

State of New Mexico  
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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**Michelle Lujan Grisham**  
Governor

**Erin Taylor**  
Acting Cabinet Secretary

**Ben Shelton**  
Deputy Cabinet Secretary

**Toby Velasquez**, Director  
State Parks Division



**New Mexico State Parks Advisory Board Meeting**  
**Tuesday, December 2, 2025, at 10:00 A.M.**  
**Rio Grande Nature Center State Park Visitor Center**  
**2901 Candelaria Rd., NW Albuquerque, NM 87107 and via Microsoft Teams**

- 1) Call to Order –  
Chair Connealy called the State Parks Advisory Board (Board) meeting to order at 10:54 a.m. The meeting started fifty-four (54) minutes late due to an MS Teams virtual platform technical issue.
- 2) Roll Call: Director Velasquez took roll call of the Board, and a quorum was present.
  - Chair Selena Connealy – Present
  - Vice Chair Patricia Walsh – Absent (Excused)
  - Member Patrick Killen – Absent (Excused)
  - Member Eileen Everett – Present
  - Member Stephanie Bestelmeyer – (Virtual Platform)
  - Member Rodney Paris Absent (Excused)
  - Member CJ Wiegel – Present
  - Member Judith Polich – Absent (Excused)
  - Member Thomas Garcia – Present
  - Member Sharon Evanich – Present
- 3) Approval of Agenda –  
Chair Connealy entertained a motion to approve the agenda, Member Garcia made a motion to approve the agenda; Member Wiegel seconded. The motion carried.
- 4) Approval of Minutes -  
Chair Connealy entertained a motion to approve the minutes and pointed out a misspelling that required revision. Member Garica made a motion to approve the minutes as amended; Member Everett seconded. The motion carried.
- 5) Public Comment –  
There was no public participation or comment.
- 6) Director's Report –  
Director Velasquez introduced new State Parks Division (Division) Marketing Manager Diego Munoz. Mr. Munoz gave a brief introduction and stated he is very happy to be joining the state parks team. Mr. Munoz shared that he has 15 years of experience in marketing and is looking forward to getting to know and work with the Board.

Director Velasquez also introduced new Board Member Sharon Evanich. Member Evanich was very excited to be supported by Governor Lujan Grisham's Office of Boards and Commissions for her appointment to the Board. Member Evanich shared that she loves camping and visiting state parks in New Mexico and looks forward to giving back to the communities and parks. Member Evanich also shared that she feels it is important to provide the Board with a state park visitor's perspective.

a) Legislative Committee Presentations:

Director Velasquez informed the Board that he represented the Division at legislative interim committee presentations to include the Water & Natural Resources, Military and Veterans Affairs, Rural and Economic Development, and Land Grant committees. Director Velasquez stated that all presentations were focused on the NMSU study, new state park fee adjustments, Lifetime Veterans Passes, capital funds, and General Fund support. Director Velasquez stated that each committee presentation went very well and legislators expressed their support during and after the presentations.

Director Velasquez went on to share that he presented to the State Agency Capital Outlay committee, and the presentation went very well. He provided thanks to the Division's Design and Development team for the work they accomplished with historic capital outlay funds. The committee asked for the Division's FY26 capital listing and a project listing for the close out of FY25 capital funds. Director Velasquez stated that for these two fiscal years, the Division will invest \$56 million in capital improvements across the system.

Director Velasquez also stated that the Department's presentation to the Legislative Finance Committee went very well.

Director Velasquez stated that this is the most expressed legislative support he has noted in his career.

Member Wiegel asked if there is going to be consideration to change the Veteran Lifetime Pass so that the veteran can pay for utilities and if there was any data the Division can provide as far as how much revenue loss state parks has since the Veteran Lifetime Pass became effective. Director Velasquez stated that so far over 6,500 passes have been issued within the first six months and he believes that number will double before the end of the fiscal year. Director Velasquez stated that there is not enough data yet, but it is being tracked by calendar and fiscal year.

Member Evanich asked how come we can't track walk-ins? Director Velasquez stated that walk ins are free and we don't track them separately. Member Evanich asked if veterans must pay for utilities? Director Velasquez confirmed that veterans do not have to pay for utilities. Member Evanich asked do veterans have a limit on how many reservations they can make, and Director Velasquez stated it is unlimited per the legislation.

Member Garcia asked how we stop or prevent veterans from abusing the pass. Director Velasquez said that the Department of Veteran Services will be helping with those issues when identified in the field or administratively.

Chair Connealy asked when the Division met with LFC and what budget recommendation came from LFC. Director Velasquez stated the LFC FY27 General Fund budget recommendation was flat.

b) Capital Improvement Projects Update:

Deputy Director Colleen Baker gave an update on capital improvement projects happening in state parks. Deputy Director Baker started by acknowledging that staff have done a great job in the last five years. They have come up with an effective tool in doing statewide assessments of facilities that will help the Design & Development Bureau with what they will need to implement the statewide outdoor restroom project. Deputy Director Baker stated that for FY27, \$40 million dollars will be invested in capital projects and over \$30 million will go to the statewide outdoor restroom projects. She went on to state that the Division is planning to remodel some of the oldest comfort stations, but that that work will have to wait for next year's budget. She stated that Cimarron Canyon State Park will be getting many renovations as well as Sugarite Canyon, and Eagle Nest will get its first full-service comfort station. She also stated that Coyote Creek State Park is in phase two of the day use recreation area. Along with many other projects that are happening in all the parks. Member Evanich asked about the status of the Pancho Villa septic system. Deputy Director Baker let her know she would follow up with her on the matter. Member Evanich made some suggestions about signage when visitors arrive at the park, and they can see what construction projects are going on in the park and they can see where their tax dollars are going.

- c) **Veteran's Lifetime Pass Update:**  
Director Velasquez stated again that so far 6,500 passes have been issued in about 5 months. He stated that the Division had some issues that we are working on with the Department of Veteran Services (DVS) and he expects another 6000 passes to be issued by June 2026. He also stated that the Division continues to track the use of the reservation system to evaluate fiscal year revenue losses. Director Velasquez stated that the DVS has been very supportive and very grateful to work with the Division to provide this benefit to our state veterans.
- d) **Personnel Vacancy Update:**  
Director Velasquez gave a quick overview he stated we are hiring and bringing on new staff, hiring our new Marketing Manager, Diego Munoz. In Santa Fe we are recruiting and trying to retain positions by fixing our pay structure since we had the overall architectural reclassification. We have a great HR Director, Max Cordova, to help us with these changes. Director Velasquez stated he is confident by the next 2026 quarterly board meeting we should have hired a new Statewide, State Parks Educational Coordinator. We are hoping to advertise for that position by January 2026. Administrative Bureau Chief Miche Bove Garcia gave an update on overall vacancy reporting a 21.9% vacancy rate. In law enforcement we have an overall 30.7% vacancy rate. Ms. Garcia stated that she is working on some hiring packets and that she will bring the rate down and two hires that start this week. One of those hires is our Contracts Administrator Budget Analyst who will be starting Monday December 8. She went on to state that one big thing to note is we have a lot of people interested and have been applying for state park jobs. Ms. Garcia explained the outreach for recruiting by using many sources like Indeed, Conversation Jobs, and Americas State Parks to post all the agencies job listings. Member Evanich asked why do we think we have had an increase in people applying for jobs and is it because we raised the pay for law enforcement? Ms. Garcia mentioned that part of it does help, and just overall recruitment from all our team has contributed. Director Velasquez said their goal by 2026 is to have a 15% or less vacancy rate overall. Member Everett asked how the board can help to bring it to the legislative attention that the agency needs more funding for staff. Director Velasquez stated that we have less staff than we did 18 years ago but we have more parks, more capital, and more capacity needs. The division cannot continue to grow without the staff needed to accommodate the growth. The Board had a discussion on how they can reach use their networks to get recruitment information to support the agencies efforts.
- e) **New Interpretive Program:**  
Marketing Manager Diego Munoz gave a presentation on the new interactive education app. It is an app you can download on your phone to interface with state parks and to access park information. Mr. Munoz mentioned how good a job Cerrillos Hills State Park Manager Peter Lispcomb did to help create the app alongside our Central Region Interpretive Ranger Brynn Metheney who built a lot of the app. Mr. Munoz mentioned there that development was focused on education and interpretation and will enable self-guided options. Member Evanich asked if there will be QR codes that visitors will see and access to download the app. Mr. Munoz confirmed that both of those options will be available to the public when the program is deployed.

Deputy Director Baker provided an update about Pancho Villa State Park. She stated that at the preconstruction meeting that happened at the end of October the contractor was not in the field yet because they are working on getting an easement through property that belongs to the local historical society. The project completion date is yet to be determined.

- f) **New Visitor Survey Program:**  
Director Velasquez stated that Deputy Director Baker and Deputy Director Richman alongside Mr. Munoz, will be working on a program with a company called Qualtrics. Qualtrics will provide via professional services agreement technology designed to help interact with visitors in real time. This will provide visitors with a way to communicate and for park staff to get real time feedback from visitors. Director Velasquez stated that it should be a nice modern tool to provide visitors with a way to address issues in a park, good or bad. This feedback will enable our park management and staff to address issues and receive positive feedback for a job well done. Director Velasquez stated that the agency is hoping to have this program out this year. Chair Connealy suggested that the Division test the tool via a pilot project, division staff agreed with that approach.

Chair Connealy called for a motion to take a short break at 12:26 so that the Board and Division staff could get lunch items. Member Weigel made a motion; Member Garcia seconded. The motion carried.

Chair Connealy reconvened the Board meeting at 12:41 p.m.

7) President's Report and Committee Reports -

Chair Connealy began with welcoming their new board member Sharon Evanich. Director Velasquez asked if the board members received State Parks press releases and noted that they will be added to the agency distribution list to receive them again.

a) Committee Reports

i. Climate Change:

Climate committee members were not present, but Chair Connealy asked what the status is on the climate signage in the parks. Deputy Director Baker stated that there is a project happening in just about every park now and for the next meeting they will get a more specific update. One thing Director Velasquez wanted to bring to the board's attention is to be prepared for another dry winter. State Parks is working with many committees on the matter to see what they can do to prepare for extreme drought.

ii. Outdoor Classrooms:

Chair Connealy mentioned how excited the board is to hear about all the education type positions that state parks will be hiring. Member Everett wants to emphasize how SCORP will always be supportive of getting education in the parks and will continue to do so. Member Bestelmeyer spoke about the Outdoor Learning seminar and noted that they would love to connect with state parks next year.

iii. Law Enforcement:

Law Enforcement is still working on getting policies updated. Another thing they are working on is the overtime pay as well as commuting vehicle for emergency response within a 50-mile radius.

iv. Public/Private Funding and Advocacy:

Chair Connealy noted that she and Member Killen will be working on the one-page fact sheet that they have been discussing for talking point discussions with legislators and hope to get it out soon. Director Velasquez asked if the Chair Connealy would also be getting out to the media. Chair Connealy said they would. There was discussion about advocating for the Kids in Parks program and just how important it is to keep this program thriving.

8) Closing Discussion –

a) New Business:

Member Evanich asked about the new fee structure to have a better understanding of how it all works with Reserve America and making reservations. Director Velasquez explained to the group that his team has worked with the reservation system to ensure that new fees are being assessed for all reservation clients.

b) Next Meeting Date:

The Board discussed having their next meeting in March 2026, with the date and time to be determined later.

9) Public Comment -

There was no public participation or comment.

10) Adjournment –

Chair Connealy entertained a motion to adjourn. Member Garcia made a motion to adjourn; Member Evanich seconded. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 1:22 p.m.

Approved on 3/25/26  
Selma Connealy