



MONTANA FWP

Teleconference Meeting Minutes

Helena Headquarters

February 20, 2019 – 8:15 a.m.

Parks & Recreation Board Members Present:

Angie Grove, Chair; Scott Brown; Erica Lighthiser; Mary Sheehy Moe; and Betty Stone (via telephone).

Staff Present:

Director Williams, Pat Doyle, Coleen Furthmyre, Betsy Kirkeby, Tom Reilly, Beth Shumate, Ken Soderberg, and Zach Zipfel.

Guests: none

Topics:

1. **Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**
2. **Approval of December 19, 2018 Board Meeting Minutes**
3. **Classification and Investment Strategy Policy – Proposed**
4. **Public Comment ~ For Issues Not On This Agenda**
5. **Adjournment**

1. Call to Order – Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Grove called the meeting to order at 8:18 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Board Members and Director Williams conversed about current legislation and the Board confirmation hearing.

2. Approval of December 19, 2018 Board Meeting Minutes

Motion: Member Stone moved, and Member Brown seconded to approve the December 19, 2018 meeting minutes.

Amended Motion: Member Sheehy Moe asked to change the eighth paragraph, second sentence, on page 4 to state, “make sure Parks has more,”; needs to be clearer what “the” is in the original statement.

Action on Amended Motion: Motion Passed. 5-0

3. Classification and Investment Strategy Policy – Proposed

Beth Shumate, Parks and Recreation Administrator, explained the impetus behind the need for a classification policy started due to a legislative performance audit in the early two-thousands. In 2015, the Montana State Parks Strategic Plan was adopted by the Parks and Recreation Board (Board) that directed staff to manage parks and programs in a manner that considers:

- Allocation of resources
- Fiscal sustainability
- Visitor services and experiences
- Partnerships and engagement
- Awareness and outreach

In 2018, an audit conducted by the Legislative Audit Division included an analysis of steps the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Park's Division on how to consider developing systems and processes to strategically prioritize and allocate resources. The report included the recommendation to "Develop and implement a system-wide plan for regularly ranking, reviewing and documenting resource allocations for capital projects, and for maintenance and operations of state parks." Also, in 2018, a separate analysis was conducted by the Governor's appointed Parks in Focus Commission (PIF) which they identified the need to revise the Montana State Parks Classification and Prioritization of Parks Resources policy. All these efforts have led to the development of a revised draft Classification Policy of state parks. Classification was done with existing methodology where staff completed a thorough analysis of each park based on the overall significance, relevance and accessibility of each site. However, visitation, in-state and out, as well as revenue were not factored in to the old framework and the Department felt that these are critical metrics to consider in the revised framework and are key to grouping our parks by service and experience level. The key pivot we are making is from a scarcity-driven resource allocation exercise, with winners and losers, to a forward-looking investment strategy with the goal of building a diverse, robust and thriving parks system. Classification is what guides the level of service that each park provides while being able to better communicate the type of experience that a visitor can expect at each class/level of park. Breaking out our parks by experience level recognizes the uniqueness of Natural, Heritage and Recreation Parks. All are managed differently, and visitors can expect a different experience and typically multiple types of experiences. Classification is a way to look at how we manage resources in the park system more effectively. All Government agencies have different methods of managing resources and prioritizing investments. This is something that we have attempted to do in our park system and this policy will help provide the direction and guidance towards this effort. Grouping our parks by service level better communicates the level of customer service and customer experience across the park system. Experience groups will help bring focus to the needs of parks to potential partners, constituent groups, etc. It makes a compelling case for management, partnerships and investment to realize this vision based on the experiences that visitors desire to have at each location. People can choose parks based on service level they desire: Rustic, Core or Enhanced. It will also help our managers in decision making related to the range of services to provide and how to allocate resources within a particular grouping. An investment strategy approach is guided by the idea of experience and service class groupings, and a vision of what Montana's state parks system should look like when built out. In other words, what is the gap between the current condition and the future desired condition and how much is needed to fill the gap. Service level designations are a snapshot of our current condition of our parks today. This is why fluidity is so imperative to allow for adjustments between service levels as conditions change. This system acknowledges that not all parks are, will be or should be at a high level of development, however it also allows for parks to move within the same grouping which can be shared. It also allows the opportunity to improve training and networking among staff. The Department will be working on an implementation strategy over the course of 2019. We will revive the implementation team as the new planner position comes on board in March and link classification methodology to the PIF recommendations. Performance measures and evaluation tools will be a significant aspect of the implementation and assessment process. The draft policy has had no

public involvement to date; if the Board endorses the draft policy, the Department will conduct a 30-day public comment period; any final adoption will take place at the Board meeting in the spring.

The Department has three alternatives for the Board to consider:

1. Endorse the Draft Policy as written and put it out for public comment.
2. Amend the draft policy and put it out for public comment.
3. Do not approve the draft policy.

The Department recommends Alternative #1; once comments are received the Board can review the document in greater depth with the benefit of public perspective.

Chair Grove thanked Member Sheehy Moe, Ken Soderberg and Dave Landstrom for all the hard work they have put into creating this policy.

Member Sheehy Moe stated she appreciated Shumate's overview of the draft policy; she is concerned the public won't have the overview and it is very helpful in understanding the policy. When she looks at past minutes and the history, there has been a lot of emphasis on prioritization; not sure that it is clear from the strict reading of the policy itself and the factors that drive the prioritization. With the summarization that Shumate just gave, it helps decision making within the Department. She believes this draft policy helps visitors understand both the experiences and the service level; not sure the policy provides guidance on prioritization.

Director Williams stated the context is critical to understanding something; adding a background section to give some context would be an option.

Member Brown stated when the conversation first started, it was discussed as a tool for the Board to look at state parks and classify them. As far as visitor information goes, there is a better way to do it than the classification process. If you look at the Oregon State Parks website, rather than classifying their parks, they have a list of amenities, activities and an experience search filter tool; worth looking into something like this versus trying to make the classification system work for visitor information.

Shumate stated the Oregon State Park online user guide is top notch and is something she desires for Montana State Parks online services, whether it be through the reservation system or the website. The current website does list amenities and activities for each park throughout the state.

Ken Soderberg, Parks Chief of Operation, stated this classification system will be a guide for the way the Department communicates with a potential visitor. The current website does divide parks by recreational, natural and cultural experiences. The draft policy can be used to enhance and further develop visitor communication.

Chair Grove stated in redesigning the website and reservation system, it may be useful to have a working group, with some outside agency members, to help provide input on how to make the website/reservation system more user friendly.

Member Brown stated he looked at different states websites and Oregon stood out; wonders if Oregon developed their own system; rather than reinventing the wheel, maybe someone can ask if we could purchase or borrow their technology and adopt their system.

Member Stone stated the classification matrix developed is excellent, very concise and gives a true picture of the parks; the reservation system does need to be updated; willing to be on a working group. Staff did a great job on the matrix.

Member Lighthiser stated at a user perspective, in some of the classifications there is an overlap; need more context to explain this issue.

Soderberg stated there is definitely an overlap in some parks; you can experience all three of the experience types at a single park and there is recognition of this. Some of the intrinsic values and the original intent of acquiring a certain site were looked at while developing the old policy and the new draft policy.

Director Williams asked for clarification on the 'Natural' classification of Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park.

Soderberg explained the largest segment of visitation comes through the offering of a cave tour as a natural experience as well as an expanse of outdoor recreation opportunity. From the interpretive side of things, we asked ourselves how do we stay true to the original purpose, values and intent of interpreting the geology in the cave system and bring it above ground. The great aspect of the caverns above ground is the tremendous experiences in the natural world. We are seeing increased use of the park, particularly during the shoulder seasons, for use of the trail system and mountain biking. We considered management decisions and what strategies can be used to maintain that natural experience for visitors while also providing the recreational use of the park.

Member Sheehy Moe stated the policy language should have more descriptive classification clarification. Maybe within the classification itself use include an 'original experience' or 'core experience'. This policy is to provide staff with guidance, not for visitation purposes.

Director Williams stated Member Sheehy Moe has a great suggestion; it also correlates with the Department's core beliefs and how we protect the integrity of the outdoor experience.

Shumate stated numerous staff members took a deep dive into the policy after the December discussion; a few iterations of this current policy did have a lot of more in-depth background and information, and after conversations it was decided there was too much information and was condensed to the draft policy that is before the Board.

Chair Grove asked Member Sheehy Moe to look at the 'Purpose' section of the policy and see if it needs more clarification.

Member Sheehy Moe stated she did look at it and the 'Purpose' section states what she just said; what the Board needs to look at the policy and see if it is ready for public viewing, and if the Board has provided guidance the legislative audit says we need to provide.

Director Williams stated she must excuse herself from the meeting, so she can listen-in to Senate Bill 24.

Chair Grove stated a couple things that should be incorporated into the policy are: to include the definition of 'Natural, Heritage and Recreation' into section 2 and the definition of 'Rustic, Core and Enhanced' in section 1; because this is the formal policy it needs to be in the document itself. Also, in the previous policy there were six principles applied into the investment decision making; these principles should be added into section 3; the principles were well thought out and should be defined within this draft policy. Would also like to add a section 7 that states "We as a Board review this graphic and categorization on a biannual basis"; the legislative audit requires the Board to periodically review and update this policy.

Chair Grove, Member Lighthiser and Shumate discussed the public comment process when looking at the policy in the future.

Chair Grove asked if everyone was comfortable with the changes made to the policy at today's meeting. She is comfortable with staff making the changes and endorsing alternative #2: amend the draft policy and put it out for public comment.

Member Brown asked what is expected from the public; this policy seems more like a management tool.

Chair Grove stated she has been contacted by several Friends Groups and will converse with them about the policy; recommends the Board touch base with Friends Groups within the Boards district and the Regional Park Managers.

Motion: Member Sheehy Moe moved, and Member Lighthiser seconded the Department amend the draft policy as noted and put out for public comment.

Chair Grove asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed. 5-0

Public Comment ~ For Issues Not On This Agenda

Chair Grove stated the April 24 meeting is on hold; if there is a need for a meeting, one could be scheduled. It may be useful to have a Board retreat the afternoon before the June meeting. Joint meeting with the Fish and Wildlife Commission is tentatively set for September.

5. Adjournment

Motion: Member Sheehy Moe moved, and Member Brown seconded to adjourn the meeting. Motion Passed. 5-0

Chair Grove adjourned the meeting at 9:10 a.m.



Angie Grove, Chair



Martha Williams, Director

