

**Board of Conservation and Recreation
Thursday, December 15, 2011
Occoneechee State Park**

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Present

Mark E. Smith, Chair
Sheryl W. Swinson
Robert L. Wilkerson

W. Bruce Wingo, Vice Chair
David Watts

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Not Present

Alan D. Albert
Gwen Mason
Stephen Murray
Andrea Young

Richard Formato
George R. Melnyk, Sr.
Jennifer C. Wagner

DCR Staff Present

David A. Johnson, DCR Director
Danette Poole
Joe Elton
Tom Smith
Bill Conkle

Call to Order & Introductions

Mr. Smith called the meeting to order. There was not a quorum present.

Mr. Smith said that motions presented for action would be the sense of the Board.

Approval of Minutes from June 17, 2011

As there was no quorum, the minutes were accepted, but not approved in final form.

Director's Report

Mr. Smith welcomed Secretary of Natural Resources Doug Domenech who had been present earlier for the dedication of the marina at Occoneechee State Park. He thanked members for their service.

Secretary Domenech said that the Governor created a Government Reform Commission in 2010. He said that one of the recommendations had been consolidation of Natural Resource agencies. He said that the recommendation had been for additional study. He said that he would be turning to Board members to help review future proposals. He said that there were also considerations given to the consolidation of Boards. He said those proposals would move forward with the General Assembly Session.

Mr. Smith thanked Secretary Domenech for his comments and participation.

Mr. Johnson continued with the Director's report.

Mr. Johnson said that among the things that had occurred at DCR that he and Mr. Wilkinson had continued their visits to State Parks and Natural Heritage Areas. He said that the Natural Heritage Areas do not receive the same amount of attention as parks, but that the areas had a lot of natural beauty. He suggested that members visit these areas when possible. There are 60 Natural Area Preserves in the Commonwealth, comprising some 50,000 acres.

Mr. Johnson said that DCR is working to develop common platforms across all Agency divisions. He said that the agency was systematically reviewing practices and procedures for consistency.

State Park Master Plan Updates

Mr. Conkle gave the following Master Plan updates. He said that since there was no quorum staff would ask for a sense of the Board regarding recommendations.

Occoneechee State Park

Mr. Conkle gave an overview of the Master Plan update for Occoneechee State Park. A full copy of the Executive Summary is available from DCR.

Occoneechee State Park has 2,695 acres which are situated on the north shore of Virginia's largest lake, Buggs Island Lake. The lake, which is also referred to as the John H. Kerr Reservoir covers approximately 48,000 acres. Occoneechee State Park was brought into the Virginia State Park System through a lease with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1968.

As a part of the 2011 master plan process, the 2003 park master plan was reviewed, as well as the March 2005 and September 2009 master plan amendments made by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The 2011 master plan update describes proposed new facilities, as well as improvements to existing facilities. The full executive summary includes a list of proposed developments in priority order.

New River Trail State Park

Mr. Conkle gave a review of the recommended updates to the Master Plan for New River Trail State Park. A copy of the full executive summary is available from DCR.

New River Trail State Park is a 1,337-acre park that is located in Pulaski, Wythe, Carroll and Grayson Counties in the Mount Rogers and New River Valley planning districts. The park lies along 39 miles of the New River, and along 12 miles of Chestnut Creek. Other portions of the trail border Peak Creek and Claytor Lake.

New River Trail State Park is Virginia's National Millennium Legacy Trail. It has been designated a National Recreation Trail by the Secretary of the Interior. It is eligible for inclusion on the National Historic Landmarks Register.

The master plan update represents both new facilities and improvements to existing facilities.

Chippokes Plantation State Park

Mr. Conkle gave a review of the recommended updates to the Master Plan for Chippokes Plantation State Park. A copy of the full executive summary is available from DCR.

Chippokes Plantation is one of the oldest continuously farmed plantations in the United States and a unique and treasured Virginia State Park. Chippokes Plantation Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969. Chippokes Plantation State Park is located in the Crater Planning District along the James River in Surry County.

As a part of the 2011 master plan process, the 2000 park Master Plan and the 2006 Plan Amendment were reviewed. It was determined that no significant changes occurred to warrant a full revision of the master plan.

Chippokes, due to its location on the James River will have ongoing issues with shoreline erosion. Other ongoing challenges include placing utility wires underground in the historic areas, resurfacing roads and parking areas, constructing trails and trail connectors, and enhancing accessibility in the park.

Westmoreland State Park

Mr. Conkle gave a review of the recommended updates to the Master Plan for Westmoreland Plantation State Park. A copy of the full executive summary is available from DCR.

Westmoreland State Park is located along the cliffs of the Potomac River in the Northern Neck Planning District. The park is an hour and a half from Washington D.C. and the populous Northern Virginia region. Westmoreland was one of the original six Virginia State Parks opened in 1936.

The 2011 update places value upon connecting Westmoreland State Park to other resources in the community. Westmoreland is located near the birthplaces of George Washington (Wakefield) and Robert E. Lee (Stratford Hall). The Potomac River provides connectivity opportunities through the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail and the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail.

Park improvements since the 2006 Master Plan include the renovation of the conference center into Murphy Hall, construction of a LEED certified Visitor Center, completion of stabilization and erosion control measures the beach and park cliff, and development of a hike/bike trail connecting park amenities to the historic Route 3 corridor.

Shenandoah River Raymond "Andy" Guest, Jr. State Park

Mr. Conkle gave a review of the recommended updates to the Master Plan for Shenandoah River Raymond "Andy" Guest, Jr. State Park. A copy of the full executive summary is available from DCR.

Shenandoah River Raymond "Andy" Guest, Jr. State Park is located in the Northern Shenandoah Valley Region in Warren County, eight miles south of Front Royal and just north of the town of Bentonville, along Route 340. The park consists of approximately 1,619 acres and has 5.2 miles of river frontage along the south fork of the Shenandoah River.

As a part of the 2011 master plan update process, DCR conducted a review of the 2001 and 2006 amended Shenandoah River State Park Master Plan. Following a discussion of changing

conditions in the park, it was determined that no significant changes occurred to warrant a full revision of the master plan.

Park improvements since the writing of the 2001 Master Plan include: a LEED certified visitor center, canoe-in campground site improvements with a vault toilet and bathhouse; group camp relocation and parking adjacent to the existing canoe-in campground; development of the 33 campsites with utilities and bathhouse; expansion of park trails; 11 housekeeping cabins and all associated parking, wells, drain fields and utilities.

Mr. Elton noted that Hurricane Irene did substantial damage to Westmoreland State Park. The campground has been closed since that time. Plans were to have the campground reopened in March, 2012.

York River State Park

Mr. Conkle gave a review of the recommended updates to the Master Plan for York River State Park. A copy of the full executive summary is available from DCR.

York River State Park is located in the Hampton Roads Planning District in James City County. It is located near the heavily populated Cities of Williamsburg, Newport News, Poquoson, Hampton, Norfolk, and Virginia Beach as well as York County.

Located on the banks of the York River, the park consists of 2,536 acres and has 3.5 miles of river frontage. Proposed for state and federal historic register designation, and located within the park boundaries is the Taskinas Plantation Archaeological District which encompasses the historic 18th Century Taskinas Plantation. The park also contains significant Native American archaeological sites, one of which, the Croaker Landing Site, is on the National Register of Historic Places. There are also two known 10,000-year old Paleo-Indian activity areas within the park's boundaries that may also be eligible for National Register listing.

Mr. Smith noted that many of the recommendations in the Master Plans were conceptual in nature and depended on funding as it becomes available.

Virginia Outdoors Plan Update

Ms. Poole gave an update regarding the 2013 Virginia Outdoors Plan. A full copy of Ms. Poole's report is available from DCR. She noted that the 2013 plan would be web based and that there would not be a print version.

Outdoor Recreation Objective

Provide guidance to all levels of government and the private sector in meeting the state's conservation, outdoor recreation and open space needs.

Produced in accordance with §10.1-200 of the *Code of Virginia*.

Land Conservation Objective

Provide guidance for land protection through actions of the *Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF)*.

Identify potential conservation lands in each planning district (region).

Produced in accordance with §10.1-1021 of the Virginia Code.

Land & Water Conservation Fund

Requirement of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program.

Provides guidance for grant fund allocation to state and local projects.

Results from the 2011 Virginia Outdoor Survey

Overview

- Virginia updates Every five years for the VOP
- The next VOP update is in 2013
- DCR advertised for bids for the citizen survey and contracted with CSR
- Statewide representative random-sample survey designed to:
- Estimate demand for various activities and facilities
- Assess opinions about related issues
- Test different methods for future efficiencies

Methods

- 13,880 randomly selected addresses
- Mixed-mode survey (mail and web)
- Four treatment groups by mode
- 3,150 usable responses (22.7% overall)
 - 93% by mail; 7% by web
 - Of the four treatment groups, mail-only had the highest response rate (25.7%)
- Weighted data (adjusted for disproportionate sampling by planning district and for demographic representativeness – age, gender, race)
- Overall margin of error approx. 2.4%
- Larger error with subgroups
- Other sources of error difficult to measure

Access to Outdoor Recreation

Most popular activities

Walking for pleasure and visiting parks remain the top activities.

When you participate

When do you most often participate in outdoor activities?

Mostly on weekends	55%
About equally	37%
Mostly during the week	8%

Information

How do you usually find out about outdoor information and activities?

Word of mouth	72%
Internet	59%
Magazine and newspaper articles	46%
Travel guides, pamphlets, brochures	33%
Advertisements	33%
Other	8%

Technology***Which technologies do you use in connection with outdoor recreation?***

Internet	67%
Smart phone	27%
Social media	26%
GPS	25%
Digital mapping	23%
Remote cameras	9%
Other	6%

Developed parks vs. natural areas***Do you prefer developed parks with a variety of recreational facilities or natural areas with limited facilities?***

Both equally	49%
Natural area parks	27%
Developed parks	15%
No preference	9%

Virginia State Parks

Places for people to explore and enjoy nature	61%
Conserving & protecting our natural resources	58%
Places for walking, running and other activities	48%
Places for families and friends to spend time	45%
Recreation opportunities	36%
Attracting visitors to rural areas	24%
Places for quiet contemplation	1 7%

Camping preferences***If you camp in a state park, what type of campsite do you prefer?***

Campsites with water/electric	40%
Never use campsites	30%
Tent only	17%
Water-access (canoe-in, boat-in)	7%
Backcountry pack-in campsite	4%
Equestrian camp sites	2%

Preferred amenities in state parks

How important is it that State Parks provide the following? (Top 6 of 24)

<u>Amenity</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Very Important</u>
Hiking trails	8%	49%	43%
Camping facilities	15%	54%	31%
Visitor centers	17%	52%	31%
School programs	27%	42%	30%
Cultural/historic programs	20%	52%	28%
Family bicycle trails	21%	51%	28%

(7 more amenities at 24% to 27% “very important”)

Virginia Natural Areas & Open Space

Importance of protecting resources

How important do you feel it is to protect Virginia’s natural and open space resources?

Very important	66%
Important	28%
Not important	1%
Don’t know	5%

Spending to preserve natural areas

Should the state spend public funds to acquire land to prevent the loss of natural areas and open spaces?

Yes	73%
No	9%
Don’t know	18%

Adequacy of protection

Do you feel that Virginia’s natural and open space resources are adequately protected?

Yes	22%
No	27%
Don’t know	51%

Protection strategies

When spending public monies, which strategy is best?

Outright purchase and mgt.	68%
Purchase of easements, some public use	25%
Purchase of easements, no public use	5%

Other 3%

Virginia's Natural Area Preserves

Have you heard of Virginia's Natural Area Preserve System before?

Yes	28%
No	66%
Don't know	6%

Importance of preserve system

How important is it to you to have a state Natural Area Preserve System?

Very important	45%
Somewhat important	28%
Not important at all	3%
Don't know about the System	25%

Summary of Results

- Wide range in participation for outdoor recreation activities
- Importance of state park facilities
- Strong support for public purchase, management and access to natural areas and open space

Use of the data

- Participation rates, number of people participating and estimated population size used to create demand estimates
- Assumptions about capacity of facilities used to estimate facilities needed
- Facilities inventory from localities
- Inventory – Demand = Need

Steps in Planning Process – DCR staff

- Assess implementation of 2007 VOP (DCR & PDC staff)
- Update outdoor recreation inventory
- Conduct Virginia Outdoors Survey (UVA Center for Survey Research)
- Engage Technical Advisory Committee (appointed by DCR director)
- Conduct statewide public meetings (42 total)
- Meet with state and federal agencies
- Plan follow-up Webinar input sessions

Steps in Planning Process – Statewide

- Identify Virginia trends in outdoor recreation
- Correlate trends with inventory of outdoor recreation facilities
- Identify outdoor recreation needs based on 2011 Virginia Outdoors Survey

Steps in Planning Process – Regional

- Evaluate regional trends and outdoor recreation focus
- Identify outdoor recreation needs
- Identify projects of significance within each PDC

Public Meetings

Identify outdoor recreation uses and trends within each region of the Commonwealth

Ms. Poole said that at the next Board meeting she would give an update regarding the comments received at the public meetings.

Natural Heritage Update

Mr. Tom Smith gave an update regarding the Natural Heritage Program. A full copy of Mr. Smith's presentation is available from DCR.

Virginia Natural Heritage Program

In summary, it is our data that drives our work. This represents our Information chain – taking scientific data and transforming it into conservation information to inform land conservation and land use decision to be used and applied by many.

Natural Heritage Information Chain

Elements:

Natural communities: 125

Plant species: 609

Animal species: 827

Element ranks:

Global: 1–5

State: 1–5

Mapped locations: 8,892

Mapped location ranks

A, B, C, D, E, F, H, X

Conservation sites: 2,201

Biodiversity ranks

Boundaries.....

Ecologists conducted 80 days of field inventory at 89 sites:

- 10 days of contract work at 7 sites.
- 5 days of inventory at 2 state parks and 2 future state parks in planning.
- 12 days of inventory at 9 DCR natural area preserves.
- 53 days of de nova inventory at 69 sites.

We documented 87 new and updated EOs and collected data from 103 vegetation plots. Karen mapped the vegetation of York River State Park under contract.

DCR-DNH ecologists took advantage of the dry summer in western Virginia to visit or re-visit 21 Shenandoah Valley and mountain-top sinkhole ponds, very rare natural wetlands that were mostly dry by mid-summer in 2011. Ecologists were able to compare the draw-down stage vegetation with vegetation that had been documented in earlier visits, which in some cases was found to be surprisingly different. Several new natural community occurrences were documented.

We worked with state park resource managers and natural area stewards on the DCR sites we visited, as well as cooperators from the National Park Service, Department of Defense, Forest Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, TNC, and private landowners on the de nova sites.

Zoology field season

A new population of the federal and state endangered James Spiny mussel (G1 S1, FE, SE) was found in Buckingham County in 2011. Over the course of two days, 75 individuals of all size classes were observed within about 1km of river habitat. Both the size classes and numbers indicate this is currently a healthy population. This and 59 other sites were surveyed throughout central Virginia to locate R,T&E mussels within the James River drainage with funding provided by the USFWS.

Botany field highlights

A two year inventory funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to assess the viability of shale-barren rockcress (*Arabia serotina*, G2/S2/LE/LT) occurrences on U.S. Forest Service lands in Virginia was initiated in August of this year. The findings from this inventory will be used to focus permanent protection measures to be taken by the USFS in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The first year's field work was completed at the end of September by the DNH Field Botanist and Stewardship Biologist, with assistance in late September by the Mountain Region Steward. Shale-barren rockcress is a globally rare, federally listed Endangered and State listed Threatened plant in the mustard family. It is a biennial herb associated with shaley herbaceous to woodland habitats on steep slopes referred to as "shale-barrens". The global distribution of this species includes western Virginia and eastern West Virginia. Viability is being assessed by counting the number of "bolted plants", those that have produced a flowering/fruitlet stem; vegetative plants in the form of rosettes of basal leaves are also noted. Eighteen previously-documented, mapped locations for the species were visited in 2011 on lands within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Alleghany, Augusta, Bath, and Rockbridge counties, and a total of only four bolted plants and 79 rosettes were observed. However, the sites targeted in 2011 were focused on those in which few plants had been previously documented, as potentially larger populations will be targeted for seed collection in the 2012 field season. These seeds will be deposited for long-term storage at the North Carolina Botanical Garden.

Picketts Harbor addition

Davis Tract 88 acre
60 Natural Area Preserves –

- 50,579 acres - 587 mapped locations of natural communities and rare species

Natural Area Preserve Management

- Longleaf Pine Restoration – from 1.5 million acres to “we can count them” to 150,000 native VA longleaf seedlings on DCR NAPs.
- Native Plant Brochures
- 25th Anniversary Field day

On Saturday October 8 DCR held a series of guided hikes at 12 Natural Area Preserves ranging from Lee County to Frederick County to Northampton County. Over 200 individuals turned out for the hikes to learn more about their State Natural Area Preserve System and enjoy an interpreted hike. The day was a success in providing many citizens with a first time introduction to the Natural Heritage Program and the State Natural Area Preserve System, getting the word out that Natural Area Preserves exist statewide and are open for everyone’s enjoyment, and providing a great outdoor experience to many.

State Parks Update

Mr. Elton gave the State Parks update. A full copy of Mr. Elton’s report is available from DCR.

Mr. Elton reviewed the reorganization structure of the Division of State Parks.

Mr. Elton reviewed highlights of the 75th Anniversary of Virginia State Parks. The Board participated in the June event at Hungry Mother State Park.

The PBS Documentary on Virginia State Parks received the Platinum EMPixx Award from The American Pixel Academy.

75 Days of Summer

- Over 30,000 people participated in the 75 Days of Summer Contest
- Over \$50,000 in prizes, including a 2011 fully loaded pop up camper

Mr. Elton reviewed visitation numbers. The 2011 numbers were based on year-end projections.

	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Visitation	8 million	7.6 million
Revenue	15.3 million	15.9 million
Volunteer Hours	256,418	343,775
Interp. Programs	13,025	13,526

Other Business

There was no further business.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Suggested 2012 Meeting Dates

Thursday, April 19
Thursday, July 19
Thursday, October 18

Adjourn

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark E. Smith
Chair

David A. Johnson
DCR Director