

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-k)
LOB 305-307, 33 N. State Street, Concord
October 23, 2009 Meeting Minutes

Members in attendance: Richard Ober of NH Charitable Foundation (Chairman), Senator Bob Odell, Rep. Leigh Webb, Rep. Susan Kepner, Ruth Griffin for the public, Bill Roberts of Friends of Pisgah, Director Ted Austin for DRED, Paul Doscher of SPNHF, Maggie Stier of NH Preservation Alliance, Kathleen Reardon of Citizens Bank, Craig Mayo of NH Snowmobile Assoc., Jeff Gilbert for business.

Members absent: Rep. Christopher Ahlgren, Susan Arnold of AMC, Senator Margaret Hassan, Dick Huot of NH ATV Club.

Link to meeting agenda: [SPSAC Agenda 102309](#)

1. Welcome and Introductions; Chairman's Remarks

Chairman Ober called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. He welcomed everyone and asked council members to introduce themselves. He reiterated the council's statutory charge ([RSA 216-A:3-k](#)) and provided a brief history of its evolution.

2. Approval of Minutes: [SPSAC Minutes 092809](#)

Chairman Ober asked for a motion to approve the 09/28/09 minutes. Rep. Webb so moved. Mr. Gilbert seconded. The minutes were adopted as written, unanimously.

3. Director's Report: [Director's Report 102309](#)

Visitation. Director Austin reported that visitation (by calendar year) was up at the top 10 state parks by 68,500 in 2009 with 725,306 visits compared to the previous four year average of 656,805. The Division is improving its tracking of visitation by moving to an automated reporting system. Topics of discussion included visitor behavior between Parks, product mix of Cannon ski tickets, weather impacts, DTTD and Lodging Association comparisons against other attractions, and free admission for Seacoast Science Center members at Odiorne.

Income analysis. Director Austin reported total Division income analysis for FY 2009 as \$13,706,636 in revenue and \$13,527,943 in expense, for a net gain of 1%. The Division total is comprised of Ski Operations which had a 7% net gain and Parks Operations with a 3% net loss. The 20 year average yields a 4% net loss of (\$404,746). Topics of discussion included overhead costs of the Design, Development & Maintenance office, retail programs, unfunded and deferred maintenance, park user trends and accurate visitation tracking.

Parks comparative statement. Director Austin reported park field operations income for FY 2010 as \$5,669,771 with a 5.3% change from FY 2009. Income averaged \$5,124,689 over four years, with an 11% variance between FY 2010 vs. the 4-yr. average. A final audit won't be complete for another six months. Although fees are not collected at historic sites, donations are accepted through iron rangers at some sites.

Retail comparative statement. Director Austin reported retail income for FY 2010 as \$1,763,596, a 10.9% change from FY 2009. The four year average is \$1,729,738, with a 2% variance between FY 2010 vs. the 4-yr. average. The delay in an audited report with final expense information is an issue. Members found the reports useful.

4. Strategic Plan: [Director’s Presentation](#)
[Preface: 10-year State Parks Development Plan](#), adopted by SPSAC on 082609
[Goals & Strategies](#) (102009)

Chairman Ober provided opening remarks:

- The plan was a recommendation of the SB 5 study committee.
- Public meetings will be scheduled for review of the revised plan.
- He is encouraged by the offer of assistance from Friends Groups. Groups invited to attend today’s meeting were those identified as currently assisting the Division with operations, programs and property in the field.
- The council is interested in hearing from Friends Groups on how collaboration can be formalized and included in the draft strategic plan.

Director Austin provided his presentation. Highlights include:

- Core issue facing the Park System, as observed by the SB5 Study Commission: *“New Hampshire is the only state in the nation that attempts to fund its parks exclusively with the revenues earned at the facilities, and it has produced a systemic operating deficit... the Commission has concluded that self-funding cannot sustain the Park System into the future”* (emphasis added, as shown on presentation slides).
- Action steps from SB5: a) 10-yr. development plan (in process); b) Audit (done); c) Establish Bureau of Historic Sites (done); d) Establish State Park Advisory Council (done).
- The strategic plan will provide a framework for decision making, but will be flexible enough to allow the Division to adjust to unexpected issues. A yearly operating plan will address the entire park system and increasingly address each individual park.

▪ SPSAC Findings	▪ Plan mechanics	▪ Situational assessment
▪ Goals	▪ “Getting from here to there”	

- Director Austin envisions *“a renaissance for NHSP via volunteer contributions of effort, energy, ideas, intelligence, experience, materials, time and...maybe money... some call it fundraising... I suggest that we should call it friend raising...”*
- Plan timeline: (see updated timeline below)
 - Press conference: Nov. 19
 - Post draft of revised plan: Nov. 19
 - Public sessions:
 - * Concord: Dec. 1
 - * Lancaster: Dec. 2
 - * Peterborough: Dec. 3
 - * Seacoast: Dec. 8
 - Public comment period: Nov. 19 to Dec. 15
 - Final plan: January 2010

Chairman Ober yielded the floor to public comment from the Friends Groups:

- Brain Fowler, Old Man Legacy and Friends of Franconia Notch and Madison Boulder: Old Man Legacy is currently fundraising for a memorial and will be renegotiating its Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Division to incorporate a new scope of activity to rejuvenate Franconia Notch SP. The Friends of Madison Boulder is working with DRED on an MOA for the stewardship of the property through the town’s conservation commission. Maggie Stier stated that she is a member of the Old Man Legacy group.
- Theresa Sillanpaa, Fitzwilliam Garden Club: Promotes awareness of Rhododendron SP. They fundraise for the purchase of plants and maintain the trails and grounds around Old Patch Cottage. They work with home schooled kids on environmental education. They track their volunteer hours and activities. They do not currently have a formal agreement.

- Susan Dionne, Friends of Pillsbury: They carry out work requested by the park manager, including improvements and maintenance of the manager’s cabin and campsites, spring cleanup, trail work, and provided major assistance in the ice storm cleanup. They track their hours and activities and would welcome a formal agreement. Ms. Dionne felt it appropriate for the State to ask for help from Friends Groups, but such groups would provide assistance regardless because they love the park. They would welcome annual meetings with the Division, technical assistance and capacity building.
- Mitchell Call, Friend of Wapack Trail: They have 700 members maintaining 27 miles of trails over five properties, including Miller SP. They have provided 14,000 volunteer hours over a 20 year span. They do have an MOU, but the different property owners have various management policies making allowable activities confusing and inconsistent. Mr. Call suggested forgiving through-hikers of admission fees at Miller.
- Joyce Tompkins, Lake Tarleton Association: The association assists with grounds maintenance, lake water quality testing and the DES lake host program. The Tompkins “barter” their assistance for the use of the park barn for their horses. Ms. Tompkins recommends demolition of the house to reduce the State’s liability.
- Sue Reynolds, Lighthouse Kids: They are a service learning project for middle school kids by raising awareness and funds for the preservation of the White Island Light Station. They have an MOA with the Division, and provided \$350K as matching funds for the federal Save America’s Treasures grant to restore the lighthouse. Ms. Reynolds suggested a residential stewardship program to welcome visitors and perform maintenance tasks on the island.
- Peter Martin, Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway Trail Club: They maintain 50 miles of trail from Pillsbury to Sunapee SP. They helped in the ice storm cleanup, converted two tent platforms to shelters and restored the viewshed of Ludlow summit. Mr. Martin did not know if there was a formal agreement with the State, but they work under the direction of the State and have no specific requests of the State.
- Scot Henley, Mt Washington Observatory: They have been a NPO partner with the State for 77 years, with their weather station at the summit. They implemented live, distance learning programs to classrooms worldwide. They recently entered into a new lease agreement with the Division, providing \$60K in annual lease payments for observatory and museum space in the summit building. Mr. Henley suggested corporate sponsorship as potential income for the park system. The Observatory’s sponsors include LL Bean and Subaru.
- Scott Harris, Seacoast Science Center: NPO’s have the ability to effectively fundraise, attracting corporate and private donations. With State oversight, it is appropriate for volunteers to support State properties and resources. It is important to coordinate volunteer efforts so park needs are met. Flexibility is important: opportunities may otherwise be lost. The NPO’s identity must be preserved, as donors are willing to give of themselves vs. giving to government. Mr. Harris suggests developing a punch list of what the Division can provide, the park needs, and priorities.
- Mike Roepel, Hillsborough Historical Society: Addressed three issues a) Deferred maintenance at the Pierce Homestead; b) Lack of funding and prohibition against collecting fees; and c) their partnership with the State. He asks what the State’s priorities are, as there is little follow through. Ms. Bassett spoke on behalf of Mr. Wilson who had to leave for another meeting. Moose plate funds (\$100K) has been earmarked for the Homestead. Chairman Ober asked Mr. Roepel to testify before legislature during capital budget hearings.
- Kathy Thatcher, Friends of Pisgah: They have assisted the park since 1987, and have built the Visitors Center and installed a surplus County barn onsite to serve as a museum and meeting place. They maintain trails and assisted with the ice storm cleanup. They staff the park on weekends, and are working with DRED in the development of a management plan. They don’t

currently have an MOA, but wish to continue collaboration with the parks bureau. Ms. Thatcher suggested primitive camping and installation of an iron ranger at the Kilburn Pond trailhead.

- Don Davis, Friends of Wadleigh / North Sutton Improvement Society: The town saved the property and donated it to the State. They assist with spring cleanup and maintain the park during the operating season. The town is interested in managing the park, but needs guidance from Concord. Kearsarge Regional High School will put forth a proposal to support six local State Park properties.
- Craig Sanborn, Cardigan Highlanders: They have been maintaining 15 miles of trails from Mt. Cardigan to Mt. Sunapee. The Rollins trail needs attention before it becomes too deteriorated. He provided a handout summarizing the organization of trailwork volunteers using the AMC model.
- Jerry Gold, Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway Coalition: Provided a handout detailing the coalition, the challenges for Friends Groups and suggestions. Mr. Gold said the funding problem needs to be solved. The increased traffic at parks is overwhelming the volunteers. There are facility costs associated with hiking trails. The park managers can draw on the skills within the community and improved collaboration between Friends and Bureau of Trails.

5. Other business: Chairman Ober recognized the commitment and dedication of Friends Groups and volunteers. He recognized the need for succession planning. The next meeting will be called prior to the release of the Plan. Chairman Ober will request the formation of subcommittees to address other council tasks.

6. Adjourn: Chairman Ober asked for a motion to adjourn. Bill Roberts so moved. Paul Doscher seconded. The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

TIMELINE UPDATE: The council will be sent advance copies of the strategic plan for review and comment prior to a Nov. 23 press conference. The public comment period is Nov. 24 to Dec. 24.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy.