State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
January 26, 2024, Meeting Minutes (*Approved 04.26.24*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) was held at the DNCR Concord Office. Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. A quorum was reached at 10:40 a.m.

In attendance were Chair Jeff Gilbert for Business; Michael Bruss/Historic Preservation; Jerry Livsey designee for Buddy Dionne/General Public; Matt Leahy/SPNHF; 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 Sarah Stewart/DNCR Commissioner; Jennifer Widmark/DNCR Curator; Colin Capelle/DPR Chief of Staff; Mike Housman/Supv Park Ops; Eric Feldbaum/Comm Rec; Matt Flanders/BHS; and Johanna Lyons/State Park Planner.

Introductions. Chair Gilbert welcomed everyone and asked members and attendees to introduce themselves.

Advise the Director. Dir Wilson showed a short video of the storm damage the occurred in the North Country in December 2023 and along the seacoast in January 2024. The Division has documented the damage should the State apply for FEMA reimbursement, is making emergency repairs using its own staff and submitting contracts to G&C for approval.

Commr Stewart introduced Jennifer Widmark, who will serve as DNCR's curator and a resource to all five divisions with the interpretation of and public access to DNCR historic and cultural resources, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps records and the fire tower maps. Ms Widmark will also develop policies and methods for historic and cultural resources that can be replicated.

Dir Wilson introduced DPR's Chief of Staff Colin Capelle. Having worked at the Dept of Administrative Services procurement office, Mr Capelle will oversee contracting and administration functions under the Office of the Director.

At an event last night, the Hampton Chamber of Commerce awarded the Beach Patrol lifeguards with its President's Award. Over the summer, the lifeguards made 456 lifesaving rescues, provided 255 accessibility services and responded to 213 missing children reports. They are made one plane crash rescue. The lifeguards are highly regarded in the U.S. Lifesaving Assn and built a strong relationship with Hampton PD.

The purchase of the in-holding abutting Crawford Notch State Park is on the next G&C agenda. The G&C request included reference to SPAC's review and recommendation of the purchase. DPR is negotiating with the top three firms for the Mount Washington summit assessment contract. The negotiation team includes a representative from the Mt Washington Commission. The assessment recommendations will serve as a basis for capital improvements and legislative support.

The bid for the replacement of Cannon's aerial tramway closed last week, with only one bidder at a cost of $33M. Doppelmayr, the current provider, did not submit a bid. Legislature had approved $18M for the project. DNCR is re-evaluating the costs and considering its next steps, including working with Treasury to increase the $6M bonding threshold for the Cannon Capital Improvement Fund. That account is funded by the payments received from the Mount Sunapee ski area lease. It was suggested that the Division could seek private donations or enter into a public-private partnership for capital funding in exchange for revenue sharing. The Division relies on Tram revenue to help support the park system and Dir Wilson was concerned about cuts in Tram revenue. Chair Gilbert said that the Council played a role in supporting the Tram project.

A new General Manager for Franconia Notch/Cannon has tentatively accepted the position and will be relocated from out-of-state. The candidate spent a day at Cannon to see the operation and meet the staff.

AARP projects include campground expansion, repairs and maintenance projects at historic sites, and the purchase of trail grooming and maintenance equipment that will be loaned out to clubs. The Division is working on the next biennial Capital Budget request that is due in April.

Fiscal Committee approved the Division's request to increase campground fees: no questions were asked. A summary of administrative rule changes is included in the meeting materials.

Minutes. Rep Renzullo MOVED to accept the minutes of October 17, 2023; Rep Vail SECONDED; the minutes were APPROVED as written.

Advocate for Parks. *Legislation.* Dir Wilson was concerned about the fiscal and operational impact of SB345 that would set a 50% threshold for resident fees versus non-residents. Toll booth attendants would have to check the proof of residency of the nearly one million visitors entering state parks and would create traffic backups. The statutes authorize the Division to operate like a business, set fees comparable to industry standards, and to support tourism.

Copies of the DOT "NH Rail Trails Plan" were provided to the Council members. The BOT's is collaborating on SB397 that appropriates $2M towards repair and restoration of trail infrastructure damages by storms. The BOT and trail clubs are requesting an amendment that would allocate $1M in a non-lapsing account for use on state lands and $1M allocated to the Grant-in-Aid program for trail clubs to use. DOT testified in support of the amendment, as it would benefit the Rail Trails managed by DNCR.

Agreements. Dir Wilson said that he will have Mr Capelle take the lead in administering the Division's contracting, including the leases with the Mt Washington Auto Road and the AMC Lonesome Lake Hut. Mr Capelle will help foster strong relationships with the partners. Chair Gilbert said that the Council leasing subcommittee is ready to assist in the review of the contracts, as needed.

Volunteer Programs. Volunteer Program Manager Andy Crowley is reviewing and updating the volunteer agreements to balance community building and adequate liability protections for the state. There are many large-scale trail projects that are currently under agreement, including the World Trail Network and the AMC.

Any other business. Dir Wilson reported that the new landowner of the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters tract is reducing its forestry operations so as to use the forest for carbon offset credits. The BOT maintains 240 miles of roadways on the property and DNCR received $1M from legislature in HB25 for road repairs and paving. Parks is working with the CLH Citizens Committee to update the CLH Management Plan. Dir Wilson recognized Johanna Lyons for taking the lead on oversight of the CLH Tract easements.

The meeting adjourned at noon.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy