

1st Natural Bridge State Park Master Plan Committee Meeting Record
April 26, 2016; 3 to 5:30 PM
Natural Bridge Hotel

Purpose of Meeting – Initiate the master plan process for Natural Bridge as a State Park

Committee Members in Attendance

Jennifer Bell, Paul Cooper, Al Bourgeois, Lauren Stull, Jay Scudder, Paul Bryant, Creigh Deeds, Eric Wilson, Erin Yancey, Spencer Suter, Terry Austin, Jean Clarke, Sam Crickenburger, Faye Cooper, Kurt Russ, Chris Wise, Conrad Matiuk, Mike Pulice, Arthur Bartenstein, Jim Northrup, Angela Conroy

Committee Members not in Attendance

Benjamin Cline, David Hinty, Wayne Nicely, Barbara Walsh, Bonnie Riedesal (Erin Yancey attending for CSPDC), Tracy Lyons, Bill Gordge, Kevin McLindsay, John Donahue, James Woltz, Bonnie Cranmer, Scott Sayre, Ken Conger, Randy Kiser, Destry Jarvis

DCR Staff in Attendance

Lynn Crump, Clyde Cristman, Tom Smith, Craig Seaver, Jim Meisner, Danette Poole, Sam Zambon, Al Cire, Jim Jones, Jennifer Wampler, Chip Kramer, Fred Hazelwood, David Summers, Kester Dingus, Ann McCartney, Tim Schrader, Dave Collett

Others in attendance

Bill Lohmann, Bob Brown, Bob Moore, Bruce Rinker, Mike Henry, Susan Hammond, Sarah Williams (VCLF), Becky Williams(VCLF), Dean Ferguson(VCLF)

Materials provided (attached): agenda, driving tour, committee list, and schedule overview

Summary of presentations and discussions

Clyde Cristman, Director of Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), described the area to become state park that will be subject to master plan process. This public private partnership for park development and operations is unique, a first for the state. The recruitment process for getting staff on the ground is underway. The transition process will begin in July, with a target of an official ceremony in September to announce the opening of the state park.

Clyde asked for input on committee members who should be included, and thanked everyone for their participation in the master plan process.

Craig Seaver, Director of State Parks, DCR, described DCR's state park and natural area systems and shared DCR's mission statement. He referenced Article XI of the Virginia Constitution, and 10.1-200 of the Code of Virginia. He described typical park services, facilities and trends. He discussed funding for state parks, including the 2002 bond referendum and the current bond package (\$41 million).

He discussed recent legislation, including the budget amendment item 365 #7c, that DCR cannot accept by gift, transfer or purchase any lands for use as a State Park with non-general funds without approval by the General Assembly.

Craig also talked about why state parks are relevant. Kids spend an average of 7 hours each day on electronic devices and are losing their connection to the outdoors. In 2015, state parks hosted almost 9 million visitors who contributed an economic impact of \$209+ million across the state.

The need for state park in the vicinity of Natural Bridge was identified in 2013 Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP), and this property meets the criteria for the ideal state park. The biggest challenge will be finding operational and development funding. Traditionally, the master planning process does not begin until the land is acquired--Natural Bridge is an exception due to the unique partnership. Budget amendment item 365 #1c authorized DCR to proceed with state park planning and operation in advance of the transition.

Jennifer Bell, Director of Operation and COO for the Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund (VCLF), stated that VCLF is working on an MOU for DCR's management of the park, and has targeted Sept. 24, 2016 for the transition. Revenue and visitation has increased over 2015 figures. Some improvements include an indoor classroom and archaeology exhibit for the interpretive program, and an expanded trail system. 2016 will continue to be a busy year with development of the MOU, increasing visitation, correcting mistakes, getting billboards up, distributing brochures, adding guided interpretive tours and a script for bus drivers, increasing inventory of VA products, and special events targeted to youth.

Lynn Crump, Planner DCR, added that other elements make this master plan a unique process. Divisions across DCR are developing three plans in tandem: the master plan, the resource management plans (desired future condition for park's resources) and the visitor experience plan (what guests take away from the property).

Danette Poole, Director of Planning and Recreation Resources DCR, provided more background on the Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP), the guiding document for Virginia's Outdoor Recreation and Land Conservation. She stressed the importance of the public process that shapes the VOP, as are the partnerships that are shaping this master plan process. Development of the VOP, the state's comprehensive outdoor recreation and land conservation plan, is required by state code. It also must meet National Park Service guidelines to receive funding through the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#).

The Virginia Outdoors [Survey](#), updated every five years to guide development of the VOP, revealed that 82% of households in 2011 walk for pleasure, the most popular outdoor activity. Other popular activities include visiting historic areas (64%), visiting parks (51%) and visiting natural areas (50%). Hiking and walking trails were the most needed recreation facility, and access to state waters for fishing, swimming and beach use ranked second. An overwhelming majority of respondents – more than nine in ten – consider access to outdoor recreation to be “very

important” or “important.” The survey also solicits public opinion on the reasons for having a state park system, the importance of protecting natural areas, and public spending to preserve natural areas. A noticeable shift in trends between 2006 and 2011 was that paddling increased by 75%.

The master planning process is also a code requirement, established by the General Assembly in 1998. Master plans must be updated every 10 years and adopted prior to major development. Code directs that the plan must consider public input and complete future build out and limit development to 15% of the property. Plan updates are triggered by more than a \$500K investment, major land acquisition, or relocation of major facility. The first step is to establish an advisory committee. Next steps include a resource analysis and identification of buildable areas. The committee will approve a purpose statement along with goals and objectives for the park and staff will prepare a draft of future park development and phasing schedule for committee review. The completed plan will be presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation, who may then vote to forward on an executive summary to legislators for their approval. The process described required 12-18 months; with a targeted completion date of Fall 2017. All approved state park master plan executive summaries are available [online](#).

In addition to the master plan, resource management plan and visitor experience plan, DCR will complete a state park business plan and marketing study analysis for Natural Bridge.

Al Cire, resource specialist for State Park District 3 DCR, said that Natural Bridge has many special natural resources, more than many other places in Virginia. He described resource management plan activities and contents for each chapter. He described how ecosystems are identified and what constitutes a unique management area. The plan will identify desired future conditions with natural and cultural management goals, and include an implementation table and monitoring plan for success or re-direction.

Sam Zambon, Visitor Experience Specialist for State Parks DCR, described the information that will be included in the visitor experience plan (VEP): location of signage, programs, and the look and feel of facilities, etc. This planning process begins with a 3-day foundation workshop to examine management goals, significance of the park, potential audiences, interpretive themes, visitor experience objectives, issues and influences. The purpose is to develop a focused message that visitors take home. After have general goals, audiences and messages are identified, the next step is a desired future workshop. This workshop focuses on locations for interpretive trails and signs, and development of a checklist of activities for park visitors. The plan will include park-wide recommendations, identify visitor experience areas (arrival corridor, visitor center, etc.) and detail plans for pre-arrival and outreach—how people find information on park.

Sam also provided a photo tour of the driving tour (handout) and encouraged committee members to tour the park on their own. VCLF provided free passes to the Bridge, light show and caverns, and offered a special rate for committee members who want to stay overnight at

Natural Bridge and experience the attractions. If committee members are interested they can Contact Paul Cooper, Hotel Management Co. President, at pcooper@retrohospitality.com or 301-418-5793.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, June 23 at Natural Bridge (room to be determined). At this meeting, the committee will review the park purpose statement and the site analysis. Prior to the next meeting attendees will receive notes from the first meeting and a survey to document your expectations for park. Results will be discussed at the next meeting on June 23. Homework: Please visit key sites between now and next meeting. Also, double check the committee list to make sure your information is correct. Be on the lookout for the survey, and respond quickly so that we can tabulate results for the next meeting.

Summary of comments received

Q: Why did 9% of households not support spending on parks and open space?

A: The survey instrument did not ask why.

Q: Do we collect demographic information on survey?

A: Yes. More information on the survey and the 2013 Virginia Outdoors Plan is available [online](#).

Q: How is decision on cabins made?

A: All park facilities to be included are determined as part of master plan process, this is why we are here.

Q: Can you place slide shows online?

A: Yes, will send link to committee.

Molly Joseph Ward
Secretary of Natural Resources
Clyde E. Cristman
Director



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Rochelle Altholz
*Deputy Director of
Administration and Finance*
David C. Dowling
*Deputy Director of
Soil and Water Conservation
and Dam Safety*
Thomas L. Smith
Deputy Director of Operations

**NATURAL BRIDGE STATE PARK
MASTER PLAN
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

AGENDA
April 26, 2016
3:00 – 5:30 PM

Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center
15 Appledore Lane, Jefferson Room
Natural Bridge, VA 24578

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
OPENING REMARKS
THE VIRGINIA STATE PARK SYSTEM
VISION OF VIRGINIA CONSERVATION LEGACY FUND
THE STATE PARK MASTER PLANNING PROCESS
OVERVIEW OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANNING
OVERVIEW OF VISITOR EXPERIENCE PLANNING
PHOTOGRAPHIC TOUR OF NATURAL BRIDGE
SCHEDULE FOR MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT
NEXT MEETING
ADJOURN

600 East Main Street, 24th Floor | Richmond, Virginia 23219 | 804-786-6124

*State Parks • Soil and Water Conservation • Outdoor Recreation Planning
Natural Heritage • Dam Safety and Floodplain Management • Land Conservation*