



MEMORANDUM

Date: Jul 14, 2023

To: Baxter State Park Authority

From: Park Director Kevin Adam

Subject: Park Operational Updates for **July 21, 2023 Authority Meeting**

Committees:

BSP Advisory: Erica Dubois is the new Chairperson of the Advisory Committee. She is moving up from the Vice Chair position. Tom Goetz's term as Chair has ended. We want to thank Tom for stepping up and displaying all the hard work and dedication he gives to the committee and to Baxter State Park.

Park Visitation Summary and Operational Highlights:

Baxter State Park has rolled out a new Park information line. Acting Chief Ranger Rob Tice discovered that BSP has extra phone lines we were not aware of. We made one of them (207-731-9500) a visitor call-in line for daily Park conditions. Every day reservations staff will record a voice update of what is occurring in the Park and will include Trails, Roads, Water levels, Fire Danger (seasonal), and Other pertinent Park updates. The goal is to reduce the number of phone calls customer service representatives receive about Park updates. We are also working on a Park Update button on the BSP website that will also be updated daily giving the same information.

We have a persistent bear issue at Trout Brook Farm. A bear approximately 60-80 lbs has become accustomed to campers. We have been set up several times to deal with the bear and he hasn't shown up. There have been many other bear sightings across the Park but no other campgrounds are having issues of this frequency.

A bear of about 110-120 lbs was in South Branch Campground down by the water. Ranger Russ Porter was in the area and responded. Ranger Porter deployed blanks at the bear first to drive him out of the area with no success. He then fired a shotgun bean bag round towards the bear and struck it in the hind quarter. The bear then ran out of the campground. Although it was seen later it was staying outside the campground curtilage.

From the end of May to the beginning of July, we have responded to three lower leg injuries on the trail that needed a ranger response. Maine Forest Service was involved in one rescue. Rangers have also responded to three broken wrists during that time period.

Communications/ Security/ Infrastructure:

Tim Deetz has been working on an Intranet site for employees and we are in the final stages to proceed with the rollout of this initiative.

Notable statistics from Tim Deetz:

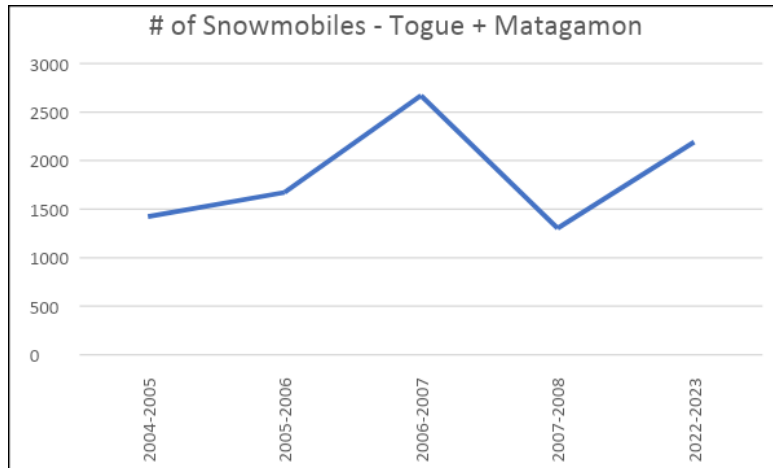
Appalachian Trail Hikers: 236 total hikers have been in Baxter Park. That is well below most other years for this time period.

Start	5/1/2	
End	6/26/2	
Year	Total Hikers	Year End Total
2015	318	1999
2016	408	2755
2017	407	2919
2018	384	2738
2019	295	2502
2020	0	945
2021	294	2769
2022	323	2902
2023	236	236

Winter Sled Traffic

Historical View

Year	# of Snowmobiles – Togue + Matagamon
2004-2005	1424
2005-2006	1672
2006-2007	2670
2007-2008	1303
2022-2023	2191



Public Sleds Only				
Gate	Direction	Avg Vel. (MPH)	# Sleds	# People
Togue Pond Gate	North	11.7	591	661
Togue Pond Gate	South	10.7	404	444
Matagamon Gate	North	22.1	201	231
Matagamon Gate	South	26.6	385	435

Finance:

The Park maintained a solid financial position through fiscal year-end, June 30, 2023, ending the year with a positive balance forward.

Revenue:

- \$5,089,183 - 7.7% positive variance over 2022.

Expenses:

- Personnel expense: \$3,342,805 - under budget, 14% positive variance.
- All Other expenses: \$1,038,037 - under budget, 23% positive variance.
- Capital expense: \$371,441 - under budget, 25% positive variance.

Net Revenue: \$336,900.00

Note: Net Revenue balance forward will be used to fund the Daicey Pond Project.

Human Resource:

Staff recruitment was a high priority during the first half of the year. Despite continued workforce recruitment and retention challenges, the Park successfully filled all open positions for the 23- '24 season. The following positions were filled.

Seasonals		
Position	Returning Employees	New Hires
Campground Rangers	19	5
Customer Representatives	6	9
Trail Crew Leader	1	-
Trail Crew Laborers	1	2
Maintenance Mechanic	-	1

Year-round New Hires		
Position	Permanent	Acting Capacity
Director of Administrative Services	1	-
Lands Manager	1	-
Interpretive Specialist	1	-
Supervisory Carpenter	1	-
Park Director	1	-
District Ranger	-	1

Reservations:

Consistent with past years, May and June was a very busy time for the Park reservation office. As presented in the table below, May and June reservations were -8% and cancellations -82% less than the prior year.

Reservation Stats					
Period: May - June	2023 May - June	2022 May - June	% Change	2022 12 mths.	2021 12 mths.
Total Camper Reservations	9,132	9,865	-7%	68,117	71,558
Cancellations	3,005	5,470	-45%	19,702	20,172
Maine Residents	58%	52%	11%	55%	56%
Non Residents	42%	48%	-12%	45%	44%
DUPR (Day Use Parking Reservations)	1,545	1613	-4%	8,176	8,013

Natural Resources Department Update:

In collaboration with Maine Inland Fish & Wildlife (IFW) staff, Park staff have installed acoustic bat detectors at 6 sites in the Park (on a two-week rotation), and plan to complete two more. At season's end, IFW staff will analyze the recordings and provide information about the presence of various bat species to the Park.

Staff have been performing seasonal detection and control of invasive plants. Knapweeds (*Centaurea* spp.) are being hand-pulled on trails in the south end of the Park, with detection efforts ongoing there and in locations in the Park that were treated last year. Following a successful small-scale experiment with mechanical control last year, staff are digging and hand-pulling bristly locust (*Robinia hispida*) at two locations in the Park.

On Katahdin's Tableland, staff have been collecting phenology data from five permanent plots that are part of the Northeast Alpine Flower Watch phenology study. A Katahdin arctic butterfly survey was completed on July 6, and staff has been documenting permanent alpine plant survey transects and other ecologically sensitive areas in advance of the commencing of trail work on the Saddle Trail.



One of the permanent phenology plots

Over a dozen special use permits have been issued for research and ongoing natural resource monitoring projects in the Park. Most of these permittees have either completed their work or the first of multiple planned days of work in the Park. Areas of study include alpine breeding birds, nightjars, bats, fish, water quality, rare plants, and forest health

In June BSP hosted a Maine Forest Service BMP Level 1 training. Ten Park staff (representing the SFMA, Maintenance, and Supervisor Rangers) and five staff from Park contractor A&A Brochu attended the daylong training, which focuses on protecting water quality in forest road and bridge construction



Rangers Dan Whitmore, Laura Whitney, and Robert Sweinhart learn Mtn Patrol Techniques

Information & Education

July saw the beginning of near-daily Mountain Patrol assignments, with assigned staff interacting with visitors about Katahdin's alpine environment, providing trail information and assistance to hikers, repairing string fencing, and various other tasks. I&E staff have been providing training opportunities on summit stewardship for staff newly participating in mountain patrols. I&E staff have been evaluating and fulfilling sign requests from staff in the field, including temporary wildlife-related signs and more permanent interpretive or operational signs.



Volunteers for Mountain Birdwatch conducting a survey of alpine birds

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Maintenance Report

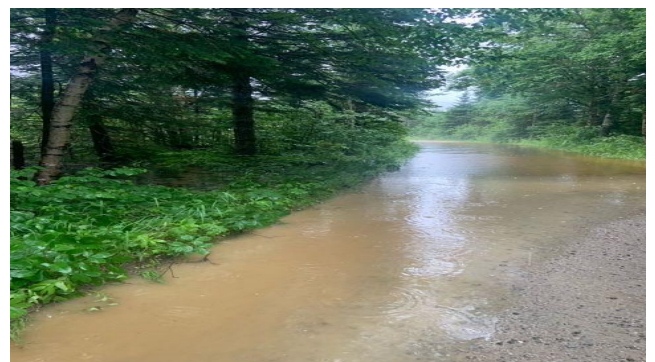
Maintenance Staff worked with Kennebec Valley Community College to replace two group-site shelters at Trout Brook Farm. The new shelters match what is found at other group sites around the Park, replacing two at Trout Brook that were undersized. Led by instructor Andrew Soule, students spent class time over the winter cutting the two timber frame structures. In June, the Maintenance staff prepped the site with new gravel pads and footings and moved the disassembled frames from Fairfield to Trout Brook Farm. Mr. Soule and the students then spent 3 days volunteering in the Park to raise the frames with assistance from Maintenance Staff who installed metal roofing the following week. This is the second year in a row that the Park has worked with the KVCC Sustainable Construction Department.



Maintenance has spent the early camping season supporting Park operations by repairing wood splitters, replacing water heaters, servicing fire pumps and chainsaws, and troubleshooting solar power systems in addition to a steady list of routine preventative maintenance on Park equipment and vehicles. The Togue Ranger Camp renovation is complete and usable by Park staff for laundry and other personal needs and is ready when needed as a base for SAR operations.

Staff has been trimming branches that are extending into the Tote Road and hanging too low overhead, focusing efforts on the North end between Matagamon and Trout Brook Crossing. A contractor is carrying out similar work on a 4-mile stretch between the Dwelley Pond and McCarty Field trailheads. Even with all the rainy weather the condition of the Park Tote Road is holding up well. Potholes are worse than usual as would be expected, but ditches and culverts are functioning as needed which can be credited to work done over the last few years, particularly in the areas of Abol, Marston, and South Branch Pond Road.

Rain has been steady for May, June, and July, during a recent string of thunderstorms Nesowadnehunk Stream flooded its banks. This is a common flooding area that will have to be looked at for future years.



Supervisor Wehmeyer has continued to work on planning the Daicey Pond project. He has provided SFMA staff with a specs and quantity of logs to be harvested when forestry operations begin again this summer, Those logs will then be peeled before being staged for use on the Daicey project. In addition, he is in the early stages of labor recruitment, and material sourcing.

SFMA Update:

In preparation for harvest operations, the decking was replaced on a bridge on the Useless Road (the cost was shared with Katahdin Forest Management, the road's owner), and 10 culverts have been replaced. Road grading began on June 26 on the roads in the southern portion of the SFMA, where the summer/fall harvest is taking place. Brent Chadbourne, a hand cutter, began harvesting on June 26. As of 7/12/2023, the A&A Brochu cut-to-length crew has been delayed in commencing work due to equipment issues.

Contractors are ready to undertake approximately eight miles of boundary line maintenance in the north end of the SFMA (with the cost being shared with the neighboring landowner), and approximately 200 acres of pre-commercial thinning to take place in July/August (with follow-up soil scarification by Brent Chadbourne).

Due to a prior re-routing of the Freezeout Trail that resulted in its bisecting of a harvest block, the cut-to-length crew will be harvesting on both sides of the hiking trail in July or August. Staff and harvest contractors are preparing to notify SFMA visitors, redirect them to other trails as much as possible, and minimize their risk if they plan to use the trail during the harvest.

Law Enforcement:

The Park continues to have volunteer Search and Rescue teams provide coverage every weekend of the camping season. This weekend on July 8 and 9 we had Rangers and SAR members respond on the Abol Trail to rescues for dehydration and a broken wrist.

On June 9, 10 Maine Forest Service taught Park staff the "Maine Basic Wildfire Fighter training course". The new District Forest Ranger Mitchell Stapleton has been familiarizing himself with Baxter Park.

Park staff has pressure tested nearly 7,500 feet of fire hose and has about 6,000 left to test. Most of which should be completed on July 15.

The Maine Warden Service conducted float plane flights in the Park on July 6 to look at locations on lakes where we have needed rescue operations in the past. New District Game Warden Will Gormley has been exploring the Park and performing fisherman checks and getting to know his new area of responsibility.

The Director and Acting Chief Ranger reached out to Katahdin Woods and Waters' Superintendent and Chief Ranger, and have shared contact information.

The Maine Army National Guard 3-172 Mountain Company will be in the Park doing some technical rock training this fall. They will provide Search and Rescue coverage during the time they are here, as well as provide our Chimney Pond Ranger staff with teachable moments on how they would conduct a technical rock rescue on Katahdin.