



Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
State Trails Advisory Committee

State Trails Advisory Committee Meeting

October 24, 2023

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM, Virtual

Time and Place

The State Trails Advisory Committee meeting took place from 10:30am-12:00pm on Tuesday, October 24, 2023 virtually on Microsoft Teams.

State Trails Advisory Committee Members Present

Torsha Bhattacharya
Wood Hudson
Cat Anthony
Ursula Lemanski
Champe Burnley
Andrew Downs
Allison Wishon
Sally Aungier
Nathan Burrell
Adrienne Kotula

Nathan Hilbert
Matthew Helt
Elliott Caldwell
Ernest Rodriguez
Jeff Monroe
Brantley Tyndall
Frank Maguire
Peter Krebs
Jeff Monroe

State Trails Advisory Committee Members Not Present

Jerry Nichols
James Thompson
Max Goldman
Leslie Grayson
David Cook
Nikki Rovner
James Beamer
Timothy Hupp
Anthony Duncan
Rob Campbell
Justin Doyle

Michael Burton
Victoria Ferguson
Paul Gilbert
Jody Shiflett
Steve (Anthony) Pike
Kristine McCormick
Dennis Gaston
Mona Burwell
Melicent Miller
Alister Perkins

DCR Staff Present

Taylor Jenkins, Environmental Program Planner
Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner
Kelly McClary, Planning and Recreation Resources
Division Director

Frank Stovall, Deputy Director of Operations
Matthew Wells, Director of DCR
Joshua Ellington, Chief of Resource Management

Welcome

Kelly McClary welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced Taylor Jenkins as the newest Planning and Recreation Resources planner that would be taking over State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) facilitation. Taylor introduced herself further and covered agenda items to be discussed.

Icebreaker

Taylor led attendees through an icebreaker poll, which asked STAC members to indicate what their trail expertise falls under (trail creation, construction, maintenance, use, management, or other). Those who were unable to respond to the poll were asked to place their responses in the chat box.

VDOT State Trails Office Update

Torsha Bhattacharya introduced herself as the Program Manager for the State Trails Office and shared that the State Trails Office website is up, but would look different in the coming months. The State Trails Plan is underway and VDOT's consultant team is engaging with stakeholders and the public. The statewide survey recently concluded and collected over 5,000 responses. The remainder of outreach should be complete by December 2023.

The State Trails Office engaged with STAC on the state trails definition, and responses were positive overall with an underlying theme of desiring ongoing collaboration opportunities. Based on STAC feedback, the State Trails Office revised the definition to encompass a wider variety of skills and added the word "preferably" to each section of the definition.

Torsha spoke about three virtual public engagement forums that would be held in the evenings of October 30th, November 1st, and November 2nd. Each of the sections will present the same prerecorded content and representatives from each of the districts will be in attendance. The final step of the public engagement process will be small focus groups.

STAC Survey and Discussion

Taylor Jenkins provided an overview of the survey administered to STAC members from August 9 – September 8, 2023. There were 23 responses and individuals received a varying number of follow up emails depending on when or if they completed the survey.

While most respondents were solely members of STAC, some respondents were members of other trail-related committees in Virginia. According to a question that asked respondents to react to a statement, more than half of respondents did not agree that the roles and responsibilities of STAC were clearly identified. Sally Aungier provided context for her response, indicating that STAC is evolving with the creation of the State Trails Office and that lines were becoming blurry. Cat Anthony agreed.

The next question asked what STAC members thought their role was in coordinating with the State Trails Office. The theme of these responses related to ongoing collaboration, decision-making, and representing the full spectrum of trail users and trail types. Another question asked about future meeting content and general themes included more case studies that highlighted best practices, hearing about funding programs and policies, and strategic planning. The final question asked about STAC structural changes, and major themes from responses included subcommittees, more authority, and formalized membership criteria.

Draft Standard Operating Procedures

Survey feedback provided the foundation for the draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that Samantha Wangsgard provided an overview of. The SOP addresses policies, procedures, and roles to help guide the future of STAC. It outlines committee size, composition, member appointment, term lengths, voting, and engagement outside of regular meetings. Samantha clarified that once decided, the "clock" for term limits would begin upon adoption of the SOP document.

Cat Anthony proposed a third meeting prior to the October 1st deadline for the STAC report so that members can talk through ideas and review the draft. Ernest Rodriguez asked if notification or a letter could be provided officially appointing members to STAC. Cat Anthony suggested that maybe one of the STAC subcommittees could focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice within STAC.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in April 2024 in-person at the 2024 VaULT conference. Andrew Downs suggested that STAC should focus on what recommendations they can provide rather than just updates at STAC meetings. He mentioned information exchange and said members can focus on one or two of the bullet points covered in the STAC legislation each meeting. Andrew Downs also mentioned not knowing where the gaps were in the statewide trail network, and Frank Maguire indicated wanting to see more interactive sessions. The meeting adjourned at 11:52am.