

STATE PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL (RSA 216 – A: 3 – k)
September 28, 2009 10 AM (*Minutes approved on 10/23/09*)
Department of Resources and Economic Development

Members present:

Richard Ober, Chairman
Senator Odell, Vice Chairman
Ted Austin, Director of Parks
Rep. Susan Kepner
Rep. Leigh Webb
Rep. Christopher Ahlgren
Susan Arnold, AMC
Craig Mayo, NH Snowmobile Assn.
Paul Doscher, SPNHF
Jeffrey Gilbert, Business Comm.
Maggie Stier, NH Preservation Alliance

Members Absent:

Senator Margaret Hassan
Ruth Griffin, General Public
Dick Huot, NH ATV Club

Other present:

Gail Wolek, Parks Deputy Director
Ben Wilson, Parks Historic Sites
Michael Housman, Supervisor of Parks Operations
Amy Bassett, Public Information
Rep. Judith Spang
Rep. Frank Tupper
Rep. Ricia McMahon
Charles Yeaton, Rumbletree
Don Davis, No Sutton Improvement Society
Steve Enroth, No. Sutton Improvement Society

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 A.M.

The August 26, 2009 Minutes were approved unanimously

Director's Report – Director Ted Austin reported that the revenue and visitation performance statistics versus the previous year to include the Labor Day weekend showed an increase of 4.8% for all parks in operations and 7% without including Hampton parking meters and Cannon Mt. Retail income had improved to at 11.8% for all parks and 8% if Cannon and Mt. Washington removed (Hampton, Cannon and Mount Washington State Parks are separate accounts). Income at just campgrounds was up 2.9% while visitation at campgrounds was down less than 1% (0.69%). These are encouraging results during a struggling economy which suggested that parks were successfully seen as a less expensive alternative for summer leisure time and spending. Also distributed was a listing of towns and entities that have indicated an interest in helping a specific park. The Division is considering an agreement with the City of Laconia for a pilot program to manage Ahern State park.

Chairman Ober reviewed the statutes clarifying the roles of the State Parks System Advisory Council as stated in RSA 216 – A: 3 – k:

VI. The council shall:

- (a) Provide advice to the director of the division of parks and recreation on issues relating to the operation and development of the state park system.
- (b) Act as an advocate for the state park system.
- (c) Review existing statutes and capital appropriations relating to the state park system and recommend to the general court any changes needed to improve efficiency and clarify responsibilities in the operation of the state park system.
- (d) Review, with the assistance of the attorney general, all agreements, memoranda of understanding, leases, special use permits, deeds, or other legal documents to which the division of parks and recreation, or the department of resources and economic development, or both, are a party.
- (e) Investigate the development of new incentives to encourage nonprofit clubs, ""friends" groups, or other individuals or organizations to assist with construction, maintenance, scientific research, visitor services, and other activities required for the efficient operation of the state park system.

(f) Submit a report of its findings to the speaker of the House of Representatives, the president of the senate, the house clerk, the senate clerk, the governor, and the state library no later than November 1 each year.

Ober clarified that the SPSAC is not charged with developing the 10-Year Development Plan but has been providing advice to the Division about the plan. As called for in RSA 216 – A:3 –c, it is the responsibility of the Director of Parks and the Commissioner of the Department of Resources and Economic Development to complete the plan and submit it to the legislature and governor.

Director Austin reported that the revisions of the 10-Year Development Plan are progressing as planned and a draft will be ready in early November. The outline of the plan will remain generally the same as distributed at the August SPSAC meeting, with, introduction, principles and findings, parks today and visions for future strategies. The plan will not include a list of specific management alternatives for each park but will call for a methodology by which each park will be analyzed to determine appropriate management. The condensed presentation format will drive more supporting information to the appendices.

Member and guest comments: Friends Groups should be able to accept money to structure their group to help at a park. It was asked whether there are potential expenses at parks requiring collecting full assessment information (for instance: endangered species that are not yet known). At the next SPSAC meeting, "Friends" groups and other nonprofit and community groups that are directly involved in helping manage parks will be invited for their input before the draft is completed and released for public comment.

Legislation: Chairman Ober referred to the statutory charge that requires SPSAC to review the body of statutes that guide the Division of Parks and Recreation. The Resource Recreation and Development (RR&D) Committee Chairman, Representative Judith Spang reported that her committee is working on two retained bills relative to the state parks fund and leasing (HB 218 and 558) and have formed sub-committees studying funding, leasing, and the strategic plan. She invited SPSAC to participate in the discussion about these bills and on the subcommittees. Representative Frank Tupper emphasized the importance of the State Parks and noted the National Parks series currently being aired, by Ken Burns shows how the parks came together, developed funding and management.

Other Business: Following up a request from the August meeting, Joel Anderson from the House of Representatives staff presented a memorandum summarizing the legislature's action regarding funding state parks. Joel's memo concluded that there is no "self-funding mandate" in legislation and nothing preventing DRED from seeking general fund appropriations. The memo read in part, "Currently there is no statute requiring the parks fees bring in enough revenue to cover all expenses of the State Parks System. However, the Legislature has certainly indicated its strong desire that revenues be enhanced where possible, within the constraints of the purposes of the State Park System". Joel noted that bonds provide for appropriations of construction projects and are repaid from the General Fund.

Adjourn

Next Meeting - Date, time and place to be determined