



Baxter State Park Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

BSP Headquarters, April 30, 2016

BSP Advisory Attendees: Richard Bray, Tom Goetz, R Michael White, Tom Bradbury, Doug Callnan, Jeff Dubis, Anne Huntington, Erica Kaufmann, Laurie Nale, David Wilson

BSP Advisory Absentees: Eric Baxter, Bob Baribeau, Rosemary Hastings, Steve Hutnak, Darrell Morrow

BSP Staff Attendees: Jensen Bissell, Acadia Tripp, Stewart Guay, Christine Theriault, Georgia Manzo

Chair Rick Bray called the meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. and following introductions, asked that the minutes of the February 25 Polycom Sites meeting be accepted. Nale noted that to accurately reflect the minutes, the status of the art committee discussion should be added, as well as the mention of the possibility of a member of the Advisory attending the AT meetings. A motion was made to accept the minutes as amended, all in favor. Motion passed. It was mentioned that if the Advisory wants to participate in the AT meetings or the less formal follow-up meetings, arrangements can be made via Polycom. Bissell mentioned that the remote meeting platform may be changed, expressing reservations regarding the University of Maine Polycom being used by the Park – an outside agency. BSP may look at laptops or other casual means. Dubis suggested that he discuss the Park's status using the UM Polycom system with site coordinator Leslie Kelly at UMFK. If UM has no objections to BPS use of the system we might continue with this practice. Dubis will get back to Bissell after talking with Kelly.

This meeting is Bray's last as Chair. Tom Goetz is the Vice Chair and next in line. He expressed that personal considerations and distance are factors and is happy to help where needed but that an officer position is not necessary. Bray motioned that the committee elect Laurie Nale as chair. The motion was seconded. With no other nominations, Nale was elected unanimously with a show of congratulations and applause around the table. Goetz will continue as Vice Chair.

Park staffing changes were outlined including the change from two trail leaders and one supervisor, to two trail specialists (42-week positions), for which we are currently interviewing. Theriault explained title changes. This has been a difficult hiring process, having had to re-advertise the positions - partly because for the first time, a candidate refused the offer because he did not want to move to Millinocket. It was mentioned that AMC also had trouble filling similar positions.

The year-round Supervisor-Ranger position recruiting process has begun, and there may be some potential in-house competition for this position. Bissell mentioned that the staff is strong right now with the promotion of Chief Ranger Guay who has effectively united the ranger staff, the hiring of Interpretive Specialist Acadia Tripp, and other internal shifts in responsibility.

The Advisory contact list was reviewed and there were some corrections noted.

Bissell mentioned that Eric Baxter has been on the Advisory Committee for many years as a member of the Baxter family. This is a very active committee, and Baxter is amenable to stepping down as an active member, while continuing to offer services where needed. Bissell has spoken with Steve West who has spent a lot of time in the Park and who is interested. Former BSP Advisor Mike Perry is also interested and both will be pursued to potentially fill the two seats vacated by Bray (termining off) and Eric Baxter. Advisory was invited to suggest other possible new committee members.

The AT Hiker Permit Card System is in place following discussions with the ATC and the ME ATC. All northbound thru-hikers, section hikers and flip-flop hikers entering BSP in 2016 will be required to secure an AT card. It was decided that Monson was the best location to distribute the registration cards. The ATC will not participate in the distribution of BSP AT Hiker Permit Cards, but BSP will be placing a kiosk at the ATC Visitor Center in Monson that will provide registering AT hikers with a voucher exchangeable for a permit card once they have reached the Park. ATC traffic has increased 8% annually since 1991. An ethics based "things you should know" poster as well as stickers displaying the three behavior suggestions (hike in small groups, celebrate quietly and leave the alcohol for later) will be displayed in various locations, and pocket cards will be provided. The messages will start at Harper's Ferry and brought north. It is anticipated that this will be a 2-4 year process. At the end of 2016 BSP will review the process and revise as needed.

Long-term maintenance will include a receipt with rudimentary information, and enforcement will be casual but that may change over time. The majority of cards will come from thru-hikers and the trail section between Monson and Katahdin Stream will produce 90% of the card distribution. It was noted that misinformation is out there in social media; permit systems are not a new idea, and park users want to miss large crowds. Bissell noted that any process like this takes time. Be prepared to talk about how it works. Cards purchased (2,500 count) cost around \$2,000. Cards are numbered and will be recorded and cards will be colored/numbered by year. Bray commended Bissell and others involved with a "hats off to all" for their ability to look at the complexities of this potentially difficult issue and cooperatively develop a process at which to start. (Outline of the program is available and in the meeting packet.)

The budget discussion started with Bissell thanking Theriault for managing the brunt of the budget monitoring and reporting process. The budget itself has benefited from the donation from The Baxter Park Wilderness Fund. Theriault then highlighted the details of the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget, focusing on the financial order request process, the operations budget, personnel services, insurances, and capital, explaining breakdowns and fielding various related questions. Theriault

stated that uniforms were not in the budget due to a ruling by the governor requesting no union side arrangements going forward – everything must be in the contract. The grandfathered employees had dry cleaning benefits. Now, Connie Theriault washes Park uniforms. Theriault also explained that the stipend for interns was increased to ensure qualified candidates (three interns for six months starting in May and working with the Interpretive Specialist, and two the end of June working in the SFMA). Medical services increased due to Hepatitis B shots being required for field personnel. The SFMA Certification cost is \$40,000 for a five-year period; and the SFMA committee decided not to pursue certification in 2016 as it provided no market advantage, among other reasons. Workers Comp premiums are steady/reasonable. Auto insurance is up due to some Park vehicles traveling outside of the park and requiring more coverage for replacement. Information Technology budget changed as new IT contractors have changed how we operate internally and the Park is moving away from ME.gov and using Google, pulling away from OIT to a degree. Google is meeting the retention and security protocols well. Capital projects were discussed including the website renovation and reservation system changes. The fleet rotation looks good and the Park will be purchasing used vehicles for the campgrounds. White asked about whether leased vehicles had been considered. The Park prefers to have control (maintenance, flexibility with outright purchases, i.e. good deals, concern about use of decals, radio mountings as examples). The snowmobile inventory rotates but does not increase in number. Renovations at headquarters include moving the small first floor conference room and postage meter station to the second floor in order to expand the reservation office for the sake of noise reduction and elbow room. Installation of new solar panels at Togue Pond is in progress. (Budget details are available and were in meeting packet.)

BSP 1.2 rule review discussion surrounded the issue of groups of more than 12 people camping in the Park at specific locations. The definition of groups is unclear from a legal and policy perspective. Initially, it referred to organized large groups such as the Boy Scouts. Visitor impact is the issue. Bissell looked to the Advisory for input and advice. Theriault explained that the Reservations Office had, in the past, opportunities to educate with the prior hands-on system, but the online reservation system now in place doesn't offer that communication. The Reservation Office is struggling to define acceptable group parameters. Discussion included that LE Rangers and Campsite Rangers can educate as needed; with undefined groups, behavior becomes the question; it isn't happening often; silent issues are occurring; often, visitors do not always read the rules; the kind of behavior that is expected would be helpful (already in place); flagging would be adversely viewed and reservation staff should not be put in the position to decide what is a "group". Theriault explained that flagging would only occur with a negative experience, and only when law enforcement had to get involved. In following years, the flagged group would have educational talk but would not be refused a reservation. Huntington noted that this is similar to the AT Hiker issue in that sometimes just two people can cause disruption, when large groups may not. Bissell will consider all discussion points.

The Media Policy review was requested by Bissell in order to get needed feedback from the Advisory as to the number of permits per year and the nature of the permits, as some circumstances make administration difficult. It may be time to find common breakout points and

screen out, in advance, various activities that are unacceptable. The Park's permit cost and fine are both minimal and may not cover enforcement efforts. Discussion included that organized production companies may need to carry different weight levels; fees are not weighted to the style of production; part of the permitting process may be to require an assigned guide with set fees; charging equally, in a sense, punishes those who do respect the rules, so perhaps a credit at some point through the monitored process would be appropriate if they do not appear to be a problem; develop a pdf of concerns (difficult to encapsulate); average permit numbers are six per year; contractual language may be necessary with a tiered responses; the issue is the outcome, not the number of people; the Authority would say that the park is not set up for this purpose when referring to the trust, but where is the line? What is the AG's opinion? A legal review of the permit would be helpful; asking if the company or any of the crew is being compensated may be necessary. The Park does not have a commercial use policy. The issue is not commercial use, it is disruption. A set of criteria (parameters) to filter fair and transparent permitting was suggested. Bissell said that all comments were helpful and he would put together a proposal.

The operations update included that the Katahdin Stream Bridge will be done shortly after the Tote Road opens to KS; the construction of two new cabins at Kidney Pond for staff housing are planned; and a new bunkhouse (standard 8 -person design) at Nesowadnehunk campground will supplement existing housing there. The current Camp Cozy bunkhouse at Nesowadnehunk will remain in place and provide summer and winter cabin housing with a 2 person capacity.

The Advisory Committee summer outing was discussed, with the possibility of a project at Camp Phoenix (dump removal). This project may also be done with a handful of volunteers. Bissell also mentioned the relocation effort on the Hunt Trail as a hiking option, and a site review of North Branch Camps to consider repurposing the camps to a more useful format. Other ideas included a ski outing from Abol Bridge to Foss Knowlton, or an overnight outing @ Abol Narrows with Friends of Baxter (hiking/kayaking). Available dates are requested and events and possible dates will be done with Survey Monkey in the near future. September is a good month for most.

Meeting guests were invited to speak. Bray thanked all for the opportunity to chair the Advisory Committee, and for the cooperative nature of the group. He has visited the Park for 57 years, and has volunteered for 40 years. His service is extremely valued, and he will be honored for his service at the Authority meeting on May 20.

Bissell thanked all for the day's work and for attending the meeting. Chair Bray adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Manzo, Park Secretary

