



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT of NATURAL and CULTURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION of PARKS and RECREATION
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January 12, 2024

The Honorable Michael Moffett
and the State-Federal Relations & Veterans Affairs Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 206-208
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB1179-FN relative to state park system fees for retired members of the armed forces.

Dear Chair Moffett and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation ("Division") regarding HB1179-FN relative to state park system fees for retired members of the armed forces. NH State Parks has long supported the men and women who serve in the military.

We support removing from current law RSA 216-A:3-g, V(b), referencing NH national guard members who retired in pay grade E6 or below as eligible for free day use admission. We provide a variety of programs to benefit military personnel and wish to share the following information.

By way of background, the State Park Fund was established in 1991, creating an operationally self-funded parks system. The House Appropriations Committee report that recommended passage wrote: *"This bill establishes the New Hampshire state park and ski areas as an enterprise-type self-funded, accountable business entity to provide improved park and ski recreation facilities and services to New Hampshire citizens and tourists alike."*

The fee approval process through the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee pursuant to RSA 216-A:3-g, was established *"...to provide the department with the ability to maximize revenues and to adjust fees according to market conditions and trends as is the common practice in private industry."*

The opportunity to collect revenue at some parks to support the rest of the park system is also at the foundation of our self-funded parks system. RSA 216-A:3-g states that: *"Fees for the use of park areas shall be designed to recover a reasonable portion of budget expenses consistent with the purposes of RSA 216-A:1 and 216-A:3. The general court does not intend that all park facilities be self-supporting."* Of the 93 state park properties, the Division collects a day-use admission fee at only 21 state parks, resulting in 77% of park properties having no day-use admission. Of the 21 parks that collect fees, only 14 state parks provide surplus revenue to support the rest of the state parks system.

Our intent is to make NH state parks as affordable as possible. The day-use admission fee of \$2 for youth (age 6-11) has not changed since 2008. The \$4 day-use admission fee for adults has

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not changed since 2010, except for six of our high-use parks where a \$1.00 increase was implemented in 2012.

The majority of state park visitors reside in NH and Massachusetts; therefore, the fiscal note is based upon data obtained for those two states. The average number of visits to NH state parks by active members of the armed forces and NH national guard, and NH disabled veterans is 2.65. We use that average for the number of potential visits to state parks by retired military personnel.

Military retirees are defined as those who have served on active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Space Force or Marine Corps for a period of 20 years or more; or retired medically from the U.S. armed forces listed herein (Defense Finance and Accounting Service). There are 9,533 military retirees in New Hampshire and 17,721 military retirees in Massachusetts, (NH Dept of Military Affairs and Veterans Services and U.S. Dept of Defense, Office of the Actuary).

Day-use admission to state parks is \$4.00/adult and \$5.00/adult at the popular, high-use parks. Using the \$5.00/adult admission fee to generate the higher end of an estimated financial impact to the State Park Fund, we estimate a maximum loss of revenue of \$361,116 (NH & MA military retirees of 27,254 x park admission of \$5 x average number of visits 2.65).

If we charge something to everyone, it helps to make state parks available to all. And, to the extent that we generate a surplus, it allows the Division to continue to re-invest in the parks system and address the \$100 million in deferred maintenance identified in the 2010 Ten Year Strategic Plan, thus providing more recreational opportunities and a better visitor experience. Any reduction in revenue would result in a reduction of services and investment in the park system.

The Division continually strives to balance its priorities in part by examining its fee structures, visitation data, and other metrics to inform recommendations for adjustments to its fees. We urge you to please consider fully the impact on revenue, the consistency of this legislation with existing statutes, and New Hampshire's self-funding model for the state park system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and additional information on HB 1179.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Wilson
Director

C: Sarah L. Stewart, Commissioner, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

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