

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
March 7, 2023, Meeting Minutes (*Approved 06/22/23*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) held at DNCR Concord Office. Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. with a quorum present.

In attendance were Chair Jeff Gilbert for Business; Rick Blanchette/Friends of Wapack; Tom Chrisenton for Forestry; Jen Kennedy/Blue Ocean Society; Matt Leahy/SPNHF; John Nyhan/Hampton Area Chamber; 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 Mike Housman and Shawn Hamilton/Park Ops, and Johanna Lyons/State Park Planner.

Chair Gilbert welcomed newly appointed Council member, Rep Vail, and gave an overview of the Council's statutory responsibilities and history.

Election of Officers: Chair Gilbert called for a MOTION to nominate of a Chair. Mr Nyhan nominated Mr Gilbert; seconded by Mr St.Clair. The motion CARRIES, unanimously. Nominations for a Vice Chair will be made at the next meeting when a larger number of members are present.

Minutes: Mr Leahy MOVED to accept the minutes of June 13, 2022; Mr Blanchette SECONDED. The minutes were APPROVED as written, with one abstention.

2023 SPAC Goals: Dir Wilson looks forward to engaging SPAC and the constituent communities on a variety of Park items, including an update of the Division's Ten-Year Strategic Plan. A more consistent quarterly meeting schedule was proposed, beginning in June. Dir Wilson will consult with Commr Stewart to set dates and locations. The Council will discuss the need for additional subcommittees at the next meeting when the 2023 Goals may be defined.

Advise the Director: *Director's Report.* Dir Wilson reviewed the Parks Forecast Report. He anticipates breaking even this fiscal year as the Division addresses the ongoing challenges of increased utility and construction costs, labor shortages, and supply chain issues. For example, the Division has had to put out its bid for golf carts four times. The Governor's budget includes a 10% increase in wages to attract and to retain staff. Parks worked with personnel to make lifeguard positions more competitive. We are awaiting a federal emergency declaration to enable access to FEMA funds for reimbursement of damages caused by the December storm.

The mild winter start, staffing shortages, and power outages have been a challenge for Cannon, but they look forward to hosting several U.S. ski racing events. Closing is projected for the first week of April. The Division was saddened by the passing of Great North Woods Regional Sandy Young. He was well known and involved in his community. Brian Parise will serve as the Regional Supervisor, whose office will be in the new Gorham building.

The seacoast chief lifeguard position is now a full-time and will support the seacoast and inland beaches. IPS is the new vendor for the seacoast parking paystations. The contract includes a pay-by-mobile phone app and License Plate Recognition handhelds for improved efficiencies.

The Master Plan for Mount Washington was completed and accepted by the Governor. A capital budget request to fund an assessment of the facilities, environmental and other items is working its way through the legislative process.

Matthew Flanders was hired as the Director of the Bureau of Historic Sites. He is overseeing several ARPA funded improvement projects allocated to the historic sites. Operational funds for the bureau will be from the general fund, as was originally established.

Andrew Pacuk was hired as the Trails Bureau non-motorized coordinator. He will work closely with the Division's Volunteer Coordinator and will focus on site specific trail projects.

Drive Brand Studios of North Conway is the Division's new marketing firm, having been the long-time marketing firm for Cannon Mountain. Mr Hamilton presented the Division's current campaign "Find your new point of view" that encourages visitors to explore other, lesser-known state parks. The Division's new, mobile-based website is in production and will be released in six months. Greg Keeler has accepted the Division's PIO (Public Information Officer) position after being with Cannon for 15 years.

Capital & Parks Improvements. Ms Lyons provided an update on the Division's capital budget request: Roofing & Repairs \$1.2M; Trails Bureau equipment \$1M; Mt Washington study \$1M; and adding \$1.75M for road and parking lot improvements at the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters property that has 50-year-old infrastructure and 269 miles of dirt roads. She reported on the ARPA projects, including \$980K Phase 2 for the campground expansion of Jericho, Pawtuckaway and Mollidgewock. All ARPA projects must be encumbered by 2024 and completed by 2026.

Fee Package. Dir Wilson said that the Division has requested approval from the Fiscal Committee for a \$1 increase in the metered parking rate at the seacoast. He will continue to work with the Governor's Office for modest fee increases and obtain Fiscal Committee approval. He thanked Mr Nyhan for leading the SPAC subcommittee that reviewed the park fees and made recommendations for fee updates.

Advocate for Parks. Dir Wilson reviewed the 2023 legislative activities. HB141 would enact a law that would allow unleashed dogs on state park trails; however, this is already permitted by administrative rule. Administrative rules allow DNCR to be responsive to specific uses based on the attributes of the location.

SB55 would appropriate \$25M for the replacement of the Tram that is 40 years old and replacement components are no longer available. The Governor has recommended replacing the Tram with a gondola system that could transport more skiers. However, the primary use of the Tram is during the summer season where visitors are able to enjoy views above tree line that a gondola system could not provide. DNCR had held a public info session and solicited public comment for the project. The public supported keeping an aerial tram. Chair Gilbert said that the Tram is an iconic image of the State and that Jackson Hole, WY had considered similar changes and decided to keep its tram system to support its summer expansion. Mr St.Clair agreed that the Tram is an emotional icon for NH and that its loss would be similar to the loss of the Old Man of the Mountain. Dir Wilson appreciated the Council's comments and will keep the Council informed.

The meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy