

Council on American Indian Concerns

Regular Monthly Meeting, August 12, 2009  
DNR Conference Room, Atlanta

Council members in attendance: Nealie McCormick, Marilyn McGaughey, Ralph Crews, Tom Gresham, JB Jones, Royce McCrary and Sarah Hill

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Nealie McCormick at 1:35 pm. Ralph Crews led the group in an opening prayer.

The June, 2009 meeting minutes, which had been emailed to members earlier, were approved as presented.

The treasurer's report for expenses in FY 2009 was read by Ralph Crews. This indicated an unspent balance of about \$4,656 for FY 2009.

Invited guest Chris Clark, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, addressed the Council, mainly to inform and update the Council on recent departmental decisions prompted by severe budget cuts. Mr. Clark began by apologizing for not consulting with the Council during the department's deliberations. He stated that there will be a 24 % cut in the DNR budget for 2010, with deeper cuts possible. Parks and Historic Sites Division was especially hard hit, with a 39 % cut. This required cuts in services and personnel in the Parks Division, including 150 layoffs and furloughs for the remaining staff. DNR is looking to cut costs in many areas, such as lodges and golf courses. Regarding historic sites, Mr. Clark emphasized that DNR is not getting out of the historic sites business, even though they do not financially break even. The recent cutback in hours at historic sites, including the three with predominantly Indian themes (Etowah, Vann House and New Echota), were necessary, but not desirable. The DNR is looking at several options to restoring some of the hours, including discussions with the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and several parks Friends groups. Marilyn McGaughey interjected that a Friends group is being formed to help at Etowah. Mr. Clark said that in addition to trying to restore hours of the existing parks, he would like to see other sites highlighted and opened to the public.

Sarah Hill asked what the criteria were for deciding the severity of cutbacks at parks. Mr. Clark said the Georgia Legislature wanted parks to "break even", but he said that would be impossible. He presented to the Council budget data for each historic site for FY 06, 07 and 08. This showed that all had losses, some returning only 10 to 12 % on expenditures. He said DNR does not want to close any parks, but will close parts of parks and will curtail hours. Geography played a role in the decision process, mainly in whether there was another park close enough to share personnel. Degree of community support was another factor, as was projected impact on the economies of nearby towns.

In response to a question about when Parks will be back to near normal, Mr. Clark said the 2011 budget will also reflect a very low level of funding, and he has not looked further ahead. He said that as he has become familiar with DNR facilities, he is embarrassed at the shabby condition of the DNR Preservation Lab at Panola Mountain. He said improving this facility is a high priority.

Sarah Hill requested that the Council be kept in the communication loop because we might be able to help. Mr. Clark and Becky Kelly readily agreed that the Council will be kept well informed. In response to Sarah Hill's question about how the Council can help right now, Mr. Clark said that promoting and marketing the historic sites and visitation to them would be a high priority. As examples, he suggested the Council work with others at creating trail systems (of Indian sites, for example), or tie in with National Historic Sites, or develop new ways and new media to inform the public of our historic sites. He said that supporting the working group that Jim Langford has created would be helpful. He concluded that the DNR is open to all sorts of new ideas and partnerships.

Marilyn suggested that Parks and Historic Sites maintain a close relationship with the Council, and Becky Kelly agreed this would be desirable; she will try to attend many of our meetings. State Archaeologist David Crass said that while his Historic Preservation Division and the Parks and Historic Sites Division have collaborated many times, more can be done to improve this relationship. Ms. Kelly concluded that she saw a positive outcome from this financial hardship, that being closer relationships among our like-minded entities and possibly new partnerships.

Sarah Hill asked Mr. Clark about the state opening two new parks in these financially stressful times. He replied that the Georgia Legislature more or less forced the two new parks on DNR. These are the Chattahoochee Bend Park in Coweeta County and the Don Carter Park in Hall County. DNR will have to manage them as best they can with very limited resources.

Jim Langford then took the floor to inform the Council about a meeting he convened yesterday that brought interested parties together to discuss ways to help DNR through the budget crisis. He said that many entities have similar goals in historic preservation, but do not work closely enough together. The essence of the meeting was to develop means to get historic sites on a higher, more visible platform and thus better funded. Such a meeting had been held years ago, and a five-year plan was adopted, but there was not enough follow-through to produce meaningful results. The Council decided that Marilyn McGaughey, Sarah Hill and Nealie McCormick will be a committee to represent the Council at future meetings of the working group. They are charged with developing specific, constructive things the Council can do to help raise the profile of historic sites, and especially those with Indian themes.

Visitor Ken Akins, former manager of Etowah Mounds, said that the recent cutbacks have really hurt school visits to the site, and that this is very detrimental to the mission of the site. Ms. Kelly said Parks and Historic Sites is working on improving the visitation hours at that site.

Discussion of administrative support for the Council was tabled for later discussion in Ms. Kelly's office.

Marilyn McGaughey stated that there are no new developments with our Rules and Regulations.

In news articles, Sarah Hill stated that the U.S. Congress, through a Senate Resolution, issued an apology to American Indians, citing depredation and neglect of American Indians. Nealie McCormick shared an article about the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Trail of Tears Motorcycle Ride in Alabama.

Neele McCormick informed the Council that a date has been set for the National Governors Interstate Indian Council, which will be held on October 17<sup>th</sup> in Palm Springs, California. The Council has allocated money for he and Vonnie to attend on behalf of the Council.

Frankie Mewborn mentioned the parking deck fees, saying that the rate will rise from \$1,344 to \$2,400 for the nine Council members beginning in October. He said that we could use the adjoining deck for \$5.00 per use, but that it would involve a longer walk. Each Council member is to inform Frankie which deck he or she wishes to use.

JB Jones related that he received an email via Sarah Hill about an alleged cemetery of Indians near Frogtown, now on privately held property, that has been obliterated. The person wants the remains moved to public land. The land owner proposed that if a certified archeologist can find human remains, he will pay \$2,500 to \$3,500 towards the exhumation and reburial of the remains; but he will not pay if nothing is found. JB will pursue helping with the negotiations between the landowner and complainant.

Marilyn McGaughey read the letter that the Council wrote in June to the three Historic Sites personnel who were laid off from the Indian-themed sites.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Visitors: Chris Clark, Becky Kelly, Frankie Mewborn, David Crass, Ryan Kennedy, Patty Wallenberg, Ken Akins, Jim Langford, Vonnie McCormick, Frances Crews, Gisela Gresham, Ann Williams, Dan and Dola Davis