

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
June 11, 2021 Meeting Minutes (*Approved on 09/16/21*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) held at Pawtuckaway State Park. Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. with a quorum present and introductions made.

In attendance were Michael Bruss for Historic Preservation; Dir Bryce/DNCR designee; Jeff Gilbert for Business; Rep Robert Harb/House; Matt Leahy/SPNHF; John Nyhan/Hampton Area Chamber; Rep Andrew Renzullo/RR&D Chair; Sen Tom Sherman/Senate; and Rep Suzanne Smith/RR&D. Also present were DNCR Commr Sarah Stewart; Jonathan Melanson/Gov Office; members of the public and Parks staff.

Park Manager Dave Richardson welcomed the group and gave an overview of the park, including having reached 100% camping occupancy, record visitation and a record of \$1M in revenue.

Minutes: Rep Harb MOVED to accept the minutes of April 2, 2021; Mr Nyhan SECONDED. The minutes were APPROVED as written.

Advise the Director: *Director's Report.* Dir Bryce encouraged the Council members to use their season passes to visit state parks and report back on how Parks is doing. Commr Stewart said Parks opened early and safely during the pandemic. Dir Bryce said Parks is doing well and opened the southern and hiking parks early to accommodate the increased numbers of visitors. Mr Gilbert complimented the Commissioner, Dir Bryce and Parks staff for the great service provided to visitors on behalf of the state.

Roundtable Discussion. Dir Bryce, Mr Nyhan and Park Ops Supv Mike Housman reported on working with the Town of Hampton and law enforcement to manage the recent unruly crowd that was called through social media to gather at the beach for live boxing. Although the property deed prescribes that the Town of Hampton is responsible for maintaining public order, the town manager and Hampton police chief coordinated their efforts with the Governor's Office, area law enforcement, Parks and local business organizations for the safe return of the beach and preventing the planned, second event.

Dir Bryce also thanked the Governor's Office for its support in working with federal contacts to hire J1 foreign student workers on the seacoast. Mr Melanson said the Social Security Administration has about a 2 week of backlog for processing.

Parks Budget & Capital Projects. The Parks Fee Package was not brought to the Fiscal Committee so that the Committee could remain focused on the budget. Dir Bryce wants to get public comment on the Fee Package before bringing it to the Governor's Office and Fiscal Committee. Rep Harb reports that his constituents support fee increases for non-residents. Mr Gilbert said there is clear support for Parks based upon the amount of donations received and with the Parks Plate now over \$1M.

Dir Bryce thanked the Governor and legislature for their support of Parks' budget and improvement projects. Commr Stewart said Parks provided its list of projects for federal stimulus funding in the amount of \$23M that will go to the Fiscal Committee on Tuesday. Tom Mansfield reported that the proposed projects include Mt Washington's sewage and water projects; Greenfield water and electrical systems; electric upgrades at Hampton Beach and Ellacoya RV parks; campground expansion at Jericho and Pawtuckaway; campground improvements at Bear Brook, Dry River, Mollidgewock, Coleman Lodges; and improvements at Ft Stark and Ragged Neck. Sen Sherman said that he would like to be present at any project presentations made to the seacoast communities. Rep Smith was glad to see that Jericho was included in the proposal.

Mr Mansfield discussed the various options for use of the cottage at Ragged Neck in Rye, including its use as a dormitory for seasonal employees, a single-family staff housing, weekly rental, an administrative office/museum, leased to a third-party, or demolition (least desired option). Members discussed the options and were in agreement that demolition could be controversial and is not recommended. Parks is required by law to inform the town's planning board of any changes in use. Housing is a statewide workforce challenge and having someone onsite would help prevent vandalism and keep the building in shape. Commr Stewart suggests inviting the Governor and Councilor Stevens to the next SPAC meeting, should it be held on the seacoast.

Park Ops. Mr Housman appreciates the comments from the Council. He said that Parks staff have done a great job and were happy to be able to keep working throughout the pandemic. Parks will continue to use the reservation system to help manage park capacity, but we have increased the “set-aside” number for walk-ins. Shawn Hamilton reported that campgrounds have been full, season pass sales have doubled, and that visitors like the reservation system for its guaranteed entry. Dir Bryce expressed concern that the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) may require Parks to use the DAS vendor for gift cards, rather than Parks’ ReserveAmerica vendor that has provided a comprehensive e-commerce system for camping and day-use reservations, gift cards, donations, online shopping. Parks would need to request a waiver from DAS.

Pawtuckaway Disc Golf Course. Johanna Lyons informed the Council that Parks has partnered with Granite State Park’d Disc Golf Club to construct the first disc golf course in state parks. The course will be located in a 10-acre, unused picnic area at Pawtuckaway. The golf club established itself as a registered non-profit organization and is raising the funds for the entire project.

Capital & Parks Improvements. Mr Mansfield reported on the current projects, including the Ellacoya bathhouse, Milan Hill park office foundation, Shieling Forest facility, Pawtuckaway toilet building, Wentworth Coolidge Mansion retaining wall, Cannon’s sprinkler system, trailhead pit toilets and the Sunapee boat ramp. Dir Bryce said that \$27K was applied at North Beach for seaweed cleanup and the repositioning of the concrete blocks, but that keeping the ocean tides at bay will remain a challenge. Sen Sherman appreciates the cleanup effort and said that the contractor was great. Parks may need to educate the public to set realistic expectations for North Beach.

Advocate for Parks. The legislative members led a discussion on current bills, including the study committee on constructing a pier at Hampton Beach (SB100) that is in Conference Committee; the bill prohibiting the siting a landfill near a state park was voted down; Best Management Practices for rail trails is in for the Governor’s signature; the seasonal platforms and temporary docks bills were passed; and the bills on Class 6 roads and Hoit Road Marsh were retained in committee. Dir Bryce thanked Rep Renzullo for informing him about the status of SB100 as it worked its way through the House.

Dir Bryce announced the hire of Craig Rennie as the new Chief Supervisor for the Bureau of Trails. Chief Rennie is meeting with the Town of Gorham regarding OHRV trails and could not attend today’s meeting.

Review of Agreements. Dir Bryce reported that the Seacoast Science Center is expanding the Science Center building and will renegotiate its agreement with Parks for a longer term. Sen Sherman would like to serve on the Leasing Subcommittee when it reviews the agreement. The lease that enables Parks to manage and operate lands owned by the SPNHF as part of Monadnock State Park was granted a one-year extension while the parties continue to negotiate a new lease that will include reinvestments in trails.

Friends Groups. Volunteer Manager Jesse Creedy-Powers provided the Volunteer Program 2020 Annual Report, send separately. Due to the pandemic, volunteer operations were put on hold until June 2020, when the Re-opening Task Force provided guidance for safe operations. Work has since returned to normal with \$245K in donated services. Parks held a video conference to thank the volunteers, with Commr Stewart and Dir Bryce in attendance. Parks will also post signage within parks to recognize and thank the work of its volunteers. Rep Smith thanked Ms Creedy-Powers for her work with the Friends of the Pemi. Mr Gilbert commented that Parks has come a long way since 2005, when it was trying to revive its volunteer program.

Adjourn. Commr Stewart thanked the Council for its time and support of state parks. Rep Smith MOTIONED to adjourn; Sen Sherman SECONDED. The meeting adjourned at noon. Following lunch, the Council hears from the Pawtuckaway Lake Improvement Assn and the Nottingham Town Manager and Police Chief, then toured the Pawtuckaway bathhouses.

The next meeting will be held on the seacoast and include a tour of Ft Stark and the Rye Harbor cottage.

Summary of Action items include:

1. Park Fee Package update
2. Odiorne food truck RFI update
3. Update on the use of the Rye Harbor cottage

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy