

**Board of Conservation and Recreation
Thursday, May 4, 2023
Natural Tunnel State Park, Duffield, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The Board of Conservation and Recreation meeting took place at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 4, 2023, at the Cove Ridge Center at Natural Tunnel State Park in Duffield, Virginia.

BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS PRESENT

Danielle Heisler, Chair

Dexter C. Hurt, Vice Chair

Hunter H. Ihrman

John W. Inge, IV

Esther Nizer

Ross Stewart

BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS VIEWING REMOTELY

Chief Walt "Red Hawk" Brown

Kat Maybury

Cisco Minthorn

BOARD OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Hon. James Cheng

Col. Eric Hoggard

Camilla Simon

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Matthew S. Wells, Director

Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director

Laura Ellis, Deputy Director for Administration and Finance

Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations

Melissa Baker, Director, Virginia State Parks

Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy

Sharon Buchanan, District Manager

Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage

David Collett, Western Field Operations Director

Robert Chapman, Manager, Natural Tunnel State Park

Whitten Cluff, Executive Assistant for Operations

Joshua Ellington, Chief of Resource Management

Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison

Sharon Partee, Director of Finance

Timothy Schrader, Eastern Field Operations Director

Lesley Starke, Natural Heritage Stewardship Chief

Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner

ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

With six (6) members of the Board present, a quorum was not established.

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Heisler called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Director Wells addressed the Board regarding the lack of quorum and requirements under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The necessary quorum for the Board of Conservation and Recreation (BCR) is seven. Six members were in attendance.

Director Wells advised that while FOIA allows remote participation of Board members, a physical quorum must be present for those members to actively participate in the meeting. He noted that the members viewing online would not be able to actively participate in the discussion.

Director Wells noted that FOIA does allow the Board to hold virtual meetings on a limited basis. However, to do so, the Board must adopt a written policy at a meeting where a physical quorum is present.

WELCOME TO NATURAL TUNNEL STATE PARK

Park Manager, Robert Chapman, welcomed members and staff to Natural Tunnel State Park. He reviewed the agenda for the remainder of the day.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 6 2023

With no quorum, the minutes of January 6, 2023, were passed by until the next meeting.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT – *Matthew S. Wells, DCR Director*

Director Wells thanked Chairman Heisler and the Board members in attendance. He expressed appreciation to Mr. Chapman and the staff at Natural Tunnel State Park.

Director Wells advised that the Board would hear an overview of the master plan for Clinch River State Park and a review of the Natural Area Preserve Management Guidelines. Due to the lack of quorum, he noted that a special called meeting may be necessary.

Director Wells reported that he would review three important issues:

- The revision to the Virginia Outdoors Plan
- The impact of DCR's recreation facilities on the state's economy
- State Park system expansion

Virginia Outdoors Plan

Every five years the agency is required to complete a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to continue to receive funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This funding supports land acquisition and public outdoor recreation facility development.

The Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) will be finalized in December.

DCR works with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to conduct a statewide survey of recreational needs. In the 2022 Virginia Outdoors Survey:

- More than 90% of Virginia Outdoors Survey respondents said that scenery and “scenic views” were important when making travel plans.
- 90% of respondents reported that they support the expenditure of taxpayer funds to acquire land for outdoor recreation.

In the same survey, 67% of respondents said that they would be more likely to stay overnight in a Virginia State Park if it had cabins.

Impact of DCR recreation facilities on the state’s economy.

Visitors attracted annually to Virginia’s State Parks trigger a large amount of economic activity throughout the state.

- In 2022, visitors to Virginia’s State Parks spent an estimated \$304.9M in the Commonwealth. Approximately 404% (\$123M) of this spending was by out-of-state visitors.
- The total economic activity stimulated by Virginia State Parks during 2022 was approximately \$478.7M.
- The total economic impact of Virginia State Parks during 2022 was an estimated \$364.2M.
- In 2022, for every \$1.00 of general tax revenue provided to state parks, \$15.21 , on average, was generated in fresh money that likely would not be there if not for the operation of Virginia State Parks.

Growing the State Park System

Director Wells reported that DCR has four exciting park projects underway. The are:

- Sweet Run State Park in rural Loudoun County near the West Virginia border in northwestern Virginia. When officially opened as a state park, the nearly 900-acre park will provide outdoor recreation access to millions in the Washington DC metro area.
- Hayfields State Park in Highland County, the least populated locality in Virginia, will provide access to more than 1,300 pristine acres in the rolling hills and countryside. Park visitors will be able to disconnect from technology and enjoy nature while exploring the many miles of trails that are planned.
- Culpeper Battlefields State Park in Culpeper County will include the Brandy Station and Cedar Mountain battlefields – among the most significant sites of the American Civil War and include numerous outdoor recreation opportunities. Numerous cultural, historic and natural resources will be conserved and protected.

- Mayo River State Park located in southwestern Henry County, is not officially open as a state park but does provide access to a new trail system which opened in April 2022. DCR has acquired approximately 637 acres of land between the North Mayo River And South Mayo River. The park will complement North Carolina's Mayo River State Park, located a short distance across the border.

Director Wells thanked those in attendance and online for their service. He encouraged members to make every effort to attend meetings in person.

FINANCIAL CONDITIONS REPORT – Sharon Partee, Director of Finance

Ms. Partee gave the financial conditions report.

General Fund Appropriation and Expenditures

FY 2023 Total Legislative Appropriation: \$431,138,368

Appropriation Transfers & Adjustments	
Water Quality Improvement Fund Transfers	(315,596,531)
SWCD Dam Repair	(900,000)
Dam Safety / Flood Prevention & Protection	(10,732,147)
Land Conservation Fund Transfers	(16,000,000)
Central Appropriation Adjustments*	2,888,865
Discretionary Reappropriated Amounts**	8,106,983
	(332,232,830)

FY 2023 Total GF Appropriation Available for Operations: \$98,905,538

* Adjustments for central service items approved in Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 2, 2022 Special Session I. Pending allocation approval.

** Amounts obligated by the agency, but not expended by the end of the prior fiscal year.

Mandated Balance carry forward, pursuant to section 4-1.05 1.b of Chapter 2, 2022 Acts of Assembly, Special Session I

Division	Division Target	YTD Actual (As of March 31, 2023)	Target vs. Actual %
Soil & Water Conservation	\$19,125,580	\$13,465,541	70.4%

Dam Safety	\$1,932,937	\$1,264,396	65.4%
Natural Heritage	\$4,579,747	\$3,600,097	78.6%
Land Conservation	\$4,067,831	\$1,468,777	36.1%
State Parks (incl. Breaks)	\$31,247,050	\$34,598,439	110.7%
PRR (incl. Design & Construction)	\$23,819,390	\$1,722,724	7.2%
Director's Office – Admin – Finance	\$14,133,003	\$8,940,854	63.3%
<u>Grand Total</u>	<u>\$98,905,538</u>	<u>\$65,060,828</u>	<u>65.8%</u>

Ms. Partee reviewed the State Parks Projects Cash Fund. There were no changes or recommended projects since the January meeting.

REVIEW OF 2024 MEETING DATES – *Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison*

Mr. Fletcher presented the proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2023 and for calendar year 2024.

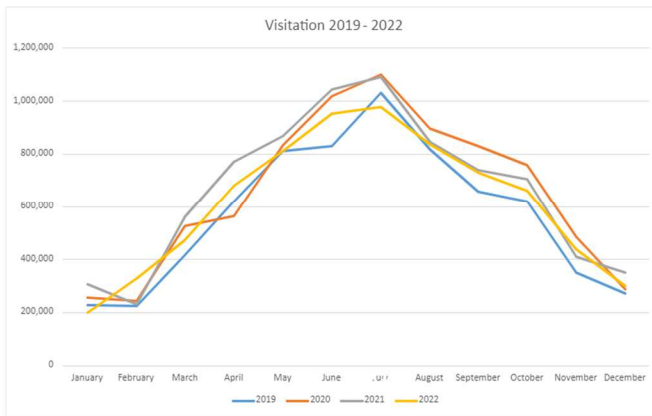
- November 14-17, 2023: Fall meeting at Fairy Stone State Park
- January 5, 2024: First Meeting at Pocahontas State Park
- April 15-19, 2024: Spring Meeting at First Landing State Park
- September 30- October 4, 2024: Fall Meeting at Douthat State Park

Mr. Fletcher noted that staff would poll the Board with regard to scheduling an additional meeting to address business actions that could not be completed at this meeting.

STATE PARKS UPDATE – *Dr. Melissa Baker, Director, Virginia State Parks, DCR*

Dr. Baker gave the update for Virginia State Parks.

2022 Visitation



2022 – 7,388,467
VS 2021 -7%
VS 2019 +7.3%



2022 Education and Interpretation

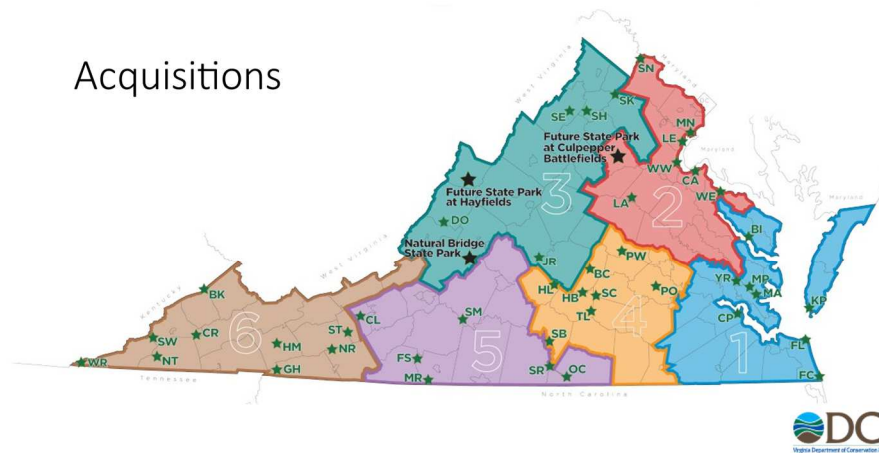
- 17,129 programs provided
 - 644 classroom programs
 - 17,820 children reached
- 288,949 program attendees

2022 Volunteer Efforts

Category	Hours	Year over Year
Volunteer Programs	81,307	+31%
Individuals	57,219	+19%
Groups	24,087	+72%
Special Service Programs	129,385	-15%
Youth Conservation Corps	20,736	+183%
AmeriCorps	25,477	-44%
Camp Hosts*	83,172*	-16%*
Total	210,692	-1.7%



Acquisitions



Current Initiatives

- Point of Sale Reservation System Implementation
- Asset Management Program Development
- GID Data Program Development

CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE – Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner

Ms. Wangsgard gave the report on behalf of Ms. McClary.

Budgets:

- \$18 Million ARPA Funds Obligated
- 40 Projects in Progress - \$86 Million
- 61 Future Projects Totally \$118 Million
- FY24 Maintenance Reserve - \$3.5 Million

Douthat Log Cabin Renovations

- 30 Cabins in total
- Budget: \$7.8 Million, \$4.7 Million ARPA
- Funding: 2016 VBPA and 2021 ARPA

Fairy Stone Block Cabin Renovations

- 25 Cabins in total
- Budget: \$7.6 Million
- Funding: 2016 VPBA

Fairy Stone Log Cabin Renovations

- 25 Total Cabins
- Budget: \$7.6 Million
- Funding: 2026 VPBA

Additional Projects

- Bear Creek Lake Bath House Renovation
- Twin Lakes Dam Spillway Repairs
- Widewater New Boat Ram and Bathrooms

NATURAL HERITAGE PLANNING - Jason Bulluck, Director, Division of Natural Heritage

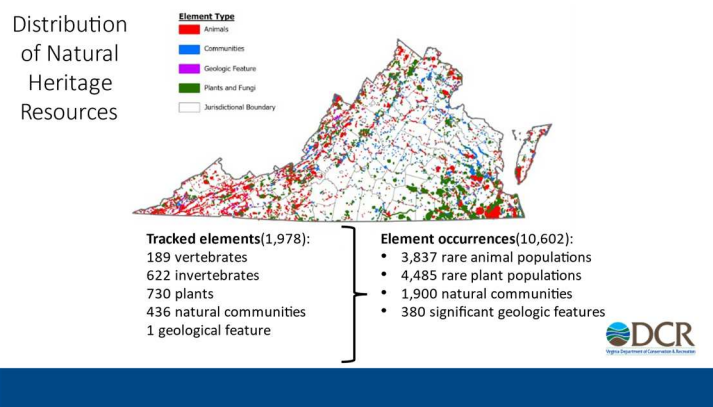
Mr. Bulluck gave the Division of Natural Heritage update. He introduced Lesley Starke, the new Natural Area Stewardship Chief.

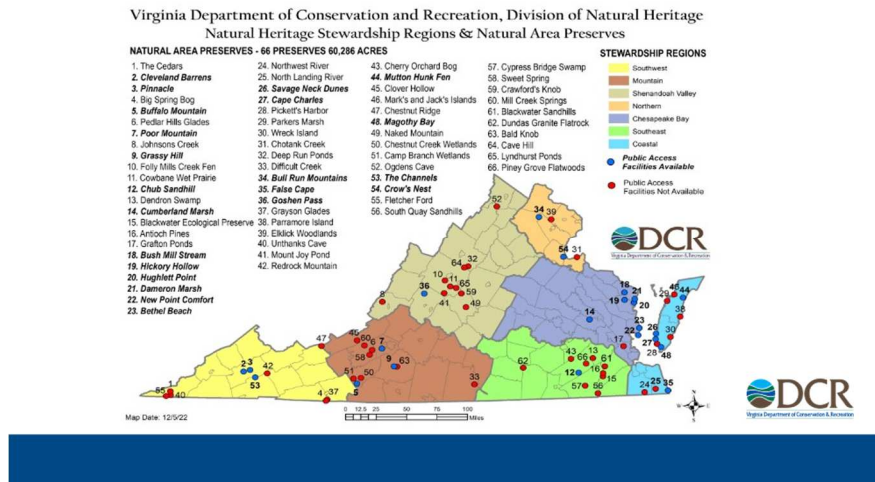
DCR's Natural Heritage Program

Mission: Conserving Virginia's biodiversity through inventory, data and information sharing, environmental review, protection, and stewardship.

Focus on:

- Rare plants and animals
- Rare and exemplary natural communities
- Significant caves and karst features





What are NAPs for?

- Protecting habitats for rare species and examples of natural community types.
- Research and Education
- Compatible public outdoor recreation

Virginia Natural Area Preserve System

- 66 state Natural Area Preserves
- 60,289 acres
- Selected to protect the rarest and most threatened elements of Virginia's natural heritage.
- Of the 66 NAPs, 44 were purchased and are owned by DCR and 21 are owned by others and are protected by easements.
- 23 NAPs have parking areas and trails.

Mr. Bulluck reviewed the proposed Natural Area Preserve Management Guidelines.

He outlines proposed changes and edits to the guidelines. A copy of the proposed revisions is available from DCR.

The Board will vote to adopt the guidelines at the next meeting.

CLINCH RIVER STATE PARK MASTER PLAN - Samantha Wangsgard, Chief Environmental Planner

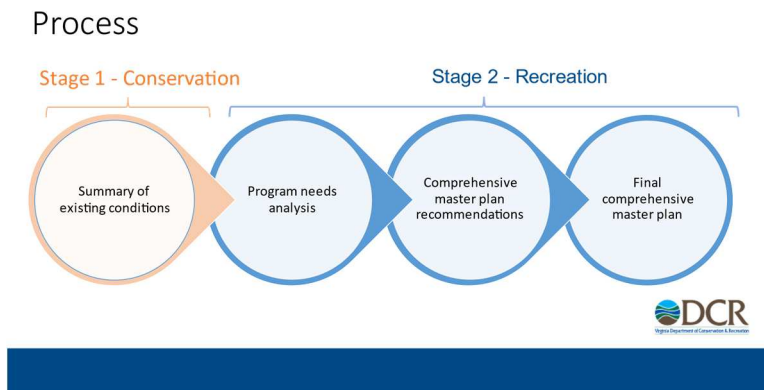
Ms. Wangsgard presented the overview of the Master Plan for Clinch River State Park.

Project Background

Background: Most recent contract dated March 30, 2021 between DCR and consultant

Scope of Work: Provide a high-level overview of anticipated activities and develop a Comprehensive plan, in compliance with DCR requirements and guidelines, that will focus on existing acquired properties and the future development of Clinch River State Park

Objective: Once developed, Clinch River State Park will highlight the Clinch River’s natural, historical, and recreational resources as the first blue-way state park in Virginia. The comprehensive plan will set a framework of goals, programming, and priority implementation for the development of current sites and future site acquisitions.



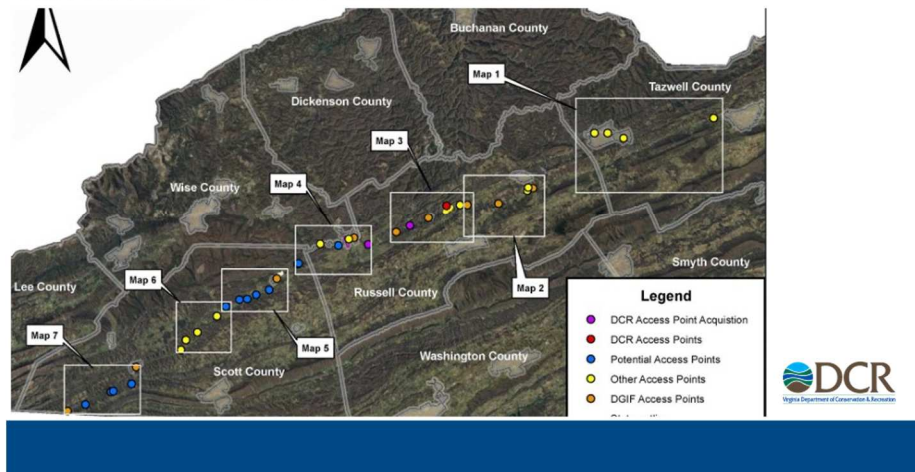
Stakeholder Input

- Three meetings with the Advisory Committee, Sept. 2021 – Dec. 2022. 30 members representing 20 organizations in the Clinch River region.
- Public Input meeting Dec. 2021 and Feb. 2023.
- 170 respondents to the online public needs survey, (Dec. 2021-Jan. 2022)
- 40+ comments received during public input period February 15 – March 17, including through email and social media.
- Feedback generated pointed to alignment of priorities and programming that supports:
 - Preserving and celebrating the Clinch River’s biodiversity
 - Providing water access, trails, overnight stays, and a visitors center
 - Engaging with the community and connect the park with the region

Clinch River Purpose Statement

Clinch River State Park is envisioned as a string of pearls along the ecologically significant Clinch River, providing opportunities for all for recreation and education that connects visitors to the environmental and cultural significance of the river and the region, conserving and enhancing sensitive resources; and fostering connections within and between adjacent communities.

Clinch River State Park Locations



Key Plan Components

- Market Study
- Park Programming
- Site Design of Anchor Properties and Support Sites
- Phased Development

Anchor Properties

240-450 acres, located to share unique experience or aspect of the Clinch.

- Serve as hubs for the Clinch River SP.
- Large properties developed with a diverse range of recreation opportunities and services.
- Locations are site opportunity-based, showcasing unique features of the Clinch River.
- Standard amenities include visitor contact and info station, river access, trails, and a variety of overnight facilities.

Implementation Timeline

- Spring 2023 - Master plan finalized.
- Master Plan will be reviewed by the Board of Conservation and Recreation and adopted by the Director.
- The Master Plan will be made available to the General Assembly for review.
- Expected build-out timeline is 30 years.

The Board will take action at the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Heisler opened the floor for public comment.

Ms. Maybury expressed appreciation for being able to view the meeting. She asked when the General Assembly would review the Master Plan.

Director Wells responded that the legislature would come back for a final vote on the budget prior to July 1. However, the Master Plan does not have to go before the legislature for a vote. Members are asked to submit comments back to the agency. The DCR Director has the final authority to approve the plan.

Director Wells advised that DCR staff will poll the Board for a meeting date prior to the end of June.

Mr. Chapman introduced Ranger Ethan Howes.

Mr. Howes gave a presentation regarding a color-blind view finder that will replace the current view finder at the park gazebo location. This equipment enhances the view for those who may be color-blind.

This is the first equipment of this kind in Virginia. The park hopes to have it active in June.

ADJOURN

There was no further business, and the meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.