



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 17, 2023

To: Baxter State Park Authority

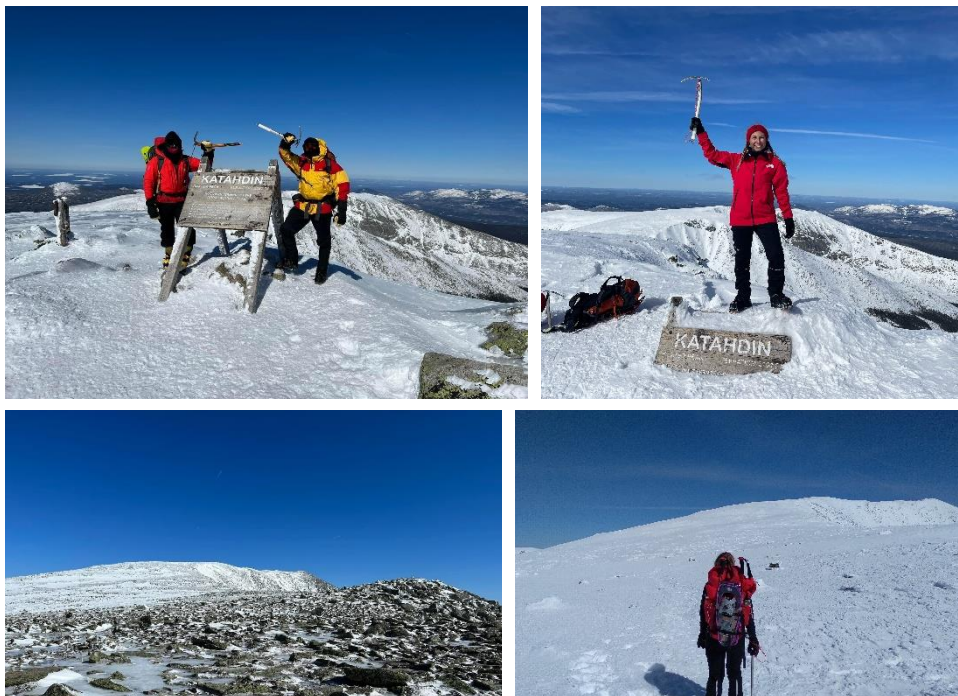
From: Natural Resource Director Nava Tabak

Subject: Park Operational Updates for March 24, 2023 Authority Meeting

Park Conditions and Visitation

Park rangers report high visitation during February and March, with high occupancy of cabins and lean-tos, as well as commercial use (guided trips) and day use facilitated by snowmobiling to southern Katahdin trailheads. Stream crossings only froze intermittently, if at all, this winter, and ice on standing water bodies is about 1.5-2 ft deep currently, with shoreline ice beginning to destabilize. As of 3/17, total snow recorded at Chimney Pond for the season was 115.5", and the current snow depth is 56".

The snow buildup on the tablelands has been notable this year. For comparison, total snow measured at Chimney Pond was 111" this day last year. These photos from early March illustrate how the difference in snow retention on the tablelands between this year and last year far exceeds the 4.5" difference in total snowfall on this date (and the ca. 15" difference in snow depth measured at Chimney Pond in early March of each year).



Comparison of Baxter Peak (top) and Tablelands (bottom) snow conditions between March 5, 2022 (left), and March 11, 2023 (right). Photos courtesy of Baylee Brodeur (BSP staff).

Search and Rescue

In mid-February, staff collaborated with a Maine Forest Service helicopter to locate a solo hiker who had not arrived at the destination of his itinerary. The helicopter identified his tracks off-trail, and BSP Ranges located him and escorted him out of the Park. Park Rangers have also assisted with stranded vehicles and a snowmobile in locations just outside of the Park.

For the second year, the Park hosted training for the Advanced Warden Service on March 1-3. Search and Rescue teams and BSP staff demonstrated various rescue and first aid techniques. Wardens learned to use mountaineering equipment during a climb to summit Katahdin.

Trails

A storm with high winds in late December caused widespread blowdowns in the southwestern part of the Park. Staff worked intensively to re-open access to the Tote Road and winter trails to Kidney Pond, Daicey Pond, and Nesowadnehunk campgrounds.

Staff have been preparing for the trail work season by hauling materials to project sites, including the Freezeout and Katahdin Lake Trails. This work is ongoing, with additional plans to deliver materials to the Chimney Pond Trail. Staff have crafted a notable number of replacements for trail signs over the winter.

Trail Supervisor Brennan Turner has formed a collaboration with professors with the University of Maine Civil Engineering Department. We hope that students will be visiting the Park this year to begin creating bridge designs for a replacement bridge over Nesowadnehunk Stream near the Daicey Pond trailhead. Students would submit final designs to the Park in spring 2024, and staff anticipate following up with professional contractors for a final design and construction.

Appalachian Trail (AT)

Regional managers and landowners of the Appalachian Trail met recently at Park headquarters to plan for the upcoming season. The Maine Appalachian Trail Conference (MATC) reported that they have so far been unable to secure funding for the Golden Road Ridgerunner position in 2023. In past years, the Park and other partners collaborated closely with these ridgerunners, and the ridgerunner covered the Park during the Park AT Ranger's days off. Their work has made noticeable differences in hiker preparedness for their time in the Park, and in reducing rescue needs and generally improving conditions in the 100-Mile Wilderness. With partners (including Baxter Park, Maine Forest Service, and Maine Warden Service) emphasizing the importance of this ridgerunner position, MATC will continue to explore avenues for funding.

The Appalachian Trail Conference provides an optional registration for through hikers, and reports that the number of registrants is currently lower than last year. However, locally, two businesses are offering new supported hiking services and trips (e.g., 100-Mile Wilderness slack-pack trips), and they note that such trips are in high demand. Taken together, we currently estimate AT through hiker numbers to be similar to last year's (around 2,900), and staff will monitor the number of AT through hikers in the Park throughout the season.

Daicey Pond Campground Closure Communications

On January 13th, staff made the first public announcement—via the Park website, reservations office, and social media—about the expected closure of the Daicey Pond Campground from Spring 2024 to Spring 2025, to allow for repair of the cabins. Friends of Baxter State Park collaborated with staff, using their outreach outlets to reach wider audiences. As expected, the announcement was met by the public with questions, some disappointment, and also support. Reservations staff report that many people calling to make reservations at Daicey Pond for the upcoming 2023 season indicate that they are already aware of the expected closure during the following year.

Research

The Research Committee met on 3/3/2023 and reviewed and approved one new application for research in the Park. The Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife will include multiple locations in the Park in a statewide wildlife camera study that will inform wildlife population management (with a focus on fisher and marten). This project is an implementation of previous research, also including the Park, which provided valuable information specific to the Park.

Two previously-approved research projects—one on glacial geology and one on forest regeneration in the SFMA tornado area—will continue to collect data in the Park this year. This winter three staff completed priority surveys for the Maine Winter Bird Atlas (which is in its final of 5 years of surveys), and IF&W staff have been completing creel surveys on waterbodies at the north end of the park.

SFMA

The contracted crew has completed cutting for the winter harvest in the north end of the SFMA. Loading of logs and trucking to yards and mills is ongoing (and recently transitioned to night hauling due to warm daytime temperatures). Primary products in this winter harvest are spruce and pine sawlogs, fir studwood, hardwood pulp, and both hardwood and softwood firewood for use in the Park. There is currently a strong market for wood products. Staff are planning for a summer harvest in the south end of the SFMA.

Outreach

The Park staffed a display at the Penobscot County Conservation Association's Sportsmen's Show in Orono, March 10-12. The handsome display and 3D model of Katahdin drew about 700-800 visitors to speak with Park representatives and have their questions answered.

Personnel

Year-Round Staff: 21/25 Positions Filled

- Park Director vacancy – interviews are being scheduled with the Park Authority.
- Reservations Supervisor vacancy – interviews and candidate reviews are underway. Posting closes 3/24/2023.
- Interpretive Specialist vacancy – interviews and candidate reviews are underway. Posting closes 3/24/2023.
- BSP Carpenter vacancy – interviews and candidate reviews are underway. Posting closes 3/24/2023.

The Reservations Supervisor and BSP Carpenter vacancies follow the retirements of Marybeth Varney and Craig Kennedy, respectively. We are grateful for their many years of service to the Park.

Seasonal Staff

- 3/3 winter positions filled
- 36/43 summer season positions filled
 - Summer seasonal staff are currently on Seasonal Leave
 - Positions are posted for current seasonal vacancies, closing once filled
 - Interviews and employment offers are underway