

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
June 13, 2022, Meeting Minutes (*DRAFT*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) held at Ellacoya State Park. Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. with a quorum present and introductions made, including the regionals and park manager.

In attendance were Chair Jeff Gilbert for Business; Rick Blanchette/Friends of Wapack; Michael Bruss NH Historic Preservation; Dir Phil Bryce/DNCR designee; Tom Chrisenton for Forestry; Buddy Dionne NHOVA; John Nyhan/Hampton Area Chamber; Rep Andrew Renzullo/RR&D Chair; Sen Tom Sherman/Senate; Rep Suzanne Smith/RR&D; and Brett St.Clair/Western Skyline Marketing. Torene Tango-Lowy served as clerk.

Also present were Park Ops: Mike Housman, Shawn Hamilton, Erik Nelson, Logan Thorner and Pam Prescott; Trails Bureau: Craig Rennie and Alexis Rudko; and Eric Feldbaum/Community Recreation.

Mr Nelson provided a brief overview of Ellacoya State Park, including park improvement projects and the staff's efficient use of funding and labor resources.

Minutes: Rep Smith MOVED to accept the minutes of Sept 16, 2021; Mr Nyhan SECONDED. The minutes were APPROVED as written.

Advise the Director: *Director's Report.* Dir Bryce reported that parks is doing financially well despite weather variations. Continued growth is not expected, but the reservation system prevents overcrowding. He thanked Mr Nyhan and the Fee Package Subcommittee for their work on the Fee Package which is currently in review at the Governor's Office. Parks submitted its \$4-6M capital budget request. It is recommended that 5-10% of the value of assets is applied toward maintenance and repairs; Parks has \$265M in assets. See pg. 6 of the Director's Report for an update on the ARPA projects.

Dir Bryce said that the Mt Washington Commission is completing its Master Plan for the summit and will hold public sessions to solicit comments. Bureau of Historic Sites Director Andrew Cushing left for another job and interviews are being held for his replacement. The Bureau of Trails promoted Alexis Rudko to Deputy Chief, a new position needed to support the increased administrative requirements. They are also looking to fill a non-motorized position.

The Parks Comparative Report for Week 48 shows \$21.5M for FY'22, compared to \$14M at Week 48 in FY'12. However, expenses and construction costs continue to increase. In response to Mr Dionne's question, Dir Bryce said that Parks balances campground improvements, including RV hookups, with keeping campsite fees accessible for campers. He replied to Rep Smith's inquiry that Parks is requesting capital budget funds for the Tramway replacement. It was determined that a gondola system would not provide the capacity needed for summer visitation, which is greater than the winter use. Rep Smith said she had a great experience riding the Tram and was impressed by the tour that the operator provided.

Mr Nyhan said that the Hampton business community has a great partnership with Parks. Because of J1 program constraints, he and Seacoast Region Supervisor Meredith Collins collaborated with the One Spirit work program to connect Native American youths to job opportunities. Supported by federal DOL and Bureau of Indian Affairs funds and private donations, Mr Nyhan and Ms Collins travelled to Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to speak with families and elders, hiring 11 youths to work at seacoast businesses and Hampton State Park. Dir Bryce thanked Mr Nyhan and the Hampton community for their leadership and support.

Roundtable Discussion. Sen Sherman said that the seacoast parks look fantastic. He toured the North Country and noted the signage along Franconia Notch State Park. Mr Nyhan said he will attend the G&C meeting in support of the SB346 feasibility study of a pier at Hampton Beach for access and fishing. Dir Bryce said Parks continues to provide access to beach areas by providing beach chairs and wheelchair accessible mats. He expressed concern about the cost of pier infrastructure and maintenance and which agency would be responsible for it, including ACOE or Ports and Harbors. He thanked the Council for their

comments and encouraged them to use the SPAC Parks Pass to visit state parks, historic sites and campgrounds and to send their comments in. He said Parks are operating 3 months longer than ten years ago and is doing well recovering from the challenges caused by the pandemic.

Parks Financials. Dir Bryce reviewed the Parks & Retail Comparative Report: Parks sub-total in Week 48 FY'22 is at \$10.5M compared to \$5.9M in 2012. Retail is at \$2.5M compared to \$1.3M in 2012. Mt Washington retail adds \$1.3M to that sub-total. The Park Summary Forecast report anticipates an ending balance of \$12.6M for the state park system. Dir Bryce said that the current challenge is the capacity to expend the funds. The department's Design, Development & Maintenance office is seeking an Administrator to help contract and manage the multiple ARPA and capital projects.

Dir Bryce is reviewing the Fee Package with the Governor's Office. He said that no changes will be made to the day-use fees, having a non-resident fee would make collection more challenging, but that an increase in the rate for parking meters and clarification of pavilion rentals is proposed. He did have Dept of Revenue Administration (DRA) appraise the Swim with a Mission event.

Discussion topics. Dir Bryce reports that the Rye Harbor Cottage was updated to allow use of the downstairs areas for staff housing. The Council discussed the naming of interior areas within state park buildings to recognize large donor contributions. Current law requires G&C approval for the naming of state park buildings. Dir Bryce was concerned about public spaces being perceived as "for sale." Sen Sherman chairs a national foundation and said it is common practice to acknowledge large donors and some form of acknowledgement will be necessary. Mr Bruss agreed, and the Council discussed various ideas, such as targeting the recognition to a program, or installing a plaque that would be removed if the lease holder changes. Dir Bryce will discuss these options with the Seacoast Science Center.

Capital & Parks Improvements. Mr Housman referred to the capital budget report on p. 23. Utility system upgrades include improvements at Ellacoya, Jericho and Greenfield. Toilet building upgrades will include Ragged Neck. The Tramway project will be funded through the capital budget and DNCR will make its capital budget presentation next Monday. The State owns the roadways on the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters (CLH) tract and road maintenance and improvements are needed. Information is available through the CLH Citizen Committee website.

Advocate for Parks. Dir Bryce thanked the legislative members for their support of several bills during the 2022 Session, including killing the bill that would have allowed drones on state trails, support for the Marine Memorial bill and the landowner liability bill, and establishing an OHRV study commission.

Review of Agreements. Completed agreements include the Management & Occupancy Agreement with the White Mountain Attractions Assn., whose value is based upon an appraisal by DRA; the Lease of Forest Society-owned lands that abut Monadnock State Park; the Service Agreement with the Student Conservation Assn; and the Contract Amendment with the Seacoast Science Center. Upcoming agreements include the Mt Washington Auto Road's use of the summit parking lots; the New England Ski Museum at Cannon; and the Blue Ocean Society Visitor Center at Hampton Beach.

Friends Groups. Mr Feldbaum reported that volunteer activities are trending up to pre-COVID numbers.

AOB. Dir Bryce thanked the Town of Gilford for its support of Ellacoya State Park and recognized the guests for the town, including Fire Chief Steve Carrier who said that the Fire and Police Departments worked with park staff for the Timberman Triathlon and their relationship has been great. He said that the reservation system has helped to improve the parking situation at the park.

Chair Gilbert and the Council extended their thanks and appreciation to Dir Bryce, who is retiring at the end of August, for his extraordinary job as Director of the state park system.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m. Lunch was provided, and a tour of Ellacoya State Park immediately followed.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy