#### Montana State Parks & Recreation Board

Ulm. Montana February 26, 2014

**Present:** Tom Towe, Chair; Diane Conradi; Jeff Welch; Mary Sexton; Doug Smith; Mike Volesky, Deputy Director FWP; Chas Van Genderen, FWP; Chet Crowser, Regional Park Manager (R-2); Roger Semler, FWP; Tom Reilly, FWP; Matt Marcinek, Regional Park Manager (R-4).

Guests: See Board file for sign-in sheet.

Chair Tom Towe, opened the meeting, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Approval of December Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Towe indicated he had requested some corrections to the minutes of the December 19, 2013 meeting and Coreen Robson (Parks Administrative Assistant) said those had been made. There being no more corrections to the minutes he said the minutes would stand approved as read.

### **Approval of December Expenses**

**Motion:** By: Mary Sexton - To approve the expenses of the December 19, 2013

meeting of the State Parks & Recreation Board

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Board Member Reports**

Chairman Towe said he appeared on the Aaron Flint Show radio show, which airs statewide, and talked for a half hour about State Parks. The show included questions from the audience. He mentioned he received an invitation to visit the Kartchner Caverns in Arizona.

Mary Sexton stated she had visited a couple state parks in Texas. They have over 100. Texas has little public land and parks are a very important part of their recreation, hunting and fishing.

Doug Smith said he would be meeting with people in Region 6 to discuss potential state parks in the region.

Diane Conradi said she had not visited any parks since the last meeting, but planned a visit to Fort Owens and Traveler's Rest in Region 2 with Chas Van Genderen.

Jeff Welch indicated he would visit Bannack when the weather warms up. He is going to vacation in Costa Rica and described the country as a great model for a recreational economy.

# **Director/Staff Report**

Mike Volesky, Deputy Director, Fish, Wildlife and Parks described the budgeting process. This Board and the Fish and Wildlife Commission approved initial legislative priorities and will approve the budget priorities. The Governor's Budget Office has said no new programs, new fees or new FTE.

The Department has been in a reorganization process. The Fish and Wildlife Advisory Council will be looking at licenses and permits that provide funding for that side of the agency. Season setting has been taking place.

Chas Van Genderen, Administrator Parks Division, noted the Division is gearing up for the summer season. The Division launched a new commercial during the Olympics. Planning is taking place for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary summer. Summer employees are being hired. He thanked Coreen Robson for her work ethic and for filling in as Administrative Assistant.

The Parks Division conducts manager schools each year. A staff survey and a legislator survey have just been completed regarding the park system as part of the strategic planning process. There will be a Parks Division meeting March 19, 20, 21 that will include Sen. Jon Sesso and possibly the Governor.

## Public Comment for items not on the Agenda

Mona Ehnes, Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association, offered complimentary newsletter subscriptions to the Board members.

Stan Meyer provided some history of the First People's Buffalo Jump State Park. Plundering was an accepted practice at the site in the 1950s. The new Montana marked a change in attitude. Mr. Meyer was Chairman of the Ulm Pishkun Support Committee for nine years. Part of the work was to educate the community about the preservation of the resource. An event at the site drew 350 people, raised funds and created interest. A second event was held a year later. An archaeological dig was conducted. Later, Ted Turner bought up land around the park and a land trade was made at his Flying D Ranch. The next challenge was legislative approval. He attributed much to "luck."

Mary Sexton recalled the purchase of the Eustace property also was lucky. DNRC purchased the land in 2008 and partnered with FWP on a conservation easement. There are now 2,000 acres in the parkland.

Gayle Fisher, Executive Director, Central Montana Tourism Region, formerly the Russell Country Tourism Region, welcomed the Board to the region. The organization is involved in promotion activities. They hope to keep working as partners in tourism with State Parks.

Jane Weber, Cascade County Commissioner, stated she was formerly involved with the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center. First People's Buffalo Jump is the first place people should come, then Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and the C.M. Russell Museum. She attended the first

fundraiser at the Buffalo Jump with her family. State Parks play a major role in the economy for our counties, she noted. Historical interest groups come to the built environment state parks. Montana State Parks has been a wonderful partner with various events hosted by Get Fit Great Falls.

Dr. Ruthann Knudson stated she is the archaeological member of the State Burial Preservation Board. She thanked the Parks and Recreation Board for allowing First People's Buffalo Jump to be a burial site for otherwise unacknowledged Native human remains in this state.

Amy Teegarden, President, Montana Trails Recreation Park Association, thanked the Board with an invitation to their statewide conference in Butte September 16-19. The conference fee would be waived for any Board members who want to attend.

Dave Cunningham, Lewis and Clark National Forest spoke about working together with State Parks on Silver Crest at the top of King's Hill, the snow mobile trails and trail facility in the national forest in the Little Belts, Giant Springs and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, the trail to White Sulphur Springs, the Conservation Round Table, More Kids in the Woods, the Smith River, and the trails for dirt bikes and ATVs in the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Public land and recreational opportunities add value to the quality of life and are part of the economy of the community and the state.

Melinda Barnes, Executive Director, stated that Bike Walk Montana is a statewide nonprofit working to promote and support biking and walking across the state. Montana Trails Rx is a collaboration of state and local parks and medical providers where medical providers issue prescriptions for walking utilizing local trails. She invited the Parks and Recreation Board to their annual summit, March 27-29 in Billings.

Matt Marcinek, Regional State Manager, Great Falls, welcomed the Board. He spoke about the Highwood Pedestrian Committee grant for a project that included a bridge over a stream next to a major highway in collaboration with Bike Walk Montana. He also described the river's edge trails system in Great Falls. They are working on a Trails Rx program at Giant Springs.

### Fish Creek State Park Draft Management Plan Public Comment

Chet Crowser, Region 2 Parks Manager, Missoula, reported there were 572 comments received. A summary document was provided. There was support for diverse recreational opportunities that balanced recreation with the resource values at Fish Creek. There were a number of concerns raised regarding the scale and scope of proposed development and the potential impacts to fish and wildlife resources. The top four themes developed from the public comment included increased use and development, protection of natural resources and character, and diverse recreation opportunities and potential. Other themes that emerged were roads, costs related to development and maintenance, coordination and partnerships and general management.

The issue will be revisited at the next meeting. A management plan will come back to the Board for review and approval by the Director. Mr. Van Genderen wanted the board to understand and endorse the plan and help set priorities for funding and management actions. Jeff Welch spoke in

favor of a site visit. Environmental assessments will occur before breaking ground on specific projects.

Mr. Van Genderen noted the land is next to the Clark Fork River. Mineral County is 90 percent publicly owned and economically struggling. Alberton Gorge is a significant tourism destination. The proximity to Coeur d'Alene, Spokane and Missoula, the river and the landscape were factors. This could be a recreation and tourism economy destination and the largest state park in Western Montana and help create jobs. It would help meet the responsibility to acquire additional state parks. The park would be at the north end closest to the road system and include an old fire tower. The area will be managed for habitat. In response to a question from Jeff Welch, Mike Volesky explained \$10 million was set aside for Access Montana to develop fishing access sites and state parks. Tough decisions will be made with the help of the Board. Diane Conradi commented this is heavily managed land that is covered with roads. The public comments raise a lot of management issues but also management opportunities. The importance of visiting the site was discussed. Chairman Towe stressed the importance of addressing the concerns regarding wildlife management. He favored a site visit in August before final approval. Doug Smith indicated he was willing to defer to the staff.

### **Proposed Legislation for 2015 Session**

Chas Van Genderen, Parks Administrator, indicated the Board will be asked to approve legislative priorities at the April meeting and forward those to the Director's office. Under consideration was a change in statute that would allow for concession contracts to go from a 7 year cap to up to at least 20 years to attract private equity investment in the park system for camping or concessions. Return on investment is difficult under a 7 year contract. Chairman Towe asked about the 20 years, and was informed that is the standard throughout the country. One concept would be to change state purchasing law. Another would be to adopt the current exclusion that the Heritage Commission has.

A second item was to establish a law to place a moratorium on any new state parks for five years unless approved by the Legislature.

Another item was to allow for development of boating facilities to improve protection of personal property and enhance disabled access as approved by the Parks Board. This would affect the ability to put a boat dock on Wild Horse Island. Chairman Towe favored a specific site by site decision.

These proposals are considered internally, then by the Governor's office, the Environmental Quality Council (EQC), then the legislature. If the law is changed an Environmental Assessment would need to be written, another public process. The EQC reviews all agency legislation prior to submission.

Mary Sexton expressed support. Chas Van Genderen encouraged the Board to study Title 23 that oversees the park system.

# **Executive Planning Process, FY'16-17**

Roger Semler, Assistant Administrator of Operations, reported in January 2014, Parks Division program managers developed the EPP proposal for additional FTE, operations funding and equipment authority. Total FY 16-17 biennial costs for these proposals included \$1,799,750 in personal services, \$994,764 in operations and \$1,167,190 in capital equipment. These were over and above current funding levels. The next step will be to prioritize needs.

Chairman Towe inquired about the need for additional FTEs. Roger Semler advised there is a need in the field in the parks themselves. The 7 FTE were related to critical needs that presently could not be met. There is no maintenance specialist or natural resource management specialist on staff of any sort. Another need was for an Assistant Parks and Recreation Planner. Many Montana state parks do not have management plans.

Doug Smith asked about the Governor's policy of no new FTEs. Roger Semler acknowledged that would be a factor. The approval process was still to come and any new FTE may not be feasible. Mary Sexton added this is fairly typical to look at what real needs are and to go forward with that. Prioritization will take place through the process. Chairman Towe asked if the \$1.4 million would have to eat into the reserves. Roger Semler indicated these would be subject to our fund balances according to fiscal analysis. If no new funding is approved, the Division will continue as they are now with staffing and O&M. Mary Sexton said that given the new parks, Fish Creek, Milltown and Yellowstone River, the justification for additional needs was fairly conservative. Diane Conradi expressed agreement with Mary Sexton.

# **Montana State Parks 75th Anniversary**

Mary Sexton introduced Kristen Inbody and Erin Madison from the *Great Falls Tribune* who visited every state park last year, wrote great articles and whose book will be part of the 75<sup>th</sup> Celebration. Chas Van Genderen added that Governor Bullock will write the introduction to *Guide to Montana State Park* with a guest commentary by Maile Maloy, who will also provide some input. Some of the proceeds on the book will come back to the park system. Kristin and Erin were recognized by the Montana Trails and Recreation Park Association for their work.

Chas Van Genderen noted, in January we celebrated 2.1 million visits in the parks system. Additionally they just closed out the Smith River permit application process with over 7,000 permit applications for this year, another new record.

He described the new TV commercial and the efforts and support that went into creating it. With the creation of a new State Parks website, Subway donated \$25,000 to help fund the commercial this summer on CBS stations in Montana. There will be a State Parks sandwich and employees will wear State Parks t-shirts. Social media will also be developed.

Monte Dolack will unveil a commissioned painting of the Smith River as part of the celebration that will hang in the capital this year. Proceeds from poster and postcard sales will benefit the State Parks System.

An online store will launch in March. Montana State Parks will sponsor a Monday luncheon at the Governor's Conference on Tourism. The book, noted above, will come out in May. There will be a kickoff reception in Helena with the Governor and First Lady, with Phillip Aaberg performing. Monte Dolack will also be in attendance.

There will be three Concerts in the Parks in June. There may be a film made in Bannack in July.

A benefit concert will be held in September. Erin and Kristen will speak at the Historical Society on September 25<sup>th</sup>. Jenn Lawson, State Parks Marketing and Communications Manager, has pulled in \$85,000 in sponsorships and grants to the Division.

#### Lewis and Clark Caverns/Thompson Falls Lands

Tom Reilly, Assistant Administrator, updated the Board on the project to resolve DNRC land issues with perpetual Recreational Use Easements. A 2010 legislative audit revealed there was a full section near Lewis and Clark Caverns where DNRC had been uncompensated for trust lands. Thompson Falls is a 36 plus acre site for which FWP has paid \$200 a year.

The Lewis and Clark Cavern site was appraised at \$640,000 and Thompson Falls was appraised at \$275,000. It was anticipated that a combination of Parks funding and a contributed amount from AVISTA will provide adequate funding for the easements of 100 percent of the appraised value. This included the \$526,000 remaining in the Access Montana Fund, a \$380,000 appropriation of funds from the 2013 session for lands in holdings, and an opportunity to partner with AVISTA Corporation on the Thompson Falls site totaling \$1,043,000. About \$915,000 is needed for the transaction. AVISTA has been helping pay the lease for many years. The plan going forward included a cooperative EA with DNRC for both sites, public comment and then Board approval. The goal was to have it done by the start of the 2015 legislative session. The easements include surface rights but not mineral rights.

### **Other Business**

Chairman Towe invited James Parker Shield, Chairman of the Little Shell Chippewa Pow Wow Committee to speak. The Pow Wow was moving from Great Falls to the site of the buffalo jump. This was in keeping with the State Parks Management Plan for the facility. An architectural schematic for a Pow Wow arbor was provided to the Board. The Pow Wow was scheduled for August 23-24. James Parker Shield hoped there was a way to expedite an EA or whatever else was required. The Pow Wow provides the funds. Chairman Towe thought it was a great idea if it did not interfere with the vision of the Buffalo Jump. There would be a sunrise pipe ceremony on top of the Buffalo Jump and the other tribes will be invited.

Roger Semler reminded the Board of the biennial report regarding the Heritage Resources Program. The report summarized Heritage Resource management and protection activities and expenditures over the biennium. The report is forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office. Some of the sites are in wildlife management areas and fishing access sites. Not all the sites are on state parks.

Chas Van Genderen thanked the staff of the facility.

Next meeting is scheduled for April 9-10, 2014 in Helena. There will be a joint meeting with the Fish and Wildlife Commission during the work sessions.

Adjourned at Noon.