



Sky Meadows State Park
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SKY MEADOWS STATE PARK

MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2011 UPDATE



Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
203 Governor Street
Richmond, VA 23219

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Reviewed by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on June 17, 2011.

Approved:

_____/S/_____
David A. Johnson, Director
Department of Conservation
and Recreation

9/2/2011
Date



SKY MEADOWS STATE PARK
MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2011 UPDATE

This Sky Meadows State Park Master Plan Executive Summary is an update to the official unabridged master plan document adopted in 2004 by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). It is the most recent five-year review as described in §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This master plan update is intended to set forth a clear vision for the future (based on phased development), while fulfilling the narrative text requirements of Chapter IV of the Virginia Capital Outlay Manual and §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. It outlines the desired future condition for Sky Meadows State Park when it is fully developed.

The park is located in the Rappahannock-Rapidan Region (Planning District 9) and consists of approximately 1,864 acres in northwestern Fauquier and eastern Clarke Counties near the intersection of Routes 17 and 50. The park, as it exists today, was formed by consolidating three parcels of land, which extend from Route 17 to the top of the Blue Ridge to the west and to the top of Lost Mountain to the east. The original parcel of 1,132 acres was a gift from the Paul Mellon Foundation in 1975. A 248-acre corridor containing over three miles of the Appalachian Trail was added in 1987. The third parcel, a 462-acre farm, known as the Maxwellton property, was donated to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation in 1988 and subsequently transferred to the Commonwealth. On March 17, 2004, Sky Meadows State Park was placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register, and on May 24, 2004, it was entered in the National Register of Historic Places.

Donations of land to Sky Meadows for use as a state park carry deed restrictions and other limitations, which have provided direction for developments within the park. These legal constraints and deed restrictions are set forth in the deeds of gift from the Virginia Outdoor Foundation, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and in a letter titled Sky Meadows Agreement, dated October 10, 1975. A three-mile portion of the Appalachian Trail is within Sky Meadows State Park and is managed by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club and park personnel. Various rights-of-way and protective easements exist for that portion of the Appalachian Trail located on park property. The park also has partial ownership of an easement from Route 50 to Lost Mountain. This easement leads to the Columbia Gas Company pipeline and affords emergency access to the eastern portion of the property.

This 2011 update focuses on connecting Sky Meadows to other resources in the community. Aside from the Appalachian Trail, the park has many potential connections to other trails, including the Virginia Central Rail Trail, Rapidan Connector Trail, Shenandoah River Blueway and Rapidan River Water Trail. Skyline Drive is a short distance from the park. There are also historic sites within and in close proximity to the park, including Cedar Mountain Battlefield. Sky Meadows is listed as a site on the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Birding and Wildlife Trail. The Sky Meadows State Park Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full Master Plan document.

Sky Meadows State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1981 for park facility development. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain the park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

The original Sky Meadows State Park Master Plan was developed in 1981. The 2004 update refined the mission and direction of the park for the next planning cycle and ensured that the master plan was consistent with the requirements of §10.1200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. Existing development has been in concert with the original master plan, which stated that the mission of Sky Meadows is to provide minimal impact recreation, thus allowing people to feel a part of the land, a part of the site, and a connection with the agricultural practices which formed this unique pastoral landscape over time.

The park also provides protection and interpretation of the wildlife, forested land, and segments of the Appalachian Trail. A focus of its educational programs is the interpretation of the unique cultural and natural forces which evolved the pastoral landscape and the resulting enhanced diversity of species.

The 2004 Sky Meadows State Park Master Plan update began in April 2002. The State Parks Director appointed an Advisory Committee to assist with identifying the appropriate amount of development for the park. The committee helped formulate goals and objectives, which will guide future park operations and development. After much discussion, the committee recommended that future development continue to be guided by the original park mission, which is reinforced in the goals and objectives of this plan. The DCR staff also conducted two public meetings to solicit input from the general public. The comments received at those meetings supported the recommendations of the advisory committee that the existing scenic and historic setting of the park be preserved.

As a part of the 2011 master plan update process, DCR staff conducted a review of the 2004 Sky Meadows State Park master plan. Following a discussion of changing conditions in the park, it was determined that enough significant events and changes had occurred to warrant a public meeting prior to the final revision of this master plan. The desired future condition of the park has shifted since the writing of the current plan in 2004, including the relocation of the park entrance road, construction of a visitor center, renovation of the Mount Bleak House, establishment of a discovery center, new park office and other proposals listed in the phased development plan and depicted on the attached master plan map. The phased development plan and costs have been revised to reflect projects that have been completed since 2004 and to include proposed projects. The park staffing and operations costs have also been updated to reflect current conditions.

The purpose statement for Sky Meadows State Park is: To provide in perpetuity the opportunity for visitors to peacefully enjoy an historic Piedmont farm and natural area on the slopes of the Blue Ridge and Lost Mountain while continuing the agricultural uses of a portion of its open land.

The table below depicts total park attendance during the period from 2001 through 2010.

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
110,107	98,402	109,518	121,274	122,087	133,424	132,427	149,612	126,723	127,009

In 2010 Sky Meadows State Park had 127,009 visitors, 4,021 were overnight guests, while 122,988 were day use visitors. With this level of visitation, it is estimated that the park had an economic impact on the local economy of approximately \$2,269,383. Master Plan recommendations designed to increase park visitation and improve the visitor experience, once implemented, should have a further positive impact on the community's economic vitality.

Sky Meadows State Park has minimal support structures at this time. Most of these are historic buildings that have been converted for current use, including: a Visitor Center, one restroom with running water, two residences, a volunteer bunkhouse, office, and farm pole sheds used to house park equipment and supplies. There are numerous other outbuildings, barns and silos (32 total) all of which contribute to the historic value of the property. Since acquisition, a maintenance building, road improvements, parking spaces and a contact station were added. Complementing the horse trail is a barn containing twelve stalls. Originally, a riding concession was envisioned, but after several failed attempts, there is no apparent private interest in this concession. Several of the barns and other buildings are used by the Virginia Department of Corrections, which has an agreement with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to graze cattle and raise hay on approximately 700 acres of land within Sky Meadows.

Sky Meadows State Park has over sixteen and one-half miles of hiking trails, almost seven miles of bridle trails, and approximately three miles of the Appalachian Trail within its boundaries. These are earthen trails, with gravel spread on those with poor drainage and high erosion potential.

Park improvements since the writing of the 2004 Master Plan include: campground site improvements; construction of a picnic shelter with a Sweet Smelling Toilet (SST); group camp relocation to a site adjacent to the existing campground; addition of two SST's to support all campground renovations; development of an ADA trail and fishing access around fishing pond; expansion of park trails; Meeting House renovation for office space; farmhouse renovation for use as a bunk house; and demolition of an underutilized Appalachian Trail shelter and two pit toilets.

This 2011 master plan update describes both new facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities at this park should be designed and built with consideration to the scenic and historic setting that is Sky Meadows and in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan. To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards. All future phases of park construction will be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner. Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views within the park and of the park from the

adjacent lands. Development activities will comply with the requirements set forth by the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Best Management Practices (BMP) Handbook for Erosion and Sediment Control in order to protect water quality.

Additional land acquisition is recommended in this park to enhance park offerings, establish connective trail easements/corridors, buffer the park from inappropriate development or protect valued viewsheds. All lands acquired by sale or donation will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property to preserve the natural resources, cultural landscapes and scenic resources in close proximity to the park is encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the park will be enhanced and protected over time. In the future, if land adjacent to the park becomes available, efforts should be made to preserve the property through donations, PDR's, easements, or fee acquisition. All the agencies that own adjoining land should work to preserve the unique viewshed of Gap Run and the Crooked Run Valley, one of the most scenic areas of the northern Piedmont.

Based on public meetings and input of the advisory committee, the original master plan recommended only limited additional developments that will be carefully planned to ensure that the existing pastoral scene and historic setting that the park portrays is maintained. The Planned Development Map depicts the location of planned future development. The proposed developments for Sky Meadows State Park are presented in priority order. Completion of all of the projects in this list will represent total build-out (completion of the master plan) and covers a 20-year timeframe.

PHASE I

- Reconfigure and establish new access road from Route 17
 - Safe multipurpose trail crossing of Route 17
 - Fencing
 - Parking
 - Utilities

- Construct a new contact station

- Road improvements/resurfacing of existing roads (to include bike lanes) and parking areas.

- Enhance the Abner Settle Historic Area:

- Stabilize and renovate Mount Bleak House

- Stabilize and renovate dairy barn for programs and interpretation

- Stabilize and renovate farm structures for agricultural use and interpretation

- Expand comfort stations in historic area

- Add "grassy paver style" overflow parking (50 spaces)

- Replace wire fencing with rail fencing and restore stone walls in historic area.

- Place utility wires underground in historic area

- Establish overnight parking (40 spaces)

- Establish multiuse trail to link to other trail networks (west side of park)

- Enhance picnic area

- Playground

One lane loop roads with bike lane
Parking
Utilities
Comfort station
Shelter

The total estimated cost for Phase I development is \$13,367,484

PHASE II

Rebuild bank barn into Discovery Center with exhibits
Construct park office
Construct maintenance area
Staff residence
Amphitheater with utilities, seating and stage

The total estimated cost for Phase II development is \$7,442,253

PHASE III

Staff residence
Picnic pad at fishing pond
Stabilize and restore Wayside Cottage (c. 1781) currently used as staff residence
Comfort station on east side of park
Picnic pad on east side of park
Primitive equestrian campsites

The total estimated cost for Phase III development is \$2,695,680

The total cost to bring Sky Meadows State Park to its desired future condition is \$23,505,417

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at Sky Meadows State Park are presently budgeted at \$515,000 annually, including salaries for 5 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 3 additional positions and \$180,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, 1 additional staff will be needed and along with an additional \$181,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park requires the projected staffing and operating funds identified in the budget as “existing additional needs” and the funds for the 3 development phases. The total budget for Sky Meadows at full build out is projected to be \$876,000 with 9 staff positions.

SKY MEADOWS STAFFING AND OPERATIONS REQUIREMENTS

EXISTING (FY 11)	EXISTING ADDITIONAL NEEDS *	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	FULL BUILD OUT
<i>STAFFING</i>					STAFFING
Park Manager					Park Manager
Chief Ranger					Chief Ranger
Educ. Specialist	Educ. Specialist				Educ. Specialist (2)
Park Ranger	Park Ranger (2)		Park Ranger		Park Ranger (4)
Office Manager					Office Manager
SALARY TOTAL					SALARY TOTAL
\$277,000	\$120,000		\$40,000		\$437,000
WAGE TOTAL					WAGE TOTAL
\$139,000	\$51,000	\$12,000	\$38,000	\$7,000	\$247,000
OTPS TOTAL					OTPS TOTAL
\$99,000	\$9,000	\$4,000	\$73,000	\$7,000	\$192,000
TOTAL BUDGET (FY11 dollars)					TOTAL BUDGET (FY11 dollars)
\$515,000	\$180,000	\$16,000	\$151,000	\$14,000	\$876,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY11 budget projections.

* Existing additional needs represents staff shortages that were identified as part of the 2002 re-benchmarking effort, and/or staff positions and operating costs reduced due to multiple years of state wide budget reductions.

