

Department of Resources and Economic Development
DIVISION of PARKS and RECREATION
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For Immediate Release

**New Draft Unveiled for State Parks
Ten-Year Strategic Development and Capital Improvement Plan**

(Concord, NH) The Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) today released a new draft of the Ten-Year Strategic Development Plan and Capital Improvement Plan for the New Hampshire State Parks System. The public is invited to comment on the plan through December 24, 2009. Public hearings will be held December 1st in Portsmouth, December 2nd in Concord, December 7th in Peterborough, and December 8th in Lancaster. The plan and the hearing schedule is available by visiting www.nhstateparks.org or calling 603/271-3556. Comments can be made through email, writing, or by attending one of the hearings.

According to Ted Austin, Director of the Division of Parks and Recreation, the plan is intended to reverse the trend from gradual decline to a vibrant, sustainable State Park System. It will act as a catalyst for change and a template for management to take advantage of opportunities to improve the system. The plan calls for new funding models and revenue partnerships, capital investments, and new directions in management and operations.

“Managing the State Parks more effectively will require new partnerships, new thinking, new collaboration between DRED, Friends groups, the legislature, and host communities,” Austin said.

Austin explained that the Division faces financial and operational challenges. The funding challenge is that in 1991 the Division became a self-funding agency and has consistently has been running a deficit. That deficit has averaged, on an annual basis for the past 20 years, \$404,746. The result has been deferred maintenance, reduced programming, and a growing backlog of capital needs. Recent capital appropriations in 2007 and 2009 have begun to turn the tide, but more is needed.

The plan calls for eliminating a carry-forward loss created by the annual deficit, projected as \$1.8 million for FY '09. It also calls for:

- \$750,000 in non-capital needs to replace worn-out equipment, needed for the next operating season
- \$ 1.7 million in capital investments for immediate stabilization of facilities in the next three years
- \$28.5 million in capital to attend to deferred maintenance needs in the next five years
- Some four dozen strategies for more effective management and stewardship
- New models for management, stewardship, and revenue generation

Austin acknowledged that the Division must be managed and operated better. “The parks culture must change to one of accepting responsibility, of tracking results, of establishing baselines for measurement and comparison of results, and for benchmarking performance.”

The plan includes the following:

- Comprehensive assessment of the condition of each state park
- Strategic goals and recommendations
- First ever Opinion Survey of Park Users
- Financial Overview of the Park System
- Economic Impact of State Parks
- Extensive Park by Park Capital Improvement Plan
- A proposed new Approach to Managing State Parks

“The State Park System is an important asset to the state as a natural resource that attracts tourists and businesses alike. Preliminary research shows that State Parks contribute in excess of \$500 million to the State’s economy, including \$45 million to state revenues,” stated Department of Resources and Economic Development Commissioner George Bald. “The legislature made it clear it was our department’s responsibility to produce this plan and we believe we have satisfied their intent.”

The State Park Systems Advisory Council provided advice and guidance to the Division while the plan was being developed. The Council also wrote the Findings section of the Plan after reviewing extensive public input . “We commend the Division of Parks and Recreation for listening to the people of New Hampshire and preparing this

blueprint for the future,” said Richard Ober, chair of the Advisory Council. “This document lays out the challenges and proposes a series of steps to help ensure New Hampshire has the state parks it deserves. Hundreds of New Hampshire citizens, legislators, and other friends of the parks have helped shape this plan – we look forward to serving as a bridge between the Division and those stakeholders as the plan gets put into action.”

Former legislator and Council member Jeff Gilbert added, “This plan and the Council’s findings confirm that New Hampshire’s Parks are central to our State’s natural, historical, and cultural heritage. They are a critical part of the quality of life that we cherish and our economic well-being. It is the responsibility of us all to properly maintain and protect them and it makes good business sense to do so.”

The Division of Parks and Recreation is comprised of the Parks Bureau, Bureau of Historic Sites, Bureau of Trails, and Cannon Mountain. The Division manages 74 properties, including state parks, beaches, campgrounds, historic sites, trails, waysides, and natural areas. The Division of Parks and Recreation is one of four divisions of the Department of Resources and Economic Development. To learn more, visit www.nhstateparks.org or call 603/271-3556.

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