



STATE OF ARKANSAS
DEPARTMENT PARKS, HERITAGE AND TOURISM
1 Capitol Mall Ste. 3B
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION
SOLICITATION DOCUMENT

SOLICITATION INFORMATION			
Solicitation Number:	ADPHT-25-026	Solicitation Issued:	9/20/2024
Description:	Request For Information Trails at Mena		
Department:	Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism		

SUBMISSION DEADLINE AND DELIVERY OF RESPONSE DOCUMENTS			
Response Due Date:	10/04/2024	Proposal Opening Time:	2:00 PM, Central Time
<p>Responses should be submitted in one of two ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">As an email attachment in standard document or pdf format to the Office of Outdoor Recreation email address listed below. Include the RFI Solicitation Number as the subject line.On a flash drive mailed in a sealed package to the following address (the outer packaging of mailed responses should be labeled "ADPHT-25-026 RFI Trails at Mena": Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism Procurement Attn: Jeff Griffin 1 Capitol Mall Ste. 3B Little Rock, Arkansas 72201			

AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION			
Procurement Representative:	Jeff Griffin	Phone:	(501) 682-6910
Email Address:	Jeffrey.griffin@arkansas.gov	Alternate Phone:	(501) 682-6829
Alternat Email Address:	Katherine.Andrews@arkansas.gov		

SECTION 1 – OVERVIEW

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism (ADPHT) Office of Outdoor Recreation is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to obtain information from industry experts regarding the Trails at Mena project. The Trails at Mena Project is a trail-focused recreation development project spanning Arkansas State Parks, U.S. Forest Service, and City of Mena managed lands. This project expands upon the City of Mena planning effort for trails at Ward Lake to consider the opportunities on the adjacent State Park and National Forest lands, as well. The project will include a mountain bike trail system that would, through phased development, ultimately, connect the City of Mena to Queen Wilhelmina State Park and may eventually include lift-assisted trails on the west side of the ridge between the two destinations

Information gathered from this RFI may be used to:

- Learn about new technologies, innovations, and approaches to these services
- Make decisions about future project scope, program structure, and what might be reasonably asked of potential partners in project development or future operations
- Gauge the level of qualified interest from potential partners in project development or future operations
- Potentially inform the development of a future formal solicitation

No contract will be awarded as a result of this RFI.

Responses will not be reviewed on a competitive basis, and OSP does not intend to establish or publish formal results. An organization's response to the RFI, or lack thereof, will have no impact on the evaluation of responses to any subsequent formal solicitation.

1.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Intent of the RFI

ADPHT is issuing this RFI for planning purposes with the intent to gather information on future strategic opportunities related to the Trails at Mena project.

This exploratory process will gauge whether there are qualified parties interested in partnering in the design phase of the project with ADPHT, solicit ideas for what an ideal process and partnership may look like, and help shape next steps. Respondents will benefit from involvement in concept development at an early stage and may be invited to meet with project partners to further explore concepts in a workshop format.

The information obtained during the RFI process will be utilized to inform the design of any potential subsequent solicitation and/or eventual partnership, with the goal of identifying a partner or partners to work with ADPHT on implementation and operation of the Trails at Mena.

Purpose

ADPHT is requesting information from interested parties regarding operations of the Trails at Mena project. The goal of the Trails at Mena project is to create an awe-inspiring, multi-faceted trail experience that is compatible with the landscape while providing economic vitality and community wellbeing to the surrounding region.

This project is a unique opportunity to help shape a community's future through outdoor recreation. The model of a downhill gravity park designed specifically to create exceptional mountain biking experiences is a rare opportunity. A willingness to think creatively, work collaboratively, and develop an operating model that matches the character of Arkansas, the Natural State, and the community of Mena will be critical to success.

ADPHT is committed to ensuring that visitors to the Trails at Mena enjoy an exceptional recreation and adventure experience. Interested parties may provide information about project components including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Shuttle Service
2. Lift Operations
3. Trail, Shuttle, and Lift Maintenance
4. Ticketing
5. Safety Services
6. Equipment Rental
7. Instructional Services
8. Retail and Repair
9. Food and Beverage
10. Lodging
11. Supplementary Outdoor Recreational Activities
12. Staffing
13. Aesthetic Design
14. Capital Investment

Background and Context

Introduction: Nestled in the heart of the Ouachita Mountains, Mena, Arkansas, is renowned for its scenic beauty and rich natural resources. The Trails at Mena project is an ambitious initiative designed with a focus on gravity-fed and backcountry trails that allows for the realization of a higher potential for outdoor recreation, economic vitality, and quality of life by capitalizing on the terrain and relationships between local, state, and federal partners. This narrative will guide you through the project's vision, location, design, and its transformative impact on the region.

Location: The planning area for the Trails at Mena is situated approximately 115 miles (2.5 hours) west of Little Rock and 115 miles (2.75 hours) south of Bentonville, within the Ouachita National Forest. It encompasses Rich Mountain, the highest point in the Ouachita Mountains at 2,681 feet and the second highest point in Arkansas. Atop Rich Mountain lies Queen Wilhelmina State Park. The park offers breathtaking views and a fully renovated 40-room lodge that includes a restaurant and conference rooms, as well as 41 campsites (eight Class A, 27 Class B, five tent sites with water, and one hike-in tent site), picnic areas, and trails. The area is bordered to the north and east by the Talimena National Scenic Byway (Highway 88), known for its stunning views of the natural environment. Major metropolitan areas within an approximate 4-hour drive include: Dallas-Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Memphis.

Currently, trail construction is underway at Ward Lake, occupying an area of approximately 160 acres on the north side of town. Significant parts of the project that are located on the US Forest Service property are still pending completion of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review.

The Growing Demand for Trail-Based Recreation: Arkansas, like many other regions, is experiencing a surge in demand for outdoor recreation. Trail-based activities, particularly mountain biking, have seen significant growth. In 2023, 9.2 million people participated in mountain biking, up from 7 million in 2007. Participation rates are notably higher in Northwest Arkansas (8%) compared to the national average. Mountain bikers are often willing to travel long distances—averaging 400 miles—to access quality trails.

Branded as the “mountain bike capital of the world,” Bentonville and the surrounding Northwest Arkansas region has established itself on the global mountain bike atlas. New trail networks are emerging across the state, and the state as a whole is seen as a growing destination for mountain bikers and hikers alike. While Arkansas boasts an impressive mileage of modern mountain bike trails,

many of the existing trail networks have yet to capitalize on the vertical relief and topography that Arkansas, “The Natural State,” has to offer.

A Gravity-Oriented Network: The Trails at Mena project is designed to utilize mechanized support to bring users to the top of a trail network, with the descent as the focus of the experience. With the highest point in the Ouachita Mountains as the climax, Rich Mountain and the Trails at Mena planning area represent an exceptional opportunity for a gravity-oriented trails system.

Unique Utility: The Trails at Mena will be planned and constructed for destination, gravity-oriented downhill cycling. In comparison to other gravity-oriented riding destinations, Mena will hold a competitive advantage in its ability to attract year-round ridership. Without significant snowfall in the winter, and barring some overly hot and humid summer days, the business case for the project will spread demand throughout the year, making for a strong financial case and marketable product to attract surrounding cyclists in key regional markets. The Trails at Mena’s built infrastructure, developed for the project utilizing public funds, establishes Mena as an appealing location for private or nonprofit operational investment.

Project Vision and Goals: The Trails at Mena project aims to leverage the unique topographical features of Rich Mountain to create a gravity-oriented trail network. This network, which utilizes mechanized support to transport users to the top of the trails, with a focus on thrilling descents, is unique in Arkansas. The project’s goals include:

1. **Multi-Faceted Trail Experience:** Create a trail and visitor experience that does not exist elsewhere in Arkansas through varied trail types and circulation through federal, state and city lands.
2. **Economic Vitality and Community Wellbeing:** Cultivate an economic engine for Mena and Southwest Arkansas through the establishment of a unique network of trails and overall experience. Promote wellbeing and enhance the quality of life within the community through additional recreational outlets harnessing the natural and built environment from mountain top to town.
3. **Compatible with Landscape:** Ensure development balances with conservation and land/wildlife management efforts.
4. **Awe Inspiring:** Express intention with design and implementation to create iconic elements and experiences.

Design and Features: The following aspects of the Trails at Mena will be planned and developed by ADPHT and the City of Mena:

1. **Trail Network:**
Varied Trails: The network has potential for over 100 miles of destination-quality trails, featuring easy, moderate, and challenging routes. This includes approximately 30 gravity-specific trails within the 1,300-foot descent of Rich Mountain, alongside 15-20 backcountry trail loops with over 5,000 feet of climbing.

Family & Beginner-Friendly Options: A “backyard” trail system in the Ward Lake Valley, extending from Round Top Mountain to downtown Mena, and beginner-friendly trail opportunities throughout the network will create easy-entry access for all skill levels.
2. **Visitor Experiences:**
Vantage Points: Scenic overlooks provide breathtaking views of the Ouachita Mountains, creating memorable experiences for users.
Rest Areas: Strategically placed benches, picnic tables, and shelters will provide options for comfort and relaxation.
Information Panels: Educational signage will offer insights into the local ecology, geology, and conservation efforts, enriching the visitor experience.

Community and Economic Impact: The Trails at Mena project is expected to have a substantial impact on the local community:

- **Economic Boost and Sense of Place:** Attracting visitors to the area will support local businesses and contribute to economic growth, including business attraction and creation, workforce retention, and enhanced quality of life.
- **Public Health and Wellness:** Trail access provides greater opportunities for wellness and active lifestyles.
- **Connectivity and Mobility:** Additional trail access and an increase in cyclists provides a greater opportunity for the City of Mena to provide several types of infrastructure to support the growth of the community as a biking destination and promote the use of cycling as a mode of transportation.

Future Developments: Future plans for the Trails at Mena project include expanding the trail network and enhancing facilities to further elevate the user experience and solidify the area's status as a premier destination for outdoor recreation. The project may eventually include lift-assisted trails and developments similar to a ski village.

Conclusion: The Trails at Mena project is a landmark initiative that merges community engagement with environmental stewardship. By leveraging Rich Mountain's topographical features, it aims to offer unparalleled recreational experiences, drive economic vitality, and provide awe-inspiring outdoor adventures for generations to come in the greater Mena area. ADPHT looks forward to working with additional partners through this RFI process to make the Trails at Mena project become reality.

1.3 KEY FEATURES OF RESPONDENTS

- A. The State seeks information from qualified respondents who have knowledge of best practices in the industry and among public entities.
- B. The State is especially interested in receiving feedback on this RFI from the following types of firms, organizations, and individuals:
 1. Mountain bike downhill enthusiasts and clubs
 2. Current or former operating entities of ski resorts or mountain bike parks
 3. Individuals or organizations with an interest in running mountain bike parks
 4. Design professionals
 5. Companies that sell mountain bike elements

1.4 QUESTIONS REGARDING THE RFI

- A. Please direct all questions to the contact listed on Page 1 of this Solicitation document.

1.5 RESPONDING TO THE RFI

- A. Respondents should use the *Information Response Packet* to submit their responses.
- B. Respondents should prepare responses simply and economically, providing straightforward, concise descriptions of the solution(s) available, adhering to the page limits specified in the *Information Response Packet*.
- C. The State **shall** have the right to use all ideas, or adaptations of those ideas, contained in any response received to this RFI. While responses to this RFI are optional, all knowledgeable parties are strongly encouraged to provide complete responses.

- D. The State may exercise the option to further discuss the details of submitted response with one or more respondents if it is determined to be in the best interest of the State, but responding or not responding to this RFI will not determine future partnerships.

1.6 PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

- A. The release of public records is governed by the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act (Arkansas Code Annotated § 25-19-101 et. seq.).
- B. Submission documents pertaining to the RFI become the property of the State and are subject to the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- C. In accordance with FOIA, and to promote maximum competition, the State may maintain the confidentiality of certain types of information described in FOIA. Such information may include trade secrets and other information exempted from public disclosure pursuant to FOIA.
- D. Consistent with and to the extent permitted under FOIA, a respondent may designate appropriate portions of a response as confidential by submitting a redacted copy of the response.
- E. By so redacting information contained in the response, the respondent warrants that, after having received such necessary or proper review by counsel or other knowledgeable advisors, it has formed a good faith opinion that the portions redacted are not considered public records under FOIA.
- F. If a respondent deems part of the information contained in a response not to be a public record, the respondent should submit one (1) complete copy of the submission documents from which any proprietary or confidential information has been redacted in their response. Except for the redacted information, the redacted copy should be identical to the original copy, reflecting the same pagination as the original and showing the space from which information was redacted.
- G. The respondent is responsible for identifying all proprietary information and for ensuring the electronic copy is protected against restoration of redacted data.
- H. The redacted copy will be open to public inspection under the FOIA without further notice to the respondent. If the State deems redacted information to be subject to a public record request under FOIA, the State will endeavor to notify the respondent prior to release of the redacted record.
- I. The State has no liability to a respondent with respect to the disclosure of respondent's confidential or proprietary information ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction pursuant to FOIA or other applicable law.