

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING
Park Headquarters
Monday, February 3, 2014 at 1:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance: Steve Katona, Chair
Jackie Johnston, Vice Chair
Fred Ehrlenbach
Carolyn Gothard
Katherine Heidinger
Matt Horton
Dexter Lee
Alice MacDonald Long
Jeanine Ross
Bruce Wiersma
Ben Worcester

Park Staff/Presenters: Sheridan Steele, Superintendent
Len Bobinchock, Deputy Superintendent
John Kelly, Park Planner
Abe Miller Rushing, Park Ecologist/ Science Coordinator
Rebecca Cole-Will, Chief, Branch of Cultural Resources
Judy Hazen Connery, Biologist
Marie Yarborough, Writer-Editor
Kristi Rugg, Visual Information Specialist
Stuart West, Chief, Division of Visitor & Resource Protection
Ryan McKelvey, Revenue & Fee Business Manager
Keith Johnston, Chief, Division of Maintenance

The Commission Chair called the meeting to order and made opening remarks. A motion to approve the minutes of the September meeting was made, and the motion was seconded. The minutes were approved, as amended.

Superintendent's Report

The Superintendent introduced three new members of the park staff: Christie Anastasia, the new Deputy Chief of Interpretation; Kristi Rugg, the new Visual Information Specialist; and the new Plumber/Boiler Mechanic, Terry Dufour (not present). He thanked Becky Cole-Will for completing four months as the acting Chief, Division of Resource Management while Dave Manski is in India, and introduced Andy Mitchell, who will act in the position for the next four months.

Discussion was turned over to Len Bobinchock who updated the commission on the budget. He discussed that Congress passed an appropriation bill in January that funds the park at the 2012 level. Because the cost of doing business increases each year, and the park must absorb a one percent pay increase, the funding will not permit the park to actually operate at the 2012 level. In 2012, the park operating budget was \$7,866,000, and this year's appropriation is \$7,707,000, a difference of about \$160,000. The bottom line is that the park is doing much better than expected, and the Park Loop Road and the Visitor Center will open on April 15, as usual. (applause)

The Superintendent then gave an update on the concession contract. The Acadia Corporation contract expired in December 2013. The regional and Washington offices initiated a process for businesses to compete for the new contract. However, due to some uncertainties and controversies surrounding the process, no official contract has been let. Acadia Corporation has filed an appeal of the decision, which goes before a hearing officer or judge in the middle of this month. There is then a 30-day time frame during which a decision can be rendered, which leaves the park in a kind of limbo. The park is hopeful that an operator will be in place before the season starts, but as time goes on, the challenge to meet that deadline is growing stronger. The Regional Director is in control of the contract, so the park is waiting, just like everyone else, to see what will happen.

Steve Katona introduced Dave Woodside of the Acadia Corporation and asked him to provide any useful information on where things stand. Mr. Woodside related that the Acadia Corporation filed a formal written protest action in federal court in Washington, DC on November 20. This means that their attorney is able to view all the evaluation panel documents under a protective order. He can review the documents, but he cannot divulge their content, even to Acadia Corporation staff. He can, however, use the documents to develop an argument, and he can compare them to the draft contract which came out in December. Mr. Woodside provided a written summary of the motion for commission members to read at a later time.

Mr. Woodside also stated that they (Acadia Corporation) never thought they would be in the position of possibly suing the government. They place high value on their relationship with the National Park Service and have enjoyed wonderful support from the community and congressional delegation. But, the level of irregularities with the process rose to a point where they felt them worthy of a challenge.

Mr. Woodside also mentioned that, on Christmas Eve, the Federal Register published a list of contracts for potential renewal for 2014, and Acadia Corporation was on the list. No one can tell them what that means, but maybe they could potentially be asked to renew for 2014. He assured everyone that they are prepared, as best they can be, to do so if they are asked. However, the longer this goes, the more difficult it will be.

A question was posed to the Superintendent about what will happen if there is no concessioner. He responded that the Jordon Pond House operation would be seriously affected and whether they could even open would be in question. He is hopeful that there will some sort of operation there this season.

The Superintendent introduced John Kelly to give a brief update on commercial air tour management. John provided background on the act passed in 2000, and the amendment to the act passed in Congress last year that will make crafting plans with operators much easier. At Acadia, only two operators are affected by this act: Acadia Air Tours and Scenic Flights of Acadia. The operators can now work directly with the NPS (re: resources and values protection) and the FAA (re: safety) to develop agreements with the park. They hope to have agreements in place by this operating season.

The Superintendent gave an update on operations at Schoodic, including background on the establishment of SERC. SERC (the Schoodic Education and Research Center) is the facility and the Schoodic Institute (SI) is the non-profit that operates the facility. SI is actively searching for a new CEO

and hopes to have the person on board in May. Mike Soukup, the former CEO, is now the Director of Science.

Sheridan then gave a Power Point presentation on Schoodic and the plans for the Schoodic Woods portion of the peninsula south of Route 186. Development activities (campground, bike paths, parking, utility line improvements) will begin in the next few weeks. He also discussed the SERC campus and how SI is ramping up operations. Improved public transportation by water and bus is also being pursued, with attention being given to how to maintain the relative quiet and special qualities of the peninsula.

There was a question about the parcel north of Route 186. Sheridan explained that there are several potential partners interested in the north half, and some have put together a proposal for a research forest. This would not be owned by the park. They will wait until the projects south of the road are developed before making decisions. It is hoped that the campground will be operational by summer of 2015.

Centennial Project

Jack Russell, board member of the Friends of Acadia (FOA), discussed FOA's involvement in planning for the park's centennial in 2016, and mentioned some of the planning highlights to date. The slogan/tag line is: Acadia's Centennial: celebrate our past, inspire our future. The message is about 100 years of conservation, but also expresses the hope that the centennial will be a springboard to the continued stewardship of this beloved park. This will be a year-long celebration. He discussed strategies for marketing and told of local partners who are involved in the centennial preparations. He explained that the working groups will be domain-specific, each dealing with a specific aspect of the event. The goal is to achieve a "very robust, community-based, and substantial celebration" of the park.

Committee Reports

Land Conservation

No new land conservation reports.

Sheridan commented that the Commission authorized the park to accept the easement on Schoodic Peninsula at the last meeting, and now 1,400 acres south of Route 186 is under park management.

Park Use

Keith Johnston provided a brief rundown of all the upcoming projects that are scheduled to be completed or newly started in 2014, including: bus stops; road paving: rehab of motor coach bridges (four to six will be done this year); attempts to alleviate erosion problems at Stanley Brook; reconstruction of the Jordan Pond North Lot; and replacement of culverts on Western Mountain Road. He also commented on funding and options for repair of Duck Brook Road in 2016.

A member asked how the park communicates closures to the public. Keith assured the commission that every available media method will be used to keep the public notified about any closures and projects.

Fees & Compliance

Ryan McKelvey discussed updates regarding the new park passes, and showed examples of passes that will be sold beginning in May. He explained how fee revenue is split between Visitor Service operations and the Island Explorer bus system. Following a public meeting and other feedback received from the public, the Washington office has approved a fee change for weekly passes. The park will now charge \$20 for weekly passes purchased at any time. There will be no off-season rate. This will result in an estimated \$250,000 increase in revenue that can go to support the IE bus system annually.

Stuart West gave a Power Point and discussed the increase in bus traffic. There is a proposed plan to allow only two buses per company on the Cadillac Mountain Road at any one time. Parking at Jordan Pond House and Thunder Hole is also being addressed. There is a real need to ease congestion, as the issue is affecting the quality of the visitor experience. Sheridan stated that he is planning to meet with representatives of the cruise line companies in Florida later in February and hopes to cover this topic with them.

Science & Education

Abe Miller-Rushing provided an update on what is going on at SERC. They are in the last stages of developing the strategic plan. He stressed the need to integrate communication so that the science community and the community at large is more informed of what is going on there. He discussed Emma Albee's work of digitizing over 3,000 documents from the archives. These records are now available on line to staff and public. The digitizing will continue for years due to the large number of items still to be done. The website where people can access these documents is <https://irma.nps.gov>. This is a database site for the entire NPS, so search by park. Judy Hazen Connery interjected a thank you to Jeannine Ross for her volunteer work at the park collecting and documenting science papers from years ago.

Abe also relayed that, with Emma's help, they are re-doing the permitting process in order to better administer science in the park. The institute is helping to recruit researchers to conduct research in the park. They are improving efforts to get information out to a broader public, including teachers. Schoodic Institute will likely host the Downeast Research & Education Network, which is a collaboration of universities, land trusts, and educational institutions.

A member asked how the general public would know about the IRMA website. Abe responded that he and Emma are working on beefing up the Research portion of the park's website so that such information would be easier to find. This site is currently largely oriented toward visitation, not scientists doing research. This, along with revising the Schoodic Institute website will provide the link.

For the June meeting, a member requested a list of projects that are on-going in the park. Abe stated that at any one time, the park has about 100 open research projects, which is double the number there

were when SERC was first instituted. Last year, 70 had applied for permits to do research in park. The project list is also on the IRMA website, but it may take a little effort to find it on the site. SI plans to hold a science symposium each year where researchers can share their projects. There has been no forum previously where researchers could discuss their work and exchange information.

Becky Cole-Will distributed a briefing statement on the Old Town Fuel and Fiber Bio-Refinery. Acadia is a Class I air quality area, and there is 30 year time series of air monitoring data. The NPS Air Quality program is concerned that the refinery will be producing a large volume of pollutants as they ramp up this project. The NPS will be commenting on the project as it progresses. Becky suggested that people contact Bill Gawley, the park's air quality program manager, if they wish more information.

Becky also talked about the potential for the Long-Eared Bat to be listed as an endangered species and provided a USFWS handout. All bats in the East are in a dire condition due to the impact of like White-Nose Syndrome. Primarily, we need to find out more information to know what is going on with the bats in the park. If the bat is listed, park operations will be affected as well, as projects may have to be scheduled so they are sensitive to these species.

A member asked if the listing of the Long-Eared Bat might affect visitor behaviors and park use. Becky responded that it will be important to inform visitors not to disturb bats and report any unusual bat behavior. Charlie Jacobi commented that historic buildings in the park would be of concern (where bats might be found), and the park would have to consider how we do business in them if bats are present.

Another member asked about White-Nose Syndrome and what is being done about it. Rebecca responded that it is being studied throughout the United States and in Canada, and listing the bat as an Endangered Species will actually increase funding for research. White-Nose Syndrome has been found in bats in Acadia. She suggested that park biologist Bruce Connery make a presentation on the issue at the June meeting. There is a great need for more study and funding to study the problem.

Judy Hazen Connery then talked about the exotic plant program, including some history of the program, and showed a one minute, time lapsed video funded by FOA, of a volunteer crew clearing Bush Honeysuckle (invasive) on the Ledge lawn Extension. The park's crew of six is now managing 26 exotic plant species. The program is totally funded by soft money, with reliance on partners, grants through Friends of Acadia, wetland mitigation money from the airport, and fee money. The program relies heavily on volunteers, and there is big effort to get the word out on exotic plants (and animals) to the public. She stressed the need for public outreach and the need to work with adjacent landowners. Last season the crew treated 100 acres, but used only 13 gallons of herbicide. They try to use the least toxic, but most effective products.

Judy outlined what is planned this year, including program staffing and integration of this into the park's institutional program to keep this effort going. A member asked about Poison Ivy. Judy indicated that they have addressed the plant in some high use areas, but because it is native, there will not be attempts to eradicate it.

New Exhibits and Twitter

Marie Yarborough talked about the exhibits at Jordan Pond and Wildwood Stables. She encouraged everyone to see the new ones installed just as winter started. She also pointed out samples of draft exhibits that she had hung on the walls that are being prepared now, and should be in place by 2015.

Kristi Rugg spoke about the park's website and Twitter account. Over 5,000 visitors have used the Twitter account already, and she responds to questions about the park and current conditions daily through Twitter.

Becky Cole-Will then updated the group on some projects and attempts to better engage with neighboring communities. She spoke about meetings and efforts with the Otter Creek community concerning current issues, e.g. cove access, connector trails, the boat launch, the story of Otter Creek. She also talked about the Islesford Museum. There is a group forming, Friends of the Museum, that is interested in using a portion of the museum for a community-based exhibit. A local artist, Ashley Bryan, will possibly exhibit some of his works at the museum.

Public Comments

David MacDonald, President and CEA of Friends of Acadia (FOA) President, thanked people in the park and the community for speaking up after the shutdown. The park's funding is still inadequate. He requested that the members of the commission keep that in mind. He commented on the photo from Stuart West's Power Point showing the summer congestion and stressed the need to continue making progress; that congestion in the park should not be the status quo.

Another FOA staff member commented that there are job postings for park positions on the FOA website, and encouraged people to spread the word.

Fred Ehrlenbach expressed concern for the lack of a concessioner for the upcoming season. It was proposed that the commission draft a resolution to send to "somebody" to bring attention to the issue. Steve agreed to draft some language and send it to members for comment.

New Business

Steve read the commission's resolution expressing gratitude to Len Bobinchock, who is retiring in March, for his years of service to the NPS and the Advisory Commission. The resolution stated:

The Acadia National Park Advisory Commission recognizes Len Bobinchock for 43 years of service to the National Park Service and especially for his 25 years of extraordinary service at Acadia National Park. As Deputy Superintendent of Acadia, Len has contributed to the success of every aspect of the Park's operations, including serving as Acting Superintendent on three different occasions totaling 14 months. The Department of the Interior honored Len's outstanding leadership by awarding him the Meritorious Service Award in 2006, recognizing his positive management style, strong work ethic, collaborative working relationships with park staff. That award also cited his success in expanding the Park's resource management program and building a strong and broad coalition of businesses,

residents, NGOs, local, state and federal agencies, and legislative leaders to advocate for and support the protection of the park's mission and goals, a legacy that will last long into the future.

Among many other things, the Commission thanks Len for all the effort he has invested in helping us organize agendas and presentations for our meetings, enabling us to communicate Park related activities to the public more broadly, accurately and effectively.

The Commission celebrates Len's many accomplishments and wishes him and his family well as he prepares to retire next month. His service has fundamentally strengthened Acadia National Park in countless ways.

There was a motion, and the resolution passed unanimously.

Suggested agenda items for the next meeting:

- a presentation on bats by Bruce Connery
- an update on activities at Isle au Haut

Next meeting: Monday, June 2, 2014. Please submit agenda items to Steve Katona.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and unanimously passed. The meeting adjourned at about 2:40 p.m.