



Baxter State Park Authority Meeting Minutes
Burton Cross Building, Augusta, ME
10 am, March 24, 2023

Approved by Authority Vote (Date): _____ Chair Signature: _____

Attendees:

Baxter State Park Authority: Chair and MFS Director Patty Cormier, Attorney General Aaron Frey

Assistant Attorney General: Lauren Parker

BSP Staff: Natural Resources Director Nava Tabak, Director of Administrative Services Lori Morrison, Acting Chief Ranger Kevin Adam, Maintenance & Transportation Supervisor Keith Wehmeyer, Office Specialist Georgia Manzo

BSP Advisory: Chair Tom Goetz, Vice Chair Erica Dubois, Robert Baribeau, Anne Huntington

SFMA Advisory: Philip (Chip) Ahrens

Friends of Baxter: Executive Director Aaron Megquier, President Josie Quintell, Jensen Bissell, Ellen Baum

BPWF Trustees: Buzz Caverly

Other guests: Louise Caverly

Chair Cormier called the meeting to order at 10:05 am with a welcome and introductions.

Consideration of the May 2, 2023 minutes: AG Frey moved to approve the minutes, and Chair Cormier seconded the motion. No discussion. Motion carried, 2-0.

Daicey Pond Cabins Project: Keith Wehmeyer reminded all that in October of 2022, the Authority provided approval for the closure of the Daicey Pond Campground from May 2024 to April 2025 to repair/replace as necessary nine of the ten cabins there. In December 2022, the Communication Plan was reviewed and we made our first public announcement about the project on January 13. As expected, the news was met by the public with questions, some disappointment, and support. The next steps include ensuring the BSP Staff understands the communication needs, working on signage, and developing a page on our website that will provide additional information.

Keith overviewed elements of the budget estimate:

- 405K to \$495K - includes materials (29%), labor (60%), and general conditions (11%)
 - Additional contingency (10%) - \$40K to \$49K
- 9 Cabins require work (includes replacement of 2 cabins)
 - The overall goal is to keep the spirit of Daicey Pond intact
 - The cost of repair and replacement are similar in some cases
 - Hoping to use TimberHP Insulation
 - Includes the use of SFMA-sourced materials whenever possible
 - significantly reduces the material costs
- Positions to be funded by Financial Order
 - (1) Project Supervisor (on-site)
 - (4) Construction Crew
- This is a unique backcountry project

- Difficult to travel, and challenging to find a general contractor at a competitive rate
- Keeping knowledge and skillsets in-house is key - will keep options open

Chair Cormier expressed that touring the campground at the next meeting will be helpful to the Authority.

Appointment of a Trustee of the Baxter Park Wilderness Fund (BPWF): Nava Tabak informed the Authority it is time to appoint a new Trustee of the fund, as Irwin (Buzz) Caverly expressed in the December 2022 meeting that he will be terming off in August of 2023 and wishes not to be reappointed. Baxter Park is recommending the appointment of Jensen Bissell.

Buzz Caverly noted added that Frank Trautmann, Founder of the BPWF, worked with Jensen in the SFMA and on other volunteer projects and he would be delighted to know that Jensen is willing to serve in this capacity. Jensen added that during his time serving the Park, a great deal of hard work was done to ensure that the endowment was sustainable for the short and long term. He has experience serving on hospital boards with similar discretionary funds that are invested similarly, with similar ideals, and would be thrilled to serve in this capacity.

AG Frey moved that the Authority appoint Jensen Bissell as Trustee of the BPWF, beginning at the conclusion of Buzz's term in August of 2023. No discussion. Motion carried 2-0.

Chair Cormier thanked Buzz Caverly for his service and thanked Jensen for his willingness to serve the Park in this capacity. AG Frey added that it's a nice transition—both having been prior Park directors—not losing that experience among the Fund's trustees.

Buzz noted that the Trustees met recently and concluded that in the new fiscal year, the fund will be able to provide \$100K in disbursements to BSP each quarter.

Letter from Matthew Dunlap, Chair, Episcopal Diocesan Committee on Indian Relations: Chair Cormier explained Mr. Dunlap's request for the Park campsite fees to be waived for tribal members for their K100 event. Considerations discussed:

- Members of the Penobscot Nation have a long history of connection to Katahdin
- They currently receive a discounted rate for camping for this event (with the ability to reserve the entire campground)
- There needs to be a clear rationale as to why the Park might continue with this access and discount, and a clear rationale for considering waiving fees altogether
- Accessibility of the campground was not codified as exclusive to the Penobscot tribe or this event but was made available as an opportunity they have taken advantage of every year
 - Generally, reservations for the K100 event are made well in advance (usually in December), and not through the 4-month rolling reservation system
- Waiving fees may establish precedence that the Park would potentially have to extend the same treatment to other entities
- Legally, granting a request such as this could be problematic- Assistant AG Parker will review
- A clear policy is necessary

The Authority asked Park staff to provide the background/history/evolution of the K100 paddle and run - how and when the event came to be as it relates to the Park, and how it was brought to the Authority

of the time at its inception. Chair Cormier will send a letter to Mr. Dunlap letting him know this subject was on the agenda and discussed at the meeting.

Wabanaki inclusion: Acting Chief Ranger Kevin Adam spoke with the BSP Advisory Committee in response to the interest of the Park and the Advisory Committee to dedicate a seat on the Advisory Committee to a Wabanaki tribal member. Park leadership has reached out to Ambassador Dana of the Penobscot Nation and she is aware that we are willing and ready to discuss this option as her schedule allows. AG Frey appreciates there have been efforts to connect with the Ambassador, adding that it's important that we get input from the Penobscots in particular about this option. Communication with Tribal members will inform our understanding of what ideas they may have for collaboration and will help us to head toward positive changes. Documenting efforts and conversations (a log of outreach efforts to date and going forward) will be helpful. Nava Tabak commented on how welcoming the Advisory is to the inclusion of a tribal member on the committee - and they have additional ideas on this effort - but we do not want to make any plans without tribal partners being involved. The work session for L. D. 294 is expected to be scheduled for an April date.

Park and Administrative Updates: Nava Tabak summarized the **winter activity** in the Park. We had high occupancy of cabins and lean-tos, commercial use (guided trips), and day-use facilitated by snowmobiling to southern Katahdin trailheads. As of 3/17, total snow recorded at Chimney Pond is 115.5", with a current snow depth of 56". Snow retention on the tablelands was notable this year. Less of the snow blew off, and the retention far exceeded the 4.5" difference in total snowfall on this date as compared to last year. We can note if we notice any difference in the impacts to trails and roads that may be associated with this increased snow retention at high elevations.

We've had a relatively quiet winter in terms of **search and rescue**. There was a lot of education of visitors through reservations and a good presence of Rangers in the Park.

There was a significant wind event in December, and rangers and maintenance personnel spent many hours cleaning up blowdowns on the Tote Road and winter trails, ensuring access for skiers heading into Kidney, Daicey, and Nesowadnehunk campgrounds.

Trail Supervisor Brennan Turner will be working with University of Maine students, (starting with a feasibility study), designing a **replacement bridge** across Nesowadnehunk Stream near the Daicey Pond trailhead. Students will submit designs in spring 2024 and staff anticipates following up with professional contractors for final design and construction. Keith Wehmeyer added that there used to be a low-lying bridge that was removed seasonally, and there is a history of other bridges at this location. The location is challenging due to a sharp bend in the stream.

BSP staff continues to meet with regional partners managing the **Appalachian Trail**. The Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) has not been able to secure funding for the Golden Road Ridge Runner position for the upcoming season, which covers the AT's entrance to the Park. In the past, this presence made a noticeable difference in hiker preparedness in the Park, helping to reduce rescue needs, generally improving conditions in the 100 Mile Wilderness, and enabling seven-day per week coverage for the Park (when the BSP AT Steward is off duty). MATC will continue to explore avenues for funding.

The Appalachian Trail Conference reports that the number of AT registrants is currently lower than last year. However, locally, two businesses are offering new, and reportedly popular, supported hiking

services and trips such as the 100 Mile Wilderness slack-pack trip (with daily drop off and pick up). We currently expect that AT thru-hiker numbers will be similar to last year's (around 2,900).

The Research Committee met on 3/3 and approved one new research project and got updates on two ongoing projects in the Park. The ME Department of Inland Fish & Wildlife will include multiple locations in the Park in a statewide wildlife camera study (with a focus on fishers and martens). Based on previous and related research conducted in the Park, we know this work provides us with valuable information specific to the Park even as it is a statewide project. They are trying to get cameras installed next week to catch the tail end of winter.

In the SFMA, winter cutting is completed, and it has been a good first season working with A&A Brochu who replaced Pelletier Brothers as our harvest contractor. Staff are planning for a summer harvest in the south end of the SFMA.

Bruce White, Kevin Adam, and one volunteer (Rick Bray) staffed a booth at the **Penobscot County Conservation Association's Sportsmen's Show** in Orono on March 10-12. The handsome display and 3D model of Katahdin drew about 700-800 visitors to the booth. Thank you to Bruce White for his hard work preparing the display and gathering other materials.

As a **personnel update**, we are closing the application time for three of our year-round positions - Reservations Supervisor, Interpretive Specialist, and Carpenter - so we'll be very busy conducting interviews. Two of those three position vacancies are due to retirements, and we're grateful to retirees Marybeth Varney and Craig Kennedy for their service to the Park. Our three seasonal winter positions are fully staffed, and we are actively filling positions for our upcoming season. Chair Cormier added that the first round of Park Director position interviews has been completed and the second interviews are scheduled for April.

Other Comments: Bob Baribeau has records of summit conditions as far back as the 1970s and the summit has been snow-covered like this only six times since 1976, whereby one can ski from Chimney Pond to the summit.

An Advanced Warden School took place in the Park earlier in March; this is a collaboration between BSP and ME IF&W. New wardens learned snow and ice skills and ascended the mountain. Kevin added that Bob Baribeau was very instrumental in that training and is one of the premier mountain-experienced people in the state and is involved heavily in search and rescue.

Aaron Megquier expressed his gratitude for all the thoughtful discussion surrounding L. D. 294, and Friends of Baxter State Park continues to be heavily involved and is eager to help the Authority and Park staff in any way they can to move these issues in a positive direction. Friends put together some thoughts following the discussion at the last Authority meeting and will share those with the Authority.

Adjourn: AG Frey motioned to adjourn at 11:05 a.m. Seconded by Chair Cormier. Motion carried 2.0.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Manzo