

**Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
Natural Bridge State Park Master Plan Public Meeting
December 15, 2016 6:00 pm
Washington Hall
Rockbridge, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The Public Meeting regarding the Master Plan for Natural Bridge State Park took place at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 15, 2016 at Washington Hall in the Natural Bridge hotel in Rockbridge, Virginia.

DCR STAFF PRESENT

DCR staff: Jim Jones, Lynn Crump, Jennifer Wampler, Craig Seaver, Danette Poole, Dave Summers, Al Cire, Samantha Lopez, Dave Collett, Tom Smith, Theresa Duffey, Jim Meisner

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION LEGACY FUND STAFF PRESENT

Jennifer Bell, Matthew Rutigliano

PUBLIC PRESENT

26 members of the public attended the meeting, including a reporter from NextStar (Fox) Broadcasting.

MEETING SUMMARY

Jim Jones welcomed everyone then introduced Craig Seaver. He explained that we are here tonight to both preserve and protect Natural Bridge while planning for the future of the state park. He discussed the partnership with the Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund (VCLF) and introduced Jennifer Bell, VCLF Chief Operating Officer. Jennifer reminded attendees that VCLF saved this historic property from the auction block and will protect Natural Bridge in perpetuity by donating the property to the Commonwealth for a state park. After 18 months of hard work, Natural Bridge was inducted as Virginia's 37th state park on Sept. 24, 2016.

Danette Poole described the state park master planning process, unique for Natural Bridge because the park opened without a completed plan and without DCR ownership of the property. The master plan is based in part on the Virginia Outdoors Plan, the state's guiding document for outdoors recreation, which is in turn based on the Virginia Outdoors Survey. The Virginia Outdoors Plan and survey results can be accessed on the [DCR website](#), along with the [executive summaries](#) of master plans for all state parks.

Virginia Code requires DCR to prepare a master plan for state parks prior to development. DCR updates master plans for 42 state parks every 10 years unless something like major land acquisition accelerates the schedule. An advisory committee has been established to assist with the development of a purpose statement, goals and objectives for the park and facility selection and phasing. Two public meetings are held to offer a broader opportunity for comment.

Once the plan is complete, it is presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation. Legislators also have an opportunity to comment before the final plan is adopted by DCR's director. This whole process requires about 18 months. For this park, DCR is integrating other planning documents: the resource management plan, a visitor experience plan, the state park business plan, and a market analysis into the master plan document.

Resource specialist Al Cire provided a virtual tour of Natural Bridge, a National and Virginia Historic Landmark, as well as a resource overview. He talked about the trails that have been added to the park and thanked Bill Gordge and Roanoke Pathfinders for Greenways for helping get these trails on the ground.

As part of the resource planning, park staff consider ecologically sensitive areas, natural communities, historic resources, karst resources, slope and soil suitability. Lynn Crump added that other resources considered include elevations, viewsheds, and connections between the park and the surrounding community. A “buildable areas map” identifies the best areas for facility development based on the analysis of these resources.

Lynn explained DCR’s mission and the mission of DCR’s state parks division. She then presented the park purpose statement and master plan goals developed with the advisory committee and VCLF. She also mentioned the park’s status as an affiliate site with the National Park Service, and the importance of working with all partners, tourism, and local governments on this planning effort.

Jennifer Wampler shared information on a list of potential facilities developed and prioritized by the advisory committee and VCLF.

Public comments:

- Consider specialness of place and the experience of getting to the bridge. There should be a coherent pattern of movement around what is already developed (1950’s buildings and parking lot) so that the visitor’s first impression is of the natural, not the built environment. This is the state’s oldest park, although it has been in private hands throughout most of its history, and it should be the jewel of the state park system.
- The visitor’s first impression and the visitor center cannot be a low priority, because they organize the experience of the people coming here.
- Sustainable, low-impact land uses like tent camping should be the first priority for facility development.
- The highest priority should be monitoring the Bridge itself to be sure conditions don’t deteriorate. Over the long term, take truck traffic off the bridge and move Route 11 off the bridge.

After the public comment period, attendees asked for material in advance of the meeting in order to provide meaningful input. Staff responded to questions regarding funding and timing for facility development. Attendees were asked to look over posted maps and comment on a connectivity map highlighting regional outdoor recreation resources. The meeting adjourned at 7:04

ATTACHMENTS

1. Meeting agenda
2. Park purpose statement and goals