

State Trails Advisory Committee 11.17.2020 Meeting Notes

10 a.m. to noon

Link to Meeting Slides: <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/document/STAC-presentation-11-17-20.pdf>

Link to Meeting Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQONOfiLTTk&feature=youtu.be>

Attendees:

Beth Lohman, Friends of the Huckleberry Trail
Bethany McCunn, Virginia Department of Health (Child passenger safety and bike/ped safety)
Cat Anthony, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation, Virginia Trails Alliance
Champe Burnley, Virginia Bicycling Federation
Charles Grymes, Greater Prince William Trails Coalition
Cheryl White, Elizabeth River Trail Foundation
Chris Gensic, City of Charlottesville
David Landis, Village to Village Press, LLC / TransVirginia Bike Route
Ellen Shepard, Virginia's United Land Trusts
Forrest Atwood, DCR
Heather Barrar, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR)
James Beazley, Dominion
Jason Powell, Virginia Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee
Jim Lynch, Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail; PHTA
Michael Burton, City of Richmond
John Bolecek, VDOT Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner
John Kirk, DWR
Kelly McClary-PRR Director for DCR
Kristal McKelvey, DCR.
Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Greenways
Lynn Crump, DCR
Matthew Helt, Dispersed Recreation Manager, George Washington & Jefferson National Forests
Michael Farrell, Metro Washington Council of Governments
Nathan Burrell, DCR
Pat Calvert, Virginia Conservation Network
Phil Riggan, PlanRVA (RRPDC) in Richmond
Sally Aungier, Virginia Horse Council, VSP volunteer
Sandra Tanner, Virginia Tourism and Roanoke River Rails to Trails
Sarah Sanford, East Coast Greenway Alliance
Shane Sawyer, VDOT
Shawn Lindsey, Spearhead Trails
Steve Galyean, Planning & Partnerships Director; Virginia Tourism Corporation
Steve Lambert, HRTPO
Tom Smith, DCR Operations Deputy Director
Tracy Lind, Piedmont Environmental Council (on behalf of the Emerald Ribbons Committee)
Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service, RTCA
Victoria Ferguson, Monacan Indian

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W. Alan Day, PATC: Wolf Trap, Potomac Heritage Trail
Wendy Austin, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River

New STAC members Victoria Ferguson and Jody Shiflett were welcomed along with others on the call, who were asked to put their names and affiliations in the chat log.

DCR Deputy Director Nathan Burrell provided information on agency diversity initiatives and reminded everyone that they have agency to address justice, equity diversity and inclusion in their daily lives. November is Native American Heritage Month.

Panelists James Beazley and Paul Gilbert discussed partnerships with utilities for trail development. Mr. Beazley reminded everyone that STAC member, Jim Beamer is a huge advocate for trails and is open to co-locating trails on power line right-of-ways (ROWS). This is an efficient use of space and may defray the cost of trail development. A current project is the Fall Line (former trolley line trail) in Henrico County. Some of the foundation blocks for success with that project: 1) working with officials for an initial engagement and scheduling a walk through so Dominion could identify what would be necessary for co-use 2) identifying problems up front, especially when near substations. Projects are more feasible when they are located on ROW owned by Dominion Energy – staff are open and willing to work with individuals and entities for use of these ROWs. With the Fall Line, Dominion owns the ROW. More often, power line corridors are easements that require negotiations with individual landowners. Dominion is willing to work to find solutions. Contact James Beazley or Jim Beamer for clarification or if there is a project underway that may be a good fit.

Paul Gilbert provided some history of the Washington & Old Dominion (W&OD Trail), which started with a 1.5-mile pilot project in 1974. NOVA Parks (formerly known as Northern Virginia Park Authority) proceeded to buy ROW in the 1980s at fair market value, primarily with Land and Water Conservation (LWCF) funding; Dominion maintained an easement for their transmission line. The trail is now 45 miles long and has approximately 2-3 million uses a year, one of the busiest trails in the USA. It is hard to measure use due to over 70 street crossings where people can access the trail. The trail footprint has evolved – what started as a 6-foot-wide sidewalk is now mostly 11 feet wide, with more width needed in urban area sections. Now they are installing dual trails – creating separated bike and pedestrian lanes with a median in between to keep users apart. Most funding now is through transportation dollars, although the linear park was initially funded with LWCF, then the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). More money is needed now to add bridges and overpasses as usage has increased, and the authority is partnering with regional entities to cover infrastructure costs. Although recreational use is still important, the trail is similar to a road with peak times during rush hours. The park generates over \$1 million in revenue to fund trail maintenance. Since the 45 miles is used for free, income is generated through fiber optic use of the corridor and special use permits for events. The proximity to data centers, high-tech industries and Dominion's transmission line have been important factors for utility leases.

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Q&A

Q: Since Dominion holds on to an easement, but land is owned by the Park Authority, does Dominion provide any revenue for the trail?

A: No.

Q: Can you talk about the revenue you bring in through special events?

A: NOVA Parks is unique, it operates in six jurisdictions (three counties and three cities). Since there are overlapping park systems, the tax base income is very small. The authority generates 87% of operating income through a variety of sources, wedding and event venues, water parks, etc. They have added 2,000 acres of parkland in the last decade and are in constant development mode.

Q: A shout out to Mr. Jim Beamer, who has been a champion for trail projects. Is Dominion willing to share information on the power line corridors they hold in fee simple?

A: Yes.

Four panelists provided information on their use of technology along the trail. Cheryl White with the Elizabeth River Trail Foundation started off with The Norfolk Smart Trail, a tech area along the Elizabeth River Trail (ERT) included as part of a five-city grant proposal for Fiber Optics in Hampton Roads.

The ERT meanders along the waterfront in Norfolk and includes community off-road sections, rail-trail and some mixed use on roads. This urban trail passes through historic and residential areas. The Foundation is testing different amenities based on segment characteristics. There are plans to expand and develop some loops.

The ERT is a placemaking initiative for Norfolk's Innovation Corridor – a place to attract talent – to encourage interaction– and provide connectivity for tech facilities along the route, including hospitals, universities, and transit centers. A successful \$4m capital campaign has enabled the Foundation to meet baseline needs to prepare for the fiber optic infrastructure. This includes a major wayfinding effort; over 500 signs are being installed to provide consistency as the trail user passes from sidewalk to road to rail trail and other surfaces. The Foundation has met with rescue and fire departments to design an emergency response system that will link to Norfolk's GIS System.

The Norfolk Smart Trail initiative is part of a larger regional push to use the new fiber infrastructure to improve visitor services. Some amenities being considered include sensorized trash cans, smart light poles, and an eco-dog-watering station designed by a local entrepreneur that uses a solar-powered filtration system. A company that monitors sea level rise gauges has been pulled in to monitor eco counters as well. There are plans for solar-powered trailheads structures that will feature interactive signage at the trailheads under development.

The Plum Point Park trailhead features a [double turbo challenge fitness course](#) and the [ADA kayak launch](#) is nearly complete. A play sculpture and walking labyrinth are also under development.

A luminous pathway called the GlowLine is being developed at the Jefferson Park Trailhead. The Foundation selected aggregate stone with bioluminescence from a study of fifteen

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alternatives. This will provide some light in a section of trail that is currently dark at night. The Foundation is currently asking for public input on where to focus their efforts.

Chris Gensic provided information on the educational posts planned along the Heyward Forest Trail. The City of Charlottesville received a \$600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help purchase the land, and the grant requires teaching school children about the forest. Working with the school system to meet SOL requirements, the City's limited staff will install posts with contact-free QR codes that link to educational material. The material can be updated endlessly and link to specific grade-level content, which can be as rich as desired. Some children who have enjoyed the trail have sent letters and drawings to Ms. Heyward, the property donor, expressing their appreciation.

Beth Lohman presented on solar-powered emergency towers that have been installed along the Huckleberry Trail in Christiansburg. The Huckleberry Trail was launched in 1966 as a one-mile nature path near Blacksburg. In the 80s and 90s, a Friend's Group garnered support to extend the trail through land and ROW acquisition. Now the trail is a 40-mile network extending from the Gateway Trail, which connects into the Poverty Creek Trail System in the National Forest and to a Town Forest on Brush Mountain, through the Virginia Tech campus and the Coal Miner's Heritage Park to Christiansburg.

In 2019, the Town of Christiansburg installed nine solar-powered call boxes in the Town's park system. Although crime rates are low, there was one high-profile incident that spurred public interest in safety. A push-button notifies 911 responders of the box's location, even where cell phone coverage is spotty.

Mike Farrell presented on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's [Street Smart](#) Safety campaign, which includes an electronic testimonial wall. The campaign integrates several components, including broadcast and outdoor advertising, media relations, digital media, and outreach events. Included are enforcement workshops for police officers and enforcement events designed to increase awareness and improve compliance. The wall features video and QR-code enabled testimonials from people that have been in an accident; conveying just how significantly these accidents affect people's lives. Including the emotional aspect is needed to motivate people to change.

Q&A

Q: Are any speakers familiar with wind-powered facilities for lights? Any examples?

A: Follow up answer--you can find several examples of wind solar street lights online. Some products made in the USA are available through [Colite Turbine Technologies](#), although DCR does not recommend any specific brands. Also see this list of [financial and regulatory incentives](#) for alternative power in Virginia.

Steve Galyean gave an update on the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) and Trail Development. The pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism industry. Tourism is very resilient and historically quick to recover after times of crisis. It is an instant revenue generator through lodging, retail, and food sales--all important for local communities.

Steve provided these online resources in the chat bar:

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- VTC Industry Assistance: www.VATC.org
- DRIVE Tourism 2.0 : www.vatc.org/drive2/ (The full Tourism plan will be available in December, 2020)
- Rebuild VA : www.governor.virginia.gov/rebuildva/

A [study](#) completed by Tourism's Economics section predicted the initial recovery would involve leisure and driving trips, which we are already seeing. The secondary recovery will involve small and medium-sized groups and regional air travel. Travelers choosing outdoor recreation close to home due to the pandemic resulted in a very busy camping season ([USA Today](#)).

Tourism's Drive 2.0 planning effort involved 750 industry stakeholders. A consultant survey asking "what should we be promoting?" and "what should we be building?" revealed strong support for outdoor recreation and trails. The current update (2020-2025 Strategic Tourism Plan) identifies the outdoors as the primary lure in Virginia. Outdoor recreation tops the list as a priority area for product development (89%) over the next 5 years. The Plan will be launched via a webinar on December 2.

Tourism provides marketing assistance through brand initiatives and grant programs. Some initiatives include "We'll be Waiting," "Find What you Love," "Love Lives Here," and "WanderLove." In the Spring, VTC will launch the "Share What you Love" campaign.

Last winter, DCR and VTC discussed partnering to fund an economic impact study of trails in Virginia. Plans were shelved due to the pandemic, but the effort will be picked up again as soon as possible.

Share with outfitters and other trail service providers that the [Rebuild VA](#) program can help businesses with 250 or fewer employees operating prior to 3/12/2020. The guidelines have been recently revised.

Three panelists shared lighting talks on their trails or routes in Northern Virginia. Tracy Lind described the Loudoun County Emerald Ribbons planning effort, which utilizes stream corridors to connect a countywide trail system for people and wildlife. This initiative is community-driven and named after Boston's Emerald Necklace. Since no development is allowed within the floodplain, a system of low-impact trail corridors can gradually be pieced together there. A greenways plan modeled after a 1994 plan that was never adopted received lots of community support in 2018. A subcommittee was established to track trail development and in 2019/2020, the plan was adopted by the County. The committee includes a range of stakeholders, including the Piedmont Environmental Council, American Roots, citizens, Bike Loudon, etc., who are currently working on a plan for implementation. The Emerald Ribbons Committee identifies potential trail opportunities and offers recommendations to the County.

Bill Neidringhaus presented on the Potomac Heritage Trail, which passes near its namesake river from Loudoun County through the Northern Neck in Virginia. In Western Loudoun, there is little public land but a rich network of low-traffic, unpaved roads that could be stitched together with some infrastructure improvements in higher-traffic areas. Downey Mill Road is a scenic highlight in this section. In Eastern Loudoun, more public land centered around scenic and historic resources provides connectivity. One major gap could be closed if a brownfield area could be converted to a park. This is a high priority, as it would close the gap to Great Falls.

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Other high priority gaps include the desired Pohick Creek road-walk-to-stream-valley transition and the proposed Powells Creek Boardwalk.

Dave Landis presented on the [TransVirginia Trail](#), a 550-mile trail that runs from Washington, DC to Damascus. It follows mostly unpaved forest roads and rail trails, capitalizing on the exploding popularity of [gravel riding](#) and camping. The route is 60 percent gravel, a gorgeous route through Loudoun, forest lands, and rugged riding on high mountain ridges. For less skilled riders, a valley route cuts out some of the climbs. A higher, more rugged mountain route hugs the West Virginia border in some areas. The route utilizes National Forest roads and rail trails through millions of acres of public land. Riders support local businesses: it is possible to camp or stay indoors and the route passes by small community markets and country stores. The route includes the C&O Canal Trail, the W&OD Trail, New River Trail State Park, and the Virginia Creeper Trail into Damascus. There are several shorter route options. Some sections parallel the Appalachian Trail, so riders can use hostels that also cater to hikers. The route connects urban and rural areas.

Q&A

Q: Are you seeing many electric bikes on the trail?

A: Not yet – the range is 50 miles for most E-bikes. E-bikes are legal along most of the route except in some sections of National Forest.

Q: What is the source of the "Loudoun County Standard?"

A: I believe that it would be in the CIP. That's where the county determines what facilities are required based on population. The county set its own standards for mileage of trails per person. The Park Director gave us that standard.

Q: Are unpaved roads usually pretty narrow?

A: Yes, in terms of roads but not trails. Traffic volumes are much lower and traffic moves much slower on unpaved roads.

John Bolecek provided the link to [VDOT's interactive bike map](#) of VDOT's gravel roads and also unpaved state forest roads open to bicycles. The Virginia Bicycling Federation also provides a [link to this map](#).

Input since last meeting

Although less than a third of STAC members filled in the survey on the Greenways and Trails E-news, responses were very positive. These respondents primarily "always read" the E-newsletter and found the content "very useful." They were mostly satisfied with the layout. Grant information is a very important topic, along with planning and advocacy.

DCR is reaching out to collaborators and working to update the trails layer on the [VDCR Trails Collaboration website](#). This is a work in progress.

Comments on the Middle James Segment Plan and the James River Heritage Corridor Strategic Plan are due by November 24. See links below:

- Revised Middle James Segment Plan
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bNyoGT0RhVweDDx-wYK8Ppl6pNievz7/view>
- Draft JRH Corridor Strategic Plan

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1boxZCiERup_ltHBhD8MubadVeTcYNsN4/view

Topics for next meeting

Requests have come in to feature someone from the Outdoor Recreation Office and the Outdoor Recreation Caucus at the next meeting. Please send suggestions for other topics or potential speakers.

Jennifer will be working on the Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail feasibility study next year, which will require a considerable time investment.

Jennifer is serving on a national technical committee studying E-bikes. Please send your positive and negative experiences with E-bikes to share with this group. DCR revised its policy on e-bikes over the summer to address enacted legislation that went into effect on July 1, 2020 as a result of [HB543](#). The National Park Service has also revised their [policy](#). In September, the U.S. Forest Service became the latest federal agency to publicize its intentions to expand e-bike access with proposed revisions to their travel management manual that include new definitions for an e-bike and a Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3 e-bike, as well as guidance and criteria for designating e-bike use on NFS roads, on NFS trails, and in areas on NFS lands.

Conferences

New information since the meeting: The trails track of the VAULT conference will likely be May 4 or 11, 2021. Content will focus on regional trails. A call for proposals will likely go out in late November/early December. The Agritourism/Trails/Farmer's Markets conference will be planned as a virtual meeting next fall. Please send your ideas for training topics needed and potential speakers for these events.

The meeting adjourned at noon.

Other items from Chat Log

Champe Burnley: Today, Governor Northam indicated that his Administration will support legalization of marijuana. He felt that this could raise hundreds of millions of new tax revenue for the Commonwealth. Could this new revenue stream be used to fund a dedicated funding source for trails, greenways, multi-use paths and non-motorized transportation in Virginia? I would like STAC to investigate this potential opportunity.

Pete Eshelman: YESSS Champe! Yes

Sandra Tanner: Great Idea, Champ! Would love to see that!

Victoria Ferguson: Will we do land acknowledgements for the original indigenous land owners/users for all state parks?