

**Board of Conservation and Recreation
Guest/Shenandoah River State Park
October 18, 2012**

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Present

Mark E. Smith, Chair
Steve L. Apicella
William E. Small
Robert L. Wilkerson

W. Bruce Wingo, Vice Chair
Daniel F. Rinzel
Andrea Young

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Not Present

Alan D. Albert
Sheryl D. Swinson

James W. Beamer
Alexander I. Vanegas

DCR Staff Present

David A. Johnson
Joe Elton
Danette Poole
Tom Smith
Chuck Wyatt

Jeb Wilkinson
Michael Fletcher
Craig Seaver
Tony Widmer

Call to Order and Introductions

Mr. Smith called the meeting to order and declared a quorum present.

Mr. Smith recognized Tony Widmer, Park Manager.

Mr. Widmer said that Guest/Shenandoah River Park had 1650 acres, including 24 miles of trails and five miles of frontage on the Shenandoah River. He noted that in the last year park attendance was around, 194,000. For 2012, the park had already had attendance over 200,000. He said that working with Front Royal and Page County, the park has close to a \$3 million impact on the local economy.

Mr. Rinzel asked about the zip line that was discussed at the last Board meeting.

Mr. Widmer said that Mr. Wyatt was working with Virginia Canopy Tours in that regard. He said the plan was for the line to go above the primitive camping area and the Massanutten campground area. The hope is to open the line in 2013.

Chairman Smith welcomed Bill Small from Louisa County as the newest member of the Board.

Mr. Small said that he had operated Small Country campground between Richmond and Charlottesville for 37 years. He invited members to visit the campground. He said that he was pleased to have the opportunity to serve on the Board.

Minutes from July 27, 2012

MOTION: Mr. Rinzel moved that the minutes of the July 27, 2012 meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation be approved as submitted.

SECOND: Mr. Wilkerson

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Planning and Recreation Resources Update

Ms. Poole gave the Planning and Recreation Resources update.

Ms. Poole distributed copies of the Guide to East Coast Greenways. The guide was developed working with VDOT and will be rolled out at the National Bicycling Federation meeting.

2013 Virginia Outdoors Plan

Ms. Poole said that the Virginia Outdoors Plan is the comprehensive outdoor recreation plan for the Commonwealth. The plan is updated every five years and the 2013 VOP will be the 10th version.

Progress since July

- 3rd Technical Advisory Committee meeting held in September
- Staff drafting chapters
- Developing mapping components
- SNR briefing scheduled in November

Chairman Smith noted that he served on the Technical Advisory Committee for the Outdoors Plan. He said that while this version of the document would be placed on the Internet that previously members had been given copies of the printed version. He asked if copies were available that they be distributed to Board members who had not received them.

Ms. Poole noted that the plan will be on a CD, but will be presented in printed portfolio with plan highlights.

Design and Construction

Projects Completed

- Dam restoration – Twin Lakes and Holiday Lake State Parks
- Staunton River drain field
- Crow's Nest NAP Parking area
- Storm damage at Westmoreland

Major Park Projects

Occoneechee State Park

- Occoneechee Marina - \$2 million in VPBA bonds – project complete

High Bridge Trail State Park

- High Bridge Trail – linear park on abandoned railroad ROW from Burkeville to Pamplin
 - Completed construction/re-decking the landmark High Bridge
 - Towers 125' above Appomattox
 - 2,422 feet long
 - Build on 1914 steel bridge that towers over original 1853 supports
 - Opened June 26, 2012
- Acquisition of additional land parcels
- High Bridge won a Scenic Virginia award that was presented at Scenic Virginia's annual recognition event.
- High Bridge Funding
 - \$7.5 M in VPBA bonds (2008)
 - \$2 M in federal stimulus funds
 - \$743 K in VDOT enhancement funds
 - \$222 K in FHWA funds

Ms. Poole said that the work on the Bridge is complete as is most of the work on the trail.

- High Bridge Ongoing work in Phase I
 - Renovation of Prospect house for staff residence
 - 1.2 mi. access road on east side of bridge
 - Acquisition of parcels at Burkeville and Pamplin
 - Completion of trail connections to those towns
 - Landscaping and trail amenities

Powhatan State Park

- On schedule for completion of Phase 1 facilities
 - \$7.5 m in VPBA bond
 - 2.5 miles of road
 - Infrastructure and day-use facilities
 - James River water access.

Ms. Poole said that DCR was working on access to the river which should be ready by the end of the year.

Ongoing projects

- New River Trail
 - Hotel stabilization – work is being done to stabilize the building and replace the roof. The hope is to be able to eventually do work inside.
 - Maintenance Area
 - Office Renovations

- Dams
 - Pocahontas (2) and Bear Creek Lake
 - 4 District-owned dams – preliminary design underway
 - Completed 40 additional dam inundation studies

Ms. Poole said that DCR is responsible for about 132 dams statewide.

Grants

- LWCF
 - 20 applications received requesting \$2.6 M
 - Total project cost of \$6.7 M
 - Approx. \$1 million available
 - 10 projects selected/undergoing due diligence

- RTP
 - 80%-20% federal local match
 - 46 applicants requested \$4.6 M in assistance
 - Approx. \$1.4 million available
 - 12 projects selected for funding

- Open Space Recreation Fund (Tax Check-off)
 - Approx. \$245,000 available
 - Lawrence Lewis Park boat ramp \$65,000

- Balance to unfunded projects from above

Ms. Young asked about the phrase “open to the public.”

Ms. Poole said that the term does not specify a number of hours or days. She said the intent of the language is that it needs to be open more than one day a year.

Mr. Johnson said that it would mean there were established hours for the public.

Trails

- Statewide Trails Network
 - Quarterly newsletters
 - Trail workshops launched – ADA
 - East Coast Greenway – Travelers Guide published

With regard to park access Mr. Wingo said that in previous years there had been arrangements for van rides at New River Trail State Park.

Mr. Elton said those continue at New River as well as at High Bridge.

- Technical Support
 - Guidance on federal grant programs
 - Park and facility design
 - Playground safety
 - Trail planning/development
 - Public access to waterways
 - Scenic resources
 - Coordination of the Environmental Review process for DCR

Virginia Scenic Rivers

- River evaluations
- Committee reports
- Presentations
- Bull Run
- Banister
- SR comments
- Possible studies

Ms. Poole said that over the past year DCR had received requests to do 3-4 studies. She said staff had worked with the Virginia Tech Community Design Assistance Center. She said that the evaluations take a few days to gather data, but about two weeks of staff time to compile. She said the Community Design Assistance Center had agreed to perform three studies.

Mr. Rinzel said that he was at the Banister River presentation. He said that Battlefield Park is very interested in moving ahead.

Mr. Wilkinson said that he was at the presentation in Halifax.

Chairman Smith thanked Mr. Rinzel and Mr. Wilkinson for their participation in the river presentations.

Ms. Poole said that river evaluations had been done in 2012 for the Banister, Dan and Meherrin Rivers. She reviewed the field evaluation criteria.

Ms. Young asked about community interest in river evaluations.

Ms. Poole said that it is the community that drives the process. She said that the only restriction Scenic River designation places on rivers is that the General Assembly must approve the construction of a new dam.

Chairman Smith said that the Board would be asked to endorse the findings of the river evaluation process. These are then presented to the localities who work with legislator to introduce the necessary legislation for designation.

Mr. Wilkerson asked if DCR would have the opportunity to comment on a uranium mining study.

Mr. Johnson said that on any such activity involving state funding or a state permit, DCR would have the opportunity to comment if there was a direct impact on DCR property or if there was need for environmental review. He noted that early in that process he had been asked to comment in a public hearing. He said he noted that except with regard to clearing the land, building or possibly a stormwater permit this did not pertain to DCR.

Ms. Poole said that there had been new inquiries regarding river studies for the Staunton, North Anna, Hardware and Crane rivers.

Ms. Poole requested that the Board support the designation of the Meherrin River as a Virginia Scenic River.

MOTION: Mr. Wingo moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation endorse the designation of the Meherrin River as a Virginia State Scenic River as recommended by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Apicella

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Director's Report

Mr. Johnson gave the Director's Report.

Mr. Johnson said that the 39th Natural Areas Conference was well attended. He said that the Virginia natural heritage program is respected as one of the best in the western hemisphere. He recommended that Board members visit natural preserves when they can.

Ms. Young asked if special permission was needed.

Mr. Tom Smith said that the forty natural area preserves owned by DCR are open to the public. He said that others may require prior arrangements.

Mr. Small asked the purpose of designating private lands if the public does not have access.

Mr. Tom Smith said that the primary concern is to conserve native plant species. He said that recreation is a secondary concern for natural areas.

Mr. Johnson said that DCR would not be putting forward specific legislation during the 2013 General Assembly. He said that does not mean there will not be agency specific bills.

Mr. Apicella asked about the new designation for Caledon.

Mr. Johnson said that the name was changed from Caledon Natural Area State Park to Caledon State Park. He said that the master plan was revised to allow more public access.

Mr. Elton said that when opened, Caledon represented one of the most important habitats for the American bald eagle on the eastern seaboard. He said that the recommendation was that a lot of human activity would be detrimental. However, he said that with the growth of the eagle population it has been determined that the presence of humans is not a deterrent for eagles. He noted that DCR was also working with the state of Maryland with regard to paddle boating into the park.

Chairman Smith asked if the Department had been given instructions with regard to budget reductions.

Mr. Johnson said no instructions had been given as of the date of the meeting. He noted that a hiring freeze continued that made staffing a challenge.

State Parks

Mr. Elton gave the update for State Parks.

Mr. Elton reviewed budgeting and attendance records for State Parks.

Ms. Young asked if the number of visitors was seen as positive and if there was a viable threshold for the system.

Mr. Elton said that while day use and overnight visitation has been strong more would always be better. He said that Virginia State Parks are always trying to be well positioned in a state where tourism and outdoor recreation continue to grow.

Mr. Wingo noted that during the summer and fall most park cabins will be booked as much as 11 months in advance.

Mr. Elton reviewed the Social Media strategies and activities for Virginia State parks.

- Enews Weekly Newsletter – over 30,000 subscribers
- Facebook – 37,009 Fans
- Twitter – 15,693 Followers
- Blog – 10,388 page views

Ms. Young noted that visitors often like to take advantage of a package deal that connects with the city or locality they are visiting.

Mr. Elton said that the Tourism Commission is working on that concept.

Mr. Apicella said that the Pocket Ranger app was a very helpful app.

Mr. Elton said that the Pocket Ranger app is free to park users. He said that Virginia is the only state that has virtual tours of every state park trail on Pocket Ranger.

Your Comments Count Survey

- 98% of respondents would recommend the park they visited to a friend (since 1997 at least 96% said yes to this question).
- 70.9% of respondents reside in Virginia (NC – 8.9%, Tennessee – 2.7% and Maryland – 3.0%)
- 65% of reservations are made by Virginia residents
- 30.8% of respondents found out about the park by internet and 25% through friends and family
- Hiking, camping and nature observation are the most frequently reported activities

Mr. Elton reviewed current park accommodations.

- 1,850 campsites today...2,050 when you add the six new parks
- 267 cabins today...345 when you add the six new parks

New Parks

- Middle Peninsula – 30 campsites, 10 cabins
- Powhatan – 30 campsites, 18 cabins
- Seven Bends – 30 campsites, 10 primitive sites, 10 cabins
- Widewater – 60 campsites, 10 canoe in sites, 20 cabins
- Biscuit Run – 30 campsites, 20 cabins
- Mayo River – have not developed the Advisory Committee, Public meetings begin in 2013

Mr. Elton noted that there was currently no funding for new construction with the exception of Powhatan State park.

Mr. Elton discussed a collaborative partnership between DCR and the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

IMBA Affiliated Clubs in the Commonwealth include:

- Central VA Mountain Bike Association Lynchburg
- Charlottesville Area Mountain Bike Club
- Culpeper Area Mountain Biking Organization
- Eastern Virginia Mountain Bike Association
- Fredericksburg Area Trail Management and User Group
- Mid Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts
- Page Valley Cycling
- Pathways of Radford
- Quantico Mountain Bike Club
- Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition
- Southern Virginia Mountain Bike Association
- Trips for Kids – Quantico; Fredericksburg
- Virginia Bicycling Federation, Arlington
- Winchester Wheelman

Bicycling Opportunities in Virginia State Parks

Multiple Use Trails – Many parks offer shared use experiences on trails. Hikers, bikers, and equestrians all are able to enjoy the trails at Belle Isle, Chippokes, Douthat, Fairy Stone, Grayson Highlands, High Bridge Trail, James River, Lake Anna, Occoneechee, Pocahontas, Shenandoah River, Staunton River and York River State Parks.

Mr. Elton noted that several parks offer opportunities for hikers and bicyclists to share trails.

Linear Rail Trails

Linear rail trails well suited for multi-use are found at High Bridge Trail, New River Trail, Wilderness Road and Staunton River Battlefield. Rail trails are open to hikers, equestrians and bicyclists.

Single Track Mountain Bike Trails

Pocahontas and York River State Parks have single track trails designed for the mountain biker. Both parks offer trails for beginners and advanced mountain bikers. Additionally, Douthat State Park's trails are primarily single-track, and open to hikers as well.

Shenandoah River State Park

Since early 2011, the Friends of Shenandoah River State Park have teamed up to regularly inspect and maintain all of the park's trails. Members hike 3-4 miles a day, 5-6 times per week, allowing them to cover all 24 miles of trail within a two week period, inspecting, removing debris and picking up trash as they go.

Pocahontas State Park

A majority of the Friends of Pocahontas are mountain bikers. They help to maintain the trails and work with the park to keep current trail conditions posted on the website in real time based on weather patterns. They attend IMBA Trail Construction trainings to be utilized at the park. They hold "Youth Days" to instruct youth in biking skills and enjoying the sport of mountain biking.

Douthat State Park

Partnerships with the American Hiking Society, Back Country Horsemen of America, Virginia National Guard and the Nature Conservancy.

Middle Mountain Momma bike race is hosted by the Virginia Championship Commission.

IMBA has utilized Douthat for conducting mountain trail bike trail construction training.

Bear Creek Academy

Bear Creek Academy has spent countless hours at Bear Creek Lake State Park helping to maintain trails. They have logged over 1,000 hours of services. The group comes to the park every Wednesday afternoon during the school year. In exchange for their service

we have extended free boat rentals, free use of Bear Creek Hall for ceremonies and free use of park in general for school activities.

First Landing State Park

- Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club partnership since the 1960s
- Tidewater Master Naturalists
- Tidewater Striders – donated \$5,000 to purchase and install the water fountain at the first parking area at 65th Street
- RIVRON ONE – a Navy Group that adopted a trail this year

Eastern Virginia Mountain Bike Association and York River State Park Trail Partnership

York River State park has enjoyed a trail partnership with the Eastern Virginia Mountain Bike Association since 1992. They have donated many volunteer hours in maintaining the over 10 miles of bike specific trails which include Black Bear Run, Laurel Glen, and Marl Ravine.

The EVMA has been instrumental in creating the newest bike trail, Bobcat Run which was opened to the public in January, 2012. They also assist with other programs such as the Recovery Rocks 5K race.

Partnership with American Canoe Association to Certify Staff to Work with Disabled Guests

In May of 2012 Virginia State Parks teamed up with the American Canoe Association for an intensive workshop to learn how to provide kayak programs for people with mobility disabilities. The workshop covered adaptive equipment, safety, paddling techniques and addressing fears, and was designed with the goal of being able to provide a broader range of programming for more people. All park staff who participated were already ACA licensed paddling instructors, and now have their Adaptive Paddling Endorsement.

At this time the Board recessed for lunch.

Natural Heritage Update

Mr. Tom Smith gave the Natural Heritage update.

The purpose of Virginia's Natural Heritage program is to conserve Virginia's biodiversity through inventory, protection, and stewardship.

Mr. Smith said that DCR had hosted the 39th Annual Natural Areas Conference in Norfolk the preceding week. About 300 individuals from 37 states, Canada and Russia attended.

The Natural Heritage Network 2012

Mr. Smith said that the DCR Natural Heritage Program is part of a much larger network. DCR participates in an international network of natural heritage programs. The network helps Virginians make informed decisions and helps carry efforts and information to conservation decision makers throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Division of Natural Heritage Program Structure

- Inventory (gather biodiversity information)
- Information Management (store information)
- Environmental Review (disseminate information)
- Natural Area Protection (acquire natural areas)
- Natural Area Stewardship (care for natural areas)

Outreach and Relevancy

- Relevance through:
 - Relationship building
 - Messaging
 - § Through website and social media
 - § Through presentations
 - § Through newsletter
 - Production
 - § Maintaining high data quantity and quality of Natural Heritage data
 - § Disseminating data easily & strategically
 - § Protecting biodiversity through Natural Area Preserves
 - § Providing recreation to Natural Area Preserve users
 - § Contributing to the knowledge base regarding Virginia biota and natural history

Virginia Natural Area Preserve System

- 61 state Natural Area Preserves protect 51,678 acres and 611 natural community and rare species locations across the Commonwealth.
- Selected to protect the rarest and most threatened elements of Virginia's natural heritage.
- 257 acre Milton Tract dedication addition to Pedlar Hills NAP

Mr. Smith said that the *Flora of Virginia* publication would be available in early December. He said that this was a 10 year effort that categorizes 3,200 native species of the state. It also includes a guide to 50 great places to go see native plants.

Other Business

Mr. Small brought up a concern regarding private sector campgrounds and competition with state park campgrounds. He distributed a copy of Senate Bill 571 from the 2012 General Assembly session that would have addressed camping fees in state parks. The bill was carried over from the 2012 session.

Mr. Elton noted that there were some 1,800 state park camp sites vs. some 20,000 private camp sites. He said that DCR had made enormous strides with regard to camp sites. He said that Virginia had the highest fees for any public providers of campsites in the Commonwealth.

Ms. Young suggested that DCR work with Virginia Tech to develop market research regarding competition between public and private campgrounds.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next Meeting

Chairman Smith said that he would work with staff to schedule the next meeting which would likely be late March or early April.

Adjourn

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark E. Smith
Chairman

David A. Johnson
Director