

Draft Minutes of the Pisgah State Park Steering Committee

DATE: June 29, 2010

LOCATION: Fox State Forest, Hillsborough, NH

PRESENT:

Name	Affiliation	Representing
Rep. Tim Butterworth	New Hampshire State Representative	Chesterfield, Winchester and Hinsdale
Meade Cadot	Harris Center for Conservation Education	Wildlife Management
Ken Desmarais	Forest Management Bureau	Division of Forests and Lands
Chris Gamache	New Hampshire Bureau of Trails	State Agency
Emily Hague	Monadnock Conservancy	Monadnock Conservancy
Senator Molly Kelly	New Hampshire State Senator	State Senate
Don Kent	New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau	State Agency
Tim Murphy	Southwest Regional Planning Commission	Regional Planning
Robert Smith	Friends of Pisgah	Friends of Pisgah
John Stetser	Friends of Pisgah	Public, Friends of Pisgah
Kathy Thatcher	Friends of Pisgah	Non-motorized Recreation
Mark Zankel	The Nature Conservancy, New Hampshire	The Nature Conservancy

Ken Desmarais, on behalf of the Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED), called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. The Steering Committee approved the minutes of the 11 May 2010 minutes as presented.

The purpose of the meeting was to accept comments on the Draft Pisgah State Park Management Plan (Plan) posted 22 June 2010 on the Division of Forests and Lands website¹. Trail maps accompanying the Parks and Recreation section of the plan will be posted on the Division of Forests and Lands website 30 June 2010. Hardcopies of the

¹ www.nhdf.org/new-hampshire-state-lands/state-owned-reservations/pisgah-plan.aspx

plan will be provided upon request. Public comments will be accepted until 5 August 2010². Ken thanked the Steering Committee, Technical Team, and the public members who have attended meetings for their work in drafting the plan. Representative Tim Butterworth thanked State staff for coming to Keene for meetings for the past three years.

General Comments

Emily Hague requested that the state commit to an annual Steering Committee meeting. Don Kent explained that with 225 properties, the state is unable to commit to regular annual meetings. The state's practice is to meet as necessary, as evidenced by three years of monthly meetings for Pisgah. Pragmatically, the state is likely to meet periodically with the Pisgah Steering Committee until the park is operating efficiently.

Representative Tim Butterworth suggested the Plan explain the Land and Water Conservation Fund as it relates to purchase and use of Pisgah, list the names and affiliations of the of the Steering Committee and Technical Team members, and add education and research recommendations.

Mark Zankel noted that there is no reference to the public recreation forums. He suggested that the process and findings be summarized in the Plan.

Public Access and Recreation Management

Several members of the Steering Committee requested that discussion focus on the Public Access and Recreation Management section of the Plan. Chris Gamache reviewed the process for drafting the Parks and Recreation portion of the plan. The process included review of previous comments from the Steering Committee and Technical Team, the Recreation Survey, and existing Division guiding principles.

The state proposes to maintain existing signage, but to standardize appearance and language. The park lacks infrastructure to support camping, and it is unlikely funding will be available anytime soon to develop the necessary infrastructure. Laurel Powell of the Friends of Pisgah (FOP) requested that the Plan should expand on how to obtain special permits.

Facility Management

Based on current and projected fiscal considerations, the state proposed converting the existing visitor center to a residence and office for a seasonal, Forest Protection Bureau employee to increase DRED presence. Visitor center operations and FOP meetings would be moved to the barn, which would be renovated to accommodate use. The FOP annual picnic could still be accommodated on the lawn.

² Pisgah State Park Management Plan, C/o Director, New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands, P.O. Box 1856, Concord, NH 03302- 1856 or Pisgah1@dred.state.nh.us

An unidentified member of the audience expressed concern that the park could not be maintained and visitors kept safe without year-round supervision. Laurel Powell of FOP noted that the building is more than just a building – it was built to represent what a house would have looked like prior to the park establishment. This was done because so much was taken away from the towns to create the park. Some envisioned a house, school house, sugar house, barn, and even an ice house to educate people about what was once in the park.

John Summers of the FOP noted that the visitor center houses the only handicapped access facility in many miles. Chris Gamache stated that under the proposal the barn would be improved, including handicap access.

Don Kent indicated the proposal was based on three years of discussion with FOP and the Steering Committee, and now was the time to offer alternative solutions. The FOP agreed to define their potential alternatives and meet with DRED within 30 days.

Trails

Chris Gamache stated that the state proposes to maintain the existing trails. That said, DRED will evaluate proposed bicycle and equestrian trails to facilitate management and enforcement. The trail revision proposals will be posted on the Forests and Lands website 30 June 2010³. The merits of the trail revision proposals will be evaluated by the state's Land Management Team, with consideration given to public comments.

Tom Woodman of Chesterfield suggested that if the state could not manage Pisgah, perhaps we should put up gates and close it the park until sufficient funding is available. Chris Gamache indicated that closing the park will not reduce maintenance and enforcement costs, and will likely increase costs. Tom asked why the state would promote uses, e.g., ATV trails, which cost money? Moreover, why would the state expand the trail system when it cannot afford a park manager? Kathy Thatcher expressed concern about expanding use when erosion and misuse are difficult to address. Chris indicated that DRED is statutorily mandated to provide recreation opportunities for all user groups, including ATVs. The Trails Bureau is responsible for maintaining motorized trails, and enlists the aid of trail users to minimize or avoid costs. Don Kent noted that trail expansion is a misnomer. DRED entertains proposals that would lessen management and enforcement costs, which is possible with loop trails maintained by user groups through a Memorandum of Agreement.

Jeff Scott of the Defenders of Pisgah said there are plenty of ATV trail maps, but not enough hiking trail maps. Is the state advocating ATV use, but not hiking? Chris Gamache and Don Kent indicated that the state does not advocate any one use over another, but instead tries to create opportunities for all recreationists in appropriate locations.

³ www.nhdf.org/new-hampshire-state-lands/state-owned-reservations/pisgah-state-park.aspx

Representative Dan Carr expressed concern about reliance on a 2003 bicycle plan. Chris Gamache indicated that the 2003 plan was just one piece of information that was, and will be, considered when providing for bicycle trails at Pisgah. Representative Carr also noted that registration fees are unlikely to cover all the maintenance costs for the park, and that DRED has been very generous. To the best of his knowledge, only the FOP maintains hiking trails and perhaps some trails should be closed. Lastly, Representative Carr reminded the Steering Committee that quiet space in the park is important.

An unidentified member of the audience raised the issue of iron rangers for capturing use fee. Chris Gamache indicated that DRED is considering the use of iron rangers throughout the park system.

Roads

Lucius Evans of the audience expressed concern about opening a road through the park. Chris Gamache indicated the state is not proposing opening a road through the park.

Action Items

1. List names and affiliations of Steering Committee and Technical Team members in the Plan.
2. Discuss Land and Water Conservation Fund in Introduction
3. Summarize the Recreation Forums in the Plan.
4. Evaluate the need for more information about special permits.
5. Decide dispensation of proposed loop trails and include decisions in the plan.
6. The FOP and DRED will meet within 30 days to identify alternatives to facility management.