

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
March 23, 2018 Meeting Minutes (*approved as amended, 06/14/18*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) was called to order by Chairman Gilbert at Franconia Notch State Park HQ, a quorum of members being present.

Council members present were Chair Jeffrey Gilbert for business, Rick Blanchette/Friends of Wapack, Dir Phil Bryce/DNCR designee, Buddy Dionne/NH ATV Club, Sen Harold French/Commerce Vice-Chair, Ruth Griffin/for Public, Matt Leahy/SPNHF, Rep John Mullen/RR&D, John Nyhan/for Public, and Rep Suzanne Smith/RR&D.

Also present were Chris Collins/Governor's Office, Kathy Thatcher and guest, and from DNCR John "JD" DeVivo, Meredith Collins, Kate Crowe, Grant Goulet, Amy Swift, and Torene Tango-Lowy (SPAC clerk).

Call to Order. Chair Gilbert called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Mr DeVivo welcomed the Council to Cannon Mountain and provided a brief report on ski operations: skier visits are currently just above the seven year average; depending on weather Cannon may extend operations to April 22nd from the planned April 15th close; Cannon is celebrating its 80th year with events planned for June and Dec; season pass sales are five times the normal volume with "buy now and ski the rest of spring." Mr Blanchette said he'd heard good feedback about Cannon. To Mr Leahy, Mr DeVivo reported that snowmaking ceased in February and the new snowmaking equipment has resulted in \$400K in savings.

Approve Minutes. Ms Griffin motioned to approve the Jan 19, 2018 minutes. Rep Smith seconded and the Council approved the minutes as written.

Advise Director. Director's Report. Mr Blanchette asked if chainsaw training might be offered to trail maintenance volunteers. Dir Bryce said the department is in the process of formalizing its chainsaw policy and training procedures for employees, but will have Volunteer Coordinator Patrick Hummel follow-up.

Dir Bryce reported that NHStateParks.org receives as many web hits as VisitNH.gov. Parks has an aggressive social media outreach: 20K followers on Twitter compared to 14.8K in MA and 3.5K in VT, ME does not have a Twitter account (see Director's Report pg 6).

With increasing use of State Parks for large fundraising events, such as "Swim with a Mission" scheduled on a busy July 14th at Wellington, Dir Bryce is concerned about the displacement of visitors, impact to the visitor experience and to the park's revenue (see Report pg 2). He is considering developing a formal process for these requests, such as limiting event dates to weekdays and off-season. He is also working with Revenue Admin to assess the market value of park usage as Parks is charged with maximizing revenue and adjusting fees to market conditions (216-A:3-g). The Council provided input, agreeing that scheduling large events on busy summer weekends is unreasonable, consider: rules, parameters and appropriate fees; identifying specific weekend dates that an event may be scheduled; standards for on- and off-season activities; and giving priority to NH-based charities. The Council's leasing subcommittee may be convened to assist in this effort.

Dir Bryce reported that DOT Bureau of Aeronautics is presenting on overview on FAA drone regulations to the department on Mon 03/26. Park Plate sales reached 7.7K with a goal of 10K. Mr Leahy said the federal LWCF has not yet been reauthorized and is set to expire in Sept. Dir Bryce said 60% of LWCF monies are apportioned to NH communities, with more priority on recreational projects since the LWCF program is the only funding resource for recreation and there are other funding sources for land-based projects. He mentioned the Towns of Franklin's waterfront park and Littleton's project that will bring recreational and economic opportunities to their communities.

Financial Report. Dir Bryce reviewed the FY 2017 financial report in which the Division's balance is \$5.4M (see Financial Report pg 4-5). The report provides a financial breakdown of each park that collects fees. Dir Bryce discussed the Parks Forecast Projected YE FY2018 estimated to end with a Parks Fund balance of \$4.5M, based on current assumptions of revenue and expenses. The Division is currently on target to meet its

budget of \$10.9M, even with the unplanned \$500K expense for a new radio system at the seacoast needed for improved emergency response and communications.

Updates. Copies of the new State Parks map were distributed. Parks will be at this weekend's Camping & RV show in Bedford. Parks will meet with UNH to continue to develop the Carrying Capacity RFP, and may enlist the Council's leasing subcommittee to review the RFP. The Council should contact Dir Bryce directly should they have any further questions or comments on what has been provided.

Visiting with Pets. Seacoast Region Supervisor Meredith Collins provided information on their efforts to educate the public about visiting parks with a pet, especially related to leashing and picking up after one's dog. On a 70 degree day in Feb, she and a Forest Ranger conducted educational outreach to Hampton Beach visitors with dogs who were receptive. Improved signage and "Leash & Scoop" cards are being deployed; waste dispensers are already in place at each beach access stairwell. Rep Mullen agreed that dog waste contains contaminants damaging to land and water, more so than horse manure. Parks has administrative rules regulating visitors with dogs and horses.

Storm Damage. Ms Collins reported on the recent storm damage at the seacoast currently assessed at \$658K. Tides were up to 14-ft washing up boulders and sand up to 12-inches, damaging the seawall, parking lots and other structures, and causing significant loss of the sand dunes. Sand berms are built each year to minimize storm damage, but Mr. Nyhan said the seacoast saw one storm after another. DOT was instrumental in assisting Parks with immediate response. Dir Bryce said that they are meeting with FEMA to determine if FEMA monies may be available for repairs and restoration; otherwise, the State Parks Fund will need to cover the costs. Dir Bryce reviewed damage to north and central region parks caused last October.

DNCR personnel. Dir Bryce informed the Council that Commissioner Rose is leaving and the Governor has nominated Sarah Stewart. Dir Bryce and Dir Simpkins are up for reappointment. Chair Gilbert wished to go on record supporting the reappointment of Dir Bryce. Rep Mullen seconded. The Council discussed the many financial and physical improvements to the parks system under Dir Bryce. The motion was amended to send a letter under Council letterhead to the Governor in support of the reappointment. Mr Dionne seconded. The motion was approved by unanimous vote. Dir Bryce thanked the Council and said that Parks has received legislative support for its budgets, rules, fees, and legislative position.

Capital Budget. Dir Bryce reviewed the FY2020-2021 Capital Budget request of \$12M. He prioritizes the request by 1) protecting park assets and 2) protecting revenue. Funds from the operating budget and supplemented by LWCF are also used for park improvements: generating revenue and returns to the Park Fund. Members can contact Dir Bryce directly with any questions on the Capital Budget. DNCR's [Annual Consolidated Report for FY 2016 & 2017](#) is available online.

Agreements. The Seacoast Science Center Annual Operation Plan is being reviewed for approval. The food concession contract at Franconia Notch is being finalized for G&C approval. DRA will appraise Lonesome Lake Hut in preparation for a new lease agreement with the AMC. Dir Bryce will seek recommendations on a draft agreement from the SPAC Leasing Subcommittee.

Friends. As mentioned earlier, DNCR is developing its Chainsaw Policy that will be used as a guideline for chainsaw use by park and trails volunteers.

AOB. Chair Gilbert opened the floor to Ms Kathy Thatcher from Chesterfield. She said that Pisgah State Park should be managed by Parks rather than the Division of Forests and Lands (DFL). Pisgah was intended to be a "wilderness" park with recreation as a high priority and she is concerned about the regular timber harvests being done there. She has collected 700 petitions and would like 20 minutes at the next meeting to present to the Council. Dir Bryce said he would want to give DFL an opportunity to respond.

Mr Nyhan said there was a sewer break in the Town of Hampton. The Town is working with DES to resolve the issue, but it may impact the beach area.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m. The next meeting will be scheduled in June.