

## **Report on Meeting of NPHA Task Force on Rate Approvals and Standards**

The NPHA Task Force on Rate Approval met by conference call on December 21, 2009, beginning at 10:30 AM EST. Chairman John Rutter led the session. Participants were:

John Rutter, Grand Teton Lodge Company  
Bill Butts, Forever Resorts  
Bob Concienne, ARAMARK  
Derrick Crandall, NPHA  
Cindy Ognjanov, Glacier Park Inc.  
Terry Sides, Forever Resorts  
Trina Smith, Xanterra  
Scott Socha, Delaware North Companies  
Steve Tedder, Xanterra  
Dave Woodside, Acadia

The task force approved an agenda proposed by Chairman Rutter:

- 1) plan follow up actions on the November letter to Director Jarvis, including responding to Jo Pendry's request that we identify the highest priorities among requested actions;
- 2) development of recommendations to NPS on the SERA process, including our recommendations on pilots and priorities;
- 3) consideration of a new paradigm for NPS/concessioner relations built around: visitor experience standards; park resource management and protection goals; and a third party audit of performance by concessioners; and
- 4) discussion of the Task Force's role in the March 7-10, 2010, NPHA meeting.

The task force discussed the seven requested actions in the November 13 letter to Director Jarvis (attached). The task force reiterated its belief that national direction on each of the issues raised is important and should occur prior to the peak season of 2010. After discussions about strategies to pursue each issue, the task force agreed to three steps:

- 1) Derrick Crandall is asked to communicate to Jo Pendry our strong support for prompt action on issues 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 through a national guidance memorandum, and to request an opportunity to discuss these five issues in a conference call with Ms. Pendry during the week of January 18, prior to meetings with key regional directors;
- 2) The remaining issues are referred to the Marketing Committee for follow-up (websites and unique mark);
- 3) The issues will be reformatted for discussion during the regional directors meetings, as well as at the March NPHA meeting.

The task force then reviewed the latest information on the SERA process and reported little or no indication of communications with the NPS Commercial Services office during the fall of 2009. The task force noted that the October presentation to the Concessions Management Advisory Board by the NPS Commercial Services office (see

[www.concessions.nps.gov/document/2009AdvisoryBoard\\_SERA.pdf](http://www.concessions.nps.gov/document/2009AdvisoryBoard_SERA.pdf)) had indicated plans for substantial actions by now, including (1) a survey of concessioners regarding perspectives on current rate approval processes; (2) comparison of NPS rate approval processes against industry standards; (3) convening of park/concessioner workgroups to discuss surveys and benchmarks; (4) at least two pilot efforts designed to test alternative rate approval processes; and (5) develop draft recommendations for changed processes. Task force expressed interest in active involvement in the SERA process and hopes that the program, long delayed, would make substantial progress in 2010. The task force agreed to the following steps:

- 1) Derrick Crandall is to communicate with Jo Pendry and ask for a status report on SERA efforts;
- 2) Derrick is also asked to schedule a webinar on SERA involving appropriate NPS staff, if possible, during the week on January 18, and designed to help task force members become actively engaged in SERA.

The task force then considered a draft document prepared by Chairman Rutter and Derrick Crandall urging the SERA process to fulfill direction in the National Park Service Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998 to pursue “a National Park Service concessions programs and procedures more cost effective, more process efficient, less burdensome, and timelier.” The document urged consideration of significant changes in process, including reliance on clear standards for visitor services and facility management and third party measurement of compliance with these standards and with guest satisfaction, using contemporary systems. The paper urged abandonment of the burdensome process of rate approval on specific services and products. The task force discussed the paper at length and asked Derrick Crandall to revise the paper to include specific references to ISO standards, to include references to previously-expressed goals for SERA and to use current processes such as “Core Menus” and “Competitive Market Declarations” as examples of preferred models. The task force agreed to further discuss alternative models employed by other federal and state agencies for concessioner oversight.

Finally, the task force discussed plans for the March 2010 NPHA annual meeting near Washington, DC. The meeting will be held at the Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City and will include sessions at Interior and Capitol Hill, as well as involvement in a portion of the meeting of the NPS Concessions Management Advisory Board. The CMAB meeting will start on Tuesday afternoon, March 12. The task force agreed to:

- 1) ask Chairman Rutter to schedule a task force meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting;
- 2) also ask Chairman Rutter to seek time at the NPHA annual meeting for a presentation by the task force; and
- 3) to ask Chairman Rutter and Derrick Crandall to seek out involvement of key hospitality standards organizations, including AAA, to participate in the task force meeting as well as to provide comments at the CMAB meeting.

The meeting concluded at noon.

December 22, 2009