

**Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area Climbing Management Plan
Workshop 1C – August 27, 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

6:35-7:40 Small group discussions

There were approximately 10 participants so it was not necessary to split into smaller groups. The following pages are the notes guided by discussion questions.

**Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area Climbing Management Plan (CMP)
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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?**

Area/Crag	Notes
Seneca Rocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bedrock, foundation stone: literally our roots - Seneca is one of last places to adopt Yosemite grading system - Ethics are high <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Bolts placed as last resort <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Bolts are a responsibility, not just a right” ▪ Should be highly careful about bolting ▪ Trad values - Unique nature of Seneca: has been regarded as “only place in East Coast you need to do technical climbing to reach the summit” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Only place in east coast to gain experience/skills necessary to climb places like the Tetons, etc. o Similar to Gunks style o As Seneca gets more bolted, that disappears <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Example: necessity to build own trad anchors as opposed to bolted belay stations ▪ Adding more bolts & bolted stations is a fundamental change to what Seneca has been about for decades - Climbs are committing and require specific trad skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Preserving this = encouraging skills in up-and-coming climbers so they have these skills in even more committing places like Tetons - Allows climber to do things and skills that were needed and learned in the past - There are easy areas such as North Face and East Face

Champe	- "Wild area"
Smoke Hole & Reeds Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beautiful places - Community has done best we can to have good trails and good belay areas at bottom of cliff - Good mix of easy and hard routes - This area has always had a consideration for the impact of climbing on nature - After Franklin, Smoke Hole was the place where climbing and activism worked together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Put up fewer routes in 10 years than other active bolting areas due to being careful and having high consideration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Searching for those best routes - This area provides recreation money into local economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Mike Gray's guidebook took local economy/stores/etc. into consideration to promote local economy for the visiting climbers - Active, vibrant, historic culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Helps people to understand that the climbing community is not just climbers: community first and climbers are at a place that have been their home since they were writing the constitution - Highest concentration of easy/moderate routes - There are teaching stations: an anchor system at ground-level so people can safely practice anchor techniques without being off the ground (only Reed's & Guide Walls) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o This makes these areas a great new climber spot for both climbing and learning necessary skills
Franklin	- Used to be accessible but no longer due to impacts

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

Area/Crag	Notes
Smoke Hole & Reeds Creek area Campgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Want Seneca Shadows, Big Bend, & Jess Judy to be run by locals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o All of these operated by Utah company, not a local company (American Land & Leisure) o Some of the highest grossing campgrounds within Monongahela National Forest o Often, money that does stay local ends up in Seneca rather than Smoke Hole o Ex: historic picnic area was neglected/unsafe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ American Land & Leisure took over, neglected ▪ Got together funds to rebuild but did not take advice about spring floods so parking lot/area was destroyed ▪ Picnic area was closed then dismantled despite there being local contractors/people willing to restore the area

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is one way in which not having locals involved in the management has seriously impacted the enjoyment of the area for everyone ▪ Issue: legal to go and camp here even though technically all area around it not allowed to camp on - If we increase parking & trails, want them to look as natural and unintrusive as possible - Locals have been dealing with impact and mitigating impact while Seneca sends their overflow climbers, doing all they can to be proactive as locals and outdoorspeople <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not want these additional regulations or plan implementation to be not local
General/All Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wants mechanism in place that holds guide services (and university groups, any groups) accountable to impact they create <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need to contribute back ○ Needs to be mandatory and not just good-willed gestures ○ (need to understand difference between guiding and instructing in this for this) ○ Example: guiding 15 students has a high impact on the crag and environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limiting class size? ▪ Sometimes class/group size limits are circumvented by having a specific guide-to-student ratio so total number of people needs to be limited ○ Example: some services just try to take as many people as possible for profit but this crowds crags, especially when bringing more people than reasonable related to the size of the climbing area ○ There are currently some limitations at Seneca ○ Example: Seneca specific - “convenience bolting” (anchors not sport bolting) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General climbing ethics: do not go back and bolt a climb/belay stations without consulting first ascent-ers/original climbers (this refers specifically to adding bolts not added by first ascent-ers) ▪ Specifically Seneca: bolts at SSS (climbing route) that were not there for decades and first ascent-ers were not consulted; first pitch of Totem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For SSS: not many people do second pitch so this would be convenient to rappel off, esp. for guide services ▪ Reason: bolts placed (unofficially) by guide services to facilitate teaching ▪ This is not so much to benefit the climbing community but to benefit the guiding companies ○ Do not want Seneca to be based on the convenience of people to avoid them learning skills

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ These may be added for general climber safety, not necessarily guide companies ▪ possibility that each belay station would be bolted in the future ○ This may need to be a full workshop for discussion purposes and due to differing opinions in the climbing community, this is not a consensus in the community - Keep different areas within Monongahela National Forest as different climbing and close to the crags' local ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: Seneca is mainly trad, Smoke Hole/Reeds is bolted/sport
Seneca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See bullet point above for "convenience bolting" - Deforestation has been noticed along the road so would like to see the nature and wild of the area preserved - Uninterrupted scenic value - Land behind Seneca is for sale for years now, developers want to turn it into vacation home area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Possibility of the Forest Service to acquire? ○ These would interrupt the viewshed
Champe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Want to see access to Champe Rock (perhaps Access Fund could help coordinate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Part of it private property and private property is the access point so difficult to get to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guides at Seneca are taking people to Champe on regular basis so there is some dry land access from far side of river? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This access may be an agreement with the land owners
Cave Mountain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Want to see access to this area - Route development suspended due to bat activity (hibernaculum for bats in this area) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understood that this may be a very important place for a bat species globally - Good climbing so can we look deeper into this interaction?
Blue Rock Old House Big Bend & lower Smoke Hole canyon places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People could load gear into a side-by-side/overlander and head down There to climb even though it is not allowed in this area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ lack of enforcement of these ATVs by Forest Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signs have been removed, can we add another/more? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "no motor vehicle operation beyond this point" ▪ Is gate possible? or did erosion take out original gate? ○ Vehicles are accessing through day-use parking for Big Bend

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)

Area/Crag	Notes
Smoke Hole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Picnic area: able to camp here in small spot even though not allowed in land all around
All Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Currently, unless a developed Forest Service recreation site, there are no regulations requiring dogs to be on-leash o Problems: dogs create huge impact (dig pits, chase wildlife, poop on trails, bark, etc.) o Dogs might not belong at climbing areas in general - Increased impact of people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Example: social trails o Want to make sure there are funds/resources to make it possible for local climbing orgs to apply for grants/money for fixing things that need to be fixed - Increase in the number of new outdoor climbers is not correlating with an increase in people participating in stewardship of the crags <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Climbing outing numbers need to be matching with promotion of and responsibility for stewardship
Seneca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drones <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Unsafe to be so close to climbers and increasing in numbers o Currently illegal in national parks but how enforced? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enforcement is difficult ▪ Possible to require registration/permitting, pay fee, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just like guiding/outfitting anything else on public lands ▪ Possible to have more strict clearance regulations (like must stay 100ft away from climber) for a middle ground? o Drones interfere with communication, detract from experience, endanger wildlife, and operated without clearance or respect o Swoop close and around, can cause dangerous distraction o Drone photography services for climbers/others o Very rare to have drone-free days now o This is more specific to Seneca area than others like Smoke Hole (due to trees/other obstructions) - Constant loud droning engine of limestone quarry a distance away <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Are there noise policies for companies such as these? o Sound management or minimizing sound disturbance
Champe Rock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grid bolted now - Peregrine falcon nesting territory has been bolted

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

Ohio Climbers Coalition

- Seneca is a popular destination climbing spot for Ohio residents

American Mountain Guides Association representative

Guide Services in Seneca (some were present for first two meetings)

Pennsylvania has an active climbing community (present in last two meetings)

- Pittsburgh-based local climbing org

West Virginia University (already part of this)

Get locals involved

GENERAL COMMENTS

- Concern: decision by Forest Service that there should be a CMP and now we're trying to find out what it should look like; as opposed to asking if we need a climbing plan
- Consider separating policy from things that are legally required to go through National Environmental Policy Act planning process
- 1970s: meeting with forest service who made compromises, ten years later: 180 degree reversal of Forest Service policy
- Are we able to have a more flexible plan?
- How do we balance the profit that local community gets from climbing with the value of climbing?