

**SOLANO COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
JANUARY 18, 2012**

**Lake Solano Nature Center  
8685 Pleasants Valley Road, Winters, CA  
1:00 p.m.**

<b>Members Present:</b>	<b>Commissioners Alvarez, Leong and Riddle</b>
<b>Members Excused:</b>	<b>Commissioners Whited and Hermsmeyer</b>
<b>Staff Present:</b>	<b>Dan Sykes and Kristine Letterman</b>

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Acting Chairman Leong called the meeting to order. A quorum was confirmed.

**2. Approval of the Minutes**

The minutes of November 10, 2011 were approved as prepared.

**3. Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was unanimously approved.

**4. Chair and Commissioner Comments**

There were no Commissioner comments.

**5. Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**6. Elect Chair and Vice-Chair for 2012**

This item was continued to the next regularly scheduled meeting.

**7. Approve proposed meeting dates for May – November 2012**

The meeting dates of May 10, July 12, September 13, and November 8, were unanimously approved.

**8. Parks and Recreation Division Staff Report**

**A. Attendance and revenue**

Mr. Sykes provided the commission with an Attendance and Revenue Summary for FY2011/12, along with information regarding the attendance and revenue trend at county parks since the year 2004. He noted that the total attendance for all 4 parks last year was 178,142 with revenue in the amount of \$451,198, the best revenue year for the county's parks. He stated that the figures included revenues for camping, parking, rental fees, boat and RV storage, and annual park passes. He noted that attendance has been holding steady to around 180,000 visitors for the last 3 fiscal years.

Commissioner Riddle spoke with regard to the drop in attendance at Lake Solano between 2007 and 2009. He inquired if there was a significant occurrence that took place in between that time. Mr. Sykes speculated that it was due to the lack of fish in the lake. He noted that the last time the lake was stocked was in August of 2008.

Commissioner Alvarez inquired if this was due to the pending lawsuit. Mr. Sykes said that he believed that the lawsuit had been resolved. He explained that the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) was given the task of looking at each water body and determining if stocking could be done, and had not completed their review of Lake Solano. Mr. Sykes stated that at this point, the most likely answer is going to be that DFG is going to wait for the native populations to restore themselves to some extent, and that is what will be available for fishing.

Commissioner Riddle wanted to know what the biggest revenue source has been. Mr. Sykes stated that camping constituted approximately 60% of the revenue.

Commissioner Alvarez commented that if we have a revenue source and we lose that source, it is our obligation to find new revenue to supplement that loss. He stated that new revenue sources could be new programs, enhancement of existing programs, and additional revenue based on existing programs. He stated that this is something the commission should focus on in looking for new activities for our parks to supplement additional revenue.

In response to Commissioner Alvarez's inquiry, Mr. Sykes stated that the revenue obligation under the current fiscal year is approximately \$400,000.

Commissioner Alvarez inquired if a new program were to be created if the county would allow manipulation of the park's budget in the current fiscal year. Mr. Sykes stated that it would depend. He stated that if there is sufficient appropriation and there is an expenditure that is not met for some reason, it could be submitted to the Board of Supervisors at mid-year review that we would like to spend those monies elsewhere. Mr. Sykes noted that in the last several years we have not had anywhere near enough money to amend the budget during the year. He stated that there is also the ability to apply for grants. There was some further discussion among the commission and staff regarding budget appropriations and the budget process.

Mr. Sykes stated that the county does have a cost recovery policy. He said the policy is 100%, which in the Park and Recreation Division is generally unachievable unless there is extremely low overhead, a concessionaire provided the services, or contracted service where that cost has been absorbed. He said that one of the things that he wanted to bring to light is that there is a range of cost recovery models that can be incorporated depending on what the service is that is being provided. He said that this is what he wanted to focus today's discussion on. He said that it is his intent to also bring this discussion to other stakeholders, park users, and partners with a goal of being able to present to the Board of Supervisors a cost recovery policy for parks that has more flexibility. Mr. Sykes noted that the last substantial fee increase was in 2009/10 and was a raise in camping fees by \$5 per night.

Commissioner Leong inquired about Lynch Canyon and the use of that area by local Boy or Girl Scout troops. Mr. Sykes said that before something like that could happen there would need to be some facilities developed. He did note that the Lake Solano Nature Center is available for rent and that he has plans in the future to do more marketing in that area.

**B. Status of FWPF and SMSF Grant Projects**

Mr. Sykes stated that the Fish and Wildlife grants from Fiscal Year 2010/11 are currently being closed out, and contracts will soon be issued for 21 newly awarded Suisun Marsh grants. Mr. Sykes stated that he will provide the commission with a more comprehensive update on the grant projects when the new set of Suisun Marsh grant projects are underway.

In response to Commissioner Leong's inquiry, Mr. Sykes stated that all the FY2010/11 Fish and Wildlife grant projects were finished to some extent, but some had been reduced in scope. He noted that a few projects that will be returning some funds unused (Note: current estimate is that approximately 10% of funds will be returned).

Commissioner Alvarez suggested that a future grant proposal might be to pay for an intern or docent to work in the Nature Center and create exhibits.

**9. Workshop Exercise and Discussion: Assessment of park services and cost recovery**

Mr. Sykes explained to the commission the "pyramid" cost recovery methodology. The commission and audience members participated in an exercise evaluating each park service the County provides for whether it offers more of an "individual" benefit or more of a "community" benefit, whether the service meets the vision and mission of Solano County, and how costs for providing each service should be funded. He stated the goal was to consider how we, as a public agency, are working to remain financially sustainable, while supporting those services with the greatest community benefit at the lowest cost to the user.

Participants were split into two working groups to complete the exercise. Mr. Sykes stated that he wanted the groups to discuss the types of park services being provided, how the cost of operating those services are being addressed, and whether user fees are appropriate to recover the costs of providing those services. He stated that he would also like to discuss what kinds of services should be offered that are not currently being provided.

Conclusions reached by the working groups were as follows:

1. **COMMUNITY BENEFIT:** There was general consensus that the following are park services that have relatively higher levels of "community benefit" and/or are services with low cost for the county to provide: volunteer workdays, youth group camping, beach access, walk-in picnicking (non-reserved sites), pick-up games (soccer, volleyball, etc.), and use of the park as a waypoint by individual cyclists/walkers who use restrooms and drinking fountains.
2. **INDIVIDUAL BENEFIT:** There was general consensus that the following park services have a relatively higher level of "individual" benefit, and/or had costs that should be recovered: private outdoor event/picnic, indoor event rental, guided trail events, and group events that use the park as a waypoint along with local roadways (e.g., bike or foot races).
3. **SPONSORED FUNDING:** "Public access to the Nature Center" was an example of a service with relatively high community benefit, but due to higher overhead costs, was more difficult to provide. It could be more reliably provided with the assistance of sponsorships, donations, grants or endowments.

4. **FURTHER DISCUSSION:** For many park services, there was disagreement between the groups over whether the “individual” benefits outweighed the “community” benefits, and therefore justified charging higher use fees. Further discussion at a future time is needed to reach a consensus on these services, including: tent camping, RV camping, pier fishing, shoreline fishing, boat launching, non-motorized craft launching, trail use (individual), and group recreation events that are open to the general public (e.g. trail run, fishing derby).
5. **OTHER POTENTIAL SERVICES:** Participants suggested that County Parks develop more partnerships to provide classes or activities offered by city recreation departments and private parties, and to expand advertising of park services on the County website and internet.
6. Several participants commented that the exercise would be easier to do if the group defined some criteria ahead of time for what a “community benefit” is.

#### **10. Follow-up discussion on park services offered at Lake Solano County Park**

This discussion was combined with the walking tour in Item 11.

#### **11. Walking tour of recent projects at the park, and adjournment**

The commission took a brief walking tour around the Lake Solano Park grounds. Commissioners inspected the improvements made to the Shoreline Interpretive Trail and improvements to campsites such as replacement of picnic tables and grills, which included some discussion on possible ways to improve the sites and camping services. The tour also included inspection of recent grant-funded pavement improvements made at the day use area parking lot and pathways, which have improved the disabled accessibility and attractiveness of these facilities.

Since there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned.