

**State Trails Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, August 21, 2019
Albemarle County Office Building
Charlottesville, Virginia**

TIME AND PLACE

The meeting of the State Trails Advisory Committee convened at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, August 21, 2019 in the Albemarle County Office Building in Charlottesville.

ATTENDEES

Cat Anthony, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation
Sally Aungier, Virginia Horse Council, VA Trails Alliance (officer)
Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Greenways
Champe Burnley, Virginia Bicycling Federation
Harvey Darden, Dept. of Forestry
Alan Day, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, VA Trails Alliance (officer)
Justin Doyle, James River Association
Chris Gensic, City of Charlottesville
Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance
Jim Lynch, Potomac Heritage Trail Association
Peter Krebs, Piedmont Environmental Council
Dan Mahan, Albemarle County
Peter Ohlms, VDOT/VRTC
Alister Perskinson, Virginia Recreation and Park Society/James City County
Sarah Sanford, East Coast Greenway
Joe Villari, Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Patrick Wojahn, Rails to Trails Conservancy
John Bolecek, VDOT
Michael Burton, James River Park System
Joe Clarkson, GatorBridge
Casey Breedon, City of Charlottesville
Dan Butch, Albemarle County

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Thomas Smith, Deputy Director for Operations
Danette Poole, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
Forest Atwood, Virginia State Parks District Resource Specialist
Julie Buchanan, Senior Public Relations and Marketing Specialist
Michael R. Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Daniel Jordan, Park Manager, High Bridge Trail State Park
Kristal McKelvey
Dave Neudeck, Public Communications and Marketing Director
Sam Sweeney, Park Manager, New River Trail State Park
Jennifer Wampler, Trails Coordinator

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Poole called the meeting to order and asked attendees to introduce themselves. She advised that after forty years with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), she would be retiring on November 1, 2019.

Ms. Poole expressed that it was exciting to hear what was going on around the state with regard to trails. She welcomed the opportunity for this meeting of people who share a passion for trails.

Ms. Poole noted that trails are both recreation and transportation. A budget request has been submitted to consider an economic impact study regarding the impact of trails and also to consider funding the Governor's Conference on Trails. The last Governor's Conference was in 2008.

Ms. Poole asked for updates regarding the state trunk line trails.

East Coast Greenway Alliance – Sarah Sanford

Ms. Sanford advised that she was new to her position as of May 2019.

The Southeast Greenways and Trails Conference will be April 2020 in Jacksonville, Florida. The call for proposals is open until September 13. Ms. Sanford noted that she would love to see Virginia representation.

Appalachian Trail – Andrew Downs

Mr. Downs advised that the ATC was working with communities to preserve a larger Appalachian Trail Conservancy. 2019 grants to land trusts and organizations will be awarded in the next week. A significant portion of that funding is coming to Virginia. ATC hopes to develop a legislative package that will empower local communities to engage in conservation aspects.

Potomac Heritage Trail – Ursula Lemanski

Ms. Lemanski noted that the Potomac Heritage Trail has many local partners. There is still no superintendent managing the trail. There was serious rain damage from recent rains. A repair plan is currently undergoing compliance review from the National Park Service.

Ms. Lemanski also advised that the process for National Scenic Trails designation is open through November 1. She will provide information to the group via email.

Mr. Burnley suggested that it would be helpful at a future meeting to review the various trails designations.

Beaches to Bluegrass Trail—John Bolecek

Mr. Bolecek noted that a number of projects have opened in the last few years. Those projects included:

- Lesner Bridge in Virginia Beach
- The City of Chesapeake is closer to opening a section of the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail
- Smith River Trail is under construction in Henry County
- One of the spurs of the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail goes from Galax to Radford

The New River Valley Planning District is working on a Valley to Valley study to connect the New River Trail to the Roanoke River Greenway.

VIRGINIA CAPITAL TRAIL STUDY – Tom Smith, DCR

Mr. Smith gave an update regarding the Virginia Capital Trail Study. In the 2019 Session, the General Assembly authorized a request for DCR, the Secretary of Natural Resources, the Secretary of Transportation, and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to study the feasibility of transferring management of the Virginia Capital Trail from VDOT to DCR. DCR is the lead agency and is in the process of data collection.

CONSERVE VIRGINIA – Tom Smith, DCR

Mr. Smith noted that ConserveVirginia is Governor Northam's land conservation goal and strategy for his Administration. The ConserveVirginia map shows the highest priority lands in the Commonwealth for conservation. These lands are broken down into six categories, with a total of 19 data sets for the input. The six categories are:

- Natural Habitat and Ecosystem Diversity
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Cultural and Historic Preservation
- Protected Landscapes Resilience
- Floodplains and Flooding Resilience
- Scenic Preservation

Mr. Smith suggested that at a future meeting DCR staff could present an overview of the Recreation Access Model. This model divides the state into mile and a half hexagon segments. The goal is to determine what resources are needed within each section.

OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION – Tom Smith

Mr. Smith advised that Virginia is now one of fourteen states to have an Office of Outdoor Recreation. The Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade will head the Virginia office. The intent is to coordinate efforts in outdoor recreation, including businesses that support such recreation.

Mr. Smith also noted that in addition to the retirement of Ms. Poole that Craig Seaver, Director of Virginia State Parks, would also be retiring in the next month.

PROGRESS ON THE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN – Dave Neudeck, DCR

Mr. Neudeck gave an update regarding the communications plan. He noted that the intent is to address group recommendations that appear in the Virginia Outdoors Plan and to work on integrating approaches to marketing and trails. A key way to do this is to foster communication and networking among the stakeholders.

Important issues include:

- Funding for new development
- Funding for outreach
- Volunteer engagement
- Increased awareness of ongoing trail projects
- Decrease in maintenance backlog
- More connected trail networks

With that, the communications plan is looking at tactics and ways to remain focused. To do that, a workgroup was developed within the STAC. That workgroup will meet in October to begin the process of compiling knowledge and developing a toolkit for marketing. The toolkit will contain aspects of marketing that can be tailored to each group and trail. The group will also develop an editorial calendar and will provide content for STAC members to use to promote trail issues.

DCR is launching a blog entitled “DCR Insights” that will address many of these issues.

JAMES RIVER HERITAGE TRAIL UPDATE – *Jennifer Wampler, DCR*

Ms. Wampler reported that progress continues with regard to the James River Heritage Trail. Invitations to meetings are needed to reach audiences that may not typically provide feedback on outdoor recreation plans. Based on STAC feedback, the intensive planning effort along the James will focus on a Middle James Segment Plan (Lynchburg to Goochland). The whole watershed will be addressed through a strategic plan that captures opportunities, strengths and weaknesses identified by stakeholders.

The planning process will be similar to that used to develop the Lower James Segment Plan developed for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. There is currently no funding available for implementation of the plan.

VIRGINIA TRAILS ALLIANCE REPORT – *Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy*

Mr. Downs reported that the Virginia Trails Alliance (VTA) grew out of the STAC and the concerns that the legislation for the STAC would expire in 2021 as well as needing an organization that could advocate on behalf of trails. The VTA is a group of outdoor focused organizations, government representatives, and enthusiasts.

The group is addressing statewide priorities and needs and previously advocated for the development of the Office of Outdoor Recreation. The group also advocated for the return of the Governor’s Conference on Trails and full funding for the DCR Division of Planning and Recreation Resources.

RIVER MANAGEMENT SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM – *Jennifer Wampler*

Ms. Wampler advised that the River Management Society Symposium would be held in Richmond in May 2020. She provided index cards with conference information, including the call for presentations.

The 50th Anniversary of the Virginia Scenic Rivers Program will also be celebrated. There will hopefully be several rivers added to that system.

Ms. Poole noted that there had been a number of request for new scenic river studies.

Staff noted that the Virginia Outdoors Plan will hold a series of regional meetings in the fall to initiate the next five-year update to the VOP.

LAW ENFORCEMENT/TRAIL MAINTENANCE PANEL – Sam Sweeney, Daniel Jordan, Casey Breeden

Ms. Wampler facilitated a discussion with three conservation officers regarding law enforcement and maintenance on the trail. Highlights of the discussion were:

- The intent is to harbor a safe environment.
- High Bridge Trail has three officers who live next to the trail.
- Patrol routines cover the entire High Bridge Trail.
- During the summer, the school resource officer rides the trail to provide additional security and supervision.
- New River Trail covers four counties, two towns, and the City of Galax over a course of 57 miles.
- Like any community, trails will see various violation.
- Because of the proximity of the Interstate, there will often be travelers on the New River Trail trying to get off the grid and avoid detection.
- Officers have conducted rescues, searches for missing children and more.
- Sometimes gangs or thieves will target private property.
- There are occasional conflicts between horseback riders and bikers.
- Being present, doing traffic stops, checking parking fees, correlates to less major crime.
- Maintenance staff helps to expand coverage.
- A lot of greenways and trails are open from dawn to dusk. This becomes an issue as trails are used more as a transportation option.
- Trail maintenance is a continuing process.
- About 69% of the budget goes to maintenance of the trail.

GATOR ALUMINUM BRIDGES – Joe Clarkson

Mr. Clarkson gave a presentation regarding Gator Aluminum Bridges and how they are installed.

He noted:

- All products are American made
- Currently the longest span is 60 ft.
- Depending on the size of the bridge it takes about 4-6 weeks to fabricate and build the bridge.

More information is available at this link: <http://gatorbridge.com/>

FUNDING FOR STATEWIDE TRAILS – *Justin Doyle, James River Association*

Mr. Doyle advised that Virginia Forever is working on a five-year plan to address funding for statewide trails. Funding is being proposed for state parks and natural area preserves. The hope is to develop a statewide source of funding.

RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY INITIATIVES – *Patrick Wojahn*

Mr. Wojahn gave an overview of current initiatives to develop rails to trails.

Rails to Trails Networks have been around for about 32 years. There are now about 24,000 miles of converted rail lines in the country. The intent is to provide recreation as well as transportation through connected networks.

NEXT MEETING

Ms. Wampler will develop the agenda for the next meeting. Items will include:

- An overview of trails designations
- The recreational access layer of Conserve/Virginia
- The viewshed register
- Scenic Resources

Ms. Wampler asked members what messages they would like to convey in the report to the General Assembly.

Their two main concerns were 1) reauthorization of the State Trails Advisory Committee to meet past the sunset date of January, 2021 and 2) a dedicated funding source for trail maintenance.

The tentative date for the next meeting is May 11, 2020 in conjunction with the River Management Society Conference in Richmond.

Ms. Wampler thanked attendees and the meeting adjourned.