

Minutes
Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Committee
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, S. E.
Suite 1252 East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334

April 28, 2009

Attending:

Committee Members

Loyce Turner, Chairman
Earl Barrs
Joe Hatfield
Walter Hudson
Phyllis Johnson
Jim Tysinger
Tom Wheeler
Bill Carruth, Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

Gene Bishop
Warren Budd
Ray Lambert
Bob Rutland
Jim Walters

Visitors

Phil Zinsmester, Sierra Club
Josh Stancil, Georgia Forestry Association
Ronny Just, Georgia Power
Steve Ewald, Georgia Power
Jim Stokes, Sustainable Solutions of Georgia
Doug Fulle, Oglethorpe Power

Staff Members

Chris Clark
Carol Couch
Todd Holbrook
Paul Burkhalter
Susan Shipman
Dan Forster
Marlin Gottschalk
Ray Luce
Jim Ussery
Spud Woodward
Linda MacGregor
David Crass
Steve Friedman
Doralyn Kirkland
Wally Woods
Jennifer Kaduck
Connie Buck
Lon Revall
Mark Whitney
Paul Nelson
James Capp
Mark Smith
Jimmy Johnston
Emily Hitchcock
Alexandra Cleary
Sarah Dearman
Mary Ann Evans
Hellen Harris

The April 28, 2009 meeting of the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Committee was called to order by Board Chairman Bill Carruth.

Chairman Carruth called on Loyce Turner, Chairman of the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Committee. Dr. Turner called on Wally Woods, Chief of Operations for State Parks, in the absence of Becky Kelley, Director of Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division (PRHSD).

Mr. Woods stated that last month, Director Kelley had briefed the board on the proposed amendments to the ParkPass Rule, Chapter 391-5-1-.03. He further stated that the ParkPass is the fund collected and utilized for repairs and maintenance on all state parks and historic sites. He added that 100 percent of those funds are strictly for that use.

Mr. Woods stated that the proposal included three elements, an across the board increase of the daily and annual park pass fees, adjustments to discounts for seniors 62 and older, and new discounts for Georgia's active military and veterans. He further stated that following last month's briefing a public participation plan was developed to allow reasonable public involvement in decisions regarding park passes. He added that the plan included a statewide news release, notices being placed in all state parks and historic sites, notices sent to statewide stakeholder list, and a public hearing in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Board Room on April 6. He further added that no one attended the public hearing, but that staff had received 55 written comments to date – 30 were in favor of the increase, 18 were opposed and seven were neutral on the idea, but offered alternative suggestions for revenue increases.

Mr. Woods stated that he would like to request approval of the proposed amendments to the ParkPass Rule.

Dr. Turner stated that the last time the ParkPass fee had been increased was in 2005 and that funds generated from this increase will help with improvements within the state parks system, such as trail development and repairs, upgrading comfort stations, and improving the cottages, campgrounds and visitors centers. He further stated that the change will reflect a \$2.00 increase in the daily park pass and a \$20.00 increase in the yearly park pass, which will generate as much as \$1.5 million to the parks system. He added that all monies will be returned to the State Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division. He added that the Division will continue to honor free Wednesdays at State Parks, and will also continue the discount to Georgia's senior citizens and disabled veterans. He further added that new discounts will be offered to Georgia's active and retired military, and that May 20, 2009 would be the effective date of the changes.

Discussion ensued.

A motion was made by Mr. Barrs, seconded by Mr. Tysinger and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends that the Board approve the proposed amendments to the ParkPass Rule, Chapter 391-5-1-.03. (ParkPass Rule Change attached hereto and made a part hereof.)

Mr. Woods gave an update regarding the possible impact of current budget reductions. He stated that staff continues to work to find creative alternatives in a very difficult situation, including finalizing the RFP for golf operations, assessment of lodge operations, managing with reduced revenues, and anticipation of service delivery adjustments to stay within the FY-10 budget. He further stated that to generate revenue, a Spring Get Outdoors Get Away Marketing is underway April 18 through May 25, which features many incentives to visit the state parks system.

Mr. Woods commended the Friends of State Parks for their volunteer efforts in their support of the state parks and historic sites.

Commissioner Clark commended staff for their efforts during the recent floods and bad weather in South Georgia, stating that three Rangers had been recognized for life-saving events in the area, and that staff did a tremendous job at General Coffee State Park, where there was 17 inches of rain and at Reed Bingham State Park, where the dam was in question.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.