished in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024? What tasks are to be worked on in 2025? Response, a full list of accomplishments relevant to the Sustainable Recreation Plan was provided to the Advisory Board members.

B. If the Sustainable Recreation Plan is not being used/followed, when did it stop being used by the Forest Service and why was its use stopped? Response: Not applicable.

2. The LBL Regional Water Trails planning effort was a multi-year, multi-entity effort to identify, map and provide user information for canoe and kayak access points throughout the LBL region. User information contained environmental education and natural resource information. Groups that were a part of this initiative included the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lakes Region Coalition, Little

River Ramp Project and the U.S. Forest Service. An interactive map, which included detailed site and user information was developed and provided on the LBL website. I have been unable to find this interactive map or any water trail information on the current LBL website. Why is the map and water trail information not on the website? Will the map and information be restored to the website and if so, when? Response: With the current website update project, efforts are being made to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being placed on the website. The water trail map will be placed on the new website, which is planned to be available by January 1.

3. The Forest Service follows applicable regulations to post the Advisory Board meeting notices in the Federal Register and in the paper of record. Only a small minority of the public and interested users reads either the Federal Register or the paper of record. Will the Forest Service at LBL commit to posting these meeting notices on its own Facebook, Instagram and other social media sites on the same dates as it posts in the paper of record? This would help ensure that those members of the public who are members of those sites have the opportunity to know about these meetings in advance and have a greater opportunity to provide questions and comments to the Advisory Board. Response: Social media is not the proper avenue for this type of information. It was clarified that without the proper interpretation and context, these meeting notes may not be understood in the proper intended context. The meeting minutes will not be posted on social media.

Closing Statement - Rick Lint, Chairperson

Rick hopes that his goal of the Board feeling refreshed and encouraged after the meeting has been met. He expressed appreciation to the members for their discussion and participation.

The decision was made to reconvene on March 11 and 12, 2025 to allow for a field trip on the second day.

The meeting adjourned at 3:56 PM.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

John Richard “Rick” Lint, Chairperson

These minutes will be formally considered by the Board at its next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.