



Baxter State Park Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes - February 2, 2017

Google Hangouts

BSP Advisory Attendees: Steve Hutnak's office in Bangor: Steve Hutnak, Tom Bradbury, Darrell Morrow, Bob Baribeau. Mike White's office in Bangor: Mike White, Laurie Nale, Anne Huntington, Erica Kaufmann, Steve West. BSP Headquarters: Mike Perry, Rosemary Hastings, Dave Wilson, Doug Callnan, Tom Goetz. Jeff Dubis' office: Jeff Dubis

BSP Advisory Absentees: N/A

BSP Staff Attendees: Mike White's office in Bangor: Jensen Bissell. BSP Headquarters: Stewart Guay, Christine Theriault, Eben Sypitkowski, Georgia Manzo

Chair Laurie Nale called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and following introductions, asked that the minutes of the April 30, 2016 BSP Advisory meeting minutes be accepted. **A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes, all in favor. Motion passed.**

Bissell provided a summary of the current AT Hiker Registration process and plan for management of AT hikers in BSP and mentioned that the plan was posted on the BSP Facebook page the prior evening. The Authority has concluded that given the increasing numbers (23% increase in 2016), the AT hikers need to be brought into the same use limits as are placed on other BSP visitors. The workload for rangers as the numbers grow is a factor. Weather, gas prices and recent movies that triggered interest in the trail were cited as possible reasons for the increased number of hikers. It is likely the national monument will also create more visitation in Baxter State Park. The visitor center in Monson is helpful, but communication needs to be ongoing and the task force efforts need to address new issues going forward.

A total of 3,150 cards will be issued in 2017 once the Hunt Trail is opened. BSP will post the number of cards available on Facebook. *Hikers could legitimately flip-flop and get a card and hike later. It is estimated that two thirds of those with cards may not finish the hike. Hikers on the Hunt Trail without a card will be subject to a summons and fine in accordance with Rule 1.3 that is currently being revised. [*Note - following the 2/2/17 Advisory meeting, it was determined that hikers must complete their Katahdin hike within a week of getting their card.]

Letters were exchanged between the ATC, BSP and the Authority and Bissell spoke with Executive Director of the ATC, Ron Tipton on 2/1, at which time Tipton challenged the decision. Bissell said that trust documents are basically silent as it relates to the ATC and there is no record of

communication between Avery and Baxter regarding the establishment of the AT on Baxter Peak. Huntington mentioned that the Baxter materials at the State Library are being digitized. Advisory member comments also included that the number of permits is quite generous as it relates to the wilderness experience and the park's mission and that Katahdin has become an "end point". The NPS is also experiencing use issues. Bissell mentioned that in talking with the New England AT management group, the 100 Mile Wilderness is getting more commercial groups managing hikers. The character of the AT hiker has changed (now engaging in group experiences).

(Bruce) White mentioned that at BSP, daily records are kept and August and September are very busy months (long distance hikers blending with day users), but the data could probably be separated.

The testimony at the Authority meeting at Kidney Pond tells us that behavioral observation is necessary July through September on the peak and the problem is potentially with both day users and long distance hikers. There is a lot of general support from the population regarding control of numbers and behavior. There was a question regarding whether similar behavior or numbers problems were noted on other parts of the AT. Various replies were that permits were required (but not capped) in the Smoky Mountains, and that the southern end of the AT was crowded (lean-tos).

Discussion turned to the two BSP Rules 3.1 and 4.1 and the possible revisions to allow hunting with dogs for ruffed grouse and woodcock and to allow pets north of Trout Brook and Wadleigh Brook in T6 R9 and T6 R10. Bissell stated that it is hard to argue why we would prohibit dogs in hunting areas. If proposed, these would be three-year sunset rules and would end unless actively enacted after the sunset period. There were concerns that it was too controversial. Bissell said that hunting with dogs in areas where people are actively hunting, cutting trees and building roads is different than allowing it in sanctuary areas. Rules should have logic and sense behind them. It was asked if winter hunting (rabbits) would be allowed but access is difficult that time of year. Dubis mentioned that bird hunting with dogs in northern Maine isn't particularly popular.

Huntington expressed concerns about hunting, but more so that theoretically hunting dogs are trained, but if a dog is not trained, there's a significant chance that they may stray into other areas and they will not know the difference between one side of Trout Brook to the other as it relates to resource and wildlife protection. Concerns were expressed that unleashed dogs in the SFMA is a harassment of wildlife unnecessarily and it could be a slippery slope with regard to further allowances and control of the ultimate destination once the dogs are in the Park. Bissell mentioned that it may need to be on a permit system. (Mike) White mentioned that the Stephen Phillips Memorial Preserve in Rangeley permits dogs with a related fee.

Entry points were discussed. There was concern that someone with a permit to hunt with a dog is seen by someone signing into the Park who does not have a permit and is not familiar with the rule change could present problems. Signs would have to be changed. Kaufmann mentioned that she almost always sees an LE Ranger when in the Park and does not have a strong negative reaction to this proposal.

It was asked if there are laws prohibiting hunting within a certain distance of a trail. No one was familiar with such laws. Goetz asked if there is a present problem with dogs in the Park and the reply was that it is not a huge problem. (Mike) White suggested a smaller 3-4 person group could outline the various issues to present to the rest of the Advisory. The conversation was tabled until the next meeting to allow for consideration of the comments as well as the pros and cons of the proposed changes to the rules.

(Bruce) White who is the Park Maintenance Volunteer Field Coordinator (since 2012) outlined the history and efforts of BSP's Volunteer Program. As the needs of the program were identified, it was determined that an office contact person was needed and that help was provided to the extent possible by the Park Secretary. Friends of Baxter stepped up with a volunteer coordinator, Allison Violette with the AMC, who provided help and analysis of needs through 2015. Georgia Manzo came on board in 2016 and now assists White with the Volunteer Program that last year produced 2100 hours of volunteer service not including Search and Rescue.

Large groups are an asset to the program, including the BSP Advisory, College of the Atlantic, Mitchell Scholars, and Friends of Baxter Youth Wilderness Group. BSP patches, rockers, certificates are provided to volunteers, and in 2016 a Volunteer Appreciation Banquet was held at Jeff's Catering to honor SAR and other volunteers. Administrative housing for volunteers is limited and development of volunteer projects by employees needs improvement.

The 2017 Volunteer Project List has been developed and will be posted on the website in February. Thus far 25-30 volunteers have signed up and several of them have expressed interest in the Adopt-a-Trail Program being administered by the Park's two new Trails Specialists. Nale expressed interest in obtaining the Adopt-a-Trail brochure and suggested that the Advisory adopt a trail. Manzo will send the brochure to each Advisory member.

White also mentioned that the Mitchell Institute has asked BSP to share the news of their scholarship program for Maine High School seniors. The deadline for application is April 1.

Sypitkowski outlined the progress of the website redevelopment. The current website is a "rat's nest of links", and Sypitkowski is working with IT on the new structure that will funnel information with a three level "Plan, Prepare, Reserve" subject matter with dropdowns/further funneling. The Park's history, mission and other relative information will also remain, as well as meeting and event information and history. Theriault mentioned that this also puts control of the website updates in the hands of Park personnel whereas now it is handled by a contractor. Human Resources would like to see a section whereby employees can interact with BSP via a protected system to reduce mailings and provide more timely information. The Reservation page is not currently mobile friendly and that will be a focus. The website will be available for viewing in about a month but its launch may be months away.

A 2016 Employee Survey was conducted (six years after the last identical survey). Answers ranged from 1-5 with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree. Results showed improvements

pretty much across the board as compared with the 2011 survey. One of the areas identified as needing work is with regard to informal awards and Bissell noted more will be done in that regard going forward

Using a Google Docs format, The 'Katahdin, A Guide to Baxter State Park" handbook is being revised by Bissell with the help of Barbara Bentley and Acadia Tripp. The Park Trails portion will be placed on the BSP website.

Chief Guay mentioned that last year rangers were not able to establish winter trails from South Branch Pond and Russell Pond (only time in his career) and this year, they were in before Christmas (earliest in his career). Service trails in Chimney Pond were accessible only for a few weeks last year but this year they had no problems. Avalanche Training is scheduled for this week and includes the National Weather Service offering a lecture on mountain weather and snow crystal identification.

Guay also said that the maintenance team is very busy with facility modifications including the preparation of North Branch Camps that will be available as a new group site June 30. Thus far there have been no inquiries.

Supervisor Ranger Russell Porter who was promoted last year from Seasonal Ranger Duty Officer is currently completing criminal justice training and will be able to issue summonses (but not arrests). Guay also announced that Bissell just passed his 30-year service milestone with Baxter State Park.

Therault outlined BSP vacancies including a 23-week Togue Pond Gate position, a 12-week campground ranger position, a 21-week Visitor Center position and a 21-week Campground Ranger position at Katahdin Stream (transfer related).

Bradbury mentioned the recreational marijuana law that just passed. Guay said this will be handled no differently than the public consumption of alcohol. Reasonable expectations of privacy in a campground will be considered and communications surrounding this will be ongoing. Bradbury also asked if the trail development being done on the Grindstone Road will have an impact on the Park and Bissell responded that it will not.

There were no meeting guests. Chair Nale adjourned the meeting at 12:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Manzo, Park Secretary

