

**State Trails Advisory Committee
March 22, 2016
Virginia Department of Forestry
Charlottesville, VA**

Meeting Attendees

Sally Aungier, Virginia Horse Council
Niles Barnes, East Coast Greenway Alliance
Jim Beamer, Dominion
Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Commission
John Bolecek, VDOT
Champe Burley, Virginia Bicycling Federation
Michael Burton, City of Richmond
Rob Campbell, James River Association
Ted Coffman, U.S. Forest Service
Matt Crane, Richmond Cycling Corps
Harvey Darden, Virginia Department of Forestry
Alan Day, Great Eastern Trail Association
Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Anthony Duncan, International Mountain Bike Association
Paul Gilbert, NOVA Parks
Tom Johnson, Great Eastern Trail Association
Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service
Travis Sarkees, Virginia Interactive
Amanda Scheps, Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Carol Steele, Gloucester County Department of Tourism and Parks
Sandra Tanner, Virginia Tourism Corporation
Beth Weisbrod, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation
Buzz Witt, Spearhead Trails, Southwest Regional Recreation Authority
Wayne Wilcox, City of Virginia Beach
Bruce Wingo, Norfolk Southern Corp.

DCR Staff Present

Tom Smith, Deputy Director of Operations
Danette Poole, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
Janit Llewellyn Allen, LA, Environmental Programs Planner
Julie Buchanan, Public Relations Specialist
Lynn Crump, LA, Environmental Programs Planner
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Jennifer Wampler, Trails Coordinator

Others Present

Matthew Gooch, Office of the Attorney General
Randy Rose, Virginia Tourism Corporation
Christian Tucker, Office of the Attorney General

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Poole welcomed members to the second meeting of the State Trails Advisory Committee. She reviewed the agenda and welcomed new members. She noted that the enabling legislation requires two meetings annually, but that the intent was to hold three meetings in 2016 in preparation for the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan.

Ms. Poole read a tribute to Paul Revell, former Statewide Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator. Mr. Revell passed away on March 17, 2016 and a memorial service was planned for March 26, 2016.

Purpose of Committee

Mr. Smith reviewed the purpose of the committee. Established by the General Assembly in the 2015 Session the Committee has a sunset date of 2021. The purpose, as outlined in the 2015 Virginia Acts of the Assembly is as follows:

B. The Advisory Committee shall examine and provide recommendations regarding (i) options to close the gaps in a statewide system of trails as described in § [10.1-204](#); (ii) creative public and private funding strategies and partnerships to leverage resources to fund the development of trails; (iii) integrated approaches to promote and market trail values and benefits; (iv) the development of specialty trails, including concepts related to old-growth forest trails across the Commonwealth; (v) strategies to encourage and create linkages between communities and open space; (vi) strategies to foster communication and networking among trail stakeholders; (vii) strategies to increase tourism and commercial activities associated with a statewide trail system; (viii) strategies to enhance the involvement of organizations that promote outdoor youth activities, including the Boy Scouts of the U.S.A. and Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and the 4-H program of the Virginia Cooperative Extension; and (ix) other practices, standards, statutes, and guidelines that the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation determines may enhance the effectiveness of trail planning across the Commonwealth, including methods for receiving input regarding potential trail impacts upon owners of underlying or neighboring properties.

Mr. Smith noted that the committee is to present a report annually by October 1 to the General Assembly. A copy of the 2015 report was provided to members.

2016 Legislative Outcomes

Mr. Smith stated that the General Assembly had convened. The budget is not finalized as the Governor has until April 11 to make amendments. The General Assembly will reconvene on April 20 to take final actions. Additionally:

- DCR has been directed to develop a process for the establishment of fees and to report back to the General Assembly.
- The General Assembly recognized the 80th Anniversary of Virginia State Parks, and the 30th Anniversary of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program.
- The Bond bill will provide about \$41 million for State Parks most of that will be for renovation and upgrade of existing facilities.

- Money was provided for work at Widewater State Park and for the development of Clinch River State Park in Southwest Virginia.
- Other projects include:
 - Cabins at Pocahontas and Powhatan State Parks, however funding is not sufficient for cabins at both parks.
 - Money for dam repair.
 - \$8 million to the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.
- Two specific trail items include funding for:
 - Lower Appomattox River Trail
 - Mountain Bike Trail at Pocahontas

Mr. Smith noted that budget language precludes DCR from accepting additional park lands without approval of the General Assembly.

Survey results and organization of committee

Ms. Poole reviewed comments regarding the survey sent to members following the first meeting. Consensus was that members preferred the current structure and did not wish to organize formally but would rather continue as an advisory committee. Survey respondents felt that the October report accurately reflected the results of the first meeting.

Freedom of Information Act – *Matthew Gooch, Office of the Attorney General*

Mr. Gooch gave an overview of the Freedom of Information Act. He addressed how the act applies to public bodies, specifically with regard to meetings and public records.

How your work fits into the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan

Ms. Llewellyn Allen gave an overview of the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan.

VOP Purpose for Outdoor Recreation and Conservation

§10.1-200 Code of Virginia

Guidance to all levels of government and the private sector to meet conservation, outdoor recreation and open space needs.

VOP Purpose for Land Conservation

§10.1-1021 Code of Virginia

Guidance for land protection through actions of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.

VOP Schedule

- Spring 2016 – VOP TAC
- Fall 2016 – Annual regional meetings
- Fall 2017 – Post draft VOP
- Fall 2017 – VOP webinar

- 30 day VOP comment period
- Winter 2017 – Spring 2018 – Final VOP to NPS for approval

The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) identified the following support needed to move trails forward in Virginia.

- State park bond of at least \$500 million
- New state funding for trails
- Sufficient staffing for State Trails Program and related capital projects

STAC VOP Input:

- Evaluate the trails grant process to:
 - Benchmark and streamline the process
 - Add staffing and funding
- Increase regional planning and trail networks
- Prime communities to better serve trail users, and expand partnerships, education and awareness

Ms. Wampler reviewed the 2013 Virginia Outdoor Survey. She noted that the survey is helpful in addressing the General Assembly with regard to funding for outdoor recreation.

Ms. Wampler said a key issue is connectivity – connecting parks to towns, connecting parks to each other. She asked that members submit ideas for how this could be addressed.

Suggestions for questions to be added to the 2017 Outdoor Survey include:

- What opportunities will help to promote or expand trails in your locality?
- What level of per capita funding should your locality be willing to provide for trail recreation (give ranges such as “0.00-<1.00,” “1.00 - <2.00”, etc.
- How important is funding for trails close to home?
- How do you access trails? (walk, drive, scenic byway, public transportation, from campsite)?
- How close to home do you want a trail?
- List in priority order what you think your region needs most in local trails (#1 most needed, #3 least needed) a) horse trails, b) biking trails, c) hiking/walking trails
- Rank the following facilities/types/activities. What’s important to you, what would you use, how often you participate in it? (trails, swimming, water sports, tennis, basketball, baseball/softball, football/soccer/lacrosse). Note: trails always win—let citizens state this priority so that the General Assembly can direct money proportionately.
- Why do you go on trails? (exercise, recreation, commuting, stress relief, nature experience, social experience)
- How do you find out about trails/trail recreational opportunities? (Interest, word of mouth, brochures/guides, social?)
- Do you use trails to commute or do errands? (Note: this question gets at non-recreational uses, could be seen as more valuable)
- Is there a trail within 10 minutes of your home?

- How important is it to you that the Commonwealth of Virginia adequately fund trails and greenways to support economic development and job creation across Virginia? (very, some, etc.)
- Should the VOP prioritize closing the gaps and improving connectivity in the state trails system?
- Include questions relating trails to woods and environmental awareness
- Distinguish between questions regarding horse trails and single use trails.
- How is distribution determined?
- Does access to trails and recreation opportunities improve your quality of life?
- How do trails and recreation opportunities impact your business or local businesses?
- Would you support a tax increase to go specifically to trail connectivity and development?

Ms. Llewellyn Allen noted that DCR would work with the UVA Center for Survey Research to incorporate suggestions into the 2017 Survey.

Ms. Llewellyn Allen gave a summary of trail comments received during the 2015 VOP regional meetings. Those issues include:

- Rail crossings
- Funding needs
- Multi-regional trails consensus building
- Consider an MOU with DCR, DOF, USFS and Virginia Tourism to promote trail connections from state parks to state and federal forests. (Add DGIF, VDOT, National Parks, and the US Army Corps of Engineers to the MOU. Revised, this comment would read, "Consider an MOU with DCR, DOF, DGIF, VDOT, VDE, Virginia Tourism, USFS, NPS, ACOE to promote trail connections from state parks to state and federal forests.")

The committee identified the following issues of concern:

- When promoting connections it would be beneficial to connect trails to commercial centers.
- The National Park Service should be added to the MOU
- Consider that trails are not only for recreation, but also transportation corridors. The Code specifically addresses the work of this committee as recreation. Give consideration as to whether this section should be amended to address transportation.
- Consider ways to connect the state trails program to volunteer groups.
- Embrace the idea of complete corridors (for example, using rail with trail and utilities with trails)
- Support businesses serving trail users and the trail industry (GEICO management of rest stops)
- Look at online donations
- Establish a dedicated source for state trail funding and a prioritized list of projects in need of funding
- Encourage and foster public private enterprise to work together for planning and also with localities
- Identify local organizations willing to take the lead on initiatives at local level to help statewide vision.

Special Topics Discussion

Pete Eschelman, Roanoke Regional Partnership (video)

During lunch attendees viewed a presentation by Pete Eschelmann from the Roanoke Regional Partnership. The video can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JtF756g0kA>

Randy Rose

Virginia Tourism Partnership Alliance Marketing

Senior Development Specialist Partnership Marketing

Mr. Rose made the following recommendations:

- Consider development of a larger trails advocacy/education communications plan. This would build upon the research/data collection that the committee is already considering as a short-term action item, and would include phased in strategies like annual updates/education to local leaders, agency heads, etc. about economic, health, etc. benefits of trail development, as well as other to-be-determined strategies.
- Consider having current trail communities/towns focus on marketing/campaigns that highlight trail user “pay off”, such as a craft beer experience after riding a trail, or wine tasting after hiking a trail, etc. Pairing outdoor recreation and culinary activities to create an experience that reaches soft core and other outdoor enthusiasts could be considered. Challenge all larger trail systems to do this, and add those experiences to Virginia.org, their marketing, etc.
- Encourage communities with trails to consider using development tools/services for complimenting economic development such as VTC’s (funding programs, facilitation assistance, business assistance, etc.). Consider formation of tourism zones to attract businesses that compliment the trail experience.
- As a short-term strategy, communities should take steps to make sure current businesses along trails are successful. Marketing can direct trail users to those businesses now, which can help demonstrate the need for more such businesses, encourage current business to expand in size, type of services, etc. A focus on existing business may be the low hanging fruit opportunity, when compared to attracting or developing a new entrepreneur or business.
- Consider holding a statewide trails conference as soon as possible. Be sure there are tracks for elected officials, economic development staff, tourism, etc. (beyond user group organizations).
- Take a look at what other states, cities, communities are doing to creatively fund trail development and determine recommendations for VA. This may require a study with recommendations specific to VA, but is worth the potential investment.

Breakout groups

Attendees were divided into four groups and asked to provide recommendations for the Virginia Outdoors Plan. The groups were facilitated by Lynn Crump, Janit Llewellyn Allen, Ursula Lemanski, and Sandra Tanner. Following these discussions the full group reconvened and the following recommendations for the 2018 VOP were given.

Strategies to foster communication and networking among trail stakeholders

1. Create a central place for all trails stakeholders to share and learn. (e.g. Facebook & expand distribution of Greenways and Trails e-news, provide [Town Hall link](#) and encourage all committee members to share with their constituents)
2. Provide targeted trails workshops (e.g. Funding, trail building, partnerships)

Integrated approaches to promote and market trail values and benefits

1. Develop an atmosphere for successful entrepreneurship by:
 - a. Obtain data on trail use from each region to match with data from recreation providers. This data would inform a statewide gap analysis linking the economy with sustainability of trails resources.
 - b. Create a local network with businesses to identify trail service gaps and produce a report recommending opportunities for entrepreneurs. This information should be hosted on a statewide clearinghouse that lists business opportunities in each locality with options to search by theme.

Strategies to increase tourism and commercial activities associate with the statewide trail system

1. Prepare an economic analysis for trails, parks and outdoor recreation (i.e. find funding, work with Virginia Tourism).
2. Market trails benefits
 - a. Health
 - b. Tourism
 - c. Hospitality industry
 - d. Work place improvement (Especially for young professionals)
 - e. History (e.g. Civil War Trails)
 - f. Increase sky time (i.e. time outdoors without electronics)

Next Steps

The next meetings of the State Trails Advisory Committee are scheduled as follows:

August 18, 2016

The meeting will focus on three special topics:

- Creative public and private funding strategies and partnerships to leverage resources to fund the development of trails
- The development of specialty trails, including concepts related to old-growth forest trails across the Commonwealth
- Strategies to enhance the involvement of organizations that promote outdoor youth activities, including the Boy Scouts of the USA and Girl Scouts of the USA and organizations that promote outdoor youth activities, including the Boy Scouts of the USA and Girl Scouts

of the USA and the 4-H program of the Virginia Cooperative Extension

December 1, 2016

The meeting will focus on these topics:

- Options to close the gaps in a statewide system of trails as described in § 10.1-204;
- Strategies to encourage and create linkages between communities and open space;
- Other practices, standards, statutes, and guidelines that the Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation determines may enhance the effectiveness of trail planning across the Commonwealth, including methods for receiving input regarding potential trail impacts upon owners of underlying or neighboring properties.

Adjourn

There was no further discussion and the meeting was adjourned.