

MEETING SUMMARY

North Carolina National Park, Parkway and Forests Development Council

April 30, 2010

1:00 PM –3:00 PM

*Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters
Asheville, NC*

*Council Members in Attendance: Maxine Dalton, Chairperson
Jonathon Douthit
Jason Love
Myrna Campbell
Tom Massie*

*Council Member(s) Absent: Patsy Lovedahl
Eric Jenkins
Nelda Holder*

*Guests: Bob Miller / Great Smoky Mountain National Park
Marisue Hilliard / U.S. Forest Service
Phil Francis/ Blue Ridge Parkway
Tom Jackson / NC Division of Parks & Recreation
Judy Francis / NCDENR, Staff to the Council
Rick Wooten / NC Geological Survey
Leesa Brandon / BRP 75, Inc.*

- I. Call to Order – Maxine Dalton called the meeting to order at 1:15 PM.
- II. Welcome and Introductions – Maxine noted that the previous meeting summary was approved electronically so that members could forward to interested parties in a timely manner. Attendees then briefly introduced themselves.
- III. Speaker from Blue Ridge Parkway 75 Inc.
Leesa Brandon and Phil Francis presented information about the Blue Ridge Parkway 75th anniversary events and initiatives. President Obama and the First Lady hiked along trail bisecting the parkway last weekend. A number of media outlets and publications are covering the anniversary and various events in communities along the parkway. 2010 is the 75th anniversary of the parkway. BRP 75 Inc. is a collaborative made up of many representatives. Their mission is to educate the public and preserve parkway assets through events, stewardship

campaigns, commemorative merchandise, land protection, and media relations. Conferences focused on parkway issues will be held at Appalachian State University and Virginia Tech University. Federal legislation has been proposed to add more money for improvements and conservation. The organization creates opportunities to talk to people about issues such as budget shortfalls. Community outreach and tours are planned for local contacts to discuss viewshed impacts and conservation.

There was a lot of ice damage this past winter that required many man hours to clean up. On May 15, the parkway will be open from top to bottom all the way through. Some of the road repairs are being funded by the economic stimulus program and most of the contracts have been awarded to local companies. The parkway receives over 16 million visitors annually, the top visitor destination for all national park units around the country. The economic impact for the region is \$2.3 billion annually. Gateway communities are tied to the parkway economically, geographically, historically, and ecologically. Specific issues of concern are viewsheds, watersheds, biological diversity, non-native species, plant poaching, and ongoing budget challenges.

Marisue asked Judy about state contact for invasive species. Judy said that staff in different divisions are looking at the issue, but there is no single point person. Jason mentioned that local training and certification programs are available for nursery growers and local groups.

The parkway legislation has 8 co-sponsors. It has been heard in the House and Senate. Conservation Trust for North Carolina is working with NPS in the Washington office to make changes to the bill. NPS currently opposes it because it would disproportionately give the Parkway money without looking at system-wide priorities.

A parkway symposium is scheduled for October 14-16 in Roanoke. Cumberland Knob event scheduled for September 10-12 and will feature antique camping trailers, local officials, governors of NC and VA, story telling, local foods. Musical entertainment will include Ralph Stanley on Saturday night. It is still unclear which federal officials will attend.

V. Other Business

Dissemination of Agency Reports:

Judy Francis provided an update from NCDENR and talked about the upcoming planning workshop for the Mountain Resources Commission. The BRIDGE Program receives full funding in the Governor's version of the budget. Judy is working on a Climate Change Adaptation policy paper for the American Planning Association. The state budget is very bad this year and layoffs and program cuts are expected.

Bob Miller from Great Smoky Mountain National Park provided a handout with information re: White Nose Syndrome in the park. Indiana bat and Little Brown bats are infected. There is an 85% - 90% mortality rate in northern cave-dwelling bats, so all caves in the park are closed now. It is still unknown if it will be as bad as that down here. There is no known remedy for it. The Cades Cove Loop Road is now open again after extensive reconstruction. Work continues at Clingmans Dome through May. Kathleen Cook is acting as Chief of Research Science – taking Nancy's Findley place.

Marisue Hilliard provided a handout describing various US Forest Service activities including the restoration efforts in the area of Woolly Adelgid control; lots of volunteers stepping forward to help with that. They have received \$15 million in stimulus money and have hired new staff (12). The rest of the funding is going out (13.5 million) on contract for various projects. Most contracts have been awarded to locals. Successful land acquisition efforts include the Catawba Falls tract and the Uwharrie tract, and several more are in the works. There is \$1.5 million in acquisition funds for upcoming budget and Senator Burr is trying to get more. Fires are already occurring. There will be a Weeks Act celebration at Curtis Creek. 2011 is 100 year anniversary of the US Forest Service's ability to buy and hold land. The Curtis Creek tract was the first one purchased under that legislation. The Forest Management Plan rulemaking process has begun and will have an "all lands" approach that will involve more stakeholders. The USFS has undertaken new climate change research. Jonathon asked for clarification about alcohol consumption on USFS land. Marisue said that, generally, alcohol is allowed except in areas specifically banned through forest rules to address problem areas. Tom Massie said new development often blocks traditional access points and there is growing concern about adequate access to public lands. Access on each tract varies depending on how the deed is written. Tom said there is a need to find out the legal issues because if we don't protest, the public may lose their access rights. Marisue will come back with more info on this topic at our next meeting.

Tom Jackson from NC State Parks said there is a fee increase of 10% at all parks this year. A study conducted regarding implementation of a parking fee found that it is generally not effective. The division is losing more positions due to budget cuts. The law enforcement consolidation study findings are available and recommends that parks staff not be combined with other agencies. On May 26, there will be a Chimney Rock State Park master plan meeting. There is a new superintendent at Grandfather Mountain State Park. Fire season has begun and it looks like it will be an active year. A US Forest Service tanker plane helped with a fire near Gorges State Park recently.

Rick Wooten from NC Geological Survey said that slope stability mapping for Macon and Watauga counties are done. Jackson County will be mapped next. Henderson County is also now underway. Haywood County will be mapped after Jackson County is completed. A complete GIS package for Buncombe County is

available for free by request and it is now being utilized by the county. The current state budget fully funds the mapping project; however it has not been through legislative process yet so we must stay vigilant. Maxine said she would send out a request for a vote to send letter of support if the budget gets cut for the slope mapping activities.

Tom Massie said the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) budget is \$50 million in the Governor's budget. There are good opportunities to pick up bargains but not enough money to act on them. He spoke at the BRP 75 event in Boone and talked about the council.

Maxine said that Patsy Lovedahl had resigned due to reoccurring schedule conflicts. We will send her a thank you letter. Bob McCollum talked to Senator Snow and said that he will follow through during this session on the proposed council name change. She will send out a link to the wind farm recommendations being considered by Interior Secretary Salazar.

- VI. Next Meeting Date: July 30, 2010. Joint Meeting w/ Tennessee Council in Great Smoky Mountain National Park at the Twin Creeks Science Center (Gatlinburg side)

- VII. Adjourn: There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:55 PM.