

**State Trails Advisory Committee
Nov. 1-2, 2018 Strategic Doing Retreat
Cedar Crest Conference Center, Twin Lakes State Park**

Attendees

Vince Burgess, Board of Conservation and Recreation
Adrienne Kotula, Chesapeake Bay Commission
Joe Elton, interested citizen
Robert Campbell, James River Association
Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service
Kristina Weaver, Institute for Environmental Negotiation
Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Greenways
Katherine Zeringue, East Coast Greenway Alliance
Kristina McCormick (IMBA/VAMBA)
Sally Aungier (Virginia Horse Council)
Cat Anthony (Virginia Capital Trail Foundation)
Nikki Rovner (Virginia Outdoors Plan technical advisory committee)
Jerry Nichols (Recreational Trails Program technical advisory committee)
Paul Gilbert (NOVA Parks)
Champe Burnley (Virginia Bicycling Federation)
Michael Burton (sub for Nathan Burrell, James River Park System)
John Bolecek, VDOT
Tom Johnson, Great Eastern Trail Association
Jack MacClanahan (sub for Shawn Lindsey-Spearhead Trails)
Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Jim Beamer, Dominion Energy

DCR Staff: Julie Buchanan, Lynn Crump, Forrest Atwood, Danette Poole, Jennifer Wampler and Conor O'Donnell, Virginia Management Fellow

After a brief history of the park courtesy of Joe Elton and introductions that gave participants a chance to mention their favorite trail, facilitator Kristina Weaver with the Institute for Environmental Negotiation began a strategic doing process. The notes from the flip charts are below.

Day 1

10 Year “Prouds”

Imagining yourself 10 years into the future, what are you most proud of?

- Dedicated source of funding
- Formalize STAC
- Create a non-motorized transportation network
- Connectivity / system of *accessible* open space within 15 minutes of every person in Virginia

- “Connectivity to, between beyond”
- Connection of communities advocating for trails
 - Enhance the value of trails
- State office of outdoor recreation
- Wildlife corridors to prevent extinction
- Protection of forests
- Public land acquisition
- Legislative support for trails
- Recognition at the state / federal levels of the opportunity to fold trails into infrastructure investments
- Statewide scenic register
- Marketing to effectively “sell” the outdoors
- Spearhead has hit targets in terms of increasing the number of trails for different users and increasing park land, serving as an economic engine for SW VA

Best Opportunities

What are the most promising opportunities we could pursue with our existing resources and assets (thinking beyond financial)?

- Governing body – identify a structure going forward (for STAC)
- Outdoor Recreation Office
 - Provide structure
 - Provide marketing
- Outdoor Recreation Caucus
 - Mobilize / grow this?
 - Grow into a foundation?
- The STAC network could carry messages to the grassroots level but needs a platform / structure to do that
- Develop statewide advocacy for funding and outdoor recreation
- Expand involvement of transportation interests
- Work with PDCs
 - DCR is meeting with PDCs again starting next year
- Governor’s Conference to elevate trails
- Pull in success stories from other state (e.g. NY) to inspire the path forward
- Identify foundation funding for seed money or construction
- Comprehensive economic study (covering all facets) for trail corridors
- The Governor announced a 2% increase in funding for natural resources; leverage this opportunity
- Push for an Executive Order
- Infuse and support the existing Outdoor Recreation Caucus
- Push for funding around state acquisition of the Dahlgren Trail
- Push for funding for the high speed rail trails / greenways project
- Build consensus and prepare a package on projects to seek funding for
- Marketing strategy
- East Coast Greenway Conference opportunity to partner in 2021

- AT could also partner

Big Easy Short List of Opportunities

- 1 – Pull Success Stories from other States
- 2 – Governor’s Conference
- 3 – Work with PDCs
- 4 – Expand Transportation Involvement
- 5 – Develop Statewide Advocacy Group for Funding, Marketing
- 6 – Outdoor Recreation Caucus
- 7 – STAC Governing Process
- 8 – East Coast Greenway Conference
- 9 – Create package of investment opportunities for funding
- 10 – Fund High Speed Rail Trail
- 11 – Funding re: State Acquisition of Dahlgren Trail
- 12 – Executive Order
- 13 – Governor’s 2% Increase in Funding for Natural Resources
- 14 – Comprehensive Economic Study
 - Idea contributed after scoring to repurpose current studies (easier but less impact)
- 15 – Identify Foundation Funding
- 16 – Develop Marketing Strategy
- 17 – Fund Tobacco Heritage Trail
- 18 – Outdoor Recreation Office
- 19 – Create a Grant Source (VA Trails Fund, etc.)
- 20 – Bike tour (route + event) around the perimeter of Virginia

What Should We Do / Big Easy Discussion – Supplemental Notes

Probably not super useful but recorded as part of narrowing to our selected Big Easy

- Create action to link transportation opportunities and funding to trails
- DCR- manage trail funds
- Commission of Virginia Future Environment
- DCR – Dedicated Trail Staff; or could be VTC
- Coalition of groups interested in trails – develop legislative package
- Org to listen to ourselves – VCN, VRPS, Friends of VA State Park
- Sustainable Trails System in VA
- How are Outdoor Rec Offices funded elsewhere?
- Dedicated trail specific FTE instead of office?
- Advocacy Group modeled on VAULT
- Conferences can be made more strategic by linking to legislators and funding

Consensus Reached: Big Easy Proposal

STAC recommends a coalition be formed to advocate for trails.

Initial work to craft ask to the Governor:

1. Executive Order
2. Mechanism (e.g. Outdoor Recreation Office, fte)
3. Funding for Trails

Consensus Vote on Big Easy Proposal:
3 fingers (complete approval) – 16
2 fingers (approval with reservations)– 6
1 finger (do not approve)– 0

Later reached consensus to add the following language:

An alliance advocating for quality trail systems that benefit all citizens and visitors to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Consensus Vote:
3 fingers – 17
2 fingers – 6 (included DCR staff)
1 finger - 0

30 Day Tasks by Person - STAC

- Partner Long List with Contacts – Jennifer & Sally
- Forward notes from Denver conference on Outdoor Recreation Offices – Jerry
- Pull existing resources to benchmark Outdoor Recreation Offices – Ursula
- Draft STAC Memo as an fyi to executive and legislators – Virginia Trails (This change from meeting was due to Director Cristman’s suggestion that the letter should come directly from Virginia Trails to legislators with Clyde copied on the letter).
- Meet with VA Delegation to brief on what happened in this meeting – Adrian
- Coordinate next meeting in 30 days – Connor
- Pull and compile stock photos – Rob
- Serve as on call resource on DCR team – Julie

30 Day Tasks by Person – Coalition

- Draft letter to partner organizations – Paul
- Meet to further refine and identify members for the core group – Nicky, Paul, Jack, Andrew, Sally, Jim, Liz, Catherine, Cat, Christine, Champ
- Commit to bringing one strategic partner into the core group - Nicky, Paul, Jack, Andrew, Sally, Jim, Liz, Catherine, Cat, Christine, Champ
- Develop draft logo when the time is right – Paul
- Meet with Senator McLellan – Cat
- Develop framework for Communication Strategy – Christine & Andrew

Coalition Partners Categories

- Umbrella organizations & groups
- For profit
- Healthcare
- Youth
- Nonprofit
- Localities
- Conservation groups

- Park Agencies
- National organizations

Coalition Partners Brainstorm

- VRPS
- VA Association of Parks
- VA Association of Counties
- Outdoor Ind.
- VAULT
- VA Municipal League
- VAPDC
- Utilities?
- Horse Council
- Bike VA
- VAMBA
- Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts
- ATC
- Cap Trail
- VCN
- VEE
- VA Hospital and Healthcare Association
- Carillion
- VA Rest, Lodging, Travel
- VTC
- VA Sierra Club
- Master Naturalists
- VA Wild Society
- VA Association of Wineries
- Brewery Association
- Devil's Backbone
- Historic sites
- REI
- Campground Association
- East Coast Greenway
- Outdoor Industry Association (regional chapter)
- AARP
- American Hiking Society
- Agribusiness
- Rails to Trails
- Trail Maintenance Organizations

Day 2

Virginia Trails Report Back & Discussion

- Plan on conference call after Thanksgiving
- First in person meeting in Richmond in December date to be announced
- Paul is working on a sign up process / form for members
- A lot of discussion about recruiting
- Map is being created to show corridors for a spine trail – singular big trail throughout the state
 - East Coast Greenway Corridor + E/W corridor
 - Cross state network is an aspirational idea designed to build momentum and excitement while VA Trails also focuses on getting funding for other trails
- Already have web domain! www.virginiatrails.org
- Decided that the VA Trails core group would be STAC members who are willing and able to serve
- DRPT could feature as part of the ask in the Executive Order
- Feasibility Analysis needed to make the case
- Are there incentives for equestrians to back the singular trail idea?
 - Yes because it will seed an interconnected trail system
 - Yes because it may draw bikes off shared use trails ;)
 - Trail funding is not just for the singular trail – it's a both/and for all trails
- Goal is to keep trails in general top of mind for legislators so that people can advocate more easily for local needs as well
- East Coast initiative is to build momentum but not supplant other trails
- Could the Rail Bed trail be a first priority?
- Recognition that the eastern region is the most underserved in terms of trails
- CAP Trail is a model of how a spine trail seeds lots of connecting trails; the model works
- It is more strategic to lift up all priorities and stay statewide in focus
 - Rising tide in state funding
 - Funding to put into a grant program with substantial funds to make VA a leader in trails
- More strategic to focus on a mega funding ask than on particular trails
- Overlay development to date on the 2009 map to show the potential
- Ask for a State Trails Fund vs. ask for a “high splash” project?
- It's a question of emphasis – we can present both
- In making the funding ask need to distinguish from the RTP
- Need an economic impact study of both current and aspirational trails
- Step 1 is to get people of influence on board
- *Facilitator Note: Seems to be consensus in the room (though no formal test) that the focus is on an ask for State Trails Fund but that doesn't prevent members from painting the vision of the cross-state trail or any other projects*

VA Trails Process Discussion

- VA Trails will meet quarterly – 2 in person aligned with STAC meetings + 2 remote meetings per year

- VA Trails will give **courtesy** updates to DCR ahead of political action, recognizing that DCR can't influence
- Discussed VA Trails being a co-sponsor of the VAULT Conference in April
- Kudos to the founding group on a simple process!!!

STAC Process Discussion

- VA Trails will feed recommendations to STAC, which will consider those as well as other issues related to its charge and then feed recommendations to the General Assembly
- STAC will continue to meet two times a year
- Note that Kristina is a potential resource for the next in-person VA Trails or STAC meeting – coordinate with Jennifer on this

Additional Tasks - STAC

- Jennifer to send STAC members the full list with contact info for members (if anyone wants to be excluded let her know)
- Catherine to send information on how other states have succeeded with a State Trails Fund
- Paul to create a membership form before the next meeting
- Jennifer to reach out to Amy for state data on Trail Towns
- Danette & Andrew are working on the memo to agency heads; include other agency reps on STAC beyond DCR to support inter-agency coordination
- Connor to research examples of other funded programs in Virginia that might be benchmarks the kind of significant funding ask this group wants to make, as well as other trail programs in other states (specific requests include looking at West Virginia, including ATV trails)
- Ursula will share with Connor information on other states' Outdoor Recreation Offices and how they are funded
- John will share an existing summary of VDOT funding programs to educate STAC members
- Michael will check with contacts at VCU about students / academics who might be able to pull existing literature on the economic benefits of trails
- Cat will check with contacts at University of Richmond about students / academics who might be able to pull existing literature on the economic benefits of trails

Additional Tasks – VA Trails

- Christine to set up a google group or basecamp for VA Trails
- Christine to create a “splash” webpage featuring the language created during the retreat + logos of core organizations that join (and are actively working on making it happen) + list with links of organizations that sign on (focus is first on recruiting core organizations)
- Sally will send a doodle poll to all STAC members for November meeting; include a high level explanation of what happened at the retreat and the purpose of the conference call
- Jim had volunteered his conference line; Jim was not present but some nominated him to facilitate the November conference call

Retreat Feedback

Positives

- Venue
- Meals
- Downtime
- Active breaks
- Strategic Doing
- Most productive STAC meeting so far
- Facilitator
- Time to be active in session dialogue without long report backs
- Timing was perfect – the planets are lining up!

Improve for Next Time

- Have it earlier next year to align with legislative schedule
 - Mid-August a possibility for a retreat combining STAC + VA Trails Strategy Session
- Recognizing there are people here as part of their jobs + volunteers using vacation time, important to poll people with date options
- April VAULT Conference another opportunity for in-person VA Trails on the Monday night before the STAC meeting
- Name Tags next time!

The next STAC meeting will be held on Tuesday morning, April 9. It will be part of the Land Conservation and Greenways Conference held in Richmond April 8-10, 2019.