

**Board of Conservation and Recreation
Thursday, August 20, 2009 – 10:00 a.m.
The Heritage Center at Pocahontas State Park
Chesterfield, Virginia**

DRAFT MINUTES

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Present

Mark E. Smith, Chair
Linda Crandell
Jennifer C. Wagner
Robert L. Wilkerson

Stephen Murray, Vice Chair
Sheryl W. Swinson
David Watts
W. Bruce Wingo

Board of Conservation and Recreation Members Not Present

Alan D. Albert
Gwen Mason

Richard Formato

DCR Staff Present

Joseph H. Maroon, DCR Director
John R. Davy, Director, Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
Michael R. Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison
Thomas Smith, Director, Division of Natural Heritage
Warren Wahl, Assistant Director, Division of State Parks
Ann Zahn, Park Manager

Others Present

Melinda Moran, Town Manager, Town of Clarksville
Andrew Hagy

Call to Order and Introductions

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order and declared a quorum present.

Approval of Minutes from April 28, 2009

MOTION: Ms. Crandell moved that the minutes of April 28, 2009 be approved as submitted by staff.

SECOND: Mr. Murray

DISCUSSION: None

REVISED: 8/31/2009 4:09:14 PM

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Mr. Smith said he would like to welcome Robert Wilkerson from Clarksville as the newest member.

Mr. Wilkerson said that it was an honor to be with the Board. He expressed an appreciation for State Parks.

Director's Report

Mr. Maroon introduced Ann Zahn, District IV Manager to give an overview of the Park.

Ms. Zahn welcomed members to the park. She said that Pocahontas is the largest land mass park in the State Park system, with a little over 7,000 acres. She said that the park averages 300-400,000 visitors per year. The park has a full service campground, plus camper cabins. The park also has a popular swimming facility which is the only public pool in Chesterfield County.

Ms. Zahn noted that the park is a pre-season cross country training ground for six area high schools and one middle school. Pocahontas is the home course for L.C. Bird, Monacan and Midlothian high schools.

Pocahontas was one of the CCC parks and houses the CCC museum.

Mr. Watts asked about the budget and number of full time and part time employees.

Ms. Zahn said it with concessions and district operations the budget is around \$500,000. At Pocahontas there are eight employees and four district staff. The park also has about 110 seasonal employees which includes the pool operation.

In response to a question, Ms. Zahn said that the park had been quite busy in the summer. The campground has been full every weekend. She said that the park was benefitting from people staying closer to home.

Mr. Smith thanked Ms. Zahn for her hospitality and for hosting the Board.

Mr. Maroon continued with the Director's report.

Mr. Maroon said that with staff reports he would be doing a lot of pitch hitting due to senior staff not being available. He noted that Mr. Elton had a death in the family and Mr. Baxter was out on medical leave.

Mr. Maroon said that in terms of major acquisitions he was very pleased to say that within the last couple of weeks Crow's Nest Phase II had been purchased by the Commonwealth. That added nearly 3,000 acres to the property in Stafford County. The

purchase was made through a combination of federal grants, funds from Stafford County and \$4 million from the Governor's \$30 million land conservation fund.

Mr. Maroon said that Board members will be invited to the announcement event on September 14 in Stafford County.

Mr. Maroon said that at the time DCR does not have the funds to open the property. He called on Mr. Tom Smith to give an overview of upcoming open houses in Virginia's natural areas.

Mr. Smith said that the Board had been very helpful in the past with regard to promoting the natural area preserve system. He said that as a result, DCR had scheduled a series of open house events for the fall. Those events are as follows:

October 3	Upper Roanoke Roundtable
October 10	Savage Neck Dunes NAP Open House
October 17	Buffalo Mountain NAP Open House
October 21	Pinnacle NAP Open House
October 27	Dameron Marsh & Hughlett Point NAP Open House
October 31	Grassy Hill NAP Open House
November 7	Crow's Nest NAP Open House

Mr. Smith said that each of the areas have some limited facilities. He said that a number were already at capacity in terms of visitorship. He said that the trails are a part of the focus to do a better job connecting with local government officials, school groups, etc. Mr. Maroon said that he hoped that Board members would be able to join these events.

Mr. Maroon said that with regard to the Governor's 400,000 acre land conservation goal DCR's Division of Natural Heritage provides a monthly report on the goal. As of June 30th, about 340,000 acres have been preserved. This land will be permanently protected.

Mr. Maroon said that one of the properties that had been on DCR's radar screen for some time was Grand Caverns in Augusta County. Many had hoped that it might one day become one of the new State Parks; however, the property has immediate and significant maintenance and operational needs which were a hindrance to state ownership. He said that DCR has learned that the regional park authority is dissolving and that the property is being transferred to the Town of Grottoes. Also in those discussions was Natural Chimneys. That property is being transferred to Augusta County.

Mr. Maroon said that DCR would bring recreational trail grant requests to the Board at the fall meeting. He said DCR held a workshop that generated a lot of interest and that approximately \$825,000 is available in this year's grant round. The funds require a 20% match to federal dollars. He noted that DCR has received 66 applications requesting over \$6 million. He noted that of the funds available, 30% must go towards motorized trails. He said the grant round would be very competitive and that DCR would bring the recommendations to the Board at their November meeting.

Budget Report

Chairman Smith noted that Governor Kaine had presented the revenue projections the preceding day. He said that the Governor has the distinction of having to do budget cuts each of the last 3 ½ years. He reported on the Governor's budget presentation to legislators the day before. Virginia is dealing with economic times not seen in recent history and that in only three years since the Great Depression had Virginia tax revenue shown a negative balance. This is one of those years. He said that the Governor indicated that approximately 1.3 billion would need to be trimmed from the current budget. Agencies had been asked to present proposals for 5, 10, and 15% reductions. He said that this will very likely include layoffs.

Mr. Smith mentioned that the Governor reported that the state had been recognized seven different times for being one of the best managed states or the best state to raise children or most fiscally sound. Virginia is one of only a handful of states to maintain their Triple A Bond rating.

Mr. Maroon said that the Agency does not yet know the level of cuts it will have to sustain. He said that it was important to note that DCR had already sustained a 12% cut in this budget cycle. He said that these are very difficult decisions.

Mr. Maroon said that the Governor and the Department of Planning and Budget can accept or reject specific budget cuts proposed by agencies. Mr. Maroon said that DCR would not know the extent of the cuts until the Governor's plan is released.

In response to Mr. Watts question, Mr. Maroon indicated that DCR did have the opportunity to explore increasing revenues. For example, DCR had already instituted a new transaction fee for state park reservations.

The Board asked several questions relating to the budget. Mr. Maroon said that he could not give details of how cuts would be implemented. He said that staff and programs throughout the agency may be affected.

Mr. Watts suggested that DCR have a time for more detailed discussion by the Board in the future. Mr. Wingo suggested postponing the November meeting until after the Governor's budget announcement in December.

Mr. Smith said that as information is available, he and Mr. Maroon would take into consideration the need for rescheduling the meeting or adding an additional meeting.

State Park Master Plans: Oconneechee State Park Master Plan Amendment

Mr. Davy presented the proposed amendment to the Oconneechee State Park Master Plan:

Local interests approached DCR with the concept of providing a state park marina at Occoneechee State Park. The park, which is on land leased from the Corps of Engineers, is located on the Kerr Reservoir, the largest lake in Virginia. There are very few public marinas on the reservoir. There is a high demand, even in this economic climate.

A meeting was held with the Corps to determine what would be needed to see an amendment to the park's approved master plan to include the marina facility. At the request of the Corps, the Town of Clarksville and Mecklenburg County funded an economic feasibility study which showed there was truly a need for additional slips on the Reservoir and that there was enough demand to support both the proposed state park marina and the one already approved by the Corps at another site on the lake.

DCR held a public meeting. About 30 people attended the meeting and were supportive of the project.

Mr. Davy reviewed a map of the park outlining the proposed location of the marina.

Mr. Davy said that staff was proposing that the Board recommend that the Director approve the proposed amendment. He said that following Board approval, final approval must come from the Corps of Engineers.

Melinda Moran, Town Manager for Clarksville said that the park is very important to the Town and their ecotourism efforts. She said that the additional marina space will be good for the park and their program.

Mr. Wilkerson said that there was a great need for additional slips around the lake.

Mr. Davy said that there was some funding for developing the facilities. He said that DCR has the capital funding to do the initial structure, but not the entire project.

Mr. Smith asked how long the process would take with the Army Corps.

Mr. Davy said that the approval process should be completed by the end of the year. He said that the longer process involved the environmental assessment.

MOTION: Mr. Wilkerson moved that the Occoneechee State Park Master Plan be amended to include the development of a marina complex and needed support structures in the general area of current campground B and the park's existing boat launch area. The B campground sites will be converted to day use picnicking or other appropriate uses and the old campground A area will be re-developed as a modern state park campground.

SECOND: Mr. Wingo

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

Fund Raising Approval Letter

Mr. Maroon noted that the Board had an extended discussion regarding fundraising at the last meeting. He referenced a draft letter in member packets. He said that the intent of the letter is to request a five year approval for fundraising for Visitor Center Exhibits in State Parks.

Mr. Maroon noted that these were for new facilities. Bond money was available for the facilities, but not for the exhibits. He said that for DCR did receive funds from the General Assembly for the new visitor center at Shenandoah River State Park. This fundraising project would be for the remaining centers.

Mr. Smith noted that the Board had discussed this on several occasions. He noted that Ms. Swinson agreed to chair a subcommittee on fundraising but that activity had been on hold until DCR and the Board received the necessary authorization.

Mr. Watts thanked Mr. Maroon for advancing this request. He said that as the process goes forward DCR might want to consider how to accept corporate sponsorships.

Mr. Smith noted that the Board consensus was that DCR move ahead with the letter to DPB.

Cultural Heritage Sites

Mr. Maroon noted that members had been presented a concept paper and draft legislation in advance regarding Cultural Heritage Sites.

Mr. Maroon said that DCR had acquired various cultural heritages sites over the years including Washington's Grist Mill, now part of Historic Mount Vernon, the Tabb Monument and others, including Sailor's Creek Battlefield State Park.

Mr. Maroon said that Congressman Boucher had been working with facilities in Southwest Virginia to promote the history of the region. The Congressman and Scott County have particular interest in having a Daniel Boone Wilderness Trial Association Interpretive Center located in Duffield.

To address these issues and to establish a program that might promote such sites, without a substantial financial obligation placed on the state, DCR was directed to develop a concept paper for a system of Cultural Heritage sites that would not require state ownership and might only involve minimal state resources.

Following a meeting with the Governor, the concept of a Cultural Heritage program patterned after the National Park Service was developed.

After the concept paper was developed, DCR drafted proposed legislation. This would have to be passed for the concept to move forward. Mr. Maroon said that DCR wanted to present this to the Board for consideration. He said that the intent is not to have these properties managed by the state.

Mr. Wahl said that the thought was that DCR could provide marketing and designation support.

Mr. Maroon reviewed the draft legislation.

Mr. Watts said that he had some reservations. He said that it would be important to determine where this fit within the Agency's vision for State Parks in the 21st Century.

Ms. Wagner said that this was an important concept for that end of the state, but noted that she was not sure this should be a DCR responsibility.

Mr. Wingo said that it would be important to note that the Board had concerns regarding the budgetary impact of creating a cultural heritage registry.

Concern was expressed over potential management of designated sites by DCR. Mr. Smith said that it appeared to be the sense of the Board that there was no objection to this going forward, but that the Board would eliminate the language in lines 47-57.

MOTION: Mr. Watts moved that the Board express that they do not oppose the proposed Cultural Heritage Sites concept, but recommend that lines 47-57 be removed from the draft legislation and that the Board's concern about the budgetary impacts be duly noted.

SECOND: Ms. Campbell

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried

Mr. Wingo distributed copies of articles from *The Roanoke Times* regarding Hungry Mother State Park and a sports article regarding fishing at the park.

State Park Updates

Park Visitorship

Mr. Wahl gave an update regarding park visitorship. He distributed a handout providing 2008 figures for overnight attendance, day use and the total economic impact.

Mr. Wahl said that interestingly comparing the figures from 2008 to the first seven months of 2009, attendance is up by 3 percent, camping by 6 percent and cabin rental by 2 percent. He said that the numbers compare favorably to last year. Staff speculates that due to the economic conditions, people are vacationing closer to home.

Go Ape Proposal

Mr. Wahl reviewed an unsolicited proposal the Agency received to build and operate a high ropes forest adventure course at one of our parks. This project is proposed under the Public Private Education Act.

The company is based in the United Kingdom. The proposal looks as though it could generate as much as \$100,000 in agency revenue.

Board members expressed various concerns about the proposal including the 20-25 year commitment, the concession nature of the proposal, the number of other competitors offering such activity in the area, opening the door to other proposals, the precedent this would set, whether the activity is appropriate for Virginia state park system, etc.

After considerable discussion, Mr. Wingo said that he could see some benefit, but felt that operations such as this should be left to private enterprise or a local or regional park. Several members agreed.

MOTION: Ms. Crandell moved that the Board of Conservation and Recreation express that until such time that the Department has the opportunity to do long range planning for the future vision of the state park system that it would not be advisable to enter into an agreement such as this.

SECOND: Mr. Watts

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Powhatan State Park Status

Mr. Davy said that with regard to Powhatan State Park, the 2008 General Assembly provided a little over \$7 million to develop the initial offerings at the park. At this point some local concerns have been expressed that the park should not be opened until the upgrades are made to the intersection at Route 522 and Old River Road.

Mr. Davy noted that in the Master Plan process the agency agreed not to open overnight facilities in the park until the road upgrade was complete, but that the park would be opened for day use.

Mr. Davy said that VDOT has estimated that the intersection upgrade would cost about \$2.5 million. He said that to date, the intersection funding has not been approved by the General Assembly.

Mr. Wingo asked if there was danger of losing the funding for the park development. Mr. Davy said that the Department has contracted for the A&E design work and that once it is completed the Agency would move to construction bids, unless DCR was told not to proceed because of broader state budget issues.

Mr. Davy said that no action was needed from the Board at this time.

High Bridge Construction

Mr. Davy gave an update regarding High Bridge State Park. He reviewed the map and the concept design for the bridge. He said that already the park has an average of 1,200 visitors each weekend.

Mr. Maroon said that this was a new and high profile state park. He said that because of the cooperation between DCR and VDOT, staff had taken the initiative to draft a commending resolution to VDOT. He said that VDOT had completed the work on several miles of the Trail at a lower cost and provided a service that was beneficial to the Commonwealth and DCR.

Mr. Maroon said the commending resolution was intended to congratulate VDOT and recognize the cooperative efforts.

Ms. Swinson was complimentary of the work between VDOT and DCR. She said that the partnership effort saved an unbelievable amount of money and time.

The Board agreed that the resolution should be amended to be signed by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board and that the resolution be sent to the Governor, the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Natural Resources, the VDOT Commissioner and the Director of the DCR.

MOTION: Ms. Swinson moved that the Board approve the commending resolution as amended.

SECOND: Ms. Crandell

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously

Public Swimming Beaches

Mr. Maroon said that concern had been expressed by Delegate Al Pollard with regard to swimming access on public beaches at state parks. Copies of the letter from Delegate Pollard and the Agency response were provided to members. The issue has been resolved with the Delegate and his inquiry to the Attorney General's Office has been withdrawn.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Other Business

Mr. Watts inquired about the process of getting the state park logo as a service mark.

Mr. Wahl said that the matter was with the Attorney General's office.

Mr. Watts asked if at the next meeting staff could provide a briefing with regard to the Fort Monroe Base closure.

Mr. Maroon said that Mr. Davy had been co-chairing a group of representatives from other natural resource agencies regarding this property. He said that DCR was not one of the lead agencies but that the Board could be advised as the process moved forward.

Election of Officers

Mr. Smith said that in accordance with the By-Laws, the Board needed to elect a chair and vice chair. He turned the meeting over to Mr. Murray.

Ms. Swinson moved, and Ms. Crandell seconded that Mr. Smith serve another term as Chair of the Board of Conservation and Recreation. There were no further nominations and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Murray turned the meeting back to Mr. Smith.

Ms. Swinson moved, and Mr. Wingo seconded that Mr. Murray serve another term as Vice Chair of the Board of Conservation and Recreation. There were no further nominations and the motion carried unanimously.

Next Meeting: November 13, 2009

The next meeting of the Board of Conservation and Recreation will be November 13, 2009. The location will be determined at a later date.

Adjourn

Mr. Smith thanked the members and staff for their attendance and time. He said that the Board would like to express condolences to Mr. Elton and best wishes to Mr. Baxter for a speedy recovery.

Ms. Crandell moved that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Murray seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark E. Smith
Chair

Joseph H. Maroon
Director