

1st Quarterly Whitewater Commission Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2019

Location: National Park Service, 104 Main Street, Glen Jean, WV 25846

Chaired: DNR LE David Trader, Lt. Colonel, for Director Stephen S. McDaniel

In Attendance:

Commissioners: Kara Moore proxy for Ruby Chelsea (by phone WV Tourism); Lizzie Watts (NPS); Rick Johnson (River Expeditions); Chris Ellis (private river user); Roger Wilson (AOTG); Don Beyer (private river user); John Gonano (by phone RTO)

Others: Jerry Jenkins (WVDNR); Heather Kessel (WVDNR); David Trader (WVDNR); Wendy Greene (WVDNR); Christopher Carnefix (ACE); Duane Michael (NPS); Tim Barton (Alpine); Jonathan Grose (Mayor Town of Gauley Bridge); Patrick Baisi (Town of Gauley Bridge); Bobby Bower (WV PRO); Isaac Colvard (Summit BSA); Cpl. C.J. Whittington (WVDNR); Lt. Dennis Feazell (WVDNR); Chris Hayes (AOTG); David Kopsa (Summit BSA); Stacey Carroll (CCR)

Call to Order

The Whitewater Commission meeting of March 19, 2019 was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Lt. Colonel David Trader. Introductions were made. Attendance sheet provided for attendees to sign; attendance by telephone noted during introductions.

Approval of December 11th, 2018 Minutes

Roger Wilson made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 11th, 2018 meeting. Motion seconded by Rick Johnson. The motion carried.

Budget

Lt. Colonel Trader noted that the budget reports could be found in the meeting packets. No discussion on the budget.

Roger Wilson made a motion to accept the budget. Motion seconded by Rick Johnson. The motion carried.

Commission Member Terms

Lt. Colonel Trader explained that many of the terms have expired and the remaining will expire June 30, 2019. Wendy Greene explained that it would be in the Commission's best interest to develop a new list of recommendations for all seats as they must be presented to the Governor and put through the process, which will end up being after the last seats expire.

Rick Johnson made a motion to implement the following recommendations for Whitewater Commission seats:

Regarding the current seats held by private river user Don Beyer, Chris Ellis and Ed Wooton, the Commission recommended they remain in those seats. Regarding the current seats held by commercial multiple licenses Rick Johnson and Roger Wilson, the Commission recommended Heather Johnson with River Expeditions and Chris Hayes of Adventures on the Gorge for those seats. Regarding the current seats held by

commercial single license J. Patrick McCann and John Gonano, Jr., the Commission recommended Tom Dragan with Sandstone Jetboats and a representative from Cheat River Outfitters or West Virginia University. Heather Kessel is tasked with calling those two outfits to determine if there is interest to fill the last seat. Motion seconded by Don Beyer. The motion carried.

Update from Sub-Committee – New River from Railroad Bridge – Gauley River from Jodie Bridge

Chris Ellis discussed the sub-committee's findings for both sections and determined there was limited shoals on both sections, sufficient cell service in both (excluding 1 mile section above Belva to Jodie on the Gauley), sufficient areas to vacate the river in case of emergency or otherwise and that he witnessed no boating or fishing on both sections other than a kayaking group on the New from the Dries section. Chris stressed that signs were posted warning boaters of the approaching falls and had heard of no reported issues with persons going too far and over the falls. Roger Wilson noted that once whitewater zones end, the remaining section of river to the falls is outside the Whitewater Commission's purview.

The Commission discussed a need for cfs cutoffs on both sections. They determined 8,000 cfs on the Gauley and 10,000 cfs on the New.

Roger Wilson made a motion to accept the sub-committee's recommendations regarding rentals on the Gauley River section from Jodie Bridge to confluence of New/Gauley rivers at Gauley Bridge. To include a cfs of 8,000 and mirror the language used for the Shenandoah river sections. Motion seconded by Rick Johnson. The motion carried.

Roger Wilson made a motion to accept the sub-committee's recommendations regarding rentals on the New River section from Railroad Bridge to confluence of New/Gauley rivers at Gauley Bridge. To include a cfs of 10,000 and mirror the language used for the Shenandoah river sections. Motion seconded by Rick Johnson. The motion carried.

Wendy Greene explained that new proposed legislative changes would not be effective until 2020.

Thurmond Gauge Funding

There was discussion about the previous funding of the Thurmond gauge. Historically the gauge has been covered by the U.S. Geological Survey with contributions from entities such as the National Park Service and others. However, now the USGS will no longer cover the gauge as it's fallen to them to fund 100%.

Colonel Jenkins and Lizzie Watts both confirmed that Homeland Security had been approached about possible contributions to the gauge. Both Jenkins and Watts advised that Homeland Security declined to offer contributions.

The Commission agreed to contribute to the gauge, however they encouraged reaching out to others such as WV Department of Environmental Protection, WV Tourism, Boy Scouts of America and Homeland Security to solicit other contributions.

Roger Wilson made a motion to use study funds, not to exceed \$5,000, to contribute to the operation of the Thurmond gauge. However, in the instance that other funding is found the Whitewater Commission contribution would be adjusted and the Commission would be notified immediately for final approval during a special meeting, date yet to be determined. Motion was seconded by Rick Johnson.

General Discussion

Chris Ellis asked about the date when 16 year olds can operate on the New in regards to the new rule changes. Wendy Greene advised that they can operate as of the final file date, which has not been set to date.

She assured the Commission that she would advise Heather Kessel of the date, so that the information could be distributed to members.

Guest Chris Carnefix made mention that there would be runs on the Dries during the upcoming weekend and it was considered a “test run”. This brought about more discussion about the new put-in that is planned for the Dries section. DNR officers Whittington and Fezell asked if the new put-in was on public fishing access areas. There seemed to be miscommunication about what is allowed in those areas and illegal. It was decided that further details would be found and more discussion later.

Officer Whittington mentioned that he was approached by whitewater guides questioning training qualifications on the Dries. He was asked if training qualification trips had to be obtained while on “paid excursions”. He stresses that his interpretation of the law doesn’t specify that it’s on a paid commercial trip, only that the trip must be taken on a whitewater expedition and in similar craft. The Commission agreed it doesn’t have to be a paid trip.

Next Meeting

The 2nd Quarterly Whitewater Commission meeting to be held at River Expeditions located at 900 Broadway Avenue, Oak Hill, WV 25901 on Tuesday, June 18th, 2019 at 1:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Chris Ellis motioned to adjourn the March 19th, 2019 1st Quarterly Whitewater Commission meeting. Roger Wilson seconded the motion. The motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 2:32 p.m.