



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

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March 12, 2012

The Honorable Andrew Renzullo, Chairman
and Members of the Resources, Recreation and Development Committee
NH State House, Room 303
Concord, NH 03301

RE: SB 358 An act expanding eligibility for free admission to the state park system to certain members and their families and retired members of the armed forces.

Dear Chairman Renzullo and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 358 that would extend free day-use admission to the state park system to active and retired members of the armed forces, to members of the NH National Guard, and to the immediate family members of active members of the armed forces who are home on leave. The Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED), Division of Parks and Recreation (Division) does not take a formal position on this bill, however, I wish to provide this Committee with the following information.

The Division supports the principles of SB 358, and we recognize the contribution and sacrifices that the members of the armed forces have made. To that end, the Division added to its 2012 Fee Package free day-use admission to all members of the armed forces. The specific 2012 Fee Package provisions related to military personnel are provided herein for your reference:

"Active members of any military branch, regardless of residency, are granted free admission to day-use areas for themselves only, with presentation of their military ID. Includes entry for one vehicle using one parking space at Hampton Beach-South and Wallis Sands. Does not apply to camping, attractions, metered parking, function space, permits, and other enterprise and concession activities.

During times of declared war, such members and their immediate family are granted 50% discount on function space, with proof of active service and upon written request to the Director. Immediate family means parents, their dependent children, and grandparents. During times of declared war, such members are granted free use of function space for "send-off" or "deployment" events, and for "welcome home" events, with proof of active service and upon written request to the Director."

The Division submits its Fee Package to legislature for approval through Fiscal Committee, pursuant to RSA 216-A:3-g. This process allows the Division to remain responsive to changes in the seasonal, outdoor recreation marketplace, and to maintain financial flexibility as an operationally self-funded agency. We also endeavor to set up a fee system that is easy, clear and quick for the toll booth staff to get visitors into the Parks.

The Division's 2012 Fee Package was approved by the Fiscal Committee of the General Court at its January 20, 2012, meeting.

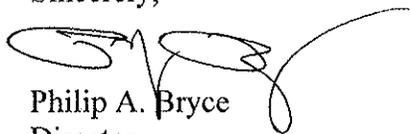
The differences between the fee package and SB 358 are as follows:

1. The fee package proposes granting free admission regardless of residency. There are members of the military who are stationed in New Hampshire who are not necessarily residents. We also do not make a distinction in park fees between residents and non residents to emphasize the importance of visitors to the state to the economy.
2. We did not include retired members of the armed forces nor did we include active member's spouse and children because we followed the lead of current legislation covering National Guard members which limits free access to the active duty guard member.
3. We did add however a discount on function space and free use of function space for send-off and welcome home events.

Although it is not known how many of the above referenced armed forces members and their families would take advantage of this extended benefit of free day-use admission, the Division currently provides free admission to active and retired NH national guard pay grades E1-E6, and to NH disabled veterans, pursuant to RSA 216:3-g. Extrapolating from the 12% of state park visitors who were national guardsmen and disabled vets admitted free in 2011, and the total population of armed forces in NH (131,266), the estimated total value of this extended benefit is \$66,000. This estimate does not include benefits extended to immediate family members, which is indeterminable. The Division carefully considers such fiscal impacts because we need to generate revenue to support the costs of our operating the park system.

We are available to answer any questions you may have on this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Bryce
Director

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C: George M. Bald, Commissioner