

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
June 22, 2023, Meeting Minutes (*Approved 10/17/23*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) was held at Wentworth Coolidge Mansion in Portsmouth. Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. with a quorum present.

In attendance were Chair Jeff Gilbert for Business; Rick Blanchette/Friends of Wapack; Michael Bruss/Historic Preservation; Tom Chrisenton for Forestry; Buddy Dionne/General Public; Carrie Gendreau/Senate; Robert Harb/House RR&D; Jen Kennedy/Blue Ocean Society; Matt Leahy/SPNHF; John Nyhan/Hampton Area Chamber; Andrew Renzullo/House RR&D; Brett St.Clair/Western Skyline Marketing; Rep Suzanne Vail/RR&D; and Dir Brian Wilson/Div Parks and Recreation. Torene Tango-Lowy served as clerk.

Also present were Meredith Collins/Seacoast Region Supv; Eric Feldbaum/Community Rec; Matt Flanders/BHS; and Johanna Lyons/State Park Planner.

Election of Officers: Chair Gilbert MOTIONED to nominate Mr Nyhan as Vice-chair; seconded by Mr St.Clair. The motion CARRIES, unanimously.

Minutes: Mr Blanchette MOVED to accept the minutes of March 7, 2023; Mr Leahy SECONDED. The minutes were APPROVED as written, with one abstention.

2023 SPAC Goals: Dir Wilson is starting the planning process to update of the Division's Ten-Year Strategic Plan and will seek input from SPAC. The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) required by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program will also serve as a reference for the Strategic Plan. Mr Feldbaum provided an overview of the LWCF program. The SCORP project identifies five top priorities for outdoor recreation: the recreational experience; climate challenges; opportunities for all; health & wellness; and economic vitality.

Mr Dionne camped at Greenfield State Park and said that the parking lot and restrooms need maintenance. He asked how park projects are prioritized. Dir Wilson said that investments enable revenue opportunities and that it is helpful to hear from SPAC members about their experiences in the park system. The Division is working on capital budget projects that close in 2024 and ARPA projects, including utility upgrades and paving. The campground expansion project at Pawtuckaway would add a new loop for RV sites. Public input has resulted in scaling back the project and constructing the campsites further back from the lake. Mr Gilbert said that Parks has done well since the 2005 legislative assessment of the state park system by generating revenue, developing enterprise parks and finding varied sources of funding.

Mr St.Clair was impressed by the 27,000 visitors to Mt Washington State Park. Dir Wilson said that the Mount Washington Commission just completed the 10-year Master Plan which calls for an environmental and facility assessment. Capacity and visitation will be part of the assessment work.

Mr Nyhan asked about the LWCF distribution of 40% to state projects and 60% to municipal projects. Mr Feldbaum said that the distribution formula for NH mirrors the federal allocation of LWCF funding between federal agencies and the states. The Legacy Grant submitted on behalf of the City of Manchester is based on the US Census urban area eligibility criteria.

Mr Chrisenton asked about the electrification projects. Ms Lyons talked about the electrical upgrades for RVs. She said that the Dept of Energy and DOT are the lead agencies for installing EV charging stations statewide. Rep Harb said that EV charging stations should be included in the next 10-year Strategic Plan. Members discussed new technologies in parks and campgrounds and options for user fees. Ms Lyons clarified for Mr Blanchett that the Bear Brook cabins scheduled for demolition are located in the Spruce Pond Camp complex, not at Bear Hill Camp.

Mr Nyhan asked about Parks' partnership with the Div of Travel and Tourism and opportunities for enhanced collaboration. For example, he was at the Montreal Travel Show where 80% of the questions were

related to outdoor recreation, camping and trails. Dir Wilson said that HB2 includes a study commission on tourism and hospitality and that DNCR will be involved with the study commission.

Advise the Director: Dir Wilson gave an overview of the budget bills HB1 and HB2. He thanked the legislators and their constituents for their support of Parks. The budget includes new positions under the Commissioner's Office: a curator, an attorney, a grants coordinator and an IT position. The budget also includes a 10% wage increase plus an additional 2% next fiscal year. These increases are to help recruit and retain state employees. The Parks Fund will need to cover these labor increases within the division. Parks anticipates a \$1.2M increase from the \$1/hour increase in the parking fee at Hampton. We will request Fiscal Committee approval of Cannon fees to fall in line with market rates. The Bureau of Historic Sites is back to being funded by the General Fund. Mr Christenton asked about same-day camping and was informed that Parks sets aside campsites for walk-in campers.

HB2 also enables efficient short-term equipment rentals that is essential for the BOT to quickly respond to trail damage caused by weather, especially in the interest of public safety. Dir Wilson thanked Sen Gendreau for her leadership to allocate \$18M for the Tram. In answer to Chair Gilbert, the Tram project will use the existing infrastructure, add a car, and that the cars are of comparable size in current capacity. Mr St.Clair asked about the Sunapee ski lease payments that are deposited to the Cannon Capital Improvement Fund used to pay Cannon's debt service. *(Note: As of December 2022, the State has received \$4,803,085 in cumulative base fee payments and \$8,207,327 in cumulative commission payments from Mount Sunapee Resort/Vail in accordance with the 1998 Lease.)*

HB2 includes \$150K for a study on accessibility at Hampton Beach State Park and \$1M for repair of the dam at Northwood Meadows State Park supported by Sen Pearl and local constituents. Park revenue is about \$45M/year. For FY2023, Parks has spent its entire budget appropriation to cover increases in utility costs, staffing and labor grade reclassifications, cost-of-goods, and equipment. With the support of the Fiscal Committee to approve fee increases, the self-funding model remains strong. The Council took a short break.

Advocate for Parks. Legislation. Dir Wilson reported that HB96 was signed into law recognizing May 3rd as Old Man of the Mountain Day. HB60 on camping fees for non-residents was retained by H-Ways & Means. Dir Wilson submitted testimony on this bill stating that DNCR already has the authority to set fees. Should this bill pass, Parks is concerned about the added cost to the reservation software contract, the difficulty with compliance in the field, and the potential loss of out-of-state campers. Mr St.Clair said that MA charges a non-resident fee and he thought it was unwelcoming. Mr Dionne said that there are fee changes for the licensing of OHRV and snowmobiles.

Rep Renzullo answered Dir Wilson's question: typically, the second session of the biennium is more policy driven and that there are usually a smaller number of bills filed.

Dir Wilson said the DOT completed its [2022 NH State Rail Trail Plan](#). DOT is proposing to transfer the rail trails to Parks. We have many concerns about this proposal, including the financial impacts to a self-funded division, enforcement of encroachments, and rail transit and ownership issues. Parks will provide a hard copy of the Plan to SPAC and put this on the fall agenda.

Mr St.Clair said that he is a mountain biker and that all trail users, including mountain bikers, should pay fees to help maintain trails. Many mountain bikers are members of user groups, such as NEMBA (New England Mountain Bike Assn).

Any other business. Mr Flanders offered to provide tours of Wentworth Coolidge Mansion. Dir Wilson was asked to propose a quarterly SPAC meeting schedule. Mr Nyhan will send Ms Tango-Lowy information to forward to the Council members about the Seafood Festival on Sept 8-10th that includes a Pease Air Show on Saturday and Sunday.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy