

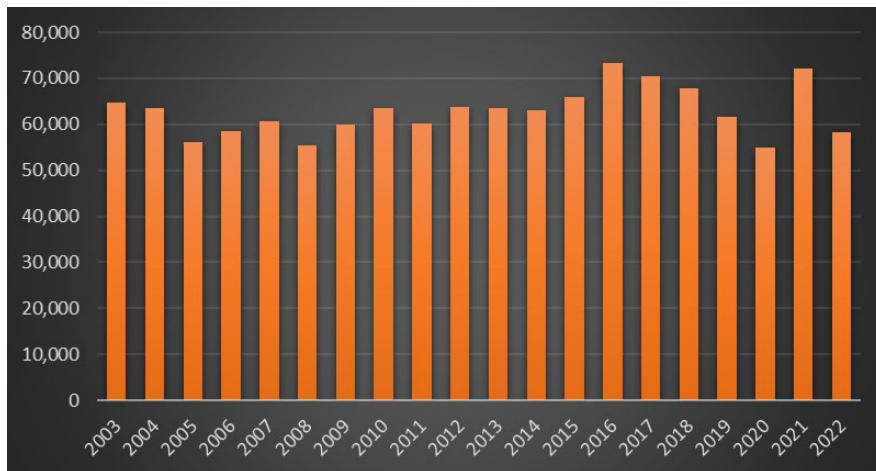


MEMORANDUM

Date: November 25, 2022
To: Baxter State Park Authority
From: Natural Resource Director Nava Tabak
Subject: Park Operational Updates for December 2, 2022 Authority Meeting

Park Visitation Summary: Spring/Summer/Fall 2022

Based on counts from the Park gates, the total number of visitors in May-October 2022 was 58,342. The annual average visitation in previous years (beginning in 2003, and excluding 2020 due to COVID-19 season irregularity) is 63,494 visitors. Visitation in 2022 represents a decrease of 8% from this average, a decrease of 19% from 2021 (which saw well-above average visitation rates), and a decrease of 5% as compared with 2019.



Total number of visitors through Park Gates in spring, summer, and fall, 2003-2022

Day users continued to represent a larger portion (62%) of visitors than campers, similar to previous years. While still representing a very small portion, there has been a notable increase in the number of visitors entering the park on foot or by bicycle (totaling 293 visitors). Maine residents represented just over 50% of visitors, a little lower than in previous years. With the exception of the COVID-19 impacted years, this reflects a continuation of a trend of a decreasing proportion of resident visitors in recent years. The Visitor Center welcomed nearly 10,800 people, which represents 18% of the total number of visitors to the Park.

Reservations were made for 68,830 campers over the season. Since 2016, this number has only been exceeded by the 71,558 campers reserved in 2021. Spring reservations were relatively high while fall reservations were relatively low compared to recent years.

The higher than typical camping reservations and the lower than average visitors-through-gates (which also include day users) hint at a pattern that has been observed by staff this past camping season. While our current data systems are not conducive for confirming the observations, staff noted larger numbers of reservation cancellations and “no-shows” (i.e. the reservation isn’t canceled but the visitors do not use it).

Registered Appalachian Trail (AT) hikers totaled 2,901 for the season (through to 10/17), which is higher than any other year except 2017 (which saw 2,919 AT hikers). The monthly number of hikers peaked in September (at 829), and was by far the highest number of AT hikers documented in any single month in Park records dating back to 2008 (exceeding the previous monthly high by 85 hikers).

Maintenance and Roads- Fall 2022 Update

Working with contractors, staff oversaw a major road improvement project on the 2.5 mile long South Branch Pond Road. This included replacing over 30 culverts, installing 6 new culverts and adding, cleaning, and defining roadside ditches. In the summer a contracted hand crew brushed back the length of the road in preparation for the construction phase. Contractors screened 3,500 and 3,000 yards of gravel at the Nesowadnehunk and East Branch Pits, respectively, for use in this project and other road maintenance and repair projects.

Staff advanced a number of other infrastructure projects this fall, including:

- Installing a new solar system for the Daicey Pond ranger station
- Constructing new lean-to’s at Katahdin Stream and Roaring Brook Campgrounds
- Preparing a new outhouse kit for the Chimney Pond Campground
- Continuing renovation of the Togue Pond Ranger Camp
- Completing routine maintenance on all solar systems in the park
- Cleaning and servicing the pellet boiler system at Park Headquarters
- Shutting down and/or preparing for winter all campgrounds

Maintenance staff are currently preparing snow removal equipment, the snowmobile fleet, and the vehicle fleet for the winter.

This winter maintenance staff will be finishing the cabin renovation and solar system installation at the Togue Ranger Camp. If weather permits, they also plan to replace the bridge deck on the Kidney Pond Bridge.

Trail Projects- 2022 Summary

In 2022, the Park fully staffed an internal trail crew for the first time in many years. The department's two full time staff members, Brennan Turner (Trail Supervisor) and Nathaniel Seifert (former Trail Specialist) were joined by four seasonal (May-October) trail crew members to accomplish a variety of tasks throughout the park. Volunteers and contractors continued to play important roles in the program's plans and accomplishments.

BSP Trail Crew Projects

- *Blow Down Patrol* - Cleared blowdowns from 175+ miles of trails.
- *Abol Trail Water Diversion* - Installed 3 large stone waterbars, and maintained and repaired 10+ existing water bars.
- *Dudley Trail Hardening* - The Crew was joined by a two-man crew from OBP Trailworks LLC to use stones quarried in 2021 to install approximately 30 stone steps on the Dudley Trail.
- *Northwest Basin Trail Clearing* - Brushed approximately 1.5 miles of trail corridor.
- *Webster Boat House Access Clearing* - Cleared the access route for SFMA staff to Webster Boat House
- *North Branch Camps Restoration* - Repaired plumbing and replaced the roof. North Branch Camps will now serve as north end trail crew housing.
- *Togue Beach Retaining Wall Replacement* - Replaced approximately 150 ft of rotten retaining wall along Togue Beach.
- *Kidney Pond Blowdown Cleanup* - Cleared blowdowns and dead trees from forest in Kidney Pond Campground, piling brush roadside for chipping.
- *Bridge Replacements* – Replaced a total of 6 bridges on Chimney Pond and Sandy Stream Pond Trails, as well as the Roaring Brook Nature Trail.
- *Bog Bridge Replacement* - Replaced a cumulative total of approximately 300 ft of bog bridging on the OJI, Sandy Stream, and Roaring Brook Nature Trails.

Trail Volunteers

- *Adopt-a-Trail Volunteers* - Wadleigh Brook, Slaughter Pond, Traveler Mountain, Rum Pond, Frost Pond, and Fowler Brook Trails were maintained by volunteer adopters. Six volunteers clocked a total of 79 hours.
- *MATC Trail Stewards* - The Maine Appalachian Trail Club Trail Steward volunteers performed a weekend of maintenance on the Appalachian Trail at the beginning and end of the season.
- *AMC Staff Led Volunteers* - A team of 10 volunteers from the Appalachian Mountain Club replaced a broken bridge on the Freezeout Trail.

Contractors and Other Crews

- *OBP Trailworks LLC* - BSP hired a two-person team from professional trail building company OBP to provide technical leadership on the challenging Dudley Trail.
- *Maine Conservation Corps* - BSP hired a four-person team during the month of September and into early October to begin the 0.4 mile reroute of the OJI trail.
- *Baxter Youth Conservation Corps* - A 3 to 5 member team joined staff in the park two days a week during July and early August to replace bog bridging on Katahdin Lake Trail and OJI Trail. They also performed corridor maintenance on Katahdin Lake and Martin Ponds Trail, and replaced a section of the Togue Beach retaining wall.
- *MATC Trail Crew* - BSP and the Maine Appalachian Trail Club split the cost of a four-person team for three weeks to work on the AT in the Park. They built a large stone staircase, several checksteps and waterbars, and replaced the bog bridging over the Grassy Pond outlet south of Katahdin Stream.

Trail work planning is well underway for the 2023 season. The trail crew will spend a significant amount of the season installing alpine protection measures along the Saddle Trail to Baxter Peak, including cairn reconstruction, scree wall construction, water diversion features, and the closure of braided trails. There will be a significant amount of work to repair storm damage to Chimney Pond, Abol Stream, OJI, and Sandy Stream trails (e.g., resetting bog bridges and cleaning water bars). On the Chimney Pond Trail staff will also build stone water diversion features, replace a bridge, and rebuild and armor sections of the trail paralleling Saddle Brook. The crew will work to complete the rerouted portion of the OJI trail, and continue annual maintenance of trails (removing blowdowns in the spring, corridor maintenance, and trail blazing).

Fall rainstorm impacts

In mid-October, Park roads and trails sustained damage due to two major rain events that occurred in close succession.

While overall the roads weathered these events well, the following repairs were required:

- A stretch of approximately 200 feet washed out on Roaring Brook Road. The washout was caused by a drainage overtopping its bank well upstream from its road crossing. Road repairs were completed the morning following the rain, by Maintenance staff and a contractor.
- Minor damage to the road occurred south of Katahdin Stream Campground, and between Katahdin Stream and Abol Campgrounds. This damage was repaired the same day of the storm.

The Park's quick response and road repairs were expedited by pre-storm preparations such as staging equipment and loading dump trucks the day prior to the storms. Staff proactively identified storm susceptible road locations, and completed the replacement of 1 culvert, the

addition of 2 culverts, and improvement of multiple side drains. A log jam at the Katahdin Stream culverts was cleared between the two storms, likely preventing serious damage to this road crossing.

Trails throughout the Park sustained significant damage from the two storms. In particular, the Chimney Pond Trail suffered major scouring along the portions of the trail that parallel Saddle Brook, and now has multiple trenches over a foot deep and several stone structures that require rebuilding. Many bog bridging sections throughout the park were swept off the trail and require resetting. The full extent of damage to trails is still being assessed, and repairs will begin in 2023.

A&A Brochu acquisition of Pelletier Companies

On November 14th, A&A Brochu, LLC, acquired Pelletier Brothers, Inc. and Gerald Pelletier, Inc. (aka “Pelletiers”). The Park has six currently active contracts with the Pelletier companies, for timber harvesting in the Scientific Forest Management Area (SFMA), road maintenance and upgrades throughout the Park and in the SFMA, and the processing and delivery of firewood in the Park (including bundling of the portion of firewood provided for visitors). The contracts have various end dates, ranging from April 2023 to May of 2025.

A&A Brochu has indicated their intention to continue executing all of Pelletier’s existing contracts with the Park, with Pelletiers owners and/or staff expected to continue to provide the contracted services. Park staff have been consulting with Assistant Attorney General Lauren Parker to complete agreements for the assignments of the 6 contracts to A&A Brochu.

2022 Volunteer Program Summary

Eighty-three volunteers contributed a total of 2,700 hours of their time to the Park in 2022. They included children, spouses, partners, and parents of BSP staff; BSP retirees; current BSP employees (volunteering for projects outside the scope of their job); Park visitors; the general public; and several BSP Advisory Committee members who volunteer time in the Park or at Park Headquarters, over and above their contribution of time and talents as Advisory members. Large volunteer groups included the Mitchell Scholars, Friends of Baxter State Park’s Maine Youth Wilderness Leadership Group, Appalachian Mountain Club, and ME Appalachian Trail Maintainers.

Jack McGibbon, a high school senior from Cape Elizabeth interned for a week at Daicey Pond and Kidney Pond campgrounds and was immersed in the day-to-day responsibilities of a campground ranger. This successful internship was coordinated by Supervisor Bruce White, who prepared other rangers and communicated closely with Jack’s parents.

This past year represented a return to normalcy for the volunteer program. Due to COVID-19, in 2020 volunteers were limited to BSP staff’s in-house family members. In 2021 the program began to build back, with isolated housing for volunteers following state COVID-19 protocols. There was no volunteer recognition event in either year. In 2022 the program was fully

restored, with a banquet held on November 6th to recognize volunteers with 25 or more hours of service and team leaders of the Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR). At this event the Park also recognized the support of the ME Warden Service, ME Forest Service, ME Army National Guard, Millinocket Airport, and Millinocket Fire & Rescue.

Along with volunteer trail projects (see Trail Projects summary above), volunteer projects in 2022 included:

- Loon Count (ME Audubon Society)
- Lynx survey in the Scientific Forest Management Area
- Katahdin arctic butterfly survey
- Opening of campgrounds
- Campground upgrades and new lean-tos at Katahdin Stream
- Shingling woodshed roof at Abol
- Building firepits at Kidney Pond
- Clearing flood debris from trail and repositioning bog bridging on Wassataquoik Trail
- Painting and carpentry projects at South Branch Pond
- Patrolling through the Park during spring and fall all-staff meetings
- Assisting in the Reservation office and at the North and South Gates during the fall all-staff meeting
- Earth Day litter patrol
- Repairing and painting picnic tables, setting posts, canoe inventory
- Landscaping and other grounds work
- Roadside mowing (SFMA)
- Stacking firewood
- Cleaning ditches and culverts
- Waterline work
- Closing of campgrounds

Park staff are grateful to have such dedicated and generous volunteers and partners. We are able to take advantage of this valuable resource due to the efforts of volunteer coordinators Georgia Manzo and Bruce White, and other staff who plan and oversee specific volunteer projects.

Winter 2022-2023 reservations

Tuesday November 1st was opening day for making winter reservations for the 2022-2023 season. Staff processed 96 reservations that day- 56 reserving in person (using the lottery system at Park Headquarters) and 27 mailed in prior to the opening. The following day an additional 13 reservations were processed for commercial users. Revenue from reservations made over these two days totaled \$73,147. The number of reservations made in these first days was similar to those made in 2021's opening, although the revenue was almost \$10,000 higher this year. Bunk houses continue to be reserved as private cabins (i.e. only one party at a time) for the upcoming winter camping season.

The most popular site in winter is the bunkhouse at Chimney Pond. Before the end of the first week of winter season reservations the Chimney Pond bunkhouse was almost completely booked for the season. Other very popular sites include the bunkhouses at Roaring Brook, South Branch Pond, and Nesowadnehunk Field, as well as the winter cabins at Daicey Pond. Abol campground is very popular for commercial groups and other winter campers seeking to summit Katahdin, as it provides the quickest access. These preferences mirror visitor's top choices in previous years of winter reservations, with the construction of the new bunkhouse at Nesowadnehunk Field a few seasons ago adding it to the list of popular camping destinations in the winter.

Personnel

Year-Round Staff: 22 / 25 Positions Filled

- Park Director vacancy – hiring process/timeline TBD
- Lands Manager vacancy – Interviews and candidate reviews are currently underway
- Director of Administrative Services – Final candidate reviews are currently underway

Recent hires:

- Law Enforcement Ranger: Todd Phillips (onboarded 11/21/222)
- Trail Specialist: Kristen English (onboarded 11/21/222)

Awards

Based on staff nominations and subsequent internal review, the following staff were recognized with Exemplary Service Awards at the Park's fall staff meeting:

- Georgia Manzo- Office Specialist
- Paul Farrington- Enforcement Ranger
- Adam Hunt- Campground Ranger

Numerous less formal recognitions provided by staff in writing and orally also highlighted the high quality and collaborative work of Park staff throughout the 2022 camping season.