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**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

**Natural Bridge State Park  
Master Plan**

**Virtual Public Input Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, October 21, 2020  
7:00 P.M.

This virtual meeting began at 7:02 pm. A recording of the meeting is available at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/nb-masterplan-public-input-meeting>.

The virtual meeting recorded that 54 attended the meeting. Attendees were asked to enter their name and affiliation in the chat bar. Attendees as recorded in the chat log:

Alfred Stone  
Anne Herring-Friends of NBSP and USDA/Rural Dev.  
Bill Conkle-DCR PRR  
Bob Biersack  
Bob Gilbert-Friends of Natural Bridge State Park  
Brandy Flint-Rockbridge County Office of Com. Dev.  
Bruce Bytnar-Rockbridge Area Conservation Council  
Courtney and Dave VanOsten-Neighbors  
Craig Moore-Property owner in Natural Bridge  
Dave Collett-DCR State Parks  
Dave Neudeck-DCR PCMO  
Ed Wells-RVARC  
Emily Price-DCR State Parks  
Eric Miller-WDBJ7  
Gabriel Irigaray-Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Reg. Com.  
Genevieve Goss-Valley Conservation Council  
Jean Clark-Rockbridge Regional Tourism.  
Jeff Waldon  
Jeffery Lineberry-VDOT Staunton District  
Jennifer Wampler-DCR PRR  
Jeremy Cox-Reporter, Chesapeake Bay Journal  
Jim Jones-Natural Bridge State Park  
John Goss-Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society

Joshua Ellington-DCR State Parks  
Julie Buchanan-DCR PCMO  
Katie Conner-Virginia Tourism Corp.  
Kelly McClary-DCR PRR  
Kristal McKelvey-DCR PRR  
Lauren Stull-US Forest Service  
Lynn Crump-DCR PRR  
Malfourd "Bo" Trumbo  
Mary Bishop-DCR PCMO  
Matt Rutigliano-Natural Bridge Hotel/VCLF  
Melissa Baker-DCR State Parks  
Nathan Younger-DCR State Parks  
Patrick Kenney-Shenandoah National Park  
Paula Moore-Adjoining landowner, Friends member  
Sandra Stuart  
Scott P. Johnson-DCR-VSP  
Shayne Dwyer-WLSL/NBC Roanoke  
Spencer Suter-Rockbridge County  
Susan Hammond-VDOT  
Theresa Duffey-DCR State Parks  
Tim Kennell-Va Association for Parks  
Tom Smith-DCR Deputy Director

Lynn Crump gave an overview of the agenda and meeting purpose, offered some helpful hints for web meetings and described the materials provided in the meeting announcement. She described the different ways that comments could be submitted until Nov. 21.

Melissa Baker, the Director of State Parks thanked everyone for participating and provided an overview of the agency's and state park's mission statements. She acknowledged that Natural Bridge State Park has statewide and national significance, and that DCR is committed to providing meaningful experiences for the public while managing and protecting this resource. Public input is important to achieve this balance.

Park Manager Jim Jones provided a brief history of Virginia State Parks and said the current goal is to have a state park within an hour's drive of all Virginia citizens. Today DCR owns or operates 40 parks, including five under development. A range of facilities include day uses, overnight accommodations, and many different programs, but the most popular opportunity is hiking, which is offered at all state parks.

Natural Bridge was opened as the 37<sup>th</sup> State Park on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Virginia State Parks. It has the largest retail operation among state parks, and hosts many community events. The Bridge is a special feature offering a range of experiences like hiking, environmental education and a Monacan Indian living history exhibit. (Note: this interpretation has not been active during the pandemic but park staff hope to put it back into operation in 2021).

Over the past few years of park operation, food service has improved and local programs have been added utilizing an interactive classroom and base camps. With a Garden Club grant, DCR recently built a children's discovery area that encourages children's free play outdoors. Jefferson Point serves as a base camp for dark sky programs. The park is currently working on dark sky certification and will be the third state park in Virginia's system to receive certification.

Lynn presented on the state park master plan process, codified under § 10.1-200.1. The master plan serves as a guide for the development, utilization and management of existing parks, and is developed with an advisory committee representing diverse stakeholders. The committee meets 3-5 times depending on process and park needs. DCR staff completed an analysis of existing conditions (i.e. historic/natural resources, soils, topography) and identified the buildable areas with the least impact on resources. The advisory Committee helped develop the park purpose statement approved in first public input meeting: *The purpose of Natural Bridge State Park is to protect one of Virginia's unique natural features, the Natural Bridge; connect visitors to our storied past; demonstrate ecologically sound management; offer a range of outdoor recreation opportunities; and work across sectors to promote this premier destination.*

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Lynn presented six goals for the park developed with the advisory committee

- Protect, conserve and enhance the natural, scenic, cultural & historic resources of the park, especially the Natural Bridge.
- Create attractive spaces that provide visitors an experience that enhances & sustains their park visit.
- Provide a range of overnight & day use opportunities & facilities.
- Provide facilities & programs for environmental education & interpretation including cultural & historical programs.
- Work across sectors to provide mutually beneficial efforts to enhance Natural Bridge & the surrounding region.
- Administer & manage the park in a professional & transparent manner, which fosters public trust.

She also described a design charrette that involved professional and local citizens for an intensive process evaluating different alternatives. Due to concerns that surfaced regarding the condition of the Bridge, VDOT was asked to complete a study considering current, future traffic loads and long term viability of the bridge.

The master plan provides guidance for development over the next 20-30 years to ensure public participation in funding decisions. Lynn reviewed the proposed phased development along with the master plan map. The phasing (highlights below) can only be implemented if funding is allocated.

Phase 1 – Protect the Bridge (initiated after the new bridge is built by VDOT)

- Upgrade the drainage and runoff from pavement over the Bridge; provide an alternative vehicular

- bypass off the bridge so the public can eventually walk on the bridge
- Complete the renovation of Rockbridge Visitor Center
- Renovate Cedar Creek Pavilion
- Maintain existing structures owned by the park
- Create a new maintenance area north of side of the Rockbridge Visitor Center
- Develop the Blue Ridge Trailhead on Route 11 with picnic facilities
- Renovate the dams
- Develop trailhead access to Buck Hill trail, including parking

#### Phase 2 – Celebrate the Bridge

- Remove the wax museum
- Upgrade parking and provide shuttles and trail for differently-abled
- Remove concrete amphitheater near Monacan village
- Develop a mountain bike area and staff residence along Route 130
- Develop facilities along Golf Course Road for viewing, gathering and education
- Create a non-RV campground with yurts south of Route 130
- Add a shelter to Blue Ridge Trailhead
- Remove concrete Amphitheater

#### Phase 3 – Experience the Bridge

- Provide additional parking at other destination points within the park
- Provide a picnic area near mountain bike trailhead
- Add contact station(s)
- Provide alternative transportation to the base of Bridge
- Enhance primitive camping above Blue Ridge Trailhead

The budget will be developed once public comments from this meeting are reviewed and addressed.

Lynn provided an overview of how to submit comments for the public input session. In addition to the items entered in the chat box during the virtual meeting, the public can email Lynn Crump until close of business on Nov. 21, 2020. Via email comments to [lynn.crump@dcr.virginia.gov](mailto:lynn.crump@dcr.virginia.gov), fax to 804-371-7899, or in writing to: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Attn: Lynn Crump 600 E. Main St., 24th Floor, Richmond, VA 23219

Staff responded to the questions during the public comment period as follows:

- The park manager described some of the education offered at the park – hikes, wildlife viewing, wildlife exhibits, observation hive, Dark Sky programs with Roanoke Astrological society, Child in the Classroom, and Rockbridge Bird Club.
- There are no plans to downgrade road service within the park.
- A participant expressed interest in expanding astronomical programs at the park.
- Dams have been studied and renovations will be completed when DCR owns the park.
- The VDOT Bridge Study is complete – cost estimates were provided for preferred alternatives. VDOT Natural Bridge investigation and route alignment studies (with alternatives) are available on the VDOT website at [www.virginiadot.org/projects/staunton/rockbridge\\_county\\_8211\\_route\\_11\\_natural\\_bridge\\_state\\_park.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/staunton/rockbridge_county_8211_route_11_natural_bridge_state_park.asp)
- The proposed phasing is ideal but doesn't always happen in that sequence. Items from subsequent phases can be moved up depending on how the General Assembly chooses to fund development. Ideally, the first phase is complete in 10 years, the second phase in 20 years and the third phase in 30 years.
- Natural Bridge will be competing for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants.

Other items of note recorded in the chat box.

- DCR will take questions and comments until November 21st at 5pm
- Completely support the plan. Thanks. If Jim could expand on the educational programs that would help us understand the impact the park has on young people. Jeff Waldrun
- We absolutely support the plan as presented. Tim Kennell VAFP
- What type of road surface will be on the road from Country Club to Jefferson Point? If it is to be used for stargazing and amateur astronomy, the road will need to be accessible by car to haul telescopes to the observing area. John Goss
- Why not remove the Cedar Creek dam? It creates a lot of water quality problems and prevents a natural restoration of wildlife? Sandra Stuart
- How quickly will the VDOT study for the new Route 11 complete, and when do you expect to have traffic removed from the bridge? Tim Kennell VAFP
- Cedar Creek dam is currently being evaluated.
- I have been water monitoring Cedar Creek since 2017 and asked the question about removing the dam. Sandra Stuart
- Thank you for the wonderful and hard work put into this master plan!
  1. Are there time frames associated with the phases?
  2. Are there primary and secondary focuses for each phase and will items in later phases take place sooner depending on the item or will each phase need to be completed before moving onto the next phase?-Katie Conner
- The night session featured observing Jupiter and Saturn. It really showed the Park's wonderful potential for dark sky observing.-John Goss
- Are there any identified concerns or plans for the water treatment facility? Bruce Bytnar
- Is the Park competing for expanded Land and Water Conservation Fund grants? Jeff Waldrun
- We try to complete day use facilities first. Timing for phases are dependent on funding. Kelly McClary
- Thank you (all) for the energy and effort you have placed in developing this master plan. Craig Moore, property owner in Natural Bridge.
  - 1 - I am supportive of the master plan as presented.
  - 2- I hope over the next 20 years there will be more opportunities to take advantage of a trail along the southern extents of Cedar Creek.
  - 3- As part of the Golf Course Road area, provide identification board for the surrounding features (man-made and natural)
  - 4- Thank you for including discovery areas
  - 5- Work to incorporate the dams in the discovery process and as some kind of recreational opportunity
  - 6- Consider pervious parking and incorporating into a discovery area.
  - 7- If still in use, incorporate the waste water treatment into a discovery process.
  - 8- A chair lift above the trees would be great for folks to have an opportunity to see the Natural Bridge from a different perspective.
  - 9 - A lookout off Route 608 would be great for folks to see the bridge and be in amazement of the greatness of the structure.
  - 10 - Consider retrofitting the impoundment located behind dam #3.
  - 11 - Consider including some winter activities such as allowing kids to go snow sliding along with a discovery opportunity to discuss the winter foods for wildlife, snow melt, etc...
- Are the local politicians on board with the plan?- Alfred Stone
- What is the source for drinking water and is it monitored? Sandra Stuart
- Natural Bridge is a blessing to our community in Rockbridge. The work that Jim and his team have completed is exactly what was envisioned from the genesis of the vision. Moving ahead, I'd ask that everyone keep in mind that this amazing feature is the namesake of Rockbridge County. It should be protected, celebrated and enjoyed. As a destination, Natural Bridge State Park is a significant generator of economic development for the County, with positive impacts reverberating through the local and regional community. As has been the case since the start, it is critical that the local community support any future

planning. The Friends of Natural Bridge State Park have stepped up because they believe in the Park and in community. Let's keep it going. Great work folks, and Thank You!-Spencer Suter

Next Steps – All comments will be responded to by Nov. 21st. If we missed reading your comments or questions aloud, we will still respond by email. Staff will complete the plan and executive Summary to present to Board of Conservation & Recreation, which will also serve as the third public Meeting. Once approved by the DCR Board, it will be sent to all legislators to review for 30 days. After this review, the final Plan can be adopted by DCR's Director