

**State Trails Advisory Committee Meeting
April 9, 2019
Downtown Richmond Hilton
Richmond, VA**

ATTENDEES

Cat Anthony, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation
Sally Aungier, Virginia Horse Council
Heather Barrar, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River
Rick Barton, Outdoor Adventure Center
James Beamer, Dominion Resources
Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Greenways
John Bolecek, VDOT
Champe Burnley, Virginia Bicycling Federation
Michael Burton, Richmond Parks and Recreation
Nathan Burrell, Richmond Parks and Recreation
Susan Chiccehitto, Woodstock Exploratory Rails to Trails
Rachel Chieppa, Chesterfield County
Summers Cleary, Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Scarlet Collie, Outdoor Adventure Center
Clyde Cristman, Director, DCR
Ryan Delaney, Prince William County
Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Joe Elton, Belmead on the James
Chris Gensic, City of Charlottesville
Paul Gilbert, NOVA Parks
Lemuel Hancock, Town of Woodstock
Don Hindman, Woodstock Exploratory Rails to Trails
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Robert Jennings, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Bill Johnston, Shenandoah Trail
Steve Lambert, Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization
Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service
Jim Lynch, Potomac Heritage Trail Association
Dan Mahon, Albemarle County
Eric Mai, VCU
Rachel Moore, City of Buena Vista
Katy Patterson, Buena Vista Parks and Recreation
Alister Perkinson, James City County
Renee Powers, Roanoke Parks and Recreation
Phil Riggan, Richmond Regional Planning District Commission
Shane Sawyer, VDOT
Danielle Simms, Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Gary Sjoquist, Quality Bicycle Products
John Turkel, Frederick County Parks and Recreation
Joe Villari, Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Mike Yuhas, Virginia Outdoors Foundation

DCR STAFF PRESENT

Rochelle Altholz
Forrest Atwood
Julie Buchanan
Lynn Crump
Michael Fletcher
Kimberly Freiburger
Lisa McGee
Dave Neudeck
Danette Poole
Thomas Smith
Jennifer Wampler

WELCOME – *Danette Poole, DCR*

Ms. Poole welcomed attendees to the first 2019 meeting of the State Trails Advisory Committee. This marks the group's ninth meeting since the formation in 2015.

Ms. Poole reported that the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP) had been released and noted that local parks were included in the VOP Mapper. She thanked members of the STAC for input into the process and for their commitment to advancing trails across the Commonwealth.

Ms. Poole advised that the 2020 conference will not be a partnership with the Virginia United Land Trusts, but would rather be a partnership with the River Management Society as DCR prepares to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Virginia Scenic Rivers program. The conference will focus on water trails, riparian trails and scenic resource management. Dates for the conference are May 12-15, 2020.

Ms. Poole introduced DCR Director, Clyde Cristman for remarks.

Director Cristman thanked the group for attending and for their work over the past four years advancing trails and providing guidance and direction for the Virginia Outdoors Plan. He noted that, according to the Virginia Outdoors Survey, natural areas, trails, and water access remain top priorities for Virginians in meeting outdoor recreation needs.

Director Cristman congratulated the group on the recent formation of the Virginia Trails Alliance. Nearly sixty (60) organizations have joined since the organization was formed at the November strategic planning retreat.

The recent permanent reauthorization of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund by Congress also came with a guarantee that forty percent (40%) of those funds will be directed to state programs. Virginia's apportionment for FY2019 is anticipated to be \$3.9 million.

Two grant rounds for acquisitions will be held in the spring through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation. Both of these programs emphasize the priorities

of the Virginia Outdoors Plan and the Governor's land conservation goal. In the summer a grant round will also be held for the Recreational Trails Program focusing on motorized trails. Director Cristman noted that these outdoor recreation and land conservation goals could not be accomplished without partnerships like the State Trails Advisory Committee. He again thanked members for their commitment to advancing statewide trails and their work over the last four years.

VIRGINIA TRAILS ALLIANCE – *Paul Gilbert, Virginia Trails Alliance*

Mr. Gilbert gave an update regarding the Virginia Trails Alliance. The Alliance was formed in November at the strategic planning retreat. A letter of support for trails funding was sent to the Governor. Mr. Gilbert, Ms. Aungier, and Mr. Burnley met with Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources Joshua Sacks to convey the same message.

The Alliance met on April 8 and passed bylaws. Officers are:

President – Andrew Downs
Vice President – Paul Gilbert
Secretary – Sally Aungier

Mr. Downs advised that the most important action at this time was to invite interested parties to join the alliance.

STATEWIDE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN COUNT PROGRAM – *John Bolecek, VDOT*

Mr. Bolecek gave an update on the Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Count Program. This is a statewide pilot program from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

In 2012, VDOT started applying counters to trails. In September 2015, VDOT installed counters along the Virginia Capital Trail. There are now seven permanent counting stations along that trail that count cyclists and pedestrians.

VDOT has four portable counters that can be deployed along paths and sidewalks. So far, they have been used in over thirty (30) locations and have counted over 1.9 million trail users.

Those interested in having a location counted should contact Mr. Bolecek.

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

Ms. Wampler reviewed four scenarios for work to continue on the James River Heritage Trail. A draft plan was developed for the James River Heritage Trail in 2011. The Town of Scottsville has recently asked that the concept plan for the James River Heritage Trail be completed. She noted that, while scenarios may be addressed, funding sources are unknown at this point. She advised that the intent was to get initial feedback from the STAC to determine the best path forward.

The four scenarios were:

Scenario 1 – No change to existing activities

Stakeholder groups, trail cleanups, and trails like the Virginia Capital Trail already exist. Water trails and trails along the river would still exist, but there would be no central coordination. Promotion would be by the site or the locality.

Scenario 2 – Middle James Pilot Project

This pilot project would focus on the area traveled by the James River Bateau. The area from Lynchburg to Goochland is mostly flatwater and has less development. The model could be based on the model used by the Friends of the Lower Appomattox River. This would be funded at the private level and promoted at the regional level.

Scenario 3 – James Watershed

This approach would focus on the entire James River Watershed. This includes the watershed and tributaries and would involve thirty-eight counties and seventeen towns or cities. The effort would require two staff people at the state level to coordinate local and regional efforts and solicit and administer grants. Funding these positions and a grant program would be a large consideration. Could a user fee be used to match state and local contributions?

Scenario 4 – State Trail System development with the James River Heritage Trail as a pilot project

This project would expand the program to the entire state with the James River Heritage Trail being one of six state trails. This could give consideration to tax revenue. The scenario would include staff in a new division or office with a director to administer grants, provide technical/planning/mapping assistance, coordinate volunteers and events, support environmental education, and promote the trail through social media and publications.

At this time, the meeting recessed to allow attendees to indicate their preference of the four scenarios. DCR staff will coordinate the responses and develop a plan for moving forward.

MINNESOTA'S STATEWIDE BICYCLING ECOSYSTEM – Gary Sjoquist, *Quality Bicycle Products*

Mr. Sjoquist gave a presentation regarding Minnesota's Ecosystem for Bicycling and Recreational Trails.

A word about Quality Bicycle Products

- Distribute parts and accessories to 4,000 bicycle retailers
- DC in MN, CO, NV, PA
- Opened an office in Taiwan
- About 800 employees and lots of dogs
- 40,000 parts in our inventory
- Now opening in Canada
- On a busy day, we'll ship 10,000+ boxes
- Sjoquist hired in 1998 as first fulltime advocate in bike industry. Here on behalf of bicycle retailers.

Q Central in Minnesota

- Q's Employees annually ride more than 320,000 miles to and from work.
- Q's been giving 6% of after-tax profits to support cycling since 1998

Ecosystem Components

- Tour operators and promoters of events, races, and routes for cyclists to ride
- Bicycle retailers who sell bikes and gear so cyclists can participate safely
- Transportation/recreation managers who oversee trails and routes that trail users and cyclists ride
- The community that benefits because the quality of life is higher thanks to having events, tours, and trails to use
- Public land managers (
- Without the cooperation and coordination with public land managers (city, county, state, or federal) , retailers to invest in the community, and cyclists and advocacy groups to advocate for events, better routes, more trails, etc., this ecosystem is incomplete
- Dave Walsh from Red Newt Bicycles in Lexington is credited for the ecosystem concept

The Minnesota Basics

- Population of Minnesota is 5.3 million
- Home to 11,000+ lakes, 92,000 miles of rivers
- Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul the 16th largest urban area in the U.S.
- Ranked 5th in headquarters for Fortune 500 companies
- Usually ranked high in voting, quality of schools, number of non-profits
- Long winters, short summers
- MN has benefitted from Congressional member support in securing federal funds for cycling
- Congressman Jim Oberstar (34 years), ranking member of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
- Congressman Mark Sabo (28 years) Chair of Appropriations, strong transit advocate
- Strong political will – Minneapolis spent \$9 million to build one mile of trail in 2011
- Legacy of advocacy by community groups

Economic Impact of Bicycling in Minnesota

- Study released in January, 2017
- "Assessing the Economic Impact and Health Effects of Bicycling in MN" study was funded by MnDOT, with research conducted by the University of Minnesota Tourism Center, School of Public Health, and Humphrey School of Public Affairs
- In 2014, MN's bicycle industry created \$778 million of economic activity
- This includes \$209 million of labor income and 5,529 jobs
- MN communities host more than 1000 bicycle events annually, bringing 90,000+ non-resident visitors to enjoy bicycling
- Trail rides, races, mountain biking events, and bicycle tours generated \$14.3 million of economic activity

- These trail rides, races, mountain biking events, and bicycle tours generated \$6.3 million in labor income
- About 90 million bicycle trips are made annually in MN for commuting, recreational riding, and other purposes

Minnesota's Ecosystem is Working

- Since economic benefits of bicycling are known, there's a lot of support for bicycling and trail initiatives statewide
- Strong advocacy organizations at city, county, and state levels help support initiatives
- Access to parks, lakes, greenways, urban areas area part of MN culture
- Access for commuters, even in winter months, is a high priority in our urban areas
- Many communities get it that our best and brightest prioritize bike and trail access; a determining factor for where they live and work

Minnesota Paved Trails

- According to the Rails to Trails Conservancy, 108 communities in Minnesota have trails totaling just under 3,000 miles
- This doesn't include our DNR State Trails
- Mix of abandoned rail lines, but much of it is around our lakes and along rivers
- Most of our communities and suburbs have 10-ft wide black asphalt trails running parallel to streets, roads, and highways

Minnesota DNR Paved Trail Network

- MN DNR operates 1,300 miles of State Paved Trails (linear state parks)
- Built mostly on abandoned rail lines
- No user fees to ride these trails
- Paul Bunyan Trail (RTC Hall of Fame Trail) runs 100 miles from Baxter to Bemidji
- Gitchi Gami State Trail runs along Lake Superior from Silver Creek Cliff to Grand Marais (80 miles)

Minneapolis and St. Paul Paved Trails

- About 500 miles of paved trails throughout the Twin Cities
- Midtown Greenway runs from west side of Minneapolis to the Mississippi River, and is a RTC Hall of Fame Trail (5,000 per day during the summer).
- Cedar Lake Trail America's first "bicycle freeway" opened in 1995
- Neighborhood group raised \$500,000 to purchase abandoned rail line
- Phase 3 – one mile cost \$9 million to build

How About E-Bikes on Trails?

- E-bikes are allowed if they meet the definition of MN Statute 169.111, Sub. 26
- Class 1, pedal-assist only (no throttle)

- Maximum assisted speed limited to 20 mph
- Basically, anywhere a bicycle can be ridden, an e-bike can be ridden unless specifically prohibited

Snowmobiling and Cross-Country Skiing

- MN has 22,000 miles of designated snowmobile trails
- 21,000 miles of this are maintained by snowmobile clubs
- MNUSA is the dominant recreational user group in MN
- Snowmobiling worth \$1 billion to MN annually
- MN has 2,000 miles of cross-country ski trails groomed by local clubs and the DNR

Motorized Trails

- MN has more than 1,000 miles of trails for ATVs, off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway vehicles
- MN also home to Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area in northern MN
- Site spans 1,200 acres and features 36 miles of trails through iron-ore pits, stockpiles, and tailings basins

Water Trails

- MN has first and largest water trail system in the U.S.
- 35 MN DNR State Water Trails
- Network features 1,500 public accesses, campsites, rest areas, and portages
- 4,500 miles of paddling available on State Water Trails
- Most Minnesotans live within one hour of a State Water Trail

Mountain Biking in Minnesota

- MN home to “unexpectedly good” mountain biking for a flyover state with no mountains
- Largest advocacy groups are Minnesota Off-Road Cyclists (MORC) with 1000 members, and Cyclists of Gitchi Gami Shores (COGGs) with about 500 members
- About 500 miles of designated singletrack mountain bike trails (not shared with other user groups)
- Almost entirely directional
- Common to use “stacked loop” system
- “Signature” trails are Cuyuna (DNR) and the Travers in Duluth (City of Duluth)
- Cuyuna currently about 30 miles, with another 40 under construction
- Built on 5,000 acre abandoned mine site in northern MN
- Traverse in Duluth is 100 miles long (actually 45 miles in length, with pockets of trail networks at 5 different locations total 100 miles)
- Cuyuna is a IMBA Silver Ride Center
- Duluth is a IMBA Gold Ride Center

Influence of Cuyuna

- Opened in 2011, immediately became a national destination (178,000 users in 2018)
- Brought significant economic impacts to the two small towns (Crosby and Ironton); 18 new businesses since Cuyuna opened
- Crosby Medical Center uses the mtb trail to recruit surgeons
- High school uses mtb trail to recruit teachers and administrators
- IRRRB, in 2018, committed \$5 million to build mtb trails in northern MN.

Fat Bikes in MN

- QBP didn't invent fat bikes, but brought mass production to category
- MORC in Twin Cities grooms 85 miles of singletrack for winter riding
- Duluth grooms all the Traverse for fat biking
- Great benefit for construction of mountain bike trails in MN; used in winter, too
- Grooming both human powered and mechanized

Minnesota High School Cycling League

- Launched in 2012 as National Interscholastic Cycling League (NICA) project
- For 2019, will have 2000+ users
- 7 race season in Sept/Oct.
- Events have 3000+ between racers, parents, coaches, volunteers, spectators
- Need parking for 1000 vehicles
- League driving mtb trail development in MN
- Gateway Trail initiative – build trails on school grounds

Minnesota League Economic Driver

- Economic Impact Study hosted by People for Bikes and NICA, 2018
- 6 NICA leagues provided survey data
- 2018 season championship weekend event in Mankato, MN (40,000 population)
- 1065 racers plus 2000+ parents, coaches, volunteers, and spectators
- Survey data on average; lodging (\$140), food and beverage (\$100), transportation (\$50)
- Measured economic impact - \$533,454

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

- RTP funds in MN distributed via the Minnesota Recreational Trail Users Association (MRTUA)
- MRTUA made of 4 motorized groups (snowmobile, off-highway moto, all-terrain vehicles, 4-wheel drive vehicles)
- MRTUA's non-motorized representation 6 groups (bicycling, cross-country skiing, hiking, equestrian, in-line skating, mountain biking)
- Addition of separate mountain biking representation in 2003 has been very beneficial

Recreational Issues in Minnesota

- Subject to “nature deficit disorder” among children
- Climate change hitting snowmobilers and skiers
- Aquatic invasive species a huge issue; 1.4 million licensed anglers/825,658 registered boats
- Paved trail maintenance a ticking time bomb
- Trail use fees on the horizon?

Recreational Trails in Minnesota

- Access to trails of all kinds seen as integral to quality of life
- Mountain biking has become a mainstream activity and recognized economic driver
- Gravel riding and fat biking huge growth areas
- Healthy ecosystem regarding trail use and bicycling in MN

VIRGINIA CAPITAL TRAIL MANAGEMENT STUDY – Tom Smith, DCR

Mr. Smith reported that the General Assembly directed the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Secretary of Transportation to conduct a study to consider the transfer of the management of the Virginia Capital Trail from VDOT to DCR.

DCR and VDOT will be working together to complete the study. The deadline for the study and recommendations is October 1, 2019.

Mr. Smith advised that DCR would be looking at the infrastructure and the maintenance needs of the trail. He noted that DCR has a backlog of \$226 million in state parks project needs.

The agencies will be seeking stakeholder input for the study.

STATEWIDE TRAILS COMMUNICATION PLAN – Dave Neudeck, DCR

Mr. Neudeck presented a list of communications goals for the STAC. He then had the attendees divide into smaller groups to address each goal.

The nine goals presented were:

1. Tear down silos – How to break down barriers and motivate a multi-agency effort?
2. Develop a new generation of advocates – How do we draw this group outside, encourage them to volunteer for trail work, and motivate them to protect natural resources for the future?
3. Build political will for trails among elected officials – What are the best ways to reach elected officials, when only a quarter of the population meets physical activity guidelines.
4. Develop business advocates – What are some ways to harness the collective impact of this group?
5. Reaching out to adjacent landowners – How do we build and maintain trust with this group?
6. Building partner support for collective impact – How do we position trails to be seen as mission critical to encourage partnerships and/or how can we expand our circle of influence to embrace more mission critical work?

7. Reaching inactive, under-served and low-income communities – How do we strengthen that diversity to encourage health and wellness, broaden that base, and promote good stewardship?
8. Encouraging trail user services in gateway communities – How do we engage communities to become trail ambassadors?
9. Building sustainable trails – How do we encourage sustainable trail building, especially among the state trail system?

Following the breakout groups, Mr. Neudeck led a discussion of each goal. These will be taken together to formulate a communications plan for the STAC. The DCR Public Communications and Marketing staff will develop a plan, and a toolkit identifying resources, to present at the next meeting.

WRAP UP – *Jennifer Wampler*

Ms. Wampler advised that the next meeting would be in late August. A Doodle poll will be circulated among members for the best date. It was requested that the meeting be in Charlottesville.

Discussion items at the next meeting will include:

- The Virginia Capital Trail and study
- James River Heritage Trail
- Possible legislation for the 2020 General Assembly Session
- Virginia Trails Alliance
- May 2020 River Management Society Conference

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned at 11:31 a.m.