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NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

June 15, 1995

STAFF DIRECTIVE 95-3

TO: Administrative Staff
 Section Chiefs
 District Superintendents
 Park Superintendents
 Program Managers

FROM: Philip K. McKnelly, Director

SUBJECT: Policy for: Natural Resource Management within the State Parks System

This staff directive is issued to clarify the policy for natural resource management within the North Carolina State Parks System. This policy is based on the principles that were established in the early years of the system.

INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Constitution and the State Parks Act, which are the guiding legislation for the North Carolina State Parks System, require the management of natural resources. Article XIV, Section 5, of the North Carolina Constitution sets the overall policy by broadly defining the conservation and protection of natural resources and the acquisition of such resources as a proper function of government. This section reads in part as follows:

"It shall be the policy of this State to conserve and protect its lands and waters for the benefit of all its citizenry, and to this end it shall be a proper function of the State of North Carolina and its political subdivisions to acquire and preserve park, recreation, and scenic areas, to control and limit the pollution of our air and water, to control and limit excessive noise, and in every other appropriate way to preserve as a part of the common heritage of this state its forests, wetlands, estuaries, beaches, historical sites, open land, and places of beauty. "

The State Parks Act [G.S. 113-44.8] states:

"The State of North Carolina offers unique archaeological, geologic, biological, scenic, and recreational resources. These resources are part of the heritage of the people of the State. The heritage of a people should be preserved and managed by those people for their use and for the use of their visitors and descendants."

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The North Carolina State Parks System plays an important role in maintaining, rehabilitating, and perpetuating the State's natural heritage. The natural resources of the State Parks System are: native plants and animals; geological features and landforms; water resources; high quality, rare or representative examples of natural communities; and the natural processes that affect these elements. The primary objective in natural resource management will be the protection of natural resources for their inherent integrity and for appropriate types of enjoyment while ensuring their availability to future generations.

POLICY

Preservation of significant resources shall have priority in the management of park resources. Natural resources will be managed by allowing natural environments to evolve through natural processes with minimal influence from human activities. Division managers will try to maintain all of the components and processes of naturally evolving ecosystems. They will not attempt solely to preserve individual species or individual processes. When intervention is necessary, under the circumstances stated below, direct or secondary effects on park resources will be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Intervention with natural processes may occur:

- 1) to correct or compensate for the disruption of natural processes caused by human activities;
- 2) to protect, restore, or enhance Rare Species and Natural Communities;
- 3) to protect, restore, or enhance significant archaeological resources;
- 4) to construct, maintain, improve, or protect park facilities;
- 5) to prevent danger to human health and safety around park facilities.

All park facilities will be designed, constructed, and maintained to avoid direct and indirect adverse impacts to high quality natural communities, rare plant and animal species, major archaeological sites, and other significant natural and cultural resources.

DEFINITIONS

Natural community

is "a distinct and reoccurring assemblage of populations of plants, animals, bacteria and fungi naturally associated with each other and their physical environment." Natural community characteristics and functions are shaped by the process of evolution and ecological interactions over long periods of time without the overriding influences of modern human activities. 1

Rare Species

are plant and animal species listed by the Natural Heritage Program as Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern, Candidate, or Significantly Rare. Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern plant and animal species have legal protection status from the North Carolina Plant Protection Program and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, respectively. 2

Plants

Endangered - Any species of plant whose continued existence as a viable component of the state's flora is in jeopardy.

Threatened - Any species of plant likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future.

Special Concern - Any species of plant which requires population monitoring, but which may be collected and sold under specific regulations.

Candidate - Any species for which there is not evidence of declining numbers or threats to the species in North Carolina, but which, because of small numbers of populations, rare habitat, or distribution, may become threatened in the future; or a species suspected of being endangered or threatened, but for which sufficient information is not currently available to support such a status classification.

Significantly Rare - Any other species which has not been listed as Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern, or Candidate species, but which has been determined to need monitoring by the Natural Heritage Program.

Animals

Endangered - Any native or once native species of wild animal whose continued existence as a viable component of the State's fauna is determined by the Wildlife Resources Commission to be in jeopardy or any species of wild animal determined to be an "endangered species" pursuant to the Endangered Species Act. Threatened - Any native or once-native species of wild animal which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range, or one that is designated as a threatened species pursuant to the Endangered Species Act.

Special Concern - Any species of wild animal native or once-native to North Carolina, which is determined by the Wildlife Resources Commission to require monitoring but which may be taken under regulations adopted under the provisions of Article 25 of Chapter 113 of the General Statutes.

Significantly Rare - Any other species which has not been listed as an Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern species, but which exists in the state in small numbers and has been determined to need monitoring by the Natural Heritage Program.

Natural processes

are physical events and biological interactions which are not the result of human activities. Natural processes include but are not limited to weather, erosion, natural fire regimes, plant succession, native insect infestation, migration, disease, and population fluctuations.

Significant archaeological resources

are "any material remains of past human life or activities which are at least 50 years old and which are of archaeological interest including pieces of pottery, basketry, bottles, weapons, weapon projectiles, tools, structures or portions of structures, rock paintings, rock carvings, intaglios, graves or human skeletal material" .3

Native plants and animals

are plant and animal species of a park that, as a result of natural processes, occur or occurred on the land or in the waters of that park.

Facilities

are developed recreational sites including, but not limited to, public access roads, trails, park offices and visitor centers, maintenance areas, picnic areas, tent and trailer campgrounds, and boat ramps.

1. Schafale, M.P. and Weakley, A.S. 1990 and as updated. Classification of the Natural Communities of North Carolina; Third Approximation. Natural Heritage Program. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources. Division of Parks and Recreation.

2. Weakley, A.S. 1993 and as updated. The Natural Heritage Program List of the Rare Plant Species of North Carolina. Natural Heritage Program. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources. Division of Parks and Recreation.

LeGrand, H.E., Jr. 1993 and as updated. The Natural Heritage Program List of the Rare Animal Species of North Carolina. Natural Heritage Program. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources. Division of Parks and Recreation.

3. North Carolina General Statute 70 -
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