

State of New Mexico
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

Sarah Cottrell Propst
Cabinet Secretary

Todd E. Leahy, JD, PhD
Deputy Cabinet Secretary

Toby Velasquez, Director
State Parks Division



New Mexico State Parks Advisory Board Meeting (PAB)

Wednesday, March 29, 2023 @ 2:00 PM

**Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources
Department (EMNRD), Santa Fe, NM and
via WebEx**

1. Call to Order

Chair Connealy called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Virtual Roll Call was taken by Chair Connealy, and a quorum was present.

Attendee Name
Selena Connealy, Chair
Judith Polich, Vice-Chair
Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Member
Patrick Killen, Member
Eileen Everett, Member
Pat Walsh, PAB Nominee
Toby Velasquez, NM State Parks Director
Miche Garcia, NM State Parks - Bureau Chief, Administrative Services
Colleen Baker, NM State Parks – Bureau Chief, Design and Development

3. Election of Officers

a. Discussion and Action

Chair Connealy: First meeting of the new year. Need to elect officers/re-elect officers.

Director Velasquez: New Mexico Statute NMSA 16-2-2 dictates that PAB must elect Chair and Vice-Chair annually.

Member Bestelmeyer: – Stated that she appreciates the work of current PAB officers and supports them to stay in their leadership positions.

Vice-Chair Polich: Concurred and stated she would be pleased to stay on as PAB officer.

Member Killen: Seconded member Bestelmeyer's comments.

Member Everett: Commented that she also supported current leadership and made a motion to elect Member Connealy and Member Polich to PAB officer positions as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

Member Killen: Seconded motion.

Chair Connealy: Asked for a show of members in favor, and stated for the minutes to reflect that all were in favor.

Vice-Chair Polich: Asked what determines a quorum. Director Velasquez provided that a majority of the currently designated PAB members establishes a quorum. Member Killen stated that he agrees with that perspective based on his knowledge of state statutes.

4. Approval of Agenda

Vice-Chair Polich moved to approve the agenda, motion was seconded by Member Bestelmeyer, no discussion, motion passed unanimously.

5. Approval of Minutes

Chair Connealy discussed length of meeting minutes and transcript format. Director Velasquez provided additional discussion regarding the length of the minutes, intent to work with staff to make minutes of the meeting minutes shorter and still accurate. Chair Connealy asked for a motion to approve minutes as drafted. Member Everett made a motion to approve, and it was seconded by Member Killen.

6. Open Meetings Act Resolution

a. Discussion and Action

Discussion about the Open Meetings Act (OMA)

Director Velasquez provided a short overview of OMA requirements and advised that since the Public Health Order was rescinded by the Governor's Office in March state agencies are receiving new guidance that meetings may be held in person and virtually. However, board/commission members will have to attend in person, but in some specific cases members may attend virtually under certain circumstances. More guidance is anticipated by next quarterly meeting, we should have much better information for boards/commissions by then.

State Parks continues to budget for PAB members to receive per diem and travel. Director Velasquez provided that the draft OMA resolution before the PAB had been reviewed by EMNRD legal counsel. Chair Connealy briefly discussed the steps for open meetings and asked for any discussion from members. Member Everett asked about a timeframe for more specific guidance on member participation in-person and virtual. Vice-Chair Polich motioned to approve the Open Meetings Resolution as drafted, seconded by Member Killen. All members were in favor. Chair Connealy closed with stating that she is in favor of board members being able to participate virtually.

7. Director's Report

- a. **2023 Legislative Update:** Received some Junior Bill appropriations. Senator Ron Griggs an outstanding champion for State Parks for years, provided funding for Oliver Lee and Living Desert State Park, \$75,000 each. Our FY24 operating budget has improved by approximately nine-hundred thousand. We were approved for \$1.6 million in capital improvement funds for water and wastewater projects. Senate Memorial 38 passed directing a feasibility study to evaluate the Broad Canyon property to become a state park. The Broad Canyon property is over 700 acres. Division will obtain a consultant through the use of Junior Appropriation funds totaling \$75,000. House Bill 35 passed supporting free access to state parks foster families and children in their care, CYFD personnel and children in their care, and tribal/pueblo children under similar care. Senate Bill 94 Rio Grande Trail Commission to transition from EMNRD to NM Economic

Development Department – Outdoor Recreation Division. Director provided a short history of Rio Grande Trail Commission and his role as a commissioner. Short discussion about Senate Bill 9, the Legacy Permanent Fund bill.

Vice-Chair Polich asked if any capital improvement funds would be used for water conservation projects. Bureau Chief Colleen Baker responded and discussed projects to upgrade fixtures and facilities in comfort stations but shut off fixtures are complicated and not robust enough for heavy use. PAB nominee Pat Walsh, a former state parks employee, discussed water issues at Sugarite Canyon State Park. Vice-Chair Polich shared her experience at this park and that she couldn't take a shower during her stay.

- b. **Personnel Vacancy Update:** State Parks currently at a 28% vacancy rate and is working to increase staffing. State Parks is aware of the loss of institutional knowledge from staff retiring after long careers. Director asked all PAB members to help recruiting state parks position applicants through their networks. Provided that a new state parks construction manager was selected for hire and will be a new position to the Design and Development Bureau. Provided information and outlined challenges in recruiting and retaining staff at Conchas Lake State Park.

Vice-Chair Polich asked if the division still moves staff from park to park to help fill gaps. Director confirmed that this coordination continues to ensure that parks are covered.

Member Everett asked about employment retention and asked for any updates on efforts and ways the PAB could support retention. Director Velasquez stated that current administration improved the general salary schedule for state employees, and implemented a cost of living increase, compaction increase, and a five percent increase was approved for FY24. Director explained how the reclassification of law enforcement positions makes us very competitive for recruitment and retention due to increased salary potential and reduced years for retirement. Director explained that retention can be best addressed through an improved operational budget with focus on a General Fund and a park fee's increase.

- c. **Current Capital Projects Update:** Design and Development Bureau Chief Colleen Baker provided a high level overview report by discussion projects in the Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and Central regions. Ms. Baker also provided details of park master and management plans that were in process of development or are already out for tribal consultation, public review, and/or PAB review.

Director Velasquez asked for feedback from PAB members based on their review of the new Eagle Nest Lake State Park master and management plan documents. PAB members provided positive feedback on the plan format and the communication of the information provided within.

Vice-Chair Polich asked what portion of the projects are being supported by the special appropriation received last year. Ms. Baker noted that approximately half of the \$20 million has been committed to support multiple parks across the system. Chair Connealy shared her appreciation for the work Ms. Baker and her team continue to provide. PAB nominee Walsh asked a question regarding the location for cabins at Sugarite Canyon State Park. Ms. Baker provided information regarding location considerations and access.

8. President's Report and Committee Reports

- a. **Parks Advisory Board Member Recruitment:** Chair Connealy thanked Vice-Chair Polich in

helping recruit Pat Walsh to the PAB, Ms. Walsh is waiting appointment. Chair Connealy indicated that Director Velasquez and Cabinet Secretary Cottrell Propst worked on recruiting new PAB members. Ms. Walsh shared her experience applying to be considered for PAB appointment, straightforward and fairly easy.

Member Bestelmeyer stated that she's curious how in person meeting requirements may impact member interest and availability and hopes it doesn't negatively impact member recruitment and retention in the future. Chair Connealy asked if the PAB feels that they should draft a letter to the Cabinet Secretary and Attorney General's Office regarding our shared concerns. Vice-Chair Polich and Member Killen were in support of this action. Member Everett discussed that the virtual option is more accessible for the public and that it should be an option for board members. Member Bestelmeyer also discussed the reduction of carbon emissions. Ms. Walsh, PAB nominee, asked that to maintain diversity on the board we need to make it easier and more accessible and affordable for members. Chair Connealy stated that she would take the lead on drafting a letter and sharing it with the PAB for their review and contributions.

b. Committee Reports

- i. **Climate Change:** Vice-Chair Polich stated that since the last meeting she and member Killen worked on climate change ideas for the parks. This would provide an option for Member Killen to seek funding support. Member Polich would like to move ahead with this committee work so outside money could be brought in. Right now, the committee is waiting for follow up from State Parks.

Chair Connealy suggested that the committee work with Director Velasquez to determine how committee workflow can be managed given current division workloads. Bureau Chief Baker stated that there is interest in supporting this committee work and also discussed the challenges in allocating time to get all the work done.

Chair Connealy and Vice-Chair Polich discussed the need to schedule a meeting with State Parks as soon as possible and not pushing this discussion to the next regular PAB meeting. Member Killen agreed that a meeting as soon as possible would be best. PAB nominee Pat Walsh stated that climate change brochures may or may not be available in state parks and that she wants to dedicate her time to supporting this PAB initiative.

Bureau Chief Baker followed up and confirmed that park master and management plans should also have a climate change section and climate change is part of project evaluation and prioritization criteria.

Chair Connealy agreed that she would communicate with Director Velasquez to establish a meeting in the next few weeks. Member Everett asked about the previously mentioned plan to hire an Outdoor Educator position and thinks this position would be a key person to support climate change work. Bureau Chief Baker confirmed that this position is an important part of current planning, and that Director Velasquez is working to establish this position.

- ii. **Outdoor Classrooms:** Chair Connealy discussed the importance of having a State Parks education coordinator to match similar efforts at the Public Education Department(PED). Member Bestelmeyer discussed her interest in establishing an Outdoor Education Coordinator and linking with PED across the state. Member Everett stated her support for establishing this position and provided an update for the status of the hires made by the PED and thinks the time is right to link the two agencies.
- iii. **Law Enforcement:** Chair Connealy discussed that one of the new nominees to the PAB will be a good addition for this PAB committee. Ms. Walsh, PAB nominee, stated that during her time at State Parks there was more emphasis on law enforcement than other

programs. Vice-Chair Polich questioned why this PAB committee exists and if this needs to change. Member Everett commented that she realizes that the agencies law enforcement program is essential and that its appropriate to support this committee with a PAB member(s). Ms. Walsh stated that she feels it is important to get representation for the maintenance program.

iv. **Public/Private Partnerships:** Member Killen stated that public/private partnerships and climate change are one in the same right now.

v. **Committee Workflow:** Chair Connealy stated that workflow needs to involve Director Velasquez and that she would discuss the Climate Change Committee request for a meeting occur in the next few weeks.

9. Closing Discussion

a. New Business:

Members had no discussion on this agenda topic.

b. Next Meeting:

Members discussed having the next meeting in June, maybe June 20th in a centralized area in either Santa Fe or Albuquerque, maybe at the Rio Grande Nature Center. Chair Connealy stated she would work with Director Velasquez on this.

10. **Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

11. **Adjournment:** Vice-Chair Polich made the motion to adjourn, it was seconded by Member Everett. Motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 3:42 p.m.

Approved:


Chair Selena Connealy

Date:

6/20/23