



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT of RESOURCES and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE of the COMMISSIONER

172 Pembroke Road P.O. Box 1856 Concord, New Hampshire 03302-1856

603-271-2411
FAX: 603-271-2629

February 12, 2013

The Honorable Charles "Chuck" Morse, Chairman
and the Senate Finance Committee
NH State House, Room 103
Concord, NH 03301

Re: SB 190 relative to admission fees for certain persons at state parks and historical sites.

Dear Chairman Morse and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 190 that changes the State Park admission fee for certain members of the public, eliminates the discount coupon books, and clarifies fees for members of the General Court and Governor and Council. The Division is in support of SB 190 particularly because it provides an opportunity for the legislature to review existing free access to Parks, free access that in some cases was created in statute prior to the adoption of the self-funding model of operation.

In 1991, the State Park Fund was established. 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.* Specifically, pursuant to RSA 216-A:3-g, fees were "...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."

Free admission for NH seniors was enacted in 1973, well prior to 1991; the discount books were enacted in 1977, also prior to 1991; and more recently, retired NH National Guard members up to pay grade E6 were granted free admission in 2003. In addition, free recreational day use parking was granted to persons with walking disabilities at Hampton Beach South and Wallis Sands State Parks in 1988. Please note, people with walking disabilities will continue to be able to park at the Hampton Beach State Park meters for free. And, free access will continue to be provided to disabled veterans and any active member of the armed forces.

The total estimated unrealized revenue for the free access provided to NH seniors, retired National Guard members and persons with walking disabilities, based upon 2012 records taken at the toll booths, is \$142,000. With the change to a 50% discount provided in this legislation, the lost revenue would be reduced to \$71,000.

Current law requires Parks to provide day use coupons that reflect a 20% discount off its usual rates. This accounts for over \$2,800 in lost revenue, but the greatest burden is administrative and we are requesting that the statute be removed.

February 12, 2013

Senator C. Morse, Chairman, Senate Finance Committee

Page 2

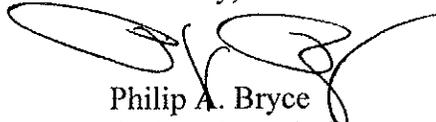
In addition to these discounts set in statute, Parks provides free access to members of the General Court and Governor and Council through the fee package approved by the fiscal committee. This legislation would now provide a 50% discount to members of the General Court and Councilors in statute, however, it would allow for continued free access while on state business.

The Division's 2010 Ten-Year Strategic Development and Capital Improvement Plan identified \$28.5 million in deferred maintenance over five years and \$71 million to replace or redevelop needed facilities over the ten year plan. In addition, we are just coming off a \$2.6 million deficit so, in recent years, we have been unable to open some Parks, even if they are revenue generating, and have been able to provide only limited, if any, support to non-revenue generating Parks. The review of our statutory fee discounts is part of a larger effort to understand and control costs, look for new opportunities to generate revenue and to work with third parties to assist in the stewardship of our park system.

We recognize that while the State Park System is driven to generate revenue to support its operations it also has a higher goal of achieving a larger public good. As such, we have supported providing free access to parks as a way for the State to recognize certain groups, such as members of the active military. However, we also believe it is time to bring the remaining discounts up to date in the context of the under the self-funding model, the needs of the Park system, and achieving that larger public good.

I am available to answer any questions you may have on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Bryce
Acting Commissioner

PAB/tfl.021213

C: Gail A. Wolek, Deputy Director, Division of Parks and Recreation