

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

September 26, 2012

Attending:

Committee Members

Steven Woodruff, Chairman
Duncan Johnson, Vice Chairman
Dennis Billew
Joe Hatfield
Mabel Jenkins
Ray Lambert
Mark Smith
Loyce Turner
Philip Watt, Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

William Bagwell
Walter Hudson
Phyllis Johnson
Rob Leebern
Mark Mobley
Philip Wilheit, Jr.

Visitors

Bill Donohue, North Georgia Mountains Authority
Nancy Gallagher, Attorney General's Office
Bryan Tolar, Georgia Argibusiness Council
Ronny Just, Georgia Power
Chris Manganello, Georgia River Network
Walter Jones, Morris News Service
Amber Brady

Staff Members

Mark Williams
Jud Turner
Todd Holbrook
Homer Bryson
Spud Woodward
Dan Forster
Becky Kelley
Dave Crass
Kyle Pearson
Zachary Harris
Lauren Curry
Ben Stowers
David Brady
Walter Rabon
Jim Laine
Kathy Knowlton
Wally Woods
Paul Nelson
Tim Banks
Randy Tate
John Martin
Sally Winchester
Jeff Weaver
David Clark
Toby Evans
Bret Albanese
Fred Hay
Jim Ussery
Doralyn Kirkland
Doug Lewis
Cathy Barnette
Mary Ann Evans
Hellen Harris

The September 26, 2012 meeting of the Parks, Recreation & Historic Sites Committee was called to order by Board Chairman Philip Watt.

Chairman Watt called on Steven Woodruff, Chairman of the Parks Recreation & Historic Sites Committee. Mr. Woodruff called on Bill Donohue, Executive Director of the North Georgia Mountains Authority (NGMA), for a briefing on Lodge Park Operations.

Mr. Donohue stated that NGMA was created in the late 1960's with the purpose of construction of the Unicoi Lodge and Conference Center, which was completed in 1972, when NGMA transferred the facility to the Department of Natural Resources' Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division (PRHSD). He further stated that NGMA currently has responsibility for Brasstown Valley Resort, Lake Blackshear Resort, and Walasi Yi.

Mr. Donohue stated that in the past year and a half, NGMA and PRHSD have been in discussions concerning the future of Unicoi Lodge and Conference Center, as well as other lodges in north Georgia, and in particular, Amicalola Falls. He further stated that these talks included what would be the best management plan for the future of these facilities.

Mr. Donohue stated that he would like to give a briefing on operational plans that are being developed. He further stated that no action is required at this meeting, but would be required at a future meeting.

Mr. Donohue stated that the recommendations are as follows:

- Transition to private sector management of Unicoi Lodge and Amicalola Falls Lodge under the direction of NGMA, by amending the existing Management Agreement with Coral Hospitality.
- Substantial Capital investments at both facilities (at Unicoi: renovation of 30 cottages, renovation of the public space, and limited investment in 100 guest rooms; at Amicalola Falls: completely renovate the 22-year old lodge, all of the cabins and the public space facilities, and update the agreement between NGMA and DNR)

Mr. Donohue stated that of the \$9.7 million available funds, \$5 million will be used at Unicoi and \$4 million at Amicalola Falls, with other transition expenses. He further stated that a detailed study has been completed on both facilities and those studies would be used in the renovations and improvements.

Mr. Donohue stated that extensive communication continues on this issue. He further stated that the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) has been informed and has given their permission to proceed. He further stated that staff at both facilities will be notified of the transition activities. He added that management by Coral Hospitality will begin at Unicoi on November 1, 2012, and at Amicalola Falls on December 1, 2012. He further added that the first operating year at both facilities will be July 2014, which will be FY-2015.

Mr. Donohue stated that he would like to thank Becky Kelly, Director of PRHSD, and her staff for all the help they have given on this issue.

Duncan Johnson, Chairman of NGMA, stated that he would also like to thank Director Kelley and her staff for their expertise and involvement in this matter. He further stated that NGMA supported moving forward with the project as outlined in the presentation.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Woodruff called on Becky Kelly, who called on Randy Tate, Program Manager of the Resource Management Unit, to give a briefing on the 2012 Natural and Cultural Resource Management Annual Report.

Mr. Tate stated that the Natural Resource Management Unit Functions are:

- Forest Health Management;
- Fire Management;
- Wildlife Management;
- Non-native Invasive Species Control;
- Habitat Restoration;
- Botanical and Arborist Services;
- Nuisance Animal Control;
- Volunteer Program Coordination; and
- Naturalists and Interpretive Programs at 64 State Parks and Historic sites on 92,880 acres.

Mr. Tate stated that Georgia Power Forestry Services is a huge partner, helping with reforestation; vegetation management, arborist services, and storm clean up, as well as helping to fund the report. He further stated that partners in saving Georgia's Hemlocks were the Georgia Forestry Commission, U. S. Forest Service, University of Georgia Warnell School of Forestry and various Friends Groups.

Mr. Tate named the partners that helped with several other PRHSD projects, including the Wormsloe Foundation, which conducted a study of the health of the Live Oak Avenue.

Mr. Tate stated that the Interagency Burn Team is a statewide collaborative effort with multiple benefits to the state.

Mr. Tate gave a briefing on the Cultural Resource Unit, which is now housed in the Historic Preservation Division.

Director Kelley gave an update on leaf-watch season and Your State Park Day.

Discussion ensued with Mrs. Johnson stating she had attended a groundbreaking ceremony at Gordonville Alsatamaha State Park, along with Senator Jack Hill. She further stated that Senator Hill praised the park system in Georgia and she wanted to pass that along.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.