

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department - State Parks Division
Park Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
April 27, 2022

1. Call to Order:

Chairwoman Selena Connealy called the virtual WebEx meeting of the Park Advisory Board (PAB) to order at 09:11 AM (MST) on April 27, 2022.

2. Roll Call – PAB Members Present:

Virtual roll call was taken by Chairwoman Connealy and a quorum was present.

Attendee Name	Status
Selena Smith Connealy, Chairwoman	Present
Judith Polich, Vice Chairwoman	Present
Stephanie Bestlemeyer	Present
Eileen Everett	Present
Patrick Michael Killen	Present
Ramon A. Martinez	Absent
Jean C. Ossorio	Absent

Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) Staff Present:

Marlene Salvidrez, Oil Conservation Division
Lois Caroline Pedro, EMNRD Office of the Secretary, Executive Assistant

State Parks Division (SPD) Staff Present:

Toby Velásquez, State Parks Division Director
Colleen Baker, Design and Development Bureau Chief

Other Attendees:

No other attendees present.

3. Review/Changes to Agenda:

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Member Judith Polich, and seconded by Patrick Killen, motion passed unanimously with no objections.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the PAB December 14, 2021, meeting minutes was made by Chairwoman Connealy and seconded by Member Eileen Everett, motion passed unanimously with no objections.

5. Open Meetings Act Resolution:

Discussion and Action:

- Agenda must be posted 72 hours in advance (to comply with Open Meetings Act). Post in a newspaper of record, and State Parks website.
- Motion to approve Open Meetings Act resolution, referenced above was made by Member Judith Polich and seconded by Member Stephanie Bestlemeyer. Motion passed with no objections.

6. Director's Report:

The PAB thanked NM State Parks Director Toby Velásquez for his work.

a. Legislative Update:

All very positive news, infrastructure money \$20 million was approved and Colleen Baker is in process of coordinating and overseeing funding and projects. This project work will occur over the next three fiscal years [2023-2025] and will support state parks across 25 of 33 New Mexico Counties. Fiscal year 2023 operating Budget has improved to ~\$28.6 million. During peak of pandemic, the agency FY 21 operating budget was ~\$21 million.

Jr. Bill appropriation of 200K:

- 100K to Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park
- 100K - Oliver Lee State Park for renovation of Visitor Center
- 500K – Capital Improvement Funds

b. Personnel Status:

State Parks recently had 76 vacancies

Departures:

- Amanda Calderon left the Agency after eight years to assist with her family's business
- Dr. David Certain after 13 years with NM State Parks accepted a position with US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- NM State Parks recently hired 7 staff

Rapid Hire Event – Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park – NM State Parks and NM Forestry Division interviewed well-qualified applicants. Approximately 40 people interviewed in-person and virtual. Kudos to Workforce Solutions and SPO HR staff who supported the event. Offers were presented with acceptances and paperwork pending. Operating FY23 – has a 13 percent vacancy rate. NM State Parks will seek more Rapid Hire events.

Vice-Chairwoman Judith Polich posed the following queries to NM State Parks Director Velásquez

- Question: How many NM State Parks without staff?

- Hyde Park – no Staff
- Brantley Lake – no permanent Staff
- Multiple Parks – no law enforcement – no management staff

Director Velasquez stated that 2021 Parks attendance was very high.

- **Question: Are there any incentives which could be taken?**
 - Yes, lowest paid staff should have an increase in pay; also identified high hours of compensatory time – suggest – cash payouts for the time of 13 employees who worked many hours
 - Staff just received a 3% raise (April 1, 2022 - first pay period)
 - Staff will receive 4% compaction increase (no less) first full pay-period July 2022

Vice-Chairwoman Judith Polich also noted that there's almost an emergency situation with a near 40% staff vacancy rate

- Director Velásquez concurred that Rapid Hire Events are best. Workforce Solutions and NM State Personnel are working to address vacancies but not the right process for all employment opportunities i.e., Law Enforcement.

Chairwoman Selena Connealy inquired: How does your Agency stand up? (i.e. wages)

- Director Velásquez stated Federal Parks have an incremental pay scale and NM State Parks need to be more competitive:
 - Federal Parks pay scales: GS 7, GS9, GS11, GS13 et al.
- NM State Parks needs to be more competitive in state.

Member Stephanie Bestlemeyer asked what are the ramifications of training staff?

- Director Velásquez explained that training and mentoring is managed by some NM State Parks Regional Managers, who also step in if Superintendent's are needed (i.e., Hyde Park) and suggested NM State Parks Division must not set up individuals for failure and needs to recruit and train staff.
- Vice-Chairwoman Judith Polich mentioned that sometimes new hires start at higher salaries, thus causing problems:
 - Director Velásquez agreed in part, added compaction has helped, but not all matters are addressed, such as Park Technicians who are a pay band 45, a conversation is taking place regarding classification/compensation and pay must be adjusted.

- Member Eileen Everett concurred that retention needs to be discussed, inquired how New Mexico compares to other States – how can we help if 3 percent and 4 percent COLA's (cost-of-living) raises are not sufficient?
- Director Velásquez advised he has had this conversation recently with Chairwoman Connealy and if there isn't money, there are no opportunities to hire staff
- Director Velásquez champions the idea of creating interest in Natural Resources cradle to careers in schools.
- Job creation, fostering excitement and life-long interest at schools may be topics for the next 60-day session (January 2023).
- Member Eileen Everett suggested that there is a need to see staff stay, address pay and determine what training needs are.
- Director Velásquez to provide vacancy data to Chairwoman Connealy and stated he would like to re-establish the Division Outdoor Education Program.

c. **Colleen Baker was introduced by Director Velasquez; Ms. Baker is the Division Design and Development Bureau Chief and discussed the following.**

- Working on Feasibility Study for Mount Cristo Rey (formerly known as the *Cerros de los Muleros (Mule Drivers Mountain)* into a State Park.
- 200 acres at edge of Sunland Park – Mt. Cristo Rey, runs right along Rio Grande River; isolated.
- A statue of Christ was placed by committee by descendants of people who worked at the smelter.
- A committee, not an organization owned by the Archdiocese of El Paso.
- EMNRD looking at – run by Insight El Paso, a student noted that there were Dinosaur tracks; sandwiched between two main railway tracks of the Burlington Northern.
- It is result of **House Memorial 35* (2016)** (*Note: House Memorial 35 was previously referred to in Discussion as Senate Memorial 35; corrected by Director Velásquez).
- Items of concern that we must take into view – approximately 35 thousand people make the pilgrimage each year.
- Federal nexus with U.S. Border Patrol on southern boundary

Question: Member Judith Polich inquired since there is smuggling and Law Enforcement present why is NM State Parks undertaking project?

- Director Velásquez advised that NM State Parks are directed by House Memorial 35 to work on this; Colleen Baker is looking at a feasibility study.
- No further questions for Ms. Baker.

d. **Parks Advisory Board (PAB) Membership**

- Chairwoman Selena Connealy discussed a potential increase of PAB Membership, many areas need representation, no less than seven (7) members and no more than eleven (11) members; current Board could recruit up to four (4) more members. The Board should think about diversity and what communities are represented.
- Member Patrick Killen inquired if the Governor's Office has communicated, Director Velásquez stated no feedback. Member Judith Polich asked if retired or current employees are eligible to apply; Director Velásquez advised both scenarios are approved and noted there could be new members by the summer if the Board files a nomination, it could be, perhaps passed. Follow-up needed with the Cabinet Secretary. Member Patrick Killen stated Advisory Board does not require Senate approval. Member Stephanie Bestlemeyer is in favor of geographic expansion we can meet by video as it is this is easier to achieve for attending meeting and a couple discussion about bringing on a couple of people at the same time to streamline training.
- Member Eileen Everett transitioning out of environmental learning, questioned if an action team could identify someone from cultural resources, law enforcement et al., who could become part of the Board. Director Velásquez mentioned if there are Board discussions, please advise how he could contribute, he's willing to reach out to rural communities. Chairwoman Selena Connealy advised that the Board would need to have a formal meeting today or take up the discussion at the next meeting. Director Velásquez suggested the Board think about today's discussion and on the next Agenda have a work session to identify needs. Chairwoman Selena Connealy stated there's work needed to understand the communities the Parks Advisory Board represents, and a discussion should take place next meeting. Member Eileen Everett expressed interest with working on Committee. Director Velásquez talked about having an Agency/Public Employee/Federal/other to support discussion from public perspective to provide a statewide experience.
- Chairwoman Selena Connealy noted that committee appointments serve at the pleasure of the Governor until December 31, 2022.

e. **Outdoor Classroom Initiative**

- The Outdoor Classroom Initiative remains a priority although Dr. David Certain is no longer with the agency. Director Velasquez advised that Girl Scouts loves State Parks also ties into the Public Education Department (PED).
- Chairwoman Selena Connealy inquired when there would be administrative positions, Director Velasquez noted that Bureau Chief positions are a priority for hiring in this fiscal year and with best efforts a couple of Construction Crew Supervisors. The Chairwoman inquired about NM State Parks office status; Director Velásquez stated NM State Parks has occupancy in the Wendell Chino Building on the second floor. State Parks are still in a hybrid mode.

Meeting Break: A five-minute restroom break occurred, and the meeting reconvened at 10:41 a.m.

7. President's Report and Committee Reports:

a. **Climate Change:**

Member Judith Polich reported there were 33 respondents to a survey which included following recommended strategies for dredging, shoring up levies, water conservation replacing toilets/showers, timed coins, modeling sustainable hybrids, EVS fire mitigation, fire breaks, desert habitation, watering plants, maintaining public awareness, permanent staffing concerns and the need for climate funding sources; what steps might be taken and how to implement the plan. Need urban and regional planner and follow-up meeting. Member Judith Polich mentioned Climate Brochure and more water is needed in Elephant Butte State Park.

b. **Outdoor Classrooms:**

Group has not met. Significant developments at the State level. Member Eileen Polich provided a quick summary – Senate Memorial 1 – Interagency Development – really important Senate Bill 32 (SB32) took interesting route will be absorbed by House Bill 2 (HB2). Many thought it would take ten years to pass, took one session. See opportunities – Rio Grande Nature Park Programs K-12. NM Highlands/Northern New Mexico Outdoor Symposium, anticipate in seeing a new Wildfire curriculum to be launched. In closing Chairwoman Selena Connealy noted that New Mexico State Parks needs to be kept at the table. Member Eileen Polich stated the need to utilize the Interagency Task Force – don't lose momentum – more support for outdoor learning.

c. **Law Enforcement:**

Director Velasquez shared that Member Martinez could not attend, he is working on Arson Statute with ABQ; has been in support of legislation prompted by Attorney General to implement 5 percent raise through comp and classification for all state law enforcement officers. .

d. **Public/Private Partnerships:**

Chairwoman Selena Connealy – this was on hold during Covid-19 times

Member Patrick Michael Killen spoke about public/private partnership project is underway Living Desert – Visitors Center upgrades to come into compliance with ADA; explore private partnerships/private grants/ private donations a conversation is needed with Director Velasquez. Chairwoman Selena Connealy asked Director Velasquez what a priority should be.

Director Velasquez stated that Living Desert is almost complete, and a public/private need recognition ADA erosion control is almost completed will keep you up to date. He also mentioned a past donation for a reptile house totaling \$1 million.

Director Velasquez recommended to Chairwoman Selena Connealy to identify interest board can help find interest then identify on state side.

Member Patrick Michael Killen concurred with Director Velasquez and stated knowing what the need is and what outstanding projects and opportunities are out will be essential.

8. Closing Discussion:

- a. New Business – No new business stated or distributed.
- b. Next Meeting – Wednesday, June 22, 2022 – 9:00AM; tentatively planned for Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park.

9. Public Comment:

- No members of the Public attended the meeting.

10. Adjournment

- Member Judith Polich moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded Member Patrick Michael Killen, motion passed unanimously at 11:27 a.m.

Approved:

Date:

Chairwoman Selena Connealy