

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
June 14, 2018 Meeting Minutes (*Approved as amended, Sept. 28, 2018*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) was called to order by Chairman Gilbert at the Dept Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) Concord Office, a quorum of members being present.

Council members present were Chair Jeffrey Gilbert for business, Rick Blanchette/Friends of Wapack, Michael Bruss/NH Historic Preservation, Dir Phil Bryce/DNCR designee, Rep Chris Christensen/RR&D Chair, Buddy Dionne/NH ATV Club, Tiffany Eddy/Tiffany Eddy & Assoc, Sen Harold French/Commerce Vice-Chair, Matt Leahy/SPNHF, Rep John Mullen/RR&D, and Rep Suzanne Smith/RR&D.

Also present were Kathy Thatcher/Pisgah Defenders, Jeff Scott/Pisgah Defenders, John Koopmann, Commissioner Sarah Stewart/DNCR, Chris Marino/DNCR Business Admin, Gail Wolek/Div Parks & Rec (DPR) Deputy Dir, Mike Housman/DPR Park Ops Supv, Ben Wilson/DPR Bureau of Historic Sites, Grant Goulet/DPR Retail Supv, Eric Feldbaum/DPR Office of Community Rec, Shawn Hamilton/DPR Camping Reservations, and Torene Tango-Lowy/SPAC clerk.

Call to Order. Chair Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Commissioner Stewart introduced herself and welcomed the Council. Attendees introduced themselves.

Approve Minutes. Rep Mullen motioned to approve the Mar 23, 2018 minutes and Mr Blanchette seconded. Rep Christensen requested a spelling correction and the minutes were approved as amended.

Advise Director. Director's Report. The Report was sent to the Council in advance for their review. There being no questions, Dir Bryce asked members to send any comments to him directly.

Financial Report. Rep Christensen noted the Comparative Statement and asked about weather impacts. Dir Bryce said all parks are dependent on weather, but especially the beach parks. Scheduled swim programs are held unless weather is hazardous. Beach advisories also impact park revenue. State Park Plate revenue will be applied back to each park to properly account for decreased admission revenue caused by Park Plate use. Dir Bryce may seek legislative support again to repeal the discount coupon books. Parks is now offering Gift Cards. The DNCR Chainsaw Policy was finalized and will apply to volunteers using chainsaws in Parks.

Mr Marino briefed the Council on the Parks Forecast Projected YE FY2018 (*Draft*) report that quantifies the performance of the Parks Fund. Dir Bryce stated that the Parks Fund has been robust enough to supplement capital projects, including the \$500K radio system at Hampton Beach needed for public safety. Revenues are being reinvested into the park system for park improvements and deferred maintenance, and storm recovery efforts. Parks is seeking FEMA aid that may cover up to 75% of recovery costs. He continues to reduce costs and extend the season with the goal of having the day-use areas become self-sustaining.

Mr Dionne asked if the campground area at Jericho will be increased. Dir Bryce replied that Parks intends to expand the campground, as documented in the master plan. The campground serves a different market than competing campgrounds in the area, and Jericho needs to operate in the positive. Priorities for the park are stewardship, access, and supporting tourism and the local economy.

Dir Bryce will submit a Fee Package to Fiscal Committee next year. His view is to position Parks to make revenue so as to provide more access, rather than to provide more access in hopes of making revenue. He will continue to provide affordable access to the public, and look for revenue opportunities to enhance Parks' revenue stream statewide and support the local economy.

Signage. Dir Bryce is considering signage that informs park guests that their payment of entrance fees helps support the park system and their experience.

Reservation and Store Manager System. Mr Hamilton presented information of the new ReserveAmerica campground reservation and point-of-sale system. NH State Parks is the only state park system nationwide currently using this system: it is EMV compliant for credit card payments and brings Park's daily revenue reporting into the 21st century. The system has increased efficiencies in daily reporting and allows statistical

analysis. It enables guests to book tours at historic sites online, purchase gift cards, make donations, and reserve pavilions online. Online donations have generated \$15K and Dir Bryce sends a thank you letter, encouraging NH residents to consider purchasing a State Park Plate. An Enterprise Manual was developed as a quick reference guide to field staff. Dir Bryce said that the new enterprise system fulfills his priorities of fiduciary accountability, increasing revenue and enhancing customer service.

Drone Policy. The Divisions of Forests and Lands and Parks met with DOT's Bureau of Aeronautics to better understand FAA's regulations on drone use. DNCR can restrict the launching and landing of drones on state reservations, but the FAA has sole control over the airspace. As drones are not "normal recreational use" a Special Use Permit is required to launch or land a drone on state reservations. The operator must comply with all FAA regulations, such as not flying over people or interfering with forest fire operations. Parks has issued permits for certain drone use in support of tourism and park promotional film productions.

Roundtable comments. Rep Christensen attended the NH Lakes Congress where they discussed invasive species, such as milfoil. Prevention efforts include installing wash stations at boat launch ramps, educating boaters, utilizing Lake Hosts, and installing informational kiosks. These efforts are in coordination with DES and Fish and Game. Dir Bryce answered that the Greenfield entrance road is on the list of improvements.

Ms Eddy suggested promoting parks through WMUR's Chronicle, just as it has benefitted the Currier Museum. Mr Wilson said the Weeks Estate received great response after being featured on Chronicle. Dir Bryce shared the "*Accolades, Awards and Praise*" notebook with the Council.

The floor was given to Ms Thatcher who expressed concerns about the commercial timber harvesting at Pisgah State Park. She has collected 800 signatures in a petition and provided information supporting her position that Pisgah was acquired with LWCF support as a "wilderness" park that should have limited logging and built infrastructure. The 2008 "clear cut" timber harvest would leave the area susceptible to invasive species. She thinks the park should be managed by Parks, not Forests and Lands. She asked for permission to convene a volunteer monitoring group to check for invasives. Dir Bryce asked Ms Thatcher to work with Mr Feldbaum under the Parks Volunteer Program. She also wanted to provide updated photos to have posted on the Parks webpage for Pisgah. Dir Bryce asked that she send the photos to him. Commissioner Stewart thanked Ms Thatcher and Mr Scott for their comments and the information.

Capital Projects. Dir Bryce provided a report on the capital projects, park improvements, and storm recovery efforts. DNCR has submitted a capital budget request of \$50M for FY2020-21, and the Governor's capital budget hearing is scheduled for June 21. The Division was approached to acquire Ruggles Mine. Sen French and others support its consideration.

Advocate for Park System. Dir Bryce may seek legislative support that would enable the bonding of parks projects, similar to the current bonding of Cannon capital improvements, and paid by the Park Fund surplus; enabling Parks to implement capital improvements more timely. Members discussed the benefits and risks of bonding projects.

Agreements, etc. Governor and Council approved a one-year Special Use Permit for AMC's operation of Lonesome Lake Hut, while Parks and AMC work on a new long-term agreement based on a recent appraisal of value. Parks will consider a lease payment of cash plus in-kind services for trail work. Dir Bryce will seek review of an agreement by the SPAC leasing subcommittee.

Other recent appraisals include the Seafood Festival for \$40K/yr. and the science center at Odiorne for \$200K/yr. Dir Bryce is concerned about the growing number of large events using parks to generate revenues for itself, but displace regular park visitors during the summer season. He is considering administrative rules that would restrict such events on weekends and holidays from July 4 through Labor Day.

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m. The next meeting will be scheduled in July or August. Following the lunch break, the Council went to the Correctional Facility to tour the firewood kiln operation.