



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT of RESOURCES and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION of PARKS and RECREATION

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January 19, 2016

The Honorable David Boutin, Chairman
and the Senate Ways and Means Committee
NH State House, Room 103
Concord, NH 03301

Re: SB 441 relative to discounts and admission without charge at state parks.

Dear Chairman Boutin and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 441 that would eliminate the discount coupon books and enable the Division of Parks and Recreation to provide discounts and free access to NH seniors in a fee package presented to the fiscal committee for approval in accordance with RSA 216-A:3-g. The legislation would help bring parks statutes up to date and address demographic trends that will affect the sustainability of park revenues into the future.

The State Park Fund was established in 1991. 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."*

The fee approval process through the fiscal committee pursuant to RSA 216-A:3-g, was established *"...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."* In addition: *"II. Fees for the use of campgrounds and ski lifts shall be comparable with the fees for use of similar privately owned facilities. The operation of all enterprise functions....shall be as profitable as possible, within the purposes of the park system."*

Free admission for NH seniors was enacted in 1973 (Chapter 503, Enacted 218:5-b) and the discount books were enacted in 1967 (Chapter 352, Enacted 218:5-a), both prior to 1991 when self-funding for the NH State Park System was emphasized through the establishment of the State Park Fund under RSA 216-A:3-i.

One of the five major challenges set forth in Parks Ten-Year Strategic Development and Capital Improvement Plan is to: *"Clarify statutory intent and framework within which the Division operates to reduce cumbersome, conflicting, and contradictory legislative direction so that operations can achieve the vision."*

In addition to the changes in the parks funding model in 1991, there has also been a change in demographic factors since 1973 when free access was provided to NH residents 65 and

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Senator D. Boutin, Chairman, Senate Ways & Means Committee

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older. First, according to the US National Vital Statistics 2012 Reports the average life expectancy for someone born in 1908 who would turn 65 in 1973 was 51.1 years. By contrast, the average life expectancy for someone born in 1943 who would turn 65 in 2008 (latest report data) was 63.3 years. The difference in life expectancy between when the law was passed in 1973 and 2008 is 12.2 years. Going forward, the current estimated average life expectancy for someone born in New Hampshire today is over 80 years.

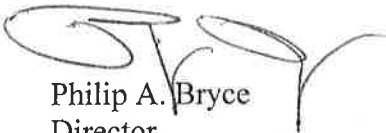
Secondly, a report by NH Center for Public Policy Studies estimates that: "*By the year 2030, nearly half a million New Hampshire residents will be 65 years or older, representing almost one third of the population.*" This is in contrast to 10-15% of the population that was 65 years or older in 1970's and 1980's. (We would note that these are factors that the park system is also considering as we improve our parks to accommodate the physical needs of all of our guests).

This legislation does not eliminate free or discounted access to NH residents over 65 years of age. In fact Parks currently provides other discounts to seniors for camping and skiing in the fee packages approved by the fiscal committee. However it is time to acknowledge where we are today by recognizing both how we now operate our parks system and how our population has changed since 1973 so that NH State Parks can be successful and adequately serve all of our visitors into the future.

Lastly, RSA 218:5-b requires the Division to provide coupons that reflect a 20% discount off its usual rates applicable at all day-use fee areas and the coupons do not expire. The greatest burden on the Division is administration of this program and this broad-based discount program is inconsistent with responding to market conditions. These discounts apply to our busiest days of the year. We are requesting that this law be repealed.

I am available to answer any questions you may have on this bill and we will do our best to provide any additional information you might need. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Bryce
Director

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C: Jeffrey J. Rose, Commissioner