

State of New Mexico
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

Melanie A. Kenderdine
Cabinet Secretary Designate

Toby Velasquez, Director
State Parks Division



Ben Shelton
Acting Deputy Secretary

New Mexico State Parks Advisory Board Meeting
Wednesday, December 4, 2024, at 10:00 AM
1312 Basehart Rd, SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106 and via Webex

- 1) Call to Order - Chair Connealy called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM.
- 2) Roll Call - Director Velasquez conducted the following roll call:
 - Chair Selena Connealy - Present
 - Vice-Chair Judith Polich - Present
 - Member Patrick Killen - Present
 - Member Eileen Everett – Absent
 - Member Stephanie Bestelmeyer (Present, virtually and left meeting at 11:04 AM)
 - Member Rodney Paris – Absent
 - Member C.J. Wiegel – Present
 - Member Patricia Walsh – Present
 - Member Thomas Garcia – Present
- 3) Approval of Agenda – Chair Connealy entertained a motion to approve the agenda. Member Garcia made a motion to approve the agenda, which Member Wiegel seconded, and the motion passed. It was noted on the agenda that the meeting should be finished by 1:00 PM.
- 4) Approval of Minutes - Chair Connealy entertained a motion to approve the minutes. Member Walsh motioned to approve the minutes; Vice-Chair Polich seconded the motion; the motion passed. The board discussed amending the minutes due to typos and confusion regarding the board's discussion concerning the veteran's pass in the previous meeting. Member Walsh withdrew her motion to approve the minutes, and Vice-Chair Polich seconded. Member Garcia made a motion to approve the minutes as amended to reflect the correction of the typos and clarification on the veteran passes as discussed. Member Killen seconded the motion, and the motion passed.
- 5) Public Comment - There was no public participation or comment.
- 6) Director's Report -
 - a) State Parks Fees: Director Velasquez commented that this is one of the most significant agency administrative accomplishments in support of administration, operation, and budget in decades. Compliments were given to Jared Langenegger, Field Operations Bureau Chief, for all his efforts and hard work from Director Velasquez and Member Wiegel. Member Wiegel had a chance to attend the hearing on October 22, where Bureau Chief Langenegger gave a presentation on the new rule changes. Member Wiegel complimented Bureau Chief Langenegger for the fantastic job. Thanks also went out to Parks Advisory Board Members for their continued support.

Field Operations Bureau Chief Jared Langenegger thanked everyone for their kind words. Bureau Chief Langenegger gave an update on the administrative status of the rule making process. Mr. Langenegger confirmed that the revised rules had filed with New Mexico State Records and Archives and should be published in the New Mexico Register on December 10 and will go into effect on January 1, 2025. Mr. Langenegger explained that management staff is working diligently on communicating this information to the public to include a press release. It was stated that the New Mexico Motor Vehicle Division is also helping to get the new boat registration fees out to the public. Mr. Langenegger clarified what kind of identification you could use to get a pass and what we will accept as identification from a New Mexico resident veteran. Member Garcia asked if they could please have a copy of the new rules. Director Velasquez assured the board members they would all be getting a copy. Board Members provided praise for the New Mexico State Park staff and their fantastic work on the fee study.

- b) Central Reservation System: Program Support Bureau Chief Dr. Robert Stokes summarized where the division stands with the central reservation system. Dr. Stokes stated that the division is still in the transition period and that the contract with Aspira expired and contract renegotiations were ongoing. Dr. Stokes stated that the reservation system has not been interrupted, and customers can still use Reserve America to make their reservations. Dr. Stokes clarified that access to making reservations through Reserve America will continue until a new contract is in place.
- c) Capital Outlay Projects: Deputy Director of Administration Colleen Baker started by saying how extremely fortunate the level of funding the division has received in the last few years and thinks it shows what we can do when we work together to implement capital improvement projects. Ms. Baker emphasized how this also demonstrates how much need there is across the system. Deputy Director Baker was happy to report that all the ARPA funding is 100% encumbered and programmed to be fully expended by June 2025. Ms. Baker stated that the division is obligating fiscal year 2025 capital funds, and that the division just closed out two of the LWFC funded projects that have been going on at Bottomless Lake for the Lea Lake Recreation Area.

Ms. Baker went on to share that the division has many improvement projects in process across the system including finishing up Sugarite Canyon and Coyote Creek cabins. Other big construction projects include investments at Eagle Nest, Navajo, El Vado, Heron, Elephant Butte, Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, Fenton, Santa Rosa, Brantley Lake and Oliver Lee State Parks. Ms. Baker stated she wanted to credit division staff for how much work they have done with the small team they have. Ms. Baker explained the amounts spent on capital projects over the last five years as follows: FY20 \$9 million; FY21 \$7 million; FY22 \$11 million; FY23 \$18 million; and FY24 \$29.5 million.

Member Wiegel asked if there were any plans for Conchas Lake State Park. Ms. Baker explained that the division is currently working with a historic consultant on a historic property evaluation. Member Wiegel asked if that would be done this year and Ms. Baker said that is the timeline she hopes to meet. Member Garcia asked if the new fee increases would fund new signage for the park and Ms. Baker confirmed that the capital funds, we have already received will cover new signage. Chair Connealy complimented Ms. Baker on her presentation. Director Velasquez added that he would seek additional full-time positions to bring on more employees for the Design and Development Bureau.

- d) Legislative Session 2025: Director Velasquez stated that this will be a significant legislative session; from his experience, it may be one of the most engaging and demanding sessions being that the 2025 session is the last 60-day session for this administration. Mr. Velasquez discussed that he anticipates legislation to establish the Broad Canyon property as a state park. Mr. Velasquez state that there are already bills being drafted and that the early filing period has been moved into early January. Deputy Director Baker mentioned that the capital budget request for FY26 is \$20 million. Director Velasquez stated that the division was seeking funds to better support our marketing

program, modernize a portion of our law enforcement program, and, in general, improve our budget to meet the cost of doing business in state parks.

Chair Connealy asked if the division hopes the sponsors will bring up the topic of legislation for Broad Canyon, and Director Velasquez stated that if funding and staffed appropriately, the division may support the bill. Member Wiegel asked if the capital funds request would potentially support the operations budgets and Director Velasquez explained that capital is separate from operations and that the division requested more General Fund support for operations. Chair Connealy asked what the state's budget is, and Director Velasquez encouraged the Board to watch the development of House Bill 2. Vice-Chair Polich asked if there were other bills the members should pay attention to that could affect the state park somehow. Director Velasquez stated that the one bill would be the Return-to-Work bill which would allow certain PERA retirees to return to work in state agency law enforcement positions.

- e) Citizen Science Working Group: Director Velasquez gave an update and stated that the Wild Friends group coordinated by Sue George and her team have been working with the division and other state land management agencies to follow the Senate Memorial 38 to explore the opportunity and need for citizen science to be expanded across the state, especially by public land management agencies. Director Velasquez explained that he presented with other state agency leaders from NM Dept. of Game and Fish and the NM Environment Department to the Water Natural Resources Committee (interim) in November.
- f) Employee Recognition: Bureau Chiefs Jared Langenegger and Miche Garcia briefly discussed our annual employee recognition policy and event. They invited the Board members to the awards ceremony to celebrate division staff for their hard work, outstanding dedication, and many years of service. Member Garcia asked what the employees receive as their award. Mr. Langenegger stated there are several types of awards and that awardees get administrative leave hours certificates, and/or service pins. Member Garcia advised how the division can work with legislative council services to develop recognition for division employees.

Member Weigel asked if he could have an update on the employee vacancy rate. Ms. Garcia told Board members that our current division wide vacancy rate was 23%. Ms. Garcia explained that due to the lengthy hiring process, we have lost some applicants. Member Walsh asked if there was anything we could do to secure their positions during the waiting period. Director Velasquez let members know we are working on this issue and hope to modernize the process, so it takes less time. Chair Connealy asked if Secretary Kenderdine is the designate and if she will be up for confirmation. They will do that during the Legislative session.

7) President's Report and Committee Reports -

a) Committee Reports:

- i. Climate Change: Climate Change: Vice-Chair Polich asked for an update on the signage that is to go up in the park. Deputy Director Colleen Baker said they are in the design process and hope to have the signs up by the end of 2025. Member Walsh stated that she spoke to Peter Lipscomb at Cerrillos Hills State Park and said his design for the park had been added. Member Walsh wanted to add that on March 18 - 20, she will support an Earth to Sky workshop at Mesilla Valley State Park. Ms. Walsh explained that this workshop is a collaboration between NASA and the National Park Service and is primarily focused on climate change communication for informal educators. Member Walsh stated that state park staff will be leading and attending this workshop.

Director Velasquez stated that the division is part of the Governor's new beautification initiative, and it complements climate change awareness. Director Velasquez stated that the directorate staff will attend a Talking Trash Summit being led by six state executive agencies.

Vice-Chair Polich moved to allow a brief break for lunch at 11:35 AM, Member Walsh seconded the motion, and the motion passed. The meeting was reconvened at 11:51AM.

- ii. Outdoor Classrooms: Chair Connealy discussed citizen science and stated that she has expertise in this area and is willing to support this initiative. Director Velasquez stated that a portion of our mission is related to outdoor education and interpretation, and that citizen science supports that portion of our mission. Member Wiegel asked if there was staff for outdoor classrooms, it was discussed that Dr. Stokes coordinates our Kids in Parks program and that a division statewide education coordinator is needed. Dr. Stokes gave a brief update on the Kids in Parks program. Chair Connealy asked about the tax check-off contributions, and it was discussed that the tax check-off doesn't generate enough revenue to cover the costs of the Kids in Parks program. Does it contribute to the program? Chair Connealy stated there is a need to advocate for this program to get more funds and bring more students to outdoor classrooms in state parks. Member Walsh mentioned that there is a need for more state park interpreters.
- iii. Law Enforcement: Field Operation Deputy Director Angie Richman stated that Chief Gabe Maes is working on updating several policies for the enforcement program, one of which is an overtime policy to help us be more competitive with other agencies. Those changes have been drafted and will be presented to a policy committee for further review.
- iv. Public/Private Partnerships: No report from this committee.

8) Closing Discussion –

- a) New Business: Vice-Chair Polich has some concerns about funding due to the new administration coming in. Director Velasquez stated that we will just have to wait to see what happens but hopes that the Governor is taking contingencies just in case federal funding is significantly impacted.
- b) Next Meeting Date: Chair Connealy stated that she would work with Director Velasquez and the Board to develop options for the next meeting date.

9) Public Comment - There was no public participation or comment.

10) Adjournment - Chair Connealy entertained a motion to adjourn, Member Walsh made a motion, and Member Killen seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 12:11 PM.

Approved by the State Parks Advisory Board on March 26, 2025.


Selena Connealy, Chair
N.M. State Parks Advisory Board