

# Rock Climbing Informational Meeting

## Meeting Minutes

Date: 2/15/11

**Present:** Keith D. Shy, Director-Secretary, Carol M. Curtis, Chairman, Rollie H. Bauer, First Vice -Chairman, Frances S. Buchholzer, Second Vice-Chairman. Also in attendance were Rob Curtis, Rob Peters, Doug Shepard, Abraham Nabors, Brian Sabourin & Shannon Hasenstab

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### Introduction/Agenda-Keith D. Shy

- Keith D. Shy, Director-Secretary, introduced himself and indicated the parameters of the meeting in how it would be conducted. Introduction of topic was announced. Mr. Shy introduced each one of the Commissioners and staff to Mr. Sabourin and Mr. Nabors.
- Mr. Sabourin introduced himself and Mr. Nabors to the Board and staff. Packets were distributed to all by Mr. Sabourin for preparation of topics.

### PowerPoint Presentation-Brian Sabourin, President-Northeast Ohio Climbers Coalition (NEOCC)

- Discussion and presentation were given by Mr. Sabourin, titled "*An Overview of Climbing in Northeast Ohio*"
  - **Why should we consider?**
  - **Environmental impact**
  - **Liability**
- **The need for change** resulted in reports of 35,000 participants that currently are involved in the activity of rock climbing in NE Ohio. The 3 largest park systems in NE Ohio (CVNP, CMP and MPSSC), provide only 1 outdoor climbing area, Whipps Ledges. It would be the 1<sup>st</sup> and only outdoor rock climbing location in Summit County.
- **Environmental impacts**-While environmental impact is important, the group is very conscientious of this, and would offer to work with Metro Parks to help lay out a plan in which they can help clean and maintain trails and anything else associated with costs. Every year, climbers hold over 100 stewardship events across the U.S. These are generally clean-ups and trail work. Climbers and land managers implement creative ideas to reduce environmental impact. This includes using anchors and bolts (which also can be camouflaged), to eliminate the use of trees and minimizes environmental impact, as well as seasonal closures and trail routing per Mr. Sabourin.
- Commissioner Curtis inquired if these were permanent anchors. It was explained that there is a group called Anchor Replacement Initiative (ARI) that travels across the U.S. and has experienced climbers that come in, drill into the rock replacing old bolts and install permanent stainless steel bolts. For any new areas, the group would have climbers with bolt replacement experience install the stainless steel anchors and bolts. Legitimate rock climbing will discourage illegal access and offsite vandalism.
- **Liability**- The NEOCC had spoken with 2 lawyers who assessed the recreational use of rock climbing. Ohio has a *Recreational Use Statute* in place for private landowners since 1963. Public owners were incorporated into the recreational statute in 1975. It was

determined that by excluding climbing as a permitted use, Metro Parks, Serving Summit County is not protected from liability to climbers under the statute, ORC 1533.18. By not prohibiting it, we are allowing it.

When asked by Commissioner Curtis if Cleveland Metroparks was crowded, Mr. Sabourin replied no, but that the personal liability coverage is through homeowners or renters policy. Most climbers do not get permits because they lack these policies whether it is due to cost or because they don't need homeowners renters insurance. However, on any given nice day, you will find climbers accessing the rocks. (Cleveland Metroparks currently has a \$300,000 liability insurance requirement. Metro Parks holds a \$1 million liability insurance requirement according to Mr. Shy.)

Mr. Sabourin gave examples of how universities, camps and gyms now have indoor rock-climbing walls and more climbers are starting to get on board. In 2 week's time, he had received over 300 hand signatures petitioning for rock climbing in the Metro Parks. Per Mr. Nabors, the rise of indoor climbing gyms has made it catch on by today's youth exploring it as another recreational activity.

### Questions/Comments

- Commissioner Bauer's biggest concern was the environmental impact and protecting our mission. If we let climbers come in to our parks, then others will ask for other activities be included in the parks. As re-iterated before, Mr. Sabourin commented that protecting the environment and serving constituents are what the NEOCC would like to work with Metro Parks on in coordinating efforts to minimize impact. Rock climbing is a low-impact, non-motorized activity with a significant user group population, as commented by Mr. Sabourin.
- Locations were mentioned as possible venues: Liberty Park and Gorge Metro Park. Starting off small and doing it right are important factors when initiating a new activity. Mr. Shy mentioned that we would only focus on Gorge Metro Park, as Liberty Park have many restrictions with funding we have received, and issues that others are not aware of. He said that we are being asked to change our rules and regulations by allowing rock climbing and that if the Commissioners decide to pursue this venture, this is a lengthy process and will take time. Mr. Shy asked Mr. Sabourin that his group provide specifics as exactly where to climb and what other criteria is needed before proceeding any further.
- Mr. Shy had asked Mr. Sabourin for the names of the 2 attorneys that they received advisement from. Mr. Sabourin did say that one of the attorneys specifically asked that his name not be revealed, but that he would certainly make efforts to ask him again. Mr. Shy also inquired as to the names Mr. Sabourin had spoken with from Cleveland Metroparks. Mr. Sabourin provided the names Mike Barnhart, whom he spoke with about a year ago, and John Mack, whom he spoke to a few weeks ago. After acquiring information from Mr. Sabourin, he agreed to email Shannon Hasenstab, Executive Secretary, the information.
- Commissioner Curtis addressed the issue of rescue, and the need to study options. Mr. Shy said that at this present time, the Metro Parks does not have the capability to perform rescues. Seeing as this is a specialized area of expertise, we would also have to consult with other entities to assess further information. There have been cutbacks due to budget purposes. Mr. Nabors responded by saying that access to safety points is more important for rescue depending on the location. He personally feels that this would not be as much of concern as other parks that require specialized rescues. Mr. Sabourin commented that any injury that might occur, would be on the ground.

- Mr. Sabourin gave a few references in case anyone had questions of resources:
  - “Outdoor Participation Report (Outdoor Industry Foundation 2009 & 2010)
  - “The Outdoor Recreation Economy” (Outdoor Industry Foundation 2006)
  - “Losing Ohio’s Future (FDR Group 2009)
  
- Mr. Shy and the Commissioners concluded the meeting by thanking Mr. Sabourin and Mr. Nabors for enlightening them, and commended them for providing such a well presented presentation.