



Rye Reflections

A change in the wind for NH state parks along Seacoast

Increased usage tests self-funding policy; Is privatization in offing?

Bill (Pappou) Drew



A storm far at sea brings waves to Fort Stark (foreground) and Odiorne Point (in the distance). (photo by Jim Cerny)

There are ten N.H. State Parks along the thirteen-mile coastline of New Hampshire. The first six, traveling north, are Hampton Beach, North Hampton Beach, North Beach, Jenness Beach, Rye Harbor, and Wallis Sands. All are accessible every day all year round. An eleventh is White Island Light Station at the Isles of Shoals, some seven miles out. They are there for everyone to enjoy.

In the past, state government has declared, "Don't look to the state treasury for funds. We have none." Benning Wentworth heard this in 1741, when as Royal Governor of the state he had to rent a brick house on Daniel Street in Portsmouth known as the Warner House. Ten years later when the state refused to build him a residence, he relocated government headquarters to his private home on Little Harbor Road, Portsmouth, now known as the Wentworth-Coolidge mansion. This mansion is now part of the N.H. State Park system. It's operation and management are in conjunction with a separate legal entity called a *partnership*. The condition of the house continues to deteriorate, and funds are urgently needed to preserve this historic treasure.



Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion from Sagamore Creek (photo by Jim Cerny)

The N.H. State Park system which has, until recently, been a fully self-funded organization, has been grappling with some desperately needed long-range planning and action.

In the seacoast region about one-half of the income comes from parking meters along the roads next to the various beaches (summertime only). The other half is through location rentals, concessions, parking fees and the like. With more than 100,000 people visiting each year and increasing, new and improved facilities, and the means to maintain them, become more difficult to finance. During the summer at Hampton Beach, it takes 9-10 hours per night, using mechanized raking equipment, to recover and remove buried trash and washed up refuse. Last year over 200 tons of material was disposed of. Making matters worse is dealing with the problems resulting from major storms which buffet the coast and alter the beach environment.

For the four parks at the northern end of the coastline - Odiorne Point, Fort Stark, Fort Constitution and the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion, raising funds has proved even more difficult and challenging. All four are historic sites, three of them being former military forts. Funds are needed for refurbishment of buildings, improved access to old fortifications, displays of artifacts, activities and accommodations for visitors, and modifying locations for the safety of visitors as many are families with small children. The administration of these rests with the State Park System. Also involved is a separate group, the N.H. Department of Cultural Resources, both under the administration of Director, George Bald, of the Department of Resource and Economic Development.

A national trend to deal with these types of problems is *Privatization*. This method can come in many forms. One course, used particularly in park management, is *Delegation* where cooperation is achieved through private sector participation. A good example of this is the program embarked upon this past summer at Fort Stark. Interested and committed citizens banded together to assist Brian Warburton, Seacoast Regional Director, with improved management of the facility. (See previous Rye Reflection articles relating to this effort [here](#) and [here](#)).

Through *Contract Delegation* there is an agreement reached between the state and a private organization to meet specific needs. Assisting in clean up operations, security, waste disposal, and service type functions come under this category.

Private or franchise delegation are agreements whereby commercial, for profit,

operations are permitted, under contract, enabling the system to service needs in particular areas.

Finally, *public-private partnerships* are used where government and private entities enter into agreements which are involved and usually require long-term commitments and capitalization.

Fort Stark is entering into this stage of the process. It started out with needs; the state sidestepped the problem, the town didn't want any involvement, so citizens began the rescue attempt. Now, where does it go from here? With the positive results of this past summer, the town is now open to avenues to facilitate moving forward in accomplishing the long-term goal, that of improving the situation. A private group is forming as a non-profit entity to legitimize the process of charting a direction and raising funds. Now the big question to be resolved: Does the town take it over and manage it or is it still going to be a state function? What responsibilities would a private entity have and what degree of latitude would be given in attempts to accomplish the mission? With certainty, it will be a joint effort and with difficult decisions to be made. At the moment, many alternatives are being considered.

The most visual and well known of this type arrangement is the Seacoast Science Center (SSC) at Odiorne Point, in Rye. This is not an organization of the N.H. State Park System; it is an independent non-profit organization that operates the Center through a contract with the state. Its horizon is expanded by working in conjunction with organizations such as UNH and environmental and marine science groups both in the local area and worldwide.



The Seacoast Science Center, Odiorne Point, Rye, N.H., at the edge of the Gulf of Maine (photo courtesy of the Seacoast Science Center)

The Center has improved and grown since it opened in 1992 and continues to provide new and engaging programs and exhibits so that regular visits are a must for local residents as well visitors to the Seacoast. The main objective has always been the education of the world around us, particularly with regard to the environment in the Gulf of Maine.

A renewal of the agreement with the state, which has five year renewable options, is currently being negotiated. Questions to the President of the organization, Wendy Lull, were countered with, "No Comment. It's under consideration." There is no question that a considerable amount of investment has been made and a state of the art facility is in use. But what of the financial situation? With a complete analysis and review by both sides, tough decisions loom. It is a success story in what it provides. Can it continue to do so?

A quick summary of everything to see and do there is described in an article [here](#) written by Jan Shepard for the Boston Globe in April of 2007. Information of the Center's activities is always available on-line [here](#). During the winter months the SSC is open to members every day, and open for visitors Saturday-Monday. Visit and you'll be astounded.

GREGG INTERACTIVE STUDIO:

The technology at the core of the Seacoast Science Center's new Gregg Interactive Learning Studio delivers a full suite of new learning opportunities for visitors and schools. Just scanning the list gives a sense of the range of new

programs the Center can offer. The 1,344-square-foot studio is equipped with three high-definition projectors with three abutting 10-foot projection screens and 5.1 Dolby surround sound. Mobile tables are equipped with touch-screen computers. The Studio has green screen production capability (the same technology used to show TV weather maps with the forecaster) which means program participants can “be” anywhere — even “in” the movies. (You can imagine the fun members had being “in” a Godzilla movie during last year’s Family Fun Day.) Using document and microscope cameras and a built-in aquarium, visitors can see little things in a big way when naturalists project very up-close images of live animals during programs.



Gregg Interactive Studio (photo courtesy of the Seacoast Science Center)

A schedule of activities within the Center is available on-line [here](#). Each entry for a particular date in the schedule provides a link to a more complete description of that particular activity.



Wendy Lull, President

Until March 31, every Saturday, Sunday and Monday, at 2:00 pm, a program called GeoAdventures, Assignment: Gulf of Maine, is presented. This is the Center’s premier multi-media, interactive experience that takes advantage of all of the Learning Studio’s lighting, production capabilities and projection technology. Participants are immersed in a theatrical experience and play a key role in its outcome. They “join” three teens on a quest to find geocaches in three locations: atop Mt. Washington, in a salt marsh, and on a lobster boat in the Gulf of Maine. As the teens find the caches

that contain clues to a final take-home message, visitors are prompted to answer questions through activities on touch-screen computer stations. Through this experience, participants learn that everything in the environment is interconnected; that our lives influence the oceans and the oceans influence our lives. This program was funded by a \$250,000 grant from the Little Harbor Charitable Foundation.

OTHER PRESENTATIONS at SSC:

Wendy Lull, President of the Seacoast Science Center, enthusiastically recommends a couple of upcoming special events which will be presented in the next few weeks.

<p>Tuesday, February 26 at 10:30 Immersion Presents will show a virtual tour of Pacific Gray whales migration as they move from Alaska to Mexico. Fee: \$5.00 for members, \$6.00 for non- members - plus SSC admission: \$2.00 or \$ 3.00</p>	<p>Sunday and Monday, March 2nd and 3rd. A <i>live</i> tour with noted marine explorer and researcher who located the Titanic, Dr. Robert Ballard, of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Five shows - 11, 12, 1, 2, 3, Fee \$2.00 for members, \$3.00 for non-members, plus SSC admission: \$2.00 or \$3.00 Reservations preferred.</p>
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For further information and event registration go [here](#) for the February 26 event and [here](#) for the March 2-3 event

As for the other three historical sites, Fort Constitution, Fort Stark, and the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion, a more concerted effort is needed to bring these historic and scenic treasures to the public's attention. As in the case of the the Seacoast Science Center, a combination of various organizations will be needed, including town and state government, working and melding together to bring about change. Up to now, it's been a patchwork of corporations, associations, citizen groups and private charitable organizations.

The state has received the message and reorganized to prepare for the future. A Development and Strategic Plan is being prepared. DRED Director Allison McLean said that SB 74 directs the Division to write a 10-year comprehensive plan, to be put together under the leadership of the Division's park planner, Johanna Lyons. This will be used as the basis for capital and operating budget requests and due to be completed by September 2008.

CONCLUSION as outlined in a study by the state of the funding situation:

"Delegation – use of the private sector to provide a service – can take various forms, but the primary goal is almost always to optimize service quality and efficiency (decreasing cost) by introducing competition among the various possible service providers. Additional benefits may include: the ability to decouple the provision of a service from its production; the increased ability of parks' administrators to focus on core agency functions; the opportunity to inject private expertise and/or capital into a public project. Concerns about privatization include: the possibility that increasing commercialization will threaten the parks mission; the few relevant models from other state parks; the potential fallout from loss of agency control, indirect transaction costs, and/or management failures. Delegation may generally be preferable when a function is not "inherently governmental," but certain circumstances have a greater probability of success than others. In New Hampshire two areas that may benefit from private delegation are retail and custodial operations. The cooperating association model exemplified by the National Parks Service-Eastern National relationship is notable as an example of delegation to a non-profit

corporation. Finally, privatization efforts in other parks systems provide examples of both successes and failures. The case studies should simultaneously warn against poorly planned endeavors and promote interest in the potential roles for the private sector in New Hampshire state parks." (NH Department of Recreational and Economic Development)



David A. Borden, NH State Representative, Rye and New Castle (Jim Cerny photo)



Allison McLean, Director, NH State Parks and Brian Warburton, Director, Seacoast Region (BD)

Responsible leadership will be required if the treasure is to be preserved for future generations. As the saying goes, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." In this case, in addition to the support of government, individuals and groups need to step forward and take action. Peter Rice lead the charge of the Fort Stark Brigade last summer. More action would seem to be desperately needed.

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