

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
September 1, 2020 Meeting Minutes (*Approved 04/02/2021*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) held by Zoom videoconference. Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. in accordance with the *Checklist compliant with the Right-to-Know Law during the State of Emergency*.

Attendance was taken by roll call: Rick Blanchette/Friends of the Wapack, PRESENT; Dir Bryce/DNCR designee, PRESENT; Buddy Dionne for public, PRESENT; Rep Ebel/Deputy Speaker, PRESENT; Jeff Gilbert for business, PRESENT; Jennifer Kennedy/Blue Ocean Society, PRESENT; Matt Leahy/SPNHF, PRESENT; John Nyhan/Hampton Area Chamber, PRESENT; Rep Andrew Renzullo/RR&D, PRESENT; and Rep Suzanne Smith/RR&D Chair, PRESENT. Torene Tango-Lowy served as the clerk.

Also on the call were Commissioner Stewart, Jonathan Melanson/Governor's Office, Michael Haley/AG's Office, John Koopmann, Jeff Scott, Chris Marino/DNCR, Tom Mansfield/DNCR, and DPR staff Chris Gamache, Mike Housman, Eric Feldbaum, Brent Wucher, Andrew Cushing, Johanna Lyons and Jesse Credly Powers.

Minutes: Rep Ebel MOVED to accept the minutes of Jan. 10, 2020; Rep Smith SECONDED. The minutes were adopted as written by roll call vote: Rick Blanchette, YES; Dir Bryce, YES; Buddy Dionne, YES; Rep Ebel, YES; Jeff Gilbert, YES; Jennifer Kennedy, YES; Matt Leahy, YES; John Nyhan, YES; Rep Andrew Renzullo, YES; and Rep Suzanne Smith, YES.

Advise the Director: *Director's Report*. Park operations under the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging, but Mr Hamilton was instrumental in managing the online advance reservation system. Camping revenue to date is \$1.89M, even with limited capacity and some campgrounds remaining closed. By comparison, camping revenue for FY2018 was \$1M. Parks received a record \$20K in donations to date. We plan to remain open longer in preparation for high demand through the fall. Staffing constraints may restrict coverage to weekends and roaming only. The reduced capacity of the seacoast parking lots will be lifted after Labor Day and Ocean Blvd will be reopened to vehicle traffic. Several members expressed their appreciation of park staff for operating the park system under the pandemic.

Parks Financial Report. Dir Bryce discussed the FY2020 unaudited financial summary. The cumulative loss in Parks Account revenue, including Hampton Meters, is -\$1.9M. Although Cannon closed early due to COVID, they benefited from advance pass sales for a positive FY2020 balance. The Park Fund ends on a small positive balance of \$262K. Parks has requested CARES Act Funds to offset some costs related to COVID, such as \$50K in portable toilets that were needed because most businesses were closed to visitors. Mr Nyhan said it was important to recognize the effort required of state parks during the pandemic, including at the seacoast with the direct loss in meter revenue. Chair Gilbert agreed that Parks is an essential state asset. Mr Nyhan MOTIONED that the Council support Dir Bryce's effort to work with the Governor's Office to offset Parks' losses resulting from the pandemic through the CARES Act money. Mr Dionne SECONDED. The motion carries with a roll call vote: Rick Blanchette, YES; Dir Bryce, ABSTAIN; Buddy Dionne, YES; Rep Ebel, YES; Jeff Gilbert, YES; Jennifer Kennedy, YES; Matt Leahy, YES; John Nyhan, YES; Rep Andrew Renzullo, YES; and Rep Suzanne Smith, YES.

Operating Budget FY2022-2023. DNCR is requesting the same budget amount as the previous year. Being operationally self-funded, the Parks budget is a request to expend rather than a request for appropriation. Parks has invested \$1.2M in surplus revenue back into the park system to offset its capital budget needs. Dir Bryce thanked the legislators for their support of Parks budget requests.

SWCAP. Dir Bryce reported that the exemption request for SWCAP assessments (indirect cost recovery) against several Parks funding accounts was denied by the Dept Administrative Services (DAS). Mr Marino provided information on the Indirect Cost Recovery Program and explained the formula used as the basis to calculate the assessment. He is working with DAS to determine if Parks is being assessed properly with regard to the number of FTE (full-time equivalent) employees, the transaction document count, and whether seasonal staff are included in the weighted average; and whether some federal programs are exempt. The FY2021 assessment against the Parks budget is \$59K. Parks was not assessed SWCAP when, prior to 2018, the Park Fund had a negative balance. SWCAP monies are deposited to the General Fund. Mr Marino will continue to seek clarification from DAS. Dir Bryce said SWCAP may be fixed cost of doing business, but questioned the application of SWCAP in contrast to the intent of the Parks Fund.

Fall Ops. Mr Housman anticipates continued use of parks and campgrounds into the fall. He is looking to extending park operations for inland beaches one week beyond Labor Day weekend and for hiking parks through Veterans Day, weather permitting. Dir Bryce added that Cannon is working on its ski operations plan. Vail has released its ski operations plans, including at Mount Sunapee. Currently, the Tram is closed to the public but is being used by staff to service the summit facility. Cannon is reviewing its choke points, such as restrooms and indoor spaces. They will not be operating their shuttle buses, but will use a reservation system to manage capacity and maintain COVID guidance requirements.

Park Fees & Fines. Mr Nyhan said that Parks submitted its last Fee Package in 2012, and suggested that the fees be reviewed and updated. For example, the parking fee at the metered lots at Hampton are \$2/hr. An 8 hour day will cost only \$16, while private lots charge \$30-\$50/day. With a \$25 parking fine, the fee is worth the ticket. Dir Bryce explained that the Fee Package is approved by the Fiscal Committee ([RSA 216-A:3-g](#)). He would seek input from staff, support from the Council and Governor's Office, and would want public involvement prior to submitting the Fee Package to Fiscal Committee. He also wants parks to remain accessible to young families and those with little discretionary income. Chair Gilbert appointed Mr Nyhan to chair the subcommittee and to solicit the SPAC members to serve on the subcommittee.

Capital & Parks improvement projects. Mr Mansfield reported that projects are under a spending freeze, but that DNCR has requested waivers for projects that need to move forward for safety purposes or to not jeopardize the current construction schedule. The projects are roof replacement on the Monadnock Manager's residence, exterior painting of Weeks Lodge and Mt Washington ventilation improvements. DNCR is working on design and bid documents so that all other projects are ready to move forward under a waiver or once the freeze is lifted. Projects include toilet building upgrades, Mt Washington sewage treatment plant, Cannon sprinkler system and the Ellacoya retaining wall.

DNCR has submitted \$21.2M for its FY2022-2023 capital budget request. It includes the rehabilitation of the Cannon Tramway, last replaced in 1978, for \$10.9M; Mt Washington water system for \$975K; roads and parking lots at \$1.8M; and Odiorne Point upgrades at \$2.2M. Chair Gilbert acknowledged that Parks are iconic places that require facility upgrades and maintenance. In answer to Mr Nyhan's question, Dir Bryce said that capital budget funding is supplemented by federal LWCF grants and the Park Fund.

Act as an Advocate for State Park System: Legislation. The filing date for legislation for the 2021 Session has started, but the legislative members have not heard of any parks-related bills being submitted to date. Rep Ebel, who is Deputy Speaker, said the pandemic made meetings during this past

session complicated and it is not yet known what 2021 will look like. Funding may be limited due to the pandemic's impact on state revenues, and \$50M is in the capital budget request for wastewater and PFAS contamination.

Agreements. Dir Bryce introduced Michael Haley from the AG's Office, who is DNCR's counsel. Dir Bryce said the Mt Washington Observatory lease renewal includes the restructuring of the parties' relationship and may include admission fees for entry to the Sherman Adams Building and Tip Top House, as well as the Observatory museum. Seacoast Science Center's building expansion is on hold. The Monadnock lease with the SPNHF expires next year.

Friends Groups. Mr Feldbaum and Ms Creedy Powers referred to the Director's Report for updates on volunteer activities, including implementation of COVID safety guidance, chainsaw training, and the development of a Volunteer Manual.

Any Other Business. Commissioner announced the hire of Patrick Hackley, as the new Director of Forests and Lands. Mr Hackley comes to DNCR from The Nature Conservancy, and starts on Sept 28th.

Public Comment: Chair Gilbert opened the floor to public comment. Mr John Koopmann said the Zoom format works well. He will reach out to the Commissioner and Dir Bryce with his concerns about Chesterfield Gorge, but thought that Parks is doing well. Mr Jeff Scott thanked the Commissioner for her help with addressing concerns at Chesterfield Gorge, which is the first state park that visitors come upon when travelling into NH on Rte 9. Chair Gilbert thanked everyone for attending and participating in the meeting.

Adjourn. Mr Gilbert MOTIONED to adjourn; Rep Smith SECONDED. The meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m. by roll call vote: Rick Blanchette, YES; Dir Bryce, YES; Buddy Dionne, YES; Rep Ebel, YES; Jeff Gilbert, YES; Jennifer Kennedy, YES; Matt Leahy, YES; John Nyhan, YES; Rep Andrew Renzullo, YES; and Rep Suzanne Smith, YES.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy