

STATE PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL (RSA 216-A: 3-k)
May 29, 2009 at the NH Charitable Foundation, Pleasant St., Concord

Members present:

Richard Ober, NHCF, Chairman
Ruth Griffin, General public
Dir. Ted Austin, Director of Parks & Rec.
Bill Roberts, Friends of Pisgah
Susan Arnold, AMC
Jeffrey Gilbert, Business community
Maggie Stier, NH Preservation Alliance
Rep. Susan Kepner, House RR&D
Kathleen Reardon, Citizens Bank
Rep. Leigh Webb, House
Paul Doscher, SPNHF

Members absent:

Sen. Margaret Hassan, Senate
Sen. Bob Odell, Senate, Vice Chairman
Dick Huot, Tri-Country CAP
Rep. Christopher Ahlgren, House RR&D
Craig Mayo, NH Snowmobile Assn

Others present:

Tom Kokx, Tom Kokx & Associates
Russ Thibeault, Applied Economic Research
Johanna Lyons, Parks Planning & Dev. Specialist
Benjamin Wilson, Historic Sites Bureau
Ted Kupper, Provan & Lorber
Gail Wolek, Parks Deputy Director
Amy Bassett, Public Information
Michael Housman, Supervisor of Parks Operations
Ken Desmarais, Forests & Lands, Forest Mgmt Div.
Jane Carey, SPSAC Clerk

Call to order: Chairman Dick Ober called the meeting to order at 9:34 A.M. After an attendance name correction the Minutes of April 24, 2009 meeting were unanimously approved.

The meeting was turned over to Parks Director Ted Austin. He reported that he has visited 44 parks so far. The parks opened the past weekend and will be open on weekends until the full season begins June 19th. The first weekend there was a 3% increase in camping reservations and increased day use from last year. It was noted that the Great Park Pursuit begins on June 6th at Bear Brook State Park and the Discover the Power of Parks program begins on June 19th at White Lake State Park. Dick Ober and Ted were on "The Exchange" on New Hampshire Public Radio on May 27 to discuss state parks and the forthcoming strategic plan. . Ted thanked Dick for being there.

Ted gave a presentation titled 2009 Strategic Plan, Chapter X, Recommendations. The Strategic Plan, when completed, will include action items and implementation along a logical path to a brighter future for the parks. Many aspects will need to be carefully studied to create a forward moving strategic plan. We need to study the past to develop the future of the parks to make the plan work. We value our resources and need to get more efficient, effective and consistent with them. The state parks are an entity between the National Parks and the municipal parks. The plan should help focus resources to have a greater impact and increase effectiveness. The strategic plan should be made to address making the parks work. There are many action steps to develop. The Parks need to be reasonably self-funded and responsible when requesting capital money from the general fund, increase day use in the parks, and increase camping numbers with the positioning of implementation and recommendations to meet the public's needs at the parks. Council members encouraged Ted to condense his visionary remarks into an introduction to the strategic plan.

Dick Ober asked each Council member to respond to Ted's presentation and to the preliminary draft of the strategic plan, which the planning team distributed by email to Council members on May 22. He provided context for the development of the plan by reminding the Council that the SB5 Study Commission in 2006 concluded that the 20-year self-funding model was falling short and recommended a ten year development plan for the state parks, a state parks audit, creation of a Bureau of Historic Sites, and establishment of the State Park System Advisory Council. The Legislative Strategic Plan Requirements are noted in the Strategic Plan draft. Ober suggested they be moved to the beginning of the Plan Document.

Council members suggested a number of constructive revisions to the plan prior to presenting it to the public. Considerable discussion centered around the "Management Options" section in which each park had been classified into one of three management categories (A, B, C) and specific management alternatives assigned (A – G) . Questions from Council members included, "Why and where did the four criteria come from to put parks into different categories? Who did the preliminary ranking and how? If a park does not meet certain criteria, what action should be taken to ensure that park is valued?" Division staff explained that the criteria came from RSA 216:A-1 in which the legislature defined the purposes of state parks in 1961. The preliminary ranking was completed by Division staff. It was intended as an initial test of the methodology. An extensive discussion ensued. Council members generally supported the concept of classification but questioned the methodology and when and how it should be used. Some Council members suggested the draft plan should recommend the classification be done but should not include a draft list; that the actual ranking be done with broader input. Others countered that it was important to include a draft list and to include specific management alternatives for each park to underscore the seriousness of the funding situation. Ultimately the Council's consensus advice to the planning team was to include the draft classification list with explanation that it was preliminary; to explain the alternative management options (A – G); but not to assign any specific alternative management options to any specific park. That should come later with broader input. For any park considered for transfer to another agency, the terms and conditions as to how parks were acquired would need to be researched prior to any changes in management. Council members advised that such research would include extensive deed examination and input from the attorney general's office. Council members advised that the "public trust" would need to be respected, and that the principles of alternative management should include continued stewardship and public access.

Council members had a number of other questions and suggestions in the section entitled 'Goals, Objectives and Actions.' Chairman Ober asked Council members to send additional comments directly to the planning team.

Johanna Lyons announced public sessions will be held on:

June 11 – 4 PM to 7 PM, Lancaster, at the North Country Office

June 16 – 12 PM to 7 PM, Concord, at the Department of Resources & Economic Development

June 18 – 4 PM to 7 PM, Portsmouth, at the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion

June 23 – 4 PM to 7 PM, Peterborough, at the Town Hall

The draft of the plan will be on the parks website for review prior to the sessions. The public sessions will be a time to review the strategic plan with the public and the public will be able to comment on the plan for thirty days afterwards. Johanna explained the sessions will be an "open house" format with posters and the opportunity for the public to interact with Parks personnel and the planning team. Council members emphasized that the information about the public sessions needs to get out to the public.

Next meeting to be scheduled after the middle of July when the comment period is complete.

Respectfully submitted, Jane Carey, Clerk