

State of New Mexico  
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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**Michelle Lujan Grisham**  
Governor

**Melanie A. Kenderdine**  
Cabinet Secretary Designate

**Ben Shelton**  
Acting Deputy Secretary

**Toby Velasquez**, Director  
State Parks Division



**New Mexico State Parks Advisory Board Meeting**  
**Wednesday, September 4, 2024, at 10:00 AM**  
**Wendell Chino Building, State Parks Conference Room 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
**Floor 1220 South St. Francis Drive, Santa Fe, NM 87505**  
**and via Webex**

- 1) Call to Order
  - Chair Selena Connealy called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.
- 2) Roll Call
  - Director Velasquez documented the following roll call:
    - Chair Selena Connealy – Present
    - Vice-Chair Judith Polich – Present
    - Member Partrick Killen – Present
    - Member Eileen Everett – Present
    - Member Stepanie Bestelmeyer – Present
    - Member Rodney Pairs – Present
    - Member CJ Wiegel – Present
    - Member Patricia Walsh – Present
    - Member Thomas Garcia – Present
- 3) Approval of Agenda
  - Chair Connealy invited a motion to approve the agenda. Member Eileen Everett made the motion and suggested adding public comments at the beginning and end of future meetings. Vice-Chair Judith Polich seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- 4) Approval of Minutes
  - Chair Connealy invited a motion to approve the minutes as written. Member Rodney Paris made the motion, and Member Eileen Everett seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- 5) Director's Report
  - a) Introduction of New Senior/Executive Staff:
    - Director Velasquez introduced our new Cabinet Secretary, acting Deputy Cabinet Secretary, new State Park Deputy Director (Operations), new State Park Deputy Director (Administration) and new Law Enforcement

Bureau Chief. All attendees summarized their backgrounds including the Parks Advisory Board (PAB) members.

b) Personnel Vacancy Report:

- Administrative Bureau Chief Miche Garcia reported on the progress and challenges regarding the State Parks Division's (Division) vacancy rates across the system. Ms. Garcia provided that the division has an overall 21% vacancy rate. The Division's goal is to lower the percentage in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of this calendar year to at or below 20%. Director Velasquez asked the PAB to aid in recruiting interest from their personal and professional networks. It was discussed that in the interim the Division will continue to evaluate and repurpose positions to further reduce vacancy rates. It was mentioned that the PAB is still looking to fill two vacant board member positions.

c) Position Reclassifications:

- Director Velasquez stated that in past PAB meetings we discussed the goal for reclassifying varying position groups and reported that the Division has accomplished portions of that goal. The Division reclassified all regional administration positions and increased their pay by improving the position pay bands. Director Velasquez stated that the next series of positions to reclassify are park maintenance positions, thirty-six in total. Director Velasquez stated that these positions are vital to management and operation of state parks. Director Velasquez stated that position reclassification improves applicant recruitment and employee retention. Member Eileen Everett commented and congratulated and thanked Division staff for this work. Director Velasquez also thanked the PAB for their continued support.

d) Legislative Interim Committee Presentations:

- Director Velasquez explained that the Division has had two interim legislative committee hearings. One was the LFC Capital Infrastructure Committee in Socorro, and the other was the Rural Economic and Development Committee (REDC) in Farmington. Director Velasquez attended and presented, and the committee hearings went well. A portion of the presentation was on ARPA funding, the \$20 million allocated to the Division is obligated and will be spent out by June 2025. The legislative committees were pleased as these funds will begin to exhibit the impacts of this level of funding to improve infrastructure across the system. Due to this work, the Division fiscal year 2025 capital funding is allocated at \$16 million, and our FY26 ask is \$20 million. Director Velasquez also highlighted the Division's collaboration with NMSU for a state parks system specific economic impact study.

Director Velasquez went on to provide additional details regarding the REDC offsite trip to Navajo Lake State Park. The offsite trip went well and highlighted the state park and the Pine Marina administered by Navajo Dam Enterprises. New Mexico State University – Arrowhead Center to conduct a Division specific economic impact study as well as an analysis

of non-market values and contributions to quality of life. Member Walsh asked if the data would be broken down and if we could see the impact of individual parks. Director Velasquez provided that the analysis will be provided by park, county, region, and statewide.

The group discussed the upcoming Water and Natural Resources (WNRC) interim legislative committee held in in Questa, NM, and Director Velasquez requested one or more of the PAB members to attend if possible. The WNRC committee meeting will take place on September 26-27, 2024. Member Walsh asked for meeting times, and Director Velasquez noted that he and Chair Connealy would notify PAB regarding times, dates, and locations. Member Garcia stated that an advisory notice of quorum may be needed.

e) Broad Canyon Ranch Feasibility Study:

- The PAB was provided the completed Broad Canyon Ranch (BCR) Feasibility Study, a product of Senate Memorial 38 (2023). The study was conducted as required by state statute. The feasibility study aids in determining options for the future use of the BCR property. The discussion focused on the three (3) alternatives provided within the study. The property is well-suited for outdoor recreation and education and has historical and cultural significance. Vice Chair Polich discussed the costs for these possible changes as provided in the study. Member Bestelmeyer commented that she had visited the BCR property and noted its popularity. Member Walsh asks just how big the area is, Director Velasquez referenced that the three BCR property parcels total just under 1,000 acres.

Chair Connealy stated that she knew the property was purchased with Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF). Dr. Stokes added that the LWCF acquisition group purchased the southern parcel of land with the addition of matching state funds. Within five years, the Division is required to have it available for the public, but the main intent was also to protect and enhance its environmental aspects. In the interim the Division has accomplished that, and now public use is the focus. The northern parcel was not purchased through LWCF. Member Polich asked if there were any structures on the property, and it was confirmed that there is a historic ranch site that has utilities available. Member Garcia asked the Division to develop a communications plan for the BCR property as this review moves forward due to multiple public land agencies having a presence around the BCR property.

f) State Park Fees Update

- Bureau Chief Jared Langenegger updated the PAB on the status of the Division fees study initiative. Mr. Langenegger explained that the Division is currently in a comment period as required by the Notice of Rulemaking. The revised rules were published on July 30 and required to have a 30-day comment period, but the Division decided to exceed the minimum requirement and receive public comment through October 22 at 5PM.

- Mr. Langenegger stated that the required administrative rules hearing will be held at the Wendell Chino Building, 1<sup>st</sup> floor in Pecos Hall on October 22, 2024, at 10a.m. Director Velasquez stated it would be meaningful for PAB members to attend and express their support on the record. Member Wiegel asked what the next step is after the hearing. Mr. Langenegger provided that after the hearing, the Division would review public comments and decide whether to proceed with the recommendations or make additional revisions. Next, the Division would work with State Records and Archives to publish them into the New Mexico register, and the revised rules would then be finalized and adopted starting January 1, 2025. Vice Chair Polich asked if Jared could brief her on the revised fees, Jared provided a listing and described what to expect from the new changes. The PAB and Division staff then discussed the need for a communications plan, and the significant time and effort it took to process this fees study initiative.

In addition, the PAB discussed veteran benefits and passes. Jared provided that the Division will expand veteran benefits. Member Garcia commented that it would be best to let veteran use their ID to get into the park as it would be the easiest way to validate and allow access.

Chair Connealy asked for information on the reservation system and how it will look when going into Reserve America regarding the new changes and costs. It was confirmed that anyone who has made reservations for the new year will still be at the current rate. Any reservation made after January 1, 2025, will be booked at the new rate. Chair Connealy also commented that she is proud of the implementation model, and that it demonstrates good government. Director Velasquez thanked the PAB for their continued support.

The Vice Chair Polich motioned to take a brief lunch break at noon. Member Killen seconded the motion. Motion carried and the meeting was reconvened at 12:23 p.m.

- g) State Parks Economic Study:
  - Director Velasquez detailed a new initiative related to the economic impacts of state parks to our state. Director Velasquez stated that this type of initiative is overdue and that the Division has entered a governmental service agreement with the NMSU- Arrowhead Center (NMSU) to conduct a state park system specific economic impact study. Director Velasquez believes this is another exciting initiative that will help bolster our position as an executive agency, which will also underscore that state parks are essential service. Bureau Chief Jared Langenegger took the lead and coordinated with NMSU. Director Velasquez is excited about this project and anticipates that this will impact the state parks system in a positive way. Member Everett asked if information had ever been collected around demographics, especially things like socioeconomic class. Director

Velasquez agreed that this initiative will provide us solid data that we currently lack or is no longer relevant.

h) Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LWCF) Awards:

- Dr. Stokes, Program Support Bureau Chief provided that the LWCF program has seen increased funding and awards. The Division hired a program coordinator, and she will be conducting inspections for the maintenance of the LWCF grants. LWCF forms are available on the state parks website.

6) President's Report and Committee Reports:

- Open Meetings Act (OMA) Guidance: The PAB received OMA guidance from the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department Office of General Counsel regarding the option for PAB members to participate in board meetings and contribute as part of a quorum. It was discussed that any PAB member experiencing an extreme burden and could not make it in person, would be able to participate virtually as part of a quorum. In addition, it was discussed that Chair Connealy would decide if the PAB members situation would qualify for this type of participation. Director Velasquez explained that PAB members can always participate virtually and inform PAB decision-making. Member Garcia mentioned his concern that this is being administered differently throughout the state.

a) Committee Reports

- i. Climate Change: The climate change committee is designing interpretive exhibits for eleven (11) state parks to educate visitors about climate change effects and mitigation tactics. The exhibits will be in indoor and outdoor areas like trailheads, parking lots, visitor centers, and museums. A contractor is developing the exhibit designs and content for review. The contractor will develop construction drawings and installation plans for spring 2025. The PAB expressed appreciation regarding this project.
- ii. Outdoor Classrooms: Member Everett said that we all agree that the Division continues to do a great job with outdoor education. State parks are big on outdoor education and will continue to be a strong force when it comes to that. Member Everett stated that she and the Board would continue to support our outdoor education and asked if there was anything she could do to support the program. Member Everett also asked if the Division still had vacant positions for interpreters. Director Velasquez provided that the Division is still working on reestablishing education positions and increasing the number of interpreters. Director Velasquez explained that the Division had park and regional educators that support various parks. Member Walsh asked when the Division will possibly have more interpreters, and Director Velasquez explained that they are exploring the transition to term positions budgeted with federal funds to fulfill these position needs.
- iii. Law Enforcement: Division Chief Gabe Maes discussed priorities for law enforcement for the next six months. Revising policy will be critical; this will include things like comp time and overtime pay. The law enforcement program has a high vacancy rate, recruitment and retention are important,

especially considering salary caps and degree requirements. Chief Maes went on to state that developing a field training program for officers after the academy is a priority.

- iv. Public/Private Partnerships: The committee had no information to report out.

7) Closing Discussion:

- New Business: Director Velasquez will review the PAB 2024 Open Meetings Act resolution as discussed.

8) Next Meeting Date:

- The date for the fourth quarter PAB meeting was discussed and tentatively planned for early December 2024.

9) Public Comment:

- No public comment or participation.

10) Adjournment:

- Member Paris moved to adjourn. Member Garcia seconded the motion. Motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:23 p.m.

**Approved:**

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Selena Connealy, Chair

Date: \_\_\_\_\_