*Welcome to LLA Reports, a podcast produced by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor’s office. This podcast is intended to be an oral representation of the written report it highlights and is primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature.*

This is Krista Baker-Hernandez. I’m a manager for LLA’s Performance Audit Services. This episode of LLA Reports focuses on our new report titled “Office of State Parks.”

This report provides the results of our audit of the Office of State Parks – or OSP – which is housed within the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism – or CRT. It is the third in a series of reports on CRT.

The purpose of this audit was to evaluate how OSP manages Louisiana’s state parks and historic sites.

We found that low staffing levels present challenges for OSP, which can ultimately affect the number of visitors who come to the state’s parks and historic sites.

While OSP has found alternatives to work around the decreased manpower, such as cross-training employees and loaning staff members from one park to another, the office has had difficulty recruiting new employees because of a smaller pool of candidates and higher salary demands since the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, since 2010, OSP has been required to spend money from the Louisiana State Parks Improvement and Repair Dedicated Fund Account – or 729 Fund – on operations.

Using these funds for operations has helped OSP rely less on state general fund dollars, but it also has contributed to a backlog of repair and improvement needs.

According to OSP, it needs approximately $42 million dollars to keep parks and historic sites operating at expected service levels.

We also found that OSP does not have a current master plan, which would provide the office with a framework to set priorities and determine where to allocate resources.

Additionally, while OSP has implemented maintenance strategies that save time and money, it also should develop a formal process to document repair and improvement decisions.

We found that, despite lower visitation numbers, OSP’s revenue increased 42.9 percent from fiscal years 2016 through 2022 largely due to short-term revenues, including COVID-19 relief funds.

However, while the pandemic resulted in increased visitation, recent hurricanes have reduced the number of visitors because some parks were closed or damaged.

In order to sustain the state’s parks and historic sites and meet the needs of visitors, OSP should evaluate its fee adjustments and pricing strategies. Since fiscal year 2017, OSP has increased various fees and used differential pricing, but further increases may be warranted.

We found as well that, during fiscal years 2019 through 2022, OSP took in $350,424 dollars from revenue-generating agreements, including public-private partnerships to provide services that improve visitors’ experience.

In addition, we found a more cohesive marketing strategy, including developing a marketing plan and having dedicated marketing staff, could improve OSP’s efforts to increase visitation and revenue.

As a result of our report, we developed 10 recommendations.

We recommended that OSP track the amount of 729 Fund expenditures used for operational costs and site repairs and improvements.

We also recommended that OSP develop a master or strategic action plan to document the needs of the state’s parks and historic sites and to provide a framework for determining priorities and allocation of resources.

We recommended as well that OSP formalize the process for selecting maintenance and capital outlay projects, put additional controls into place related to the use of travel trailers by maintenance and repair teams, and expand consistent, non-visitation revenue streams to reduce its reliance on state general fund dollars.

In addition, we recommended that OSP further evaluate the need for increased admission, amenity, and rental fees, and whether to implement other dynamic pricing strategies.

We recommended too that OSP continue to explore additional revenue-generating agreements and build relationships with friends’ groups to help promote the state’s parks and historic sites and increase visitation and revenues.

Finally, we recommended that OSP develop a strategic marketing plan and consider implementing elements from the previous master plan, such as hiring an in-house marketing specialist.

As part of its response, which is included in the report as Appendix A, OSP agreed with all 10 of our recommendations.

*We hope you found this podcast informative, and that you’ll follow future episodes of LLA Reports.*

*This podcast was created as part of the audit report just discussed and is intended primarily for the use of the Louisiana Legislature. Both the full report and the podcast can be found on the LLA’s website at* [*www.lla.la.gov*](http://www.lla.la.gov)*.*

*Thank you for listening.*