

**STATE PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY COUNCIL (RSA 216-A:3-k)  
December 7, 2007, 9 a.m., DRED Main Conference Room, Concord**

Members present:

Sen. Bob Odell, Chairman  
Susan Arnold, AMC  
Dir. Allison McLean, designee for Comm. Bald  
Craig Mayo, NH Snowmobile Association  
Kathleen Reardon, Citizens Bank  
Bill Roberts, Friends of Pisgah  
Rep. Elisabeth Sanders, RR&D Committee  
Maggie Stier, NH Preservation Alliance  
Rep. Leigh Webb, House

Others present:

Tom Elliott, Friends of Mt Sunapee  
Gail Wolek, Division Deputy Director  
Chris Gamache, Bureau of Trails Chief

Members absent:

Paul Doscher, SPNHF  
Sen. Margaret Hassan, Senate  
Jeffrey Gilbert, Business community  
Ruth Griffin, General public  
Dick Huot, Tri-County CAP and NH ATV Club  
Rep. Susan Kepner, RR&D Committee  
Richard Ober, Monadnock Conservancy

Others present:

Mike Housman, Supervisor of Park Operations  
Johanna Lyons, State Parks Planning Specialist  
Torene Tango-Lowy, Div Parks, Council clerk

Call to Order Senator Odell called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. He reiterated the Council's role to appraise the Division's operations, and provide advice to and serve as an advocate for the Division.

Director's Remarks Director McLean provided an update on Cannon Mountain winter operations: an early season opening provided by good weather conditions and the hope that the investment in early ski operations will payoff. Most park buildings and facilities are closed, but state lands remain open to the public.

Director McLean provided a list of Legislative Service Requests that may be of interest to the Division and the postcard announcement regarding ReserveAmerica. She introduced members of the Parks staff: Gail Wolek, Chris Gamache, Mike Housman, Johanna Lyons and Torene Tango-Lowy. She encouraged Council members to get to know the staff and to draw on their knowledge.

The Department celebrated the acquisition of Temple Mountain State Reservation, thanks to private, State, Federal and LCHIP funding. The Division is interviewing for the Historic Sites Specialist position. Director McLean provided a copy of the Division organizational chart.

*Proposed fee package.* Ms. Wolek facilitated a discussion of Park fees. The Division assesses its budget and the outcome of its operations with cost accounting. The next biennial budget process will begin next spring, but the Division is developing a fee package. Following its discussion with the Governor's office, the Division will provide the Council with a final draft of the fee package in January and will hold public information sessions. Further discussion entailed, including a per person v. per vehicle charge; a resident v. non-resident differential; streamlining the collection of fees to address traffic safety issues; and the increase in expenses, such as fuel. The Division plans to present a clear and compelling fee proposal to the public, with the support of the Council.

The Council discussed the \$1.5 million Division deficit, which was a cumulative effect over five years: the deficit will not increase if the fee package is denied because the Division will hold its operational expenses to its income; cuts to its 2006-2007 operations were 20-25% resulting in less staff, tighter park hours, and deferred maintenance; field operations were one of the hardest hit and

the field staff are one of the hardest working groups in State service; the Parks budget will be held to \$5.5 million based upon revenue history; any excess or savings will be applied to reducing the deficit. There will be an incremental fee increase this spring.

*Strategic Plan.* Johanna Lyons provided an update to the Strategic Plan: the Division suspended negotiations with the preferred consultant because of a major change in the project team. The Division has reconsidered its approach and will release a Request for Proposals on Dec. 10, detailing the requirements of the Plan based upon the earlier RFQ, with a not to exceed fee. The Division still hopes to meet the current deadlines for the Plan. Developing the Plan in-house is not feasible due to staffing limitations, capital projects schedules and oversight, and greater efficiencies gained from consultant expertise.

Bureau of Trails Bureau Chief Chris Gamache provided copies of recent press releases and an overview of his operations. Council members discussed Jericho Mountain State Park, which was purchased through a portion of OHRV registration and gas fees: legislature determined that there is a need to find compatible locations for ATV recreation; the trails were laid out in consultation with NHFG and DES; NHFG is the principal enforcement agency; the Bureau meets with clubs regularly; clubs assist with monitoring, grooming and maintaining trails. Mr. Roberts suggested that a breakdown of fees that supports the Bureau and its positions would be helpful to the Council.

Bureau of Parks Supervisor of Park Operations Mike Housman provided an overview of his operations. The Council discussed the following: the development, construction and maintenance crew are funded 60% Park Fund/40% General Fund and is responsible to all DRED facilities; Cannon Mountain has its own specialized crew, but also relies on the Department crew; the use of iron rangers has been successful, bringing in an additional \$50K in revenue; more iron rangers will be installed at the smaller campgrounds and un-staffed areas; parking pay stations will be test piloted at Hampton Beach; pay stations will improve the visual impact of Hampton Beach and is expected to be more efficient for revenue collection and staffing when installed in appropriate parks.

Rep. Webb requested a breakdown of the \$6 million capital improvement projects. Ms. Lyons informed Rep. Webb that an RFP has been drafted for the Sawyer House assessment and will be released early next year, after she facilitates the Strategic Plan RFP.

Any other business. Mr. Gamache responded to Senator Odell's inquiry: although feasible, other States have found limited success with using iron rangers at trailhead areas to solely fund non-motorized programs; other sources of State funding have been through lotteries and casino gambling. In NH, many public trails are located on private lands through agreements with landowners: there may not be enough trails on DRED lands to financially support a non-motorized trail program. Non-motorized trail users want grant funding for trail work, reimbursement to volunteers and for materials; and trail facilities.

Next Meeting The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 11, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. at DRED.

*Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy.*