



Appalachian Trail Long Distance Hiker Management in Baxter State Park

Background

Baxter Park has had a long relationship with the Appalachian Trail (AT). The northernmost 15 miles of the AT extend from Abol Bridge on the southern boundary of the Park to the northern terminus of the AT at Baxter Peak on Katahdin. Myron Avery established the northern terminus at Baxter Peak in August of 1933. Earlier in the same year, Percival Baxter conveyed the ownership of Baxter Peak to the State of Maine, in trust, as the first gifted parcel of what was to become Baxter State Park. Although Baxter was acquainted with Avery and Ronald Gower, both prominent figures in Appalachian Mountain Club history, there is no record of communication between Avery and Baxter regarding the establishment of the AT on Baxter Peak. Baxter did not address, or even mention, the Appalachian Trail in the formal or informal Trust Communications that form the basis for the management of the Park.

For most of the Park's history, the thread of the AT from the Park's southern border to Baxter Peak has remained an unofficial part of the Park, without specific designation other than the tacit permission of the Baxter State Park Authority. In 1997, the Park purchased a parcel of land from Great Northern Paper. This purchase extended the Park's boundary southward slightly to the West Branch of the Penobscot River. The parcel included an attached easement with conditions protecting the thread of the Appalachian Trail along the West Branch of the Penobscot River from development and disruption from logging and road construction. The easement does not extend into the original trust lands north of the T2-R10 township line.

In the six decades between 1933 and 1991, use of the AT was a modest and insignificant component of overall Park hiking activity. For the past 25 years, the numbers of AT hikers entering the Park to complete a hike of Katahdin has been documented consistently by Campground Ranger staff at Katahdin Stream Campground, the start of the Hunt Trail and the northernmost 5.3 miles of the AT. In 1991, the Park recorded a total of 359 AT hikers who registered for a hike to Baxter Peak. In the ensuing 25 years, AT hiker activity in the Park has grown substantially, with 2016 recording more than 2,600 AT hikers entering the Park for a Katahdin climb. Since 1993, the number of recorded AT hikers entering the Park for a Katahdin climb has increased an average of 8.6% each year. In 2016, AT hiker activity in the Park was more than 23% higher than 2015 use.

In response to the steadily increasing AT hiker activity over the past 25 years, the Park has added a significant number of policies and procedures, administered by Park staff and contractors, to meet the unique needs of AT hikers in the Park. These policies and procedures were detailed in a November 2014 letter to the Appalachian Trail Club (ATC) and NPS discussing the growing concerns of AT hiker use in the Park (attached). The 2014 letter addressed the primary concern to Baxter State Park:

“Of principal concern to us is the conflict between the management models of Baxter State Park and the ATC. The Trust communications of the Park clearly direct that the provision of recreational opportunities is of secondary importance in respect to the protection of the natural resources of the Park resources. We have limited daily access to Katahdin trailheads for 25 years. We apply these limits in the spirit of protecting the fragile alpine habitat on Katahdin from overuse and to provide a sustainable level of human impact and social experience in one of the most popular and iconic mountains in the northeast.”

The Authority continues to be concerned that the limits applied to Park visitors wishing to climb Katahdin have never been applied to AT hikers. Although the 2014 letter spurred a substantial improvement in the dialogue and communication between the ATC/NPS and the Baxter State Park Authority, the number of AT hikers arriving at Baxter Park to climb Katahdin in 2016 was 2,733 hikers or 35% more than 2014 (see *attached Long Distance Hiker stats in Baxter State Park*).

Plan

The Baxter State Park Authority is dedicated to its responsibility to protect the Park's resources and manage recreational use with balance and consistency. After careful consideration of the AT hiker use trends in the Park over the past two decades, the Authority has concluded that applying use limits to AT hikers consistent with the limits placed on other Maine and non-resident visitors wishing to hike to Baxter Peak is necessary and appropriate.

The 2017 Appalachian Trail Hiker Permit System

At the December 2, 2016 meeting of the Baxter State Park Authority, the Authority approved the following revision to the Baxter State Park Rules and Regulations:

Rule 1.3

Current Rule text: *“Persons entering or leaving the Park by way of the Appalachian Trail must register at Katahdin Stream Campground.”*

Revised Rule text: *“Long Distance Hikers entering the Park for the purpose of hiking all or a part of the Appalachian Trail must secure an AT -Katahdin Hiker Permit Card prior to hiking the Hunt Trail to or from Baxter Peak.”*

Beginning in 2017, Baxter State Park will issue a limited number of AT-Hiker Permit Cards to long distance hikers entering the park to complete a hike of the Hunt Trail to or from Baxter Peak.

1. The cards will be issued to four categories of long distance AT hikers: **Northbound, Southbound, Section and Flip-Flop**. These categories are commonly understood by AT hikers. Each hiker will be required to self-determine and declare their category prior to being issued an AT-Hiker Permit card.
2. AT Hiker Permit Cards will be available when the Hunt Trail opens to hiking in the spring.
3. AT-Hiker Permit Cards must be secured in person at Park Headquarters or Katahdin Stream Campground. Hikers must provide their actual name, trail name and an emergency contact phone number to receive a card.
4. The available number of AT-Hiker Permit Cards for 2017 will be as follows:

Northbound:	1,350
Southbound:	610
Section:	840
<u>Flip-Flop:</u>	<u>350</u>
Total:	3,150
5. Hikers determined by Park Rangers to be AT Long Distance Hikers hiking on the Hunt Trail without a card will be subject to a summons and fine in accordance to Rule 1.3.

Rationale

- The Authority remains concerned with a number of issues unique to the AT hiking community in Baxter State Park including behavior at Baxter Peak and congregating in large numbers at Baxter Peak. Improved communications between Baxter State Park and the ATC and NPS have resulted in efforts to address these issues, but the issue of the increasing numbers of AT hikers has yet to be successfully addressed. The rate of increase, coupled with the inconsistency in the resource protection policy of limiting access to Baxter Peak, has prompted the Authority to implement this program.
- The Park has reached a limit regarding the staff time and expense devoted to managing AT hikers. The Authority has no plans to further increase staffing or lodging levels to accommodate increased numbers of AT hikers wishing to climb Katahdin.
- The 2017 hiker card limits reflect an overall 15% increase in 2016 numbers. This cushion has been applied to allow time for the ATC and NPS to work with the Baxter Park Authority to communicate the program rationale to the AT community before the limits constrain AT hiker use. The depth of the cushion varies for each hiker category based on the relative recent rate of increase in each category (see chart attached).
- The program provides the Authority some management options regarding the current issues of concern regarding AT use in the Park. If the current issues cannot be resolved or are exacerbated, the Authority may further limit access to the Park by AT hikers.

Long Term Statistics - Long Distance Hikers at BSP

Long Distance Hikers Registered at BSP											
Year	Total	North	South	Section	Flip-Flop	Total*	% Chng				
1991	359					* (Does not include IAT hikers)					
1992	344						Total	North	South	Section	Flip-Flop
1993	522	177	60	258	27	522					
1994	534	222	69	209	34	534	2.3%	25.4%	15.0%	-19.0%	25.9%
1995	977	297	148	492	40	977	83.0%	33.8%	114.5%	135.4%	17.6%
1996	743	340	99	268	36	743	-24.0%	14.5%	-33.1%	-45.5%	-10.0%
1997	658	370	72	182	34	658	-11.4%	8.8%	-27.3%	-32.1%	-5.6%
1998	970	401	125	406	38	970	47.4%	8.4%	73.6%	123.1%	11.8%
1999	1258	504	206	478	70	1258	29.7%	25.7%	64.8%	17.7%	84.2%
2000	1449	540	234	589	86	1449	15.2%	7.1%	13.6%	23.2%	22.9%
2001	1466	599	234	554	79	1466	1.2%	10.9%	0.0%	-5.9%	-8.1%
2002	1142	532	188	328	89	1137	-22.4%	-11.2%	-19.7%	-40.8%	12.7%
2003	1117	541	193	320	60	1114	-2.0%	1.7%	2.7%	-2.4%	-32.6%
2004	1021	500	178	292	46	1016	-8.8%	-7.6%	-7.8%	-8.8%	-23.3%
2005	1049	482	151	357	58	1048	3.1%	-3.6%	-15.2%	22.3%	26.1%
2006	1236	500	189	480	65	1234	17.7%	3.7%	25.2%	34.5%	12.1%
2007	1215	451	184	501	74	1210	-1.9%	-9.8%	-2.6%	4.4%	13.8%
2008	1265	486	244	443	88	1261	4.2%	7.8%	32.6%	-11.6%	18.9%
2009	1256	543	252	375	84	1254	-0.6%	11.7%	3.3%	-15.3%	-4.5%
2010	1476	567	256	528	122	1473	17.5%	4.4%	1.6%	40.8%	45.2%
2011	1503	585	282	529	103	1499	1.8%	3.2%	10.2%	0.2%	-15.6%
2012	1742	754	383	491	114	1742	16.2%	28.9%	35.8%	-7.2%	10.7%
2013	1707	787	336	497	87	1707	-2.0%	4.4%	-12.3%	1.2%	-23.7%
2014	2017	901	276	737	103	2017	18.2%	14.5%	-17.9%	48.3%	18.4%
2015	2120	991	411	549	169	2120	5.1%	10.0%	48.9%	-25.5%	64.1%
2016	2733	1231	490	733	279	2733	28.9%	24.2%	19.2%	33.5%	65.1%
Total Hikers	31879	13301	5260	10596	1985						
Ave. Annual Change						Ave. Since '93:	9.49%	9.43%	14.14%	11.76%	14.18%
	Total	North	South	Section	Flip-Flop						
2017 Permit Cap #s	3150	1350	610	840	350	Ave. Since '07:	8.73%	9.92%	11.88%	6.88%	19.24%
% alpha from 2016	115%	110%	124%	115%	125%						