

**3rd Natural Bridge State Park Master Plan Committee Meeting Record**  
**October 20, 2016; 3:30 to 5:30 PM**  
**Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center**  
**15 Appledore Land, Washington Room**  
**Natural Bridge, VA 24578**

Purpose of Meeting – Review the purpose statement and draft goals and objectives for Natural Bridge State Park and discuss and prioritize a desired list of outdoor recreation facilities.

Committee Members in Attendance

John Mays, Susan Hammond, Mike Pulice, Ken Ingram, Amy Armentrout, Paul Cooper, Lauren Stull, Chris Wise, Kurt Russ, Jean Clark, Arthur Bartenstein, Tracy Lyons, Bill Gordge, Eric Wilson, Del. Terry Austin, Jay Scudder

Committee Members not in Attendance

Al Bourgeois, Benjamin Cline, Ken Conger, Angela Conroy, Faye Cooper, Bonnie Cranmer, Sam Crickenberger, Creigh Deeds, Chris Green, David Hinty, Destry Jarvis, Tracy Lyons, Conrad Matiuk, Kevin McLindsay, Brenda Mead, Wayne Nicely, Jim Northup, Bonnie Riedesal, Spencer Suter, James Woltz, Jennifer Bell

Others in Attendance

Don Carter, Mary Zirkle, Jeff Waldon

DCR Staff in Attendance

Lynn Crump, Sammy Zambon, Dave Collett, Al Cire, Craig Seaver, Jennifer Wampler, Theresa Duffey, Jim Jones, Kinner Ingram

Summary of Presentations and Discussion

Jim Jones welcomed everyone to the meeting. He is pleased that the community is supporting the park; many have come and thanked DCR for helping save the bridge.

Overview of Sept. 24 Event and Management Agreement

Craig Seaver described the September 24 opening of Virginia's 37<sup>th</sup> state park. A [video](#) is available online. Craig thanked the DCR/VLCF staff involved, a tremendous amount of planning was involved. About 1270 people came to event in the gorge and even more attended the dedication. It warmed hearts to see how many people cared about bringing a state park to Natural Bridge.

DCR has been successful in establishing an operation and management agreement with VCLF-- DCR has authority now to make the state park happen. This will be a property dedicated to conservation and outdoor recreation. There is so much more potential in the resources that exist in the park's 1500 acres and in packaging these with private sector resources. It is important to look globally at what Natural Bridge can be as icon of the nation in affiliation with the Natural Park Service.

Lynn provided background on progress since last meeting. DCR staff met with VDOT to find out more about traffic studies and bridge research. They also met with the Rockbridge Historical Society and the Dept. of Historic Resources--an important partner for guidance on the placement of facilities and interpretation. The visitor experience planning process has begun to determine what educational and

interpretive stories to feature at the park. The visitor experience plan and the master planning process will help determine what facilities need to be built or renovated to provide the best venue for these stories. Staff met with Virginia Tech students, who also participated in the Natural Bridge survey. It is important to engage young people to care and be stewards of land in future. A student in Virginia Tech's landscape architecture program completed a master plan of her own for the park, and her proposal eliminated the road separating Rockbridge Center from the hotel and created landscaped gardens at this entrance. She also drafted a connectivity map, which attendees were asked to mark up to provide their input on outdoor recreation resources in the region.

#### Review of Park Purpose Statement

The committee reviewed the park purpose statement and the draft goals and objectives for park. These goals and objectives are similar to goals at all of our state parks, but have been tweaked to reflect input from the committee survey and discussions in house (scroll down for Goals and Objectives handout).

Under the discussion for Goal two, Lynn provided information on wayfinding. Rockbridge County has a wayfinding system that should be studied as the park and its partners look at a wayfinding system.

Lynn mentioned that the results of the Visitor Experience Plan will be key to objectives under Goal four, and these may be expanded later based on feedback from that process.

#### Site Analysis and Buildable Areas

Lynn discussed the site analysis and buildable areas maps on display around the room and how they were used to determine what areas to avoid. The highest elevations on the north end of site are important for trail access, observation points and solitude experiences.

There are three private campgrounds along with Buena Vista Glen Maury Park in the area. A committee member did not want to see campgrounds developed at Natural Bridge and requested that DCR partner with private and public providers in the area. The discussion suggested that DCR focus limited resources on the great things that can be done at the park to encourage people to stay at hotel so it can be successful.

Another committee member noted that the higher ridges parallel I-81, serving as a sound barrier and enhancing interior movements within the park

Another committee member stated that the park is unique in the state park system because of the partnership with VCLF. Because a central core of the property is not owned by state, there has to be synergy between the two partners. Committee members asked the following questions:

- Why is DCR just looking at areas owned by the state during the master plan process?
- Can DCR work with VCLF to plan whole property?
- VCLF developed a 10-year master site plan for the property before DCR began the master plan process. How much of that plan will come to fruition?
- How will this plan be integrated into DCR's master plan?
- What does wax museum grow up to be, and how does it fit in?

Ongoing collaborative discussion and constant sharing of ideas will be needed to ensure the best outcome from this planning process.

### Proposed Park Facilities

Jennifer handed out a list of outdoor recreation facility needs based on survey results and asked for missing items to be added to the flip chart. Missing items as identified by the committee are listed below:

- Winter sports/tubing
- Potential partnerships with local business for equestrian facilities
- Tent campground (30 sites) for multi-day experience with spacious pads, trees, privacy
- Hike-in camp sites
- RV site for families
- Orientation/visitor center or museum
- Mid-grade dining option
- ADA compliant playgrounds, splash pads

### Review Timeline and Next Meeting

A design charrette will be scheduled in January to utilize information provided by the committee to draw bubbles on the map where facilities should be located at Natural Bridge. Anyone who is interested in participating should contact Lynn Crump.

The next meeting is the first public meeting, scheduled for Dec. 14 from 6 to 8 p.m. The advisory committee does not have to attend, but we welcome attendance to hear the public input. During the meeting staff will review the site analysis and introduce the public to what is known to date.

The fourth advisory committee meeting will take place in late Feb/March and will focus on what facilities go where based on the preliminary work done during the design charrette. The committee will also decide what facilities should be prioritized through a phasing process projected out over 30 years

The second public meeting will be held in late April/May.

The final presentation to the DCR Board will be scheduled with their regularly scheduled summer/fall 2017 meeting. Upon approval, the master plan will be sent to the General Assembly for approval.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

### **DCR Mission Statement**

Conserve, protect, enhance and advocate wise use of the commonwealth's unique natural, historical, recreational, scenic and cultural resources.

### **State Parks Mission Statement**

To conserve the natural, scenic, historic and cultural resources of the Commonwealth and provide recreational and educational opportunities consistent with the good stewardship of these lands, waters and facilities that leave them unimpaired for future generations.

### **Natural Bridge State Park Purpose Statement**

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.

Page Break

Natural Bridge State Park

### **Goals and Objectives**

These six goals were established to provide a wide range of traditional and unique park experiences with appropriate support facilities that are managed by well-equipped and trained staff.

#### **GOAL 1 – Protect, conserve and enhance the natural, scenic, cultural and historic resources of the Park, especially the Natural Bridge.**

Objective 1.1 – Develop and implement a Natural Resource Management Plan that utilizes an organized approach to managing the park for the benefit of native species and natural communities, including invasive species.

Objective 1.2 – Be on the cutting edge of environmentally sensitive design; following best management practices and striving for minimum impact when performing necessary development activities within and adjacent to the park.

Objective 1.3 – Analyze and prioritize viewsheds and seek viewshed protection within the park and on adjacent lands.

Objective 1.4 – Identify and protect cultural and historic sites.

Objective 1.5 - Collect, preserve, and document information and artifacts of relevant historic significance and in conjunction with local experts.

#### **GOAL 2 - Create attractive spaces that keep visitors on site and continuously returning.**

Objective 2.1 – Provide attractions to encourage repeat visitation coordinating with regional efforts for tourism.

Objective 2.2 – Define and provide a range of areas, from private seating to large public squares that allow for a variety of activities and experiences.

Objective 2.3 – Create a clearly defined entrance that announces the park and provides clear direction into and through the park.

Objective 2.4 – Create a wayfinding system that is unique to the park to reflect the park’s unique status in the park system.

**GOAL 3 – Provide recreational opportunities and visitor facilities to keep visitors on site for several days.**

Objective 3.1 – Provide a range of overnight and day use opportunities.

Objective 3.2 – Provide a system of recreational trails for a variety of users.

Objective 3.3 – Offer a group campground with multiple sites.

Objective 3.4 – Develop picnic areas with shelters, restrooms, playgrounds and parking.

Objective 3.5 – Provide appropriate and safe access to the Cedar Creek.

Objective 3.6 – Develop an outdoor stage for various education and performing activities.

Objective 3.7 – Provide outdoor ceremony and reception venues for family gatherings, weddings and other similar activities.

Objective 3.8- Upgrade facilities to meet or exceed user expectations and needs using ‘green’ facility design.

**GOAL 4 – Provide facilities and programs for environmental education as well as cultural and historical programs to keep visitors coming back.**

Objective 4.1 – Develop and implement a Visitor Experience Plan, which will provide a broad spectrum of educational and interpretive opportunities for the park..

Objective 4.2- Upgrade the Visitor’s Center and create a museum to meet the needs of park visitors and the region.

Objective 4.3 – Develop displays, brochures and interpretive programs that tell the stories of the site, land and people of the region.

Objective 4.4 – Provide guided education, recreation, and programs as well as accompanying facilities for life-long learning.

Objective 4.5 – Partner with educational and community entities to enhance park offerings and educational opportunities.

Objective 4.6 – Provide opportunities to learn about and experience the James River watershed, including connecting to the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail.

**GOAL 5 – Work across sectors to provide mutually beneficial efforts to enhance Natural Bridge and the surrounding region.**

Objective 5.1 – Participate in local and regional planning efforts to foster sustainable land use and development that protects the water quality and scenic beauty of the park and region.

Objective 5.2 - Participate in mutually beneficial tourism efforts that promote the park’s role within the region.

Objective 5.3 – Participate in mutually beneficial economic development efforts to support the region’s efforts to recruit and support business.

Objective 5.4 – Seek to link the park trail system with local and regional trails when appropriate.

Objective 5.5 – Collaborate with the National Park Service to benefit from the affiliation designation.

**GOAL 6 – Administer and manage the park in a professional and transparent manner, which fosters public trust.**

Objective 6.1 – Develop and implement a Marketing Plan to strengthen the park’s future economic viability, development, capacity, and sustainability.

Objective 6.2 – Assure proper care and maintenance of park facilities and infrastructure.

Objective 6.3 – Upgrade and provide state of the art digital communications and informational access for interpretation throughout the park.

Objective 6.4– Provide appropriate levels of staff with the necessary skills to achieve the parks goals and objectives.

Objective 6.5 – Provide services and facilities that meet the public expectation for information, security, and safety.

Objective 6.6 – Upgrade and bury utility lines to reduce upkeep costs.

Objective 6.7 – Regularly measure user satisfaction to improve services and program performance.