

**Virginia Board of Conservation and Recreation
Westmoreland State Park
Wednesday, November 7, 2007**

MINUTES

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Present

Sheryl D. Swinson, Chair
David G. Brickley
Linda Crandell
Gwen Mason
Mark E. Smith

Stephen Murray, Vice Chair
Joy A. Cooley
Richard Formato
E. Carter Nettles

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Not Present

Alan D. Albert
Jennifer Wagner

Gerry Connolly

DCR Staff Present

Joseph H. Maroon, Director
Russell W. Baxter, Deputy Director
David C. Dowling, Director of Policy, Planning and Budget
Joseph Elton, Director Division of State Parks
John R. Davy, Director Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
Michael R. Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Scott Flickinger, Park District Manager
Robert S. Munson, Planning Bureau Manager
Rick Myers, Stewardship Manager
Larry Smith, Natural Area Protection Manager
Thomas L. Smith, Director Division of Natural Heritage
Gary Waugh, Public Relations Manager
Synthia Waymack, Environmental Program Analyst

Call to Order

Chairman Swinson called the meeting order. A quorum was not present until later in the meeting.

Master Plan Updates

Mr. Davy and Mr. Munson gave updates and introduced recommended amendments for the Master Plans for James River and Staunton River State Park.

Mr. Munson reviewed the following recommended amendment to the Master Plan for James River State Park.

The adopted master plan for James River State Park was approved on December 16, 2004 by Joseph H. Maroon. Since adoption of the plan, site analysis has resulted in a determination that the proposed location for the equestrian campground is unsuitable due to archeological finds in the vicinity. A suitable replacement site was found a few hundred yards southeast of the original location. This proposed relocation was presented to the public at meeting at the Gladstone Firehouse on September 19, 2007 and was unanimously supported by those attending. It was also the consensus of the public that the state park property located in Bent Creek should be used for canoe livery operations and that the Cunningham Island property should be used for canoe-in camping, day use picnicking and for nature trail use.

Staunton River State Park

Mr. Munson reviewed a proposed amendment to the Master Plan for Staunton River State Park. This amendment addressed the acquisition of 1000 acres of adjacent land.

The adopted master plan for Staunton River State Park was approved on June 9, 2003 by Joseph H. Maroon. Since adoption of the plan, over 1000 acres of adjacent land has been purchased as an addition to the park. In light of the new opportunities this land provided, the Master Plan Advisory Committee was reconvened to decide which elements of the adopted master plan's program should be transferred to the newly acquired property. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee were subsequently presented to the public at a meeting held on October 29, 2007, in Halifax, Virginia. The 30 members of the public who attended the meeting unanimously agreed that the proposed changes were appropriate for the park. The recommended changes are as follows:

1. Move the proposed equestrian campground to the new property.
2. Move the equestrian day-use parking lot to the new property.
3. Use the old equestrian parking lot as a trailhead parking and picnic area.
4. Construct a picnic area with shelters, restroom, and parking area to the northern side of the lake on the new property.
5. Provide bank fishing and hand carry launch to the north side of the lake on the new property. Ensure fishing nodes are ADA accessible.
6. Develop an environmental education center where the cabin is located on the lake at the new property.
7. Develop a multi-use non-motorized trail system on the new property and connect with existing trails system in park.
8. Develop a handicapped accessible nature trail at the small pond on the new property.
9. Upgrade the Captain Staunton Trail to meet ADA standards.

10. Create a handicapped accessible fishing area in conjunction with the shoreline stabilization project on the Staunton River near the boat ramp.
11. Move the location of the proposed campground addition to the north of the old contact station.
12. Construct a new park contact station near the new entrance to the park.
13. Provide an additional staff residence.
14. Develop a group camp north of the lake picnic area. Use the same parking lot and restroom to serve both areas.

Mr. Murray asked how DCR obtained the additional land.

Mr. Elton said that the landowner wanted to see the land conserved. DCR was able to purchase the property with bond money.

Mr. Maroon said that the Board should hold the votes until a quorum is achieved.

Director's Report

Mr. Maroon welcomed the Board to Westmoreland State Park. He reviewed the agenda and the schedule for the day. He noted that, following the meeting, the Board was invited to participate in the dedication ceremony for the Tayloe and Helen Murphy Hall.

Mr. Maroon introduced Scott Flickinger, Park District Manager.

Mr. Flickinger welcomed the Board to the park. Westmoreland State Park is one of the original six State Parks built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The park is listed as a National Historic Area and has a mile and a half of shoreline along the Potomac River.

Ms. Cooley and Mr. Brickley arrived, and a quorum was achieved.

Mr. Maroon said that for the last several years, Murphy Hall was used as a meeting hall. The renovations turned the restaurant and camp store into a multifaceted meeting location. He said that a large portion of the renovations for the building came from a private donation.

Mr. Maroon reviewed the current budget situation and noted that all state agencies were asked to submit plans for a 5% reduction in funding. The reductions accepted by the Governor were slightly less than 5%. Areas affected were pass-through funds for Soil and Water Conservation Districts, funding for State Park dam safety repairs and State Park fees, which were raised by 5%.

Mr. Murray asked Mr. Maroon to further explain the funding for dam safety repairs.

Mr. Maroon said that the affected small watershed fund had been established several years ago and that the fund currently had \$650,000 in funds available. These funds will be shifted to repairs for DCR and District owned dams.

Mr. Maroon reviewed the adjustment in Board travel reimbursement rates that was outlined in a memorandum previously mailed to the Board.

Mr. Maroon said that there might be consideration of a new bond package in the upcoming General Assembly session. Areas being considered for funding through the package are education, mental health and natural resources.

Virginia State Parks along with the Virginia Association for Parks (VAFP) hosted a National Conference on Parks in Colonial Williamsburg. This was a joint conference of the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) and the National Park Service Leadership Council. Virginia State Parks Director Joe Elton served as the Conference Chair and was elected Vice President of the NASPD. The conference was attended by more than 300 state and national parks professionals with participants from all 50 states, Canadian Parks and Puerto Rico Parks.

State park staff were commended in a Resolution unanimously supported by conference delegates for "providing participants with outstanding educational and cultural experiences, a warm social environment, and typical Southern hospitality." State Parks Director Joe Elton received the National Distinguished Service Award "In recognition of many years of dedicated service and inspired leadership to the conservation, interpretation and enhancement of our nation's natural and cultural state park treasures."

Mayo River State Park Study

Mr. Davy gave an overview of the Mayo River State Park Study.

Mr. Davy said that the General Assembly directed two studies in Henry County for the North and South Mayo Rivers. These studies were for potential state park and scenic river designation. A draft copy of the report was provided for member review.

Mr. Davy said the initial request from the Legislature was for the state park study. DCR requested that the scenic river study also be included.

Two public meetings were held with landowners to keep them informed. Landowners were reassured that DCR only works with willing sellers and that property would not be condemned for use as state parks.

Mr. Davy said that staff evaluated both rivers and the surrounding areas. The study determined that the confluence of the two rivers provide an area where it would be feasible to acquire land and develop a state park.

MOTION: Ms. Mason moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation endorse the concept of developing a state park along the North and South Mayo Rivers in Henry County.

SECOND: Ms. Crandell

DISCUSSION: Mr. Brickley asked the width of the river in the proposed areas.

Mr. Davy said the width of the river varied from 50 to 100 feet.

Mr. Brickley asked if there was consideration to developing a cooperative park management arrangement such as the arrangement at Breaks Interstate Park.

Mr. Davy said that North Carolina did not appear to be interested in such an arrangement.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Natural Area Management Subcommittee Report

Ms. Mason gave an update on the discussion of the Natural Area Management Subcommittee. She noted that at the meeting in May, Ms. Swinson had appointed a working group to address chronic problems in the Natural Area Preserve System. Key problems are underfunding and understaffing.

Ms. Mason presented a draft letter that the subcommittee indicated they would like to send to the Governor. She said that, while the subcommittee recognized that the state was in a budget crisis, it was important to go on record to ask for the appropriate staffing level.

Mr. Tom Smith gave an update entitled Virginia's Growing State Natural Area Preserve System. A complete copy of this information is available from DCR.

Mr. Smith said that the subcommittee felt it was important to develop a communications plan for the Natural Area Preserve System. He noted that two additional preserves had been added since the last Board meeting.

Mr. Smith reviewed the key issues:

- In 2001, DCR's Natural Heritage Program had 34 State Natural Area Preserves covering 19,825 acres, 18 FTE and a general fund budget of \$800,000 for managing natural areas.
- Today, DCR has 51 natural area preserves on 42,380 acres, 12 FTE (10 general fund and 2 nongeneral fund) and a general fund budget of \$720,000 to

manage the preserve system. Eight general fund natural area stewardship staff positions are located in five regional offices and two are in Richmond.

- 36 of the existing natural area preserves are owned by DCR, the remaining 15 are owned by others and dedicated into the system, and require various levels of staff time and resources. Twelve of the DCR-owned preserves have public access facilities, typically a gravel parking area for 5-10 cars, self guided nature trail, boardwalks and wildlife observation decks. An additional six non-DCR preserves have public access facilities, for a total of 18 system-wide.

Mr. Smith reviewed the needs:

- The benchmark need is for 15 additional FTE (\$1.4 million) and operating expenses (\$531,000) totaling \$1.9 million. This will provide for adequate management of the existing system, put a regional structure in place to allow for the doubling of the System.
- The initial proposal is four FTE (\$313,000) plus operating and management expenses (\$250,000) totaling \$563,000 in general funds. This would provide two staff in Staunton, one in Sussex, and one on the Eastern Shore, enabling DCR to meet the most basic of needs.

Mr. Smith said that support for Virginia's natural areas has grown significantly over the last three Virginia Outdoors Surveys.

Mr. Smith said some of the consequences of limited staff and resources are:

- Closed North Landing River NAP, Virginia Beach
- Stopped construction of new public access areas
- Reduced staff oversight and inspections to NAPs due to increased territory to cover
- Deferred maintenance (signs, boundaries, roads, trails, boardwalks)
- Deferred invasive species management [raised NGFs (grants/donations) where possible]
- Deferred prescribed burning [raised NGFs (grants/donations) where possible]
- Increased use of volunteers (more coordination time)
- Increased use of remote surveillance

Mr. Smith reviewed the goals of the communications plan outline.

The objectives are to: *Establish the importance of natural area preserve management to the state's land conservation goals among opinion leaders and Illustrate the benefits and challenges involved with the management of Virginia's natural area preserve systems.*

Mr. Smith said that the subcommittee selected six Natural Area Preserves that best fit the criteria for advancing the message. Those areas are:

- Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve, Russell County
 - 669 acres
 - 5 miles outside Lebanon. Parking area, hiking trails, interpretive signs, swinging bridge, stocked trout stream
 - Lebanon is a growing community. Clinch River is a growing nature tourism destination, helpful to attract a new crowd to the preserve
 - Nearest State Park 45+ miles and 1 hr. plus
 - Legislators: Clarence E. Phillips; Phillip P. Puckett

- Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve, Floyd County
 - 1,140 acres
 - Seven miles southwest of Floyd. Parking area; newly constructed summit trail; interpretive signs; active volunteer stewardship committee; parking area for ~ 15 cars
 - Nearest State Parks, New River Trail and Fairy Stone, 40 miles
 - Legislators: Senator Roscoe Reynolds and Delegate Allen Dudley (retiring)

- Grassy Hill Natural Area Preserve, Franklin County
 - 1,295 acres
 - In town of Rocky Mount. Parking area, 6.6 mile trail system, interpretive signs
 - Nearest State Park – Fairy Stone 20+ miles or Smith Mt. Lake 30+ miles both 45 minutes to 1 hr. drive
 - Legislators: Delegate Allen Dudley and Senator Charles Hawkins – both retiring

- Dameron Marsh Natural Area Preserve, Northumberland County
 - 315 acres
 - Parking area, trails, observation platform, interpretive signs
 - Active Stewardship Committee with volunteer led hikes
 - Nearest State Park Belle Isle – 25 miles
 - Legislators: Delegate Robert J. Wittman, Senator John H. Chichester – retiring

- Hughlett Point Natural Area Preserve, Northumberland County
 - 204 acres
 - Parking Area, trails, observation platforms, interpretive signs
 - Active Stewardship Committee with volunteer led hikes
 - Nearest State park Belle Isle – 25 miles
 - Legislators: Delegate Robert J. Wittman, Senator John H. Chichester – retiring

* Dameron Marsh and Hughlett Point are 4 miles apart and served by same active group of volunteers.

- Southeast Region – None at present. Without an Operations Steward we do not see a Tier 1 NAP in this region. The Subcommittee noted that with addition of an Operations Steward there will be a double bonus as Cypress Bridge, Southampton County could quickly be brought online.
 - 3440 acres
 - hiking trail, interpretive signs, boardwalk and canoe launch, all need work due to closure
 - currently closed for public safety reasons
 - Nearest State Park First Landing, 45 minute drive
 - Senators Stolle & Blevins, Delegate Suit

- Savage Neck Dunes Natural Area Preserve, Northampton County
 - 298 acres
 - Parking area; birding/hiking trail; beach access. Sensitive dune system
 - Lottery deer hunt each fall
 - Active volunteer stewardship committee would need to be developed
 - Nearest State Park, Kiptopeke 20 miles
 - Senators Rerras and Delegate Lewis

Mr. Maroon expressed appreciation to the members of the subcommittee. He said that DCR also appreciated having the input of the Nature Conservancy through this process.

Mr. Maroon said that the reality is that DCR cannot open all 51 preserves. He said that the work of the subcommittee was to determine how to move ahead and to establish priorities.

Mr. Mark Smith suggested that the respective legislators be invited to stakeholder meetings. Mr. Maroon said that had been done and that some legislators had attended.

Ms. Mason presented a draft letter to the Governor on behalf of the Board.

Mr. Mark Smith suggested editing the letter to add the signatures of all Board members present.

MOTION: Mr. Smith moved that the Virginia Board of Conservation and Recreation approve the draft letter in support of Virginia's Natural Areas as submitted by DCR staff, that said letter include the signatures of all Board members present.

SECOND: Mr. Nettles

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

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A copy of the letter as signed is included as Attachment #1.

Mr. Nettles complimented the subcommittee for the work done on this issue.

Ms. Swinson also expressed appreciation of the work of the subcommittee.

State Parks Update

Mr. Elton gave an update regarding Virginia State Parks. A copy of his complete presentation is available from DCR.

Estimated attendance figures for 2007 were 7,100,000. Estimated revenue for 2007 was \$12,560,775. The economic impact to localities provided by state parks in 2007 was estimated at \$160,000. General support funds for State Parks in 2007 were \$19,355,759.

For the Jamestown 1607-2007 celebration each park developed and presented one or more interpretive programs celebrating history and nature.

There were over 147,000 volunteer hours in 2007.

Master plans were completed for High Bridge Trail State Park and Powhatan State Park.

There were twenty-three Youth Corps Plan programs in 2007. The goal is to have held at least one program in all state parks by 2008 with a permanent goal of having continuously run programs in all parks by 2010.

State Parks improved the reservation system in 2007.

- 16% increase in reservations over last year
- Web reservations have grown from just under 5,000 to over 18,000 in one year
- First year for on-line cabin reservations
- User friendly link from DCR website to reservation page

The State Parks Interpretive Information System was implemented in 2007.

- Outdoor information stations with touch-screen interactive software
- Virtual tours of every trail in each of the thirty-one parks
- In-depth information on park amenities
- Printable guides and maps
- Program descriptions and schedules
- Emergency Contact Information

State Parks Projects Fund

MOTION: Ms. Crandell moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the following State Park Project Fund requests:

Project 07-02 Bear Creek Lake State Park
Upgrade to Park Ranger Residence

\$5,000 from park dedicated funds

Project 07-03 Southwest Virginia Museum
Property acquisition

\$55,000 from park dedicated funds

SECOND: Mr. Formato

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Minutes of May 1, 2007

MOTION: Ms. Mason moved that the minutes of May 1, 2007 be approved as submitted.

SECOND: Mr. Formato

DISCUSSION: Mr. Nettles noted that Mr. Rick Myers was omitted from the staff in attendance at the May 1 meeting.

VOTE: Minutes were approved as amended

Recap of Master Plan Amendments

Mr. Munson gave a review of the proposed Master Plan amendments.

MOTION: Mr. Smith moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the staff amendment to the Master Plan for James River State Park.

SECOND: Ms. Mason

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DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

MOTION: Mr. Smith moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation recommend approval of the staff amendment to the Master Plan for Staunton River State Park.

SECOND: Ms. Crandell

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Mr. Maroon noted that the Board Chair is elected annually at the first meeting of the fiscal year.

Mr. Nettles nominated Ms. Swinson to serve a second year as Board Chair. Ms. Crandell seconded. There were no additional nominations and Ms. Swinson was reelected as Chair.

Ms. Mason nominated Mr. Murray to serve a second year as Vice Chair. Mr. Smith seconded. There were no additional nominations and Mr. Smith was reelected as Vice Chair.

By-laws

Mr. Nettles said that he was not prepared to vote on the By-laws as a copy had not been included in the mailing.

Mr. Dowling said that the same version had been presented at two prior meetings but there had not been a quorum.

Mr. Dowling reviewed proposed changes to the By-laws. A copy of the By-laws with suggested revisions is available from DCR.

Mr. Nettles noted that the Code of Virginia specified that the Board appointed subcommittees.

Mr. Dowling said that in practice the Board had functioned as other DCR Board with the Chair appointing subcommittees. He noted that the Board could give this responsibility to the Chair.

Mr. Smith suggested that the By-laws could say that subcommittees may be appointed with the concurrence of the Board.

Mr. Nettles expressed a concern that the revisions would not allow for a biennial review of the Bylaws.

Mr. Dowling said that the Board could review the By-laws at any time.

Mr. Nettles said that he had concerns that the By-laws did not conform to state law.

Mr. Formato suggested that the By-laws be tabled until these issues were worked out.

Mr. Maroon said that the By-laws had been on the Board agenda for the last two meetings but no action was taken due to a lack of quorum. He said that if Board members could submit comments by the end of November that staff would have time to address the draft and circulate it in advance of the Board meeting.

Ms. Swinson asked that staff distribute the draft By-laws to Board members and that Board members respond to staff by December 1, 2007.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation will be Friday, January 4, 2008 in Richmond.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheryl D. Swinson
Chair

Joseph H. Maroon
Director

Attachment #1

November 7, 2007

The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine
Governor of Virginia
Commonwealth of Virginia
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Kaine:

Since May of this year, a working group of your appointed Board of Conservation and Recreation has undertaken a detailed planning effort for the Commonwealth's Natural Area Preserve System. As you are aware, the System was established by law in 1989 to protect and conserve natural heritage resources, including habitats of rare plants and animals, and exemplary natural communities throughout the state. Along those lines, thank you for announcing the 50th Natural Area Preserve, Chestnut Creek Wetland, Floyd County, to join the system in September. We plan to have a celebration next spring of the 50 preserves and hope you will be able to join us.

Unfortunately, our working group has concluded two less positive issues. First, the System is largely invisible to the public eye. Working with Director Joe Maroon and management staff from the Department of Conservation and Recreation and advocates, we are developing outreach strategies to highlight six signature preserves so that the public understands and values these Commonwealth treasures. Secondly, but more critically, the growing System is suffering from chronic under-funding, such that it does not have the personnel and resources needed to sufficiently manage what it has. One need only look at the 3,441 acre North Landing River Natural Area Preserve in Virginia Beach, once the State's flagship preserve, now closed (due to reoccurring criminal activity and the lack of conservation staff to oversee the site), to make that point.

Therefore, the Conservation and Recreation Board recommends the addition of 15 FTE and a \$1.9 million general fund increase to meet the need of this expanding System. We envision this as a 6-year plan. However, understanding that fiscal resources are currently tight as you prepare your budget to the General Assembly, it is the Board's hope and strong recommendation that your upcoming biennial budget include, if at all possible, four additional FTE and \$563,000 in base funding for salary and operational support (gravel, herbicide, gates, boundary markings, etc.) for improved on-the-ground management of the Commonwealth's Natural Area Preserve System.

It is with gratitude and appreciation for your championing of natural resources that we thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to call upon us any time we may be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Members of the Board of Conservation and

Recreation

Sheryl Swinson
Chair

Gwen Mason
Chair, NAPS Working Group

Stephen Murray
Vice Chair

Alan D. Albert

David G. Brickley

Gerry Connolly

Joy Antoinette Cooley

Linda Crandell

Richard Formato

E. Carter Nettles

Mark E. Smith

Jennifer Wagner

c: The Honorable L. Preston Bryant, Jr.
Joseph H. Maroon, Director, Department Conservation and Recreation