

**State Trails Advisory Committee  
Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center  
Natural Bridge, Virginia**

**TIME AND PLACE**

The meeting of the State Trails Advisory Committee was held at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, December 1, 2016 in the Washington Ballroom of the Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center.

**MEETING ATTENDEES**

\*Sally Aungier, Virginia Horse Council  
The Honorable Terry Austin, Virginia House of Delegates  
\*Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Greenways Commission  
\*John Bolecek, Virginia Department of Transportation  
\*Champe Burnley, Virginia Bicycling Federation  
Kip Burton, Botetourt County  
\*Rob Campbell, James River Association  
\*Ted Coffman, U.S. Forest Service  
Peggy Crosson, Virginia Great Valley Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Trail  
\*Harvey Darden, Virginia Department of Forestry  
\*Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Judge Charles B. "Butch" Flannagan, Bristol Historical Association  
Chris Gensic, City of Charlottesville  
\*Emily Harper, Nelson County  
Jim Johnston, Virginia Great Valley Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Trail  
\*Tom Johnson, Great Eastern Trail Association  
\*Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance  
\*Jack McClanahan, Spearhead Trails Southwest Regional Recreation Authority  
Don Mahon, Albemarle County  
Shane Sawyer, Virginia Department of Transportation  
\*Sandra Tanner, Virginia Tourism Commission  
Sally Thomas, The Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center  
Dave Walsh, Friends of the Chessie Trail  
\*Beth Weisbrod, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation  
\*Kathryn Zeringue, East Coast Greenway  
\*Committee members

**DCR STAFF PRESENT**

Forrest Atwood, Virginia State Parks  
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

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Ms. Poole called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. and welcomed attendees. She thanked members for their commitment to the trails advisory committee. She noted that Natural Bridge State Park is a unique partnership with the Virginia Conservation Legacy Foundation that is in the process of being conveyed to the commonwealth.

Ms. Poole offered greetings from DCR Director Clyde Cristman who was unable to attend and then recognized Delegate Terry Austin, a strong advocate for trails in the Virginia General Assembly.

Ms. Poole reviewed the agenda for the day and advised attendees that a tour down to Natural Bridge would be available following the meeting.

## **VIRGINIA OUTDOORS PLAN TOPICS**

Ms. Wampler provided an overview of survey results that provided input for the Virginia Outdoors Plan and the 2016 report submitted to the General Assembly in October. Members were provided a copy of the report and the survey results.

Committee recommendations were:

- Support a Governor's Conference on Trails
- Support a state park bond of at least \$500 million
- Support new funding for trails
- Support sufficient staffing to administer and carry out the State Trails Program.

Staffing recommendations were:

- Statewide Trails Coordinator
- Planning Manager
- Planner- Specialty Trails, Outreach, Community Engagement
- Trails Planner/Technician

### *Other Survey Topics*

Besides Funding, where does the public sector fall short in supporting trail efforts?

- Red tape
- No maintenance funds
- Recognizing importance to transportation

- Political leadership and support
- Staff to work in communities with development
- Too much reliance on volunteers
- Promoting good stewardship

### *Virginia Statewide Trails*

The 1968 National Trails System Act established two trails, the Appalachian Trail National Scenic Trail and the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Other categories of trail in the legislation besides scenic were recreation and connecting. The category “historic trails” was added to the legislation later.

1970 Virginia Outdoors Plan included four State Trails

- Great North Mountain Trail
- Trans-Virginia Trail
- Potomac Heritage Trail
- Rappahannock River Trail

1971-72 Virginia Statewide Trails legislation established the same three categories as the original National Trails System Act (scenic, recreation and connecting). There is no category for historic trails in Virginia Statewide Trail legislation.

What should statewide connecting trails look like?

Ms. Wampler led a meeting discussion and the following points were made:

**Question: What categories of trails should be considered under connecting trails?**

- Two potential categories of local trails discussed included:
  - o Local trails networks
  - o Individual trails (not networked)

**Question: What criteria should be considered to qualify as a statewide connecting trail?**

- VDOT trails must be 10 miles or greater in length to be included on VDOT’s bike map. There could be a length criteria or a multi-jurisdictional criteria
- Connecting trails should promote economic development by connecting to towns and connecting urbanized areas to more rural areas.
- Evaluate local/connecting trail routes and their accessibility to statewide trails. Map for further discussion at our next meeting
- Connector trails should be built using the same standard/serving the same user group as the statewide trail they connect to.
- Connections should be clearly identified based on their category. For example, the Tobacco Heritage Trail has three categories and a connector trail. Additional trails should directly connect/intersect existing state trails in order to be considered a part of that or any trail system

- Towns that connect to statewide trails should provide recreation and tourism development.
- Where do trail spurs and extensions fit into lexicon and will they be considered for grant funding?
- The difference in safety levels of connecting trails need to be identified at the connection.
- Reasons to define connecting trails:
  - o Grant funding
  - o Mapping
  - o Signage
- Should off-road be a requirement? Consider the value of broad trail criteria vs. narrow for making needed connections. The East Coast Greenway allows on-road connections but requires a physical separation from traffic (parked cars, bollards, planting strips, etc.)
- An overlay of conserved lands and the statewide trails layer will help identify opportunities for connections.
- Connections from statewide trails to state and national parks should be mapped and prioritized for connections to strengthen the economic impact of the parks.
- Each trail has its own signage standards. There needs to be a sign plan with uniform signage recommendations. Note: Trails on VDOT right-of-way or shared-use paths must comply with MUCTD standards for signage.
- Maintain flexibility in defining criteria for connecting trails.
- Develop a general, broad purpose for statewide trail types (recreation, scenic, connecting).
- Designate trail types on the VOP Mapper.
- Connecting trails should connect to a statewide trail (East Coast Greenway, Appalachian NST, Potomac NST, James River Heritage Trail, Beaches to Bluegrass Trail, Great Eastern Trail).
- The mode of travel (type of user allowed) on the connecting trail should be the consistent with allowable uses on the statewide trail it connects to.

### **SMALL GROUP BREAKOUTS**

The committee divided into small groups twice, first based on numbering and then self-selection, to discuss the following topics for the Virginia Outdoors Plan:

Group 1: Options to close the gaps in a statewide system of trails.

Facilitator: Lynn Crump

Group 2: Strategies to encourage and create linkages between communities and open space.

Facilitator: Janit Llewellyn Allen

Group 3: Other practices, standards, statutes, and guidelines that may enhance the effectiveness of trail planning across the Commonwealth and methods for receiving input regarding potential trail impacts upon owners of underlying or neighboring properties.

Facilitator: Jennifer Wampler

Following a time of discussion, the facilitators reported discussion topics for each group along with recommendations for the Virginia Outdoors Plan.

### GROUP 3 Discussion and Recommendations

#### Discussion on needed standards and guidelines

- Blazing standards (also helps landowners when trail is clear)
- Provide one logo to indicate statewide trail or statewide connecting trail
- Culvert—how to design for use as trail tunnel—for both roadways and railroads
- Fencing can help landowners with trail issues and traffic—could there be a CREP program equivalent for trails help pay for fencing? Design standards are needed, along with cost per linear feet to help with budgeting. What about fencing that parallels agricultural fencing?
- Stormwater—rules currently require swale built along entire length of trail. Thomas Jefferson planning district is seeking exemption from stormwater standards designed for parking lots, not trails—which are long, thin linear features. If exemption is not allowed, state agencies need to work together for the planning process to make it easier for trail projects.
- Transition areas, particularly off-road to on-road trail sections—need standards for joining segments so the transition is seamless for the trail user
- On-road segments—establish a standard that requires a physical separation from traffic (parked cars, jersey barriers, planting strips, etc.)
- Publicize DCR's role as a state contact for Class A railroads for those willing to follow the Report 404 process.
- Railbanking—what are best practices for converting trails for interim use?

#### Recommendations:

1. Update Greenways and Trails Toolbox on topics discussed
2. Trail exemption from stormwater standards (or provide technical expertise to speed process)

#### Discussion on methods for engaging landowners along trails:

A tax break for landowners is needed to provide financial incentive (state needs to authorize localities to provide tax break—Dillon's rule) Greenways should have same tax break as conservation easements

Public input meetings—effective meetings require the following resources from the state in addition to staff to help localities negotiate with landowners. Without additional staff, resources could be in the form of a web-based toolkit that provides the following information:

- Case studies/best examples
- Testimonials from landowners who have converted from trail opposition to support.
- Agenda templates for a series of meetings
- Pitfalls/what to avoid

- Landowner liability law and interpretation
- Brochure or handout with more information, weblinks, etc.

#### Recommendations:

3. The General Assembly should authorize local governments to provide a tax break for trail easements
4. Provide staff and a web-based toolkit with topics discussed to support local public input meetings with landowners

#### GROUP 1 Discussion and Recommendations

##### General discussion

##### Identify and justify gaps

- Overlay the statewide trails with all public lands to see if trails through public lands can fill some of the gaps. Include industrial and institutional lands and utility corridors. Albemarle has done a first flush of this as has the DOF.
- Identify corridors and see how many would work under the VDOT/DCR/DGIF MOU.
- Use 'Safe Routes to School' to pay for, identify and connect trails; use utility corridors.
- Prove that closing the gaps makes sense. Get trail counts to help justify this by identifying use and need.

##### Gather research to help justify the value of trails.

- Research economic development benefits of trails statewide.
- Identify what we do not know and find solutions through partnerships.
- Look at best practices in other states.
- Develop an 'inter-state' visits program to see other areas/ cities solutions (funding is needed to support this and other research)
- Identify multiple gaps in services for communities that trails could help address-- i.e. health problems – use hospital/medical office resources to help build trails; lack of access to rivers –trail linkages could provide connections to waterways for fishermen and boaters; trail development could also be used for conservation and wildlife trail corridors.
- Identify multiple values of trail connections and promote the values of trails. Values could be – economic impact, biodiversity, natural and historic heritage protection and education, scenic [viewsheds] protection, floodplain protection, diversity of users, public safety.

##### Get trails on local and regional plans

- Identify trail corridors and get them in the VDOT 6- year plans.

- Educate the Planning Districts about the value of trails, where trail gaps are, trail needs and get trails in the regional and local comprehensive plans.
- Ensure that trails are in local comprehensive plans.
- Identify large swaths of statewide trail corridors [corridors of opportunity] and inform and notify communities of the opportunities.

Get people engaged and informed about the need to fill the gaps.

- Create list of user groups and get them engaged.
- Capture interested users and keep them engaged – suggestion get a ‘Close the Gap’ Virginia license plate.
- Promote the economic value of trails.
- Use trail conference to get speakers to address needs, gaps, values, etc. as an information exchange vehicle.
- Suggested topic – the Southern Mountain Partnership in MD along the AT where coordination for protection and management is conducted.

Need better revenue streams to fund research, planning, construction, and maintenance.

- Do an online [Kickstarter](#) campaign to help fund needs.
- Establish grant funds for planning corridors and gaps like NCDOT does.

Create unified signage that identifies gaps.

Recommendations:

1. Identify and justify gaps
2. Gather research to help justify the value of trails

GROUP 2 Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion on needed strategies:

- Funding – Incentive tax break for conservation easements that allow trails on private lands.
- Educate local boards of supervisors and local government. Work with the planning districts to reach out to these groups. Incorporate this idea in the statewide governor’s trail conference.
- Partnership/outreach with business and the private sector (e.g. Roanoke Brewery)
- Private land use agreements should be eligible for grants and maintenance funding.
- Private land use agreements may help address gaps and they may be the only way for trails to be connected.
- Education – Data/study to demonstrate/show the economic benefits of trails. Look at other states as examples.
- Multi-agency discussion is needed to address conflicting management goals.

- Establish a state trails foundation (Friends of Trails as a non-profit) to be a revenue generating statewide organization that creates shared identity for trails.
  - This would provide a galvanizing voice for trails, statewide.
  - Engage people beyond just using the resource.
  - Make trails a part of personal and community shared identities.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a state trails foundation (Friends of Trails as a non-profit) to be a revenue generating statewide organization that creates shared identity for trails.
  - Providing a galvanizing voice for trails, statewide.
  - Engaging people beyond just using the resource.
  - Making trails a part of personal and community shared identities.
2. Partnership/outreach with business and the private sector (e.g. Roanoke Brewery)
  - Address landowner liability to encourage use of private lands for trails. There is a perception/lack of cases to demonstrate state commitment to landowner liability.
  - Conduct a study to demonstrate/show the economic benefits of trails. (Look at other states as examples.)
  - Educate local boards of supervisors and local government. Work with the planning districts to reach out to these groups. Incorporate this idea in the statewide governor's trail conference.
  - Provide an incentive tax break for conservation easements allowing private trails.

### **VIRGINIA LAND CONSERVATION AND GREENWAYS CONFERENCE 2017**

Over a working lunch Ms. Poole gave an update regarding the Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference to be held in Williamsburg, in April 2017. DCR is partnering with the Virginia United Land Trust Conference for this event.

The conference will open with a field trip. Potential venues are a bike ride on the Virginia Capital Trail or a visit to York River State Park. The State Trails Advisory Committee will meet on the following day.

Ms. Poole asked for committee input regarding topics for breakout sessions. Ideas presented included:

- Creative funding
- Crowd sourcing
- Establishment of a foundation in lieu of government funding
- Best management practices of other states for filling in the gap for connecting trails
- Economic impact of trails on communities
- How trails have helped bolster community identity in SW Virginia
- Captain John Smith Water Trail



- Lessons learned from High Bridge Trail State Park
- C&O Canal Trust

Ms. Poole suggested that there could also be a display board for the exhibit hall for disseminating information that might not fit into a particular breakout session.

Ms. Poole asked that any members willing to work on the field trip be in contact with DCR staff. Create display boards for exhibiter hall, might get information out that might not go to breakout session.

### **THE VIRGINIA GREAT VALELY LEWIS AND CLARK EASTERN LEGACY TRAIL**

Ms. Peggy Crosson and associates gave a presentation regarding the Virginia Great Valley Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Trail.

#### *Brief History*

- 2008 – Consolidated Natural Resources Act passed by Congress
- Suitability and Feasibility of extending the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail eastward
- Included both water and overland routes traveled before and after the expedition (before May, 1804 and after September, 1806)

#### *Mission Statement*

The Mission of Virginia’s Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Trail is to promote heritage tourism and economic development in the Commonwealth by:

- Preserving the routes the Explorers traveled before and after the Expedition; by
- Honoring the people and places they visited along the way; and, by
- Encouraging citizen awareness and trail exploration in Virginia and beyond.

#### *How can the State Trails Advisory Committee help?*

- Support the Virginia State-designated Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Trail by recommending the adoption of the trail into the State system of trails as a “Specialty Trail,” or under the administrative guidance of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and in partnership with the Virginia Great Valley LCELT Committee, consider creating a new category of a Virginia “historic trail.”

Following the presentation on the Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Trail in Virginia, the committee discussed how they could support the efforts of the 10 counties currently working on this project and decided to take up this topic at the meeting in April.

This project will be listed in the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan under the category of “thematic tours.” This recreational category recognizes driving tours that feature Virginia’s heritage, product-based or nature-based sites. The VOP Mapper includes thematic driving tours if the GIS data is provided to DCR.

### **SPECIALITY TRAILS DISCUSSION**

Ms. Poole led a discussion regarding specialty trails. She noted that the report to the General Assembly included the following recommendation:

*The development of specialty trails, including concepts related to old-growth forest trails across the Commonwealth:*

- Develop regional trail networks with emphasis on connectivity, and
- Strive for an old growth forest, accessible to the public, in every locality.

During the discussion, members noted the following:

- It is difficult to find trails information on the DCR website.
- The VOP should recommend addressing specialty trails by having an inventory of trails.
- Current mapping is not useful.
- Historic trails are thematic and perhaps more appropriate as marketing or tourism, DCR focuses on outdoor recreation.
- Specialty trails for DCR should focus on outdoor recreation.
- Trails offer economic opportunities and promote tourism.
- Birding and wildlife trails should be listed.

The next meeting of the Statewide Trails Advisory Committee will be on April 26, 2017 in conjunction with the Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference.

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m. and members were provided an opportunity to visit Natural Bridge.

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