

**Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area Climbing Management Plan  
Workshop 1B – August 25, 2020 Notes and Agenda**

**Agenda**

- 6:00-6:25 Alex Schlueter introduction and presentation
- 6:25-6:35 Questions on presentation/process
- 6:35-7:40 Small group discussions (self-introductions and follow questions)
- 7:40-8:00 Report out from each group

## **6:00-6:25 Alex Schlueter introduction and presentation**

There was a delayed start due to technical difficulties and Andrew Leich, President of Cheat Canyon Climbers Coalition gave input before having to leave early:

- They mainly climb in Coopers Rock and Cheat Canyon area. They recently collaborated with Coopers Rock SF to create a CMP – bolting and environmental issues (they will send to Alex). Long history of misinformation spread about a bolting ban. Brought up gaining access to Champe Rocks – if this happened, it could boost tourism/economy. Landowners have given 4C permission to access (requires whitewater canoe to access). Would FS be willing to work to gain climber access to area: maybe propose a gravel parking lot?

## **6:25-6:35 Questions on presentation/process**

- What is FS policy on drones – Responded that they are allowed on FS land. Not allowed in Wilderness or to endanger others.
- Question about Alex's recreation background
- Seneca feels different to people because there is a sense of adventure. Can that coexist with sport climbing and a larger group of people? How specifically does this address the Seneca Rocks area? Response is that everybody looks at this differently. Described the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and how recreation is designated during the planning process. Our Forest Plan only mentions climbing 3 times. Allows more room for the Responsible Official to make decisions. Boundary of the CMP could expand if feedback dictates.

## **6:35-7:40 Small group discussions**

There were approximately 12 participants so it was not necessary to split into smaller groups. The following pages are the notes guided by discussion questions.

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**Notes**

**1. Self-Introductions of Group Leader and participants**

**2. Code of conduct and technology tips**

- Be courteous and respectful of other people's opinions: failure to adhere to this, or other inappropriate behavior, may result in removal from the meeting
- Be understanding of the limitations of the technology and exercise patience if and when technical problems arise
- Mute your microphone when not speaking; non-verbal communication is encouraged (nodding; thumbs up, hand-raising etc.)
- Be mindful of lag in audio and consider allowing some space between speaking
- Be mindful that you are on camera and try to avoid things that could cause a distraction

**3. What do you value about the area or crag(s) that you climb in this area? Please be specific as to which places you are associating your response with. (15 min)**

**Further leading questions:**

- **What motivates you to select that crag? Is it the setting, the social scene, something else?**
- **How is this area different from others you could have visited instead?**

<b>Area/Crag</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Reeds Creek	This is not a “destination” crag like Seneca Rocks is, but on those days you don’t want to climb SR, this is a great option. It has a couple easy sport climbs. Some enjoy leading climbs at Reeds whenever they don’t feel like doing trad.
Franklin Gorge (this is on private land)	This was big sport climbing area, prior to Smoke Hole area becoming developed.
Smoke Hole	This area provides a great opportunity for beginner climbers. It’s a good place to teach sport climbing. It is some of the higher quality sport climbing within 4 hours of DC.
Seneca Rocks	The quality of the rocks is worlds famous. Mountaineering history. <b>Adventure climbing area (multipitch, 300’ tall).</b> Not a lot of options like this within DC/MD/VA area. South peak can <u>only</u> be accessed by climbing. Length/amount of rock that can be accessed at one time. <b>Great place to teach trad climbing.</b> Campground is less busy than New River Gorge.
Champe Rocks	There are a lot of lines to be established on Champe. Champe has seen little traffic since Army trained.

	<p>Mostly multipitch, but some single pitch. Walls are littered with pins from the 1940s. Has a unique culture that deserves preservation. The quality of rock varies, so it is unsure how well it would develop as a crag.</p> <p><b>Rock sometimes reaches up to 800' and there is only one other place (Cannon Mtn, NH – Old Man in Granite) on the East coast with rocks to these heights. (Some participants say there is only 300-400' total height?)</b></p> <p>Slackliners also have interest in this area</p>
Nelson Rocks (on private land)	Possibility of a 7-pitch climb
North Mountain (chimneys, half moon bowl)	<p>Heinous hike to access</p> <p>This is a hub for the East coast slacklining/highlining community of about 50-100 people and growing (note: slackliners don't want to appear to be "hiding"/flying under the radar and they want to be included in these conversations)</p>

#### 4. What would you like the experience at your favorite crag(s) to be like 20 years from now? (10 min)

- Would love to see trail erosion addressed and see trails established, resources protected.
- Would like to see more areas opened up, or at least hear why they are not open. Better base of knowledge on access. Map that shows property (Forest Service/private) ownership (Alex provided link to the land status and encumbrance map). A lot of information relies on hearsay.
- Range of experience (difficult to easy), Solutions for trail erosion, defined regulations on bolting, protect Threatened and Endangered species, education to new climbers and public, decide where toilets can be placed – if they cannot be placed, how is waste going to be managed, involve local economy (campgrounds, guided services, rentals, etc.), opportunity to coordinate with slack liners (for safety), reach out to local groups and organizations. [participant will provide a more detailed list via email]
- **Local community gets to be involved! Culture of local community needs to be supported.**
- Address all user groups (definitely all aspects of climbing, but also other recreating groups). Who can use what, where? Everyone wants to use public land and uses do not always coexist well.
- **Environmental Impacts** – Maintain local flora/fauna (Seneca Rocks has unique species). Manage nonnative invasive plants.

**5. What issues are you currently experiencing that prevent you from the experience you just described? Are there any issues you anticipate becoming an obstacle to the experience you envisioned 20 years from now? (20 min)**

Site-Specific Issues:

Area/Crag	Notes
Reeds Creek	There was a kickstarter campaign to get guide book produced, anchors placed years ago. In the future, who will check on viability of these bolts/anchors?
Smokehole	Parking – see elaboration below table
Franklin Gorge (this is on private land)	Information on access at Franklin is unclear/contradictory.
Champe Rocks	<p>Have to cross private property and this has caused problems in the past. Landowner allowed them to cross the field and then must wade river. Extremely steep on the other side. Some other landowners have allowed access over their bridges (easy, 20 min hike). Not sure if this area could handle the volume, if developed. Older landowners have no interest in making a campground – younger generation could consider it in the future. Some landowners dispute the claim that Champe is on NF land. Landowners are not willing to sell – possibly an easement?</p> <p>Remoteness and access makes rescues difficult!</p> <p>In 1990s, it was said that only local people could obtain access to Champe. Access was touchy for non-locals, possibly due to the fact that they were less able to develop rapport with landowners.</p> <p>Problems stemmed from 1985 flood. Some landowners did not think they were treated fairly).</p>

General Issues:

- Rescue has become a longer process than it was 30 years ago. There seems to be no logical or clear process. Who gets notified, when? Who is in charge? (This is mostly applicable for Seneca Rocks. Not aware this is needed elsewhere).
- Concern over the closure of climbing areas in the future (going the way of Franklin or Nelson Rocks).
- Parking at areas other than Seneca Rocks. Parking will be out of control at Smokehole in 20 years due to increase in usage. Jess Judy and Big Bend have some infrastructure in place already. May need to stress carpooling to reduce number of spots needed. The FS needs to be proactive! There is also a need to locate a safe place to park where resources are protected.
- Human waste. Already an issue at Seneca Rocks. This will definitely be an issue where there are no existing porta potties. Possibly provide wag bags (look at Red Rocks)? Look to other successful climbing areas for their ideas on handling trash (microtrash like cigarettes).
- Wildlife can become aggressive in obtaining food left behind.

- Erosion at Guidewall.
- Educating climbers on behaviors
- **Overarching issue – large influx in people! Will exacerbate all of the other issues listed. More slackliners will be expected at Seneca Rocks since there aren't as many options on the East coast (Better gear, more resources on the internet.)**

**6. Lastly, are there any organizations or individuals not represented today that you feel need to be a part of this planning process?**

- Environmental stewardship and conservation groups (Sierra Club, **The Nature Conservancy**, etc.)
- Smoke Hole – talk with water users (canoers, kayakers) especially for parking usage.
- Michael Gray – has great knowledge about the bolting at Smoke Hole
- Local Emergency Medical Services
- Families that own ground around crags (Yokums, Harpers, Champe owners - Kisamore)



## 7:40-8:00 ~~Report out from each group~~ Closeout

Anecdotally, usage at Seneca Rocks and other areas has been increasing in recent years. This is a consensus among long-time climbers!

### Data Resources:

- 1994 Report has a census. 20,000 climbers to Seneca Rocks that year. Survey was supposed to be repeated. It likely undercounted, as people gave up before finishing survey.
- Alpine Club – State of Climbing report
- Outdoor Foundation – outdoor participation report

Seneca Rocks Opportunity Area Plan – Alex getting copy of this historical document

Participants are seeking clarity on the access issues. Average climber needs more information. Ethics of certain areas. What is allowed in certain areas (e.g. where can bolts be added?). Would like to see the CMP lay out which areas are open and what is allowed at each one.

**Strong agreement that Seneca Rocks remain a trad area. Hopefully climbing community can come to a consensus – needs a lot more conversation!**

Important to consider trees used for rappelling at cliff tops (controversial topic).

Possibly could become an issue in 50 years: the need to permit users (pay to climb)

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