

**Board of Conservation and Recreation
May 12, 2014
Natural Bridge Hotel
Natural Bridge, Virginia**

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Present

W. Bruce Wingo, Chair
Linwood M. Cobb, III
Michael P. Reynold
Mark E. Smith

James W. Beamer
Harvey B. Morgan
Daniel F. Rinzel
Alexander I. Vanegas

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Not Present

Andrea Young, Vice Chair
William E. Small

Steve L. Apicella

DCR Staff Present

Clyde E. Cristman
Joe Elton
David C. Dowling
Michael R. Fletcher
George Chieffo
Bill Conkle
Tom Smith
Lynn Crump

Others Present

Lauren B. Schmitt, Virginia Campgrounds Association
Mary Helen Morgan

Call to Order and Introductions

Mr. Wingo called the meeting to order and declared a quorum present. He asked members, staff and guests to introduce themselves.

Greetings from Tom Clarke, CEO of Kissito Healthcare and founder of the Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund, owners of Natural Bridge

Mr. Elton introduced Mr. Tom Clarke of Kissito Healthcare.

Mr. Clarke said that Natural Bridge was a park in waiting. He thanked members of the Board and the Commonwealth for their conservation efforts. He said that Virginia is one of only three states that provide tax credits for conservation.

Mr. Clarke said that the Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund wants the donation to be completed by the end of 2015. He said that the owners were committed to donating just over 1530 acres. While that does not include the commercial assets, he said a strong public/private partnership is envisioned. He said that the commercial assets would be integrated into and supportive of the mission of the park.

Mr. Clarke said that Natural Bridge State Park will be the most iconic State Park in the nation. For generations the Bridge has been an inspiration. He said that the Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund has the same inspiration to connect children with nature.

Mr. Clarke said that the VCLF wanted to hand off the Bridge as a fully developed state park. The VCLF is already working on interpretive displays and the Monacan village is being rebuilt.

Mr. Clarke said that the transfer had been a grass roots effort and was supported by local politicians, government agencies, private organizations, and individuals.

Approval of Minutes from September 11, 2013

MOTION: Mr. Smith moved that the minutes of the September 11, 2013 meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation be approved as submitted by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Beamer

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Director's Report

Mr. Cristman gave the Director's report.

Mr. Cristman said that it was an exciting time at DCR. He said that with the support of the Governor and the Secretary there had been some Department reorganization. He noted that the position of Chief Deputy had been eliminated and a position for the Deputy Director of Operations had been created. He noted that Mr. Elton had assumed that position and would focus on the areas of State Parks, Natural Heritage, Planning and Recreation, Environmental Education, and Land Conservation.

Mr. Cristman said that Craig Seaver was now serving as Acting Director of State Parks.

Mr. Cristman said that there had been substantial changes in the financial policies and procedures of the Agency. He said that the Auditor of Public Accounts was finishing their review and that there were areas that needed correction. He noted that there had been discussion of the issues in the Richmond media.

Mr. Cristman introduced George Chieffo who had been appointed as Special Assistant to the Director for Policy.

Mr. Smith asked if there had been any update regarding the state budget and what would happen July 1 if the budget debate was not settled.

Mr. Cristman said that he hoped the process was moving forward. He said that he had received assurance that Agency operations could continue.

State Park Master Plans

Mr. Conkle presented the state park master plans.

Mr. Conkle said that the Division of Planning and Recreation Resources was responsible for the Virginia Outdoors Plan, Scenic Rivers, Statewide Trails, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Design and Construction, Scenic Byways, and State Park Master Plans.

Mr. Conkle noted that master plans must be completed prior to any earth being moved and the construction process beginning. He noted that master plans must be updated every five years.

Twin Lakes State Park

Mr. Conkle said that the proposed amendment to the Twin Lakes State Park Master Plan called for the construction of a cabin complex. To accommodate the cabin complex, an existing group camp with associated bathhouse and a proposed 50 bedroom lodge would be removed from the plan.

Mr. Beamer noted that at a prior meeting concern had been expressed about surrounding campground owners and business receiving notice of proposed changes. He asked if that had been a concern with Twin Lakes.

Mr. Conkle said that DCR staff makes an effort to do a thorough job of notifying the community.

MOTION: Mr. Smith moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the amendment to the Twin Lakes State Park Master Plan as presented by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Beamer

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Conkle noted that the amendment would be available for review for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly. He said that based on the requirements of § 10.1-200.1, this proposed amendment, when approved, will be made part of the Master Plan for Twin Lakes State Park.

Widewater State Park

Mr. Conkle presented the amendment for the Widewater State Park Master Plan.

Mr. Conkle said that the amendment proposed the relocation of several facilities that were proposed as part of the September 2013 Master Plan. He said that due to environmental concerns regarding submerged aquatic vegetation in Aquia Creek, the boat launch and fishing pier proposed for Area IV, have been moved to Area I. He said that to balance development in the park, the visitor center and offices proposed for Area I have been moved to Area IV.

Mr. Conkle said that the amendment also recommended the reconfiguration of the roads and relocation of the proposed contact station and canoe launch in Area I. The new road will be a more direct route from Brent Point to the proposed facilities on the Potomac River. An internal park road is proposed in a later phase to relieve congestion on Brent Park Road. The amendment also recommended the addition of a fishing pier in Area III of the park.

A member asked who was responsible for the road.

Mr. Conkle said that VDOT was responsible for the road. He noted that a main concern from the public was traffic into the park.

Mr. Reynold asked the timeline for the project.

Ms. Crump noted that the phasing for all three aspects of the master plan was over the next 20 years.

MOTION: Mr. Smith moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the amendment to the Widewater State Park Master Plan as presented by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Vanegas

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Mr. Conkle said that a public meeting would be held on June 19, 2014 to receive input on this amendment. He said that following the public meeting, the amendment would be made available for review for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly. He said that based on the requirements of § 10.1-200.1, this proposed amendment, when approved, will be made part of the Master Plan for Widewater State Park.

Staunton River State Park

Mr. Conkle presented the update for the Staunton River State Park Master Plan.

A member asked about the drop in attendance at the park.

Mr. Elton explained that a derecho had caused significant damage to several state parks in 2012, including Staunton River State Park. He said that because facilities were closed during the recovery time, attendance in the park was down.

Mr. Conkle said that the 2014 master plan update described both proposed facilities and improvements to existing facilities. He said that new facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park, and are in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan, when available. He said that the plan recommended that new facilities at the park should be designed and built with consideration to the original CCC design and layout of facilities.

Mr. Conkle said that additional land acquisition was recommended to enhance park offerings, buffer the park from inappropriate development, and protect valued viewsheds. He said that future land acquisitions would only be negotiated with willing property owners.

MOTION: Mr. Beamer moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the update to the Staunton River State Park Master Plan as presented by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Reynold

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Mr. Conkle said that the update would be available for review by the Virginia General Assembly for 30 days.

Wilderness Road State Park

Mr. Conkle presented the update for Wilderness Road State Park.

Mr. Conkle said that as part of the 2014 master plan process, the 1998 park master plan was reviewed as well as the 2002 and 2009 master plan amendments. He said that it was determined that enough changes occurred to the plan to warrant a full revision. He said that the new summary showed that the phased development plan and costs were revised to reflect current proposed projects, and the park staffing and operations costs data were also updated.

Mr. Conkle said that the 2014 update places value on connecting Wilderness Road to other resources in the community. The Wilderness Road Trail connects to Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, which offers 50 miles of trails. Kentucky's 100-mile Pine Mountain State Scenic Trail is currently under construction and will, when completed, connect the Cumberland

Gap National Historical Park to Breaks Interstate Park (part of the Great Eastern Trail). Wilderness Road State Park is also identified as a component of the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail.

MOTION: Mr. Beamer moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the update to the Wilderness Road State Park Master Plan as presented by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Smith

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Holliday Lake State Park

Mr. Conkle gave the update for Holliday Lake State Park. He noted that Holliday Lake has been determined to be the second cleanest lake in Virginia. He said that with the new land acquisition the park viewshed will be protected.

Mr. Conkle said that the 2014 update to the master plan placed value on connecting Holliday Lake State Park to other resources in the community and within Virginia's Retreat region of South Central Virginia (www.varetreat.com) which highlights historic and outdoor adventures in the area.

MOTION: Mr. Cobb moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the update to the Holliday Lake State Park Master Plan as presented by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Reynold

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

State Parks Update

Mr. Elton gave the State Parks update. He noted that there had been substantial discussion about Natural Bridge becoming as state park, but said that other parks in the works include Seven Bends, Widewater, Biscuit Run, Mayo River and Middle Peninsula. He said that DCR was holding the lands for these parks and waiting for funding to begin the process of developing the parks.

Mr. Elton also noted that there had been considerable support for the establishment of Clinch River State Park in far Southwest Virginia.

Mr. Elton said that State Parks were on track to have record breaking visitation in 2014.

Natural Heritage Update

Mr. Tom Smith gave the Natural Heritage Update.

Mr. Smith said that the Natural Heritage Inventory was responsible for finding and identifying about 300 species, including the Barking treefrog (*Hyla gratiosa*) and the Cocoa clubtail (*Gomphus hybridus*) which is new to the state.

Mr. Smith gave an update regarding improving project reviews with species distribution models.

In Virginia, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has used county-level species presence/absence data to determine a need for Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species consultation. At the state level, Virginia Natural Heritage initiates consultation based on screening a project against known locations of T&E, via buffered Element Occurrence data. These two inconsistent approaches often result in differing requests for survey from state and federal agencies.

Now both agencies are beginning to use the same screening methods to trigger consultation. Inductive Species Distribution Models (SDM) are developed based on GIS and statistical analysis of the unique relationships between species locations and various habitat characteristics. Map outputs are used in USFWS and Virginia Natural Heritage online environmental review tools: IPaC (Information Planning and Conservation System) and NHDE (Natural Heritage Data Explorer). These objective methods and clear model outputs enable better-informed survey requests, and expedited consultation for government and for clients. Virginia Natural Heritage is currently building a library of SDMs for all T&E species in Virginia.

Mr. Smith gave an overview of the Crosier Tract addition to Pedlar Hills Glades. A copy of the map is available from DCR.

Mr. Smith gave an update regarding the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem.

- Pre-settlement: 1 million plus acres
- Today: 130 mature trees – most at DCR's South Quay Sandhills NAP
- DCR – Dept. Forestry cone collection program
- 225,000 native seedlings planted, most on NAPs
- 250,000 seedlings possible in 2015 = 500 acres
- Need: \$50,000/year

Mr. Smith gave an overview of the Savage Neck Dunes NAP Shoreline erosion. He noted that the state lost 2.73 acres to erosion in between 2009-2014.

Other Business

Ms. Crump presented the new Scenic Rivers brochure. She said that staff had just completed part of the Clinch River evaluation. She said that would be presented to the Board at the next meeting. She said staff is working on setting up the Dan River evaluation.

Mr. Beamer noted that at the last meeting he had given an update regarding the Richmond Regional Ride Center. He said that at this point \$170,000 of the needed \$800,000 had been raised prior to the race coming in April, 2015. He noted that the Richmond area was in competition for a grant to receive \$33,000 in trail building funds. Richmond will become one of 17 destinations worldwide and will be unique for several miles of hand cycling trails to provide additional access.

Public Comment

Lauren Schmitt of Virginia Campgrounds Association expressed appreciation for being able to attend the meeting and the Governor's event that afternoon.

Next Meeting

Staff will research possibilities for a meeting in August or September.

Adjourn

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

W. Bruce Wingo
Chair

Clyde E. Cristman
DCR Director