



## MEMORANDUM

Date: 10-24-23

To: Baxter State Park Authority

From: Park Director Kevin Adam

**Subject: Park Operational Updates for October 24, 2023 Authority Meeting**

### **Committees:**

#### **Advisory Committee:**

Erica Dubois resigned as chair of the committee for personal reasons. We will miss Erica's enthusiasm, spirit, and dedication to the Advisory Committee and Baxter State Park. On September 26 we had a Zoom meeting as our in-person meeting had to be canceled because of Hurricane Ian.

Commercial permits were discussed, with a focus on the winter camping season. The Advisory then set nominations and voted for a new chairperson.

#### **SFMA Committee:**

There was an October 20 in-person meeting and tour of the SFMA.

#### **Investment Committee:**

There was an October 20 meeting with the Investment Committee.

#### **Research Committee:**

No activity.

### **Park Visitation Summary and Operational Highlights:**

#### **Current Park Conditions daily update phone line:**

Visitors are utilizing the daily Park conditions update provided via direct phone line 207-723-5500 and by accessing the information on the Park's website. Reported activity since July 1, 2023:

Number of calls to 207-723-9500 from July 1st to Oct 13th = 1,424

Total Time people spent listening to the message = 19 hours, 37 minutes, 35 seconds

Average time spent by a caller listening to the message = 49 seconds

Number of clicks on **Today's Conditions** from July 1st to Oct 13th = 6,172

Reservation Stats			
In-Season Counts 5/15 - 9/30	2023	2022	% Change
Total Reservations (People Count)	60,321	62,439	-3.4%
Total Reservations (Site Count)	24,331	24,593	-1.1%
Maine Residents	55%	54%	2.2%
Non-Residents	45%	46%	-2.5%
Full Year Counts *2023 YTD trending - 1/1 -9/30 **2022/2021 - 1/1 - 12/31	*2023	**2022	**2021
Total Reservations (People Count)	64,668	72,968	74,858
Total Reservations (Site Count)	26,689	30,089	30,989
Maine Residents	56%	55%	56%
Non-Residents	44%	45%	44%
Day Use Parking Reservations (DUPR) *2023 YTD trending - 6/1 - 9/30 ** 2022/2021 - DUPR season 6/1 - 10/15	*2023	**2022	**2021
Total DUPR	7,233	8,140	7,973
Maine Residents	65%	49%	44%
Non-Residents	35%	51%	56%
Total Capacity	8,494	8,494	8,494
% Capacity		96%	94%

#### Communications/ Security/ Infrastructure:

The focus during the in-season was on system stabilization and enhancements. The following outcomes are the highlights of the ongoing work in the IT department primarily staffed by Tim Deetz, Data Management Analyst.

- The Park upgraded to Starlink Satellite Internet (Phone and Wi-Fi) at existing locations, including access points at the Togue Pond Gatehouse, Matagamon Gatehouse, and SFMA. Hemlock Camp. In addition, service is now available at the Togue Pond Ranger Camp.
- A computer replacement cycle project was established and completed during the season
- Twenty-one new computers were deployed during the season.
- Some older laptops were refurbished and are now on hand for failure readiness.
- Computer upgrades (All non-replaced laptops migrated to Windows 11 with 16 GB RAM)

- Created a new data collection model implementing dynamic statistical analyses for all major areas of data collection (Trails, Campground People & Occupancy, Financial, Parking, AT Hikers, Gate Vehicles and People, Visitor Center, Reservation Calls)

### **Finance:**

FY24, Q1 tracked as expected financial position:

Revenue + Balance Forward:

- \$1,603,401 - 5% positive variance over 2022.

Note: Year-over-year favorable variance is primarily due to the increase in the annual distribution fund from the Baxter Park Wilderness Fund Trust and SFMA income distribution to BSP.

Expenses:

- Personnel expense: \$1,313,611 - under budget, 5.3 % positive variance.

Note: Vacant positions

- All Other expenses: \$289,790 - under budget, 23.8% positive variance.

Note: Timing of expense.

- Capital expense: \$0

Note: Legislature approved budget excluded capital in Q1.

### **Human Resource:**

In addition to planning the fall annual meeting, HR Administrator Desirae Mishou has been busy conducting end-of-season meetings to complete employment forms. HR set up Flu and COVID shots during our fall meeting.

### **Reservations:**

Reservation activity continued to be steady through Indigenous People's Day. The last night of camping is October 15 for all campgrounds except for Katahdin Stream, Kidney Pond, and Daicey Pond, which will stay open until October 22. Winter camping begins on December 1 at all sites except half capacity at Kidney and Daicey Pond, full closures of Davis Pond, Wassataquoik Lake Island, Second Lake, Togue Ledge, Boody Brook, Pine Point, Little Coffeelos, and Telos Cut. The winter camping lottery is on November 1, 2023 at Headquarters. As with past years, the Headquarters reservation office is closed on the weekends from Indigenous People's Day through Labor Day.

### **Trails:**

Annual Maintenance:

Two days in July were devoted to brushing 2 miles of the Pogy Notch Trail. Two weeks in August were spent spike camped in the SFMA where four Trails Department staff (3 crew members, and the Trail Specialist) cleared trails of blowdowns and pruned the overgrown corridor with a combination of hand tools and our two brush saws purchased in the same month. In late September/early October our 3-person trail crew (we lost 1 member in August when she returned to school) spent eight days camped out at Russell Pond brushing back the corridor on the Northwest Basin Trail, as well as the Grand Falls Loop Trail. Blazes were refreshed on the North Traveler Trail, as well as the first four miles of the Freezeout Trail by their respective volunteer adopters. In July The Baxter Youth Conservation Corps spent two days clearing leaves and debris from turnpike swales and drainage ditches on the Chimney Pond Trail from the trailhead to Basin Ponds. Drainages above Basin Ponds were cleared by trail crew staff. Additionally, the Baxter Youth Conservation Corps spent one week brushing back the corridor of

the Horse Mountain Trail, South Branch Falls Trail, and the trail to one of the lean-tos in South Branch Campground.

#### CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR OF TRAILS:

150 feet of bog bridging was replaced on the OJI trail in July. The Trail Crew spent 5 weeks during July, August, and September at Chimney Pond. During this time the trail crew built 9 new stone water bars, an 8' long x 3' tall stone retaining wall, a French drain, one stone check step, brushed ~300 yards of overgrown vegetation below tree line on the Saddle Trail, replaced two trail signs, and began construction of a major stone turnpike inside a large ditch scoured into the trail along Saddle Brook during the flooding event in October 2022. The turnpike project was met with much difficulty due to the underlying boulder field that prevents any digging within the trench. Difficulties were compounded by equipment failure as our 40+ year-old masonry drill was very unreliable and is now retired. Progress will continue next year with the help of our Cobra Combi Demolition Drill as well as our new masonry drill.

Three weeks in July and August were devoted to making further progress on our 0.4-mile reroute of a portion of the OJI Trail. The new reroute incorporates a modern sustainable design and will bring trail users out of a bog that was previously forcing hikers off trail and impacting the surrounding environment. The new reroute is 95% complete and will be opened early in the summer of 2024.

The BYCC spent one week in July installing ~150' of new bog bridging from the Pogy Notch Trailhead to the North Traveler Trailhead. Additionally, they spent one week installing ~30 stepping stones on a seasonally muddy portion of the Katahdin Lake Trail.

The Maine Appalachian Trail Club Trail Crew spent two weeks in August and September spike camped on the Hunt Trail Relocation that began in the mid-2010s. They built a major stone waterbar, made improvements to the tread by removing stumps and roots left behind during initial clearing, and quarried a large quantity of stone to a future staircase location. Work will continue in 2024 by the BSP Trail Crew.

Trail Specialist Kris English and Trail Supervisor Brennan Turner replaced a ~75' bridge/boardwalk that consists of 5 separate spans over Blacksmith Brook and the adjacent bog. This project is 95% complete, and final polishing tasks and cleanup will be completed during mid/late October once the campgrounds are closed and traffic on the trail becomes significantly reduced.



#### Natural Resources Department Update:

Staff have continued collecting alpine phenology plot data, controlling invasive plants (including a newly discovered occurrence of knapweed at Trout Brook Farm), and installing acoustic bat detectors. They also assisted IF&W staff with fish surveys on several ponds in the Park. Researchers from agencies and academic institutions have continued their work in the Park in the fields of geology, water quality, and rare plants and animal surveys.

In July Park staff and volunteers participated in Maine Audubon's annual loon count, and staff have since compiled and submitted the data to Maine Audubon. In total 51 loons were observed in the Park through this survey, which represents a high number for the Park. At least some of this success is due to the strong effort by Cassandra Knudsen (Interpretive Specialist) to recruit participants to survey 23 waterbodies- the highest number surveyed since this data collection began in 2002.

In October, Senior Geologists from the Maine Geological Survey Bob Johnston (retired) and Lindsay Theis provided an afternoon training for BSP staff. The group was introduced to the bedrock and surficial geology of the Park and explored Traveler Rhyolite formations and the potholes and alluvial fan of Howe Brook.



Geologists and staff on Traveler Rhyolite

### **Information & Education**

Information & Education Park staff published a new issue of "Wildnotes"- the Park's long-standing annual publication with useful information for Park visitors. This publication is provided at the Visitor Center and the Park gates, and typically also distributed to regional information outlets such as the Katahdin Region Chamber of Commerce and Maine highway information centers. This year the publication included an annual insert with news for 2023 (while the main body of the publication includes no dated information and thus remains relevant in future years).

In September the Park hosted visiting artist Donna Chase for two weeks at Kidney Pond. Donna provided informal talks and a workshop for the public, in addition to displaying her artwork in an open-house format at the Kidney Pond library towards the end of her stay.

Interpretive Specialist Cassandra Knudsen began planning for an update of the displays at the Visitor Center and developed a new program about the Park's bats, which will be presented at campgrounds and community events. Interpretive staff have also fulfilled various sign requests from staff in the Park.

In advance of the full solar eclipse in April 2024 (and in response to early inquiries about viewing the eclipse in the Park), staff have begun implementing a communication plan about the limited access to the Park during that time of year. They have initiated communications among various regional partners and businesses to collaborate in planning to accommodate a potentially large influx of visitors seeking to experience the longest stretch of eclipse totality, which will occur in this region.

### **Maintenance Report**

The Maintenance Team focused the summer months on supporting day-to-day Park operations and planning future projects.

In July the Park completed the purchase of a new log loader trailer capable of being towed behind existing maintenance vehicles. The trailer was immediately put to use salvaging blowdown logs from along the Park's road corridors, with a focus on areas along the Tote Road near Kidney Pond and Daicey Pond campgrounds. These areas had been hit particularly hard with multiple blowdown events in the last two years. The logs salvaged are dangerous trees over tote roads or near cabins, and that fall across roads and block access, or are right next to roads. We are not cutting any standing trees. As of the end of September, an estimated 10+ cords of saw quality logs have been moved to a contractor's location to be sawn for use on Park projects, including the Daicey Pond project and lean-to projects at Katahdin Stream, Nesowadnehunk Field, and Roaring Brook Campgrounds. Additional logs have been moved for use as firewood.



Additionally, Maintenance staff overhauled and put back into service the Park's Farmi log winch. The winch had been out of service for 15-plus years and is now being used behind the New Holland Tractor to help with the clearing of blowdowns along Park roads.

Propane service and delivery logistics are a time-consuming part of Maintenance operations with guests relying on propane for lights, and staff needing propane for lights, refrigeration, and cooking. The Maintenance department is working to add propane licenses among its existing staff and upgrade appliances to increase efficiency and decrease service needs. Currently, Matt Martin, the Maintenance Coordinator, has the only propane license in the Department and handles all the propane service needs along with an outside contractor. The Maintenance Supervisor, Supervisor Carpenter, and Maintenance Mechanic will all be working toward licenses in the next year. Switching from propane to LED lights run from solar has been done in some locations and is being considered on a case-by-case basis in other staff use areas. Additionally, The Maintenance Supervisor along with the Park's Inventory and Supply Associate have been working closely with BSP's propane supplier to decrease the logistical burden of propane deliveries throughout the Park.

Even with an exceptionally wet season with multiple heavy rain and wind events, the Park's road system held up remarkably well with minimal issues to report. This can be attributed to past efforts to upgrade the aging road infrastructure which will continue. Maintenance staff spent considerable time in September staging gravel and equipment as multiple tropical storms approached. Fortunately, emergency usage of this staged equipment supplies was not needed, but the practice will continue as needed. The Maintenance Supervisor used these events to evaluate road infrastructure and prioritize future improvements. Maintenance staff mowed the road edges to maintain sightlines and ditches from the Park's South Gate to the Trout Brook crossing. Nesowadnehunk Field was also mowed per the Park's Operating Plan.

An unglamorous but necessary task coordinated by the Maintenance Department is the removal of human waste from the Park's outhouse vaults and septic tanks. Working with a local contractor during 10 separate pumping days during the season, 34,000 gallons of waste from 60-plus locations have been removed from the Park this season. Trash in outhouse vaults has been an ongoing issue, with pump damage due to Park trash damaging the contractor's truck pump system and taking it out of service for over a week. Issues such as this are worth monitoring to prevent damaging Park relationships with local contractors.

Frank George, the Park's Heavy Equipment Technician, and the newly added seasonal Maintenance Mechanic, James McQuarrie were busy in the shop keeping the fleet running and in good order. Oil changes, break jobs, tire patching, and other repairs and preventive maintenance kept the shop busy. Frank was also able to do a full engine swap on an older snowmobile to keep it operational and in the fleet ahead of the winter season. This is of high value to the Park due to the increasing cost of new snowmobiles.

The newly hired Supervisor Carpenter, David Fogg, started work with the Park in June, filling a void created by the previous carpenter's retirement. David has already become an important member of the department bringing a diverse skill set that goes well beyond carpentry.

#### **DAICEY PROJECT:**

The Maintenance Supervisor, along with the Park's Human Resources Administrator and Director of Administrative Services have been working through the HR and Budgetary processes of creating the Project Superintendent and Crew Member positions. The anticipated hiring of the Superintendent is January 2024 and Crew Members are April 2024.

Over 260 spruce logs ranging in length from 24 to 36 feet have been harvested from the SFMA for use on the project. These logs were carefully selected in a team effort by the Maintenance Supervisor, Lands Manager, and a contracted hand crew cutter. The logs were trucked to Patten where they are being peeled by a contractor, with some then being milled flat on one side for use as roof purlins. The logs will then be moved to a staging location near the project site prior to snowfall.



#### **SFMA Update:**

The summer harvest began in June in the southern portion of the SFMA and is ongoing. The operation is producing a relatively typical mix of products, including spruce, fir, and white pine sawlogs, hardwood hygrade, hardwood pulp, and firewood for use in the Park. Products are being sold to both Maine-based and Canadian mills. In addition to the typical products, SFMA staff and harvesters worked closely with

Keith Wehmeyer (Maintenance and Transportation Supervisor) to supply the park with tree-length spruce (of special specifications) for use in the renovation of the Daicey Pond cabins next year.



Brent Chadbourne preparing to yard logs for the Daicey Pond cabins

In September, crews from Horizon Forestry completed 200 acres of Pre-Commercial Thinning (PCT). This represents a significant accomplishment, as PCT has been recommended for multiple stands for several years, but SFMA staffing, the pandemic, and contractor availability presented challenges. SFMA staff hope to build on this first project with Horizon on future PCT and other specialized forest management tasks.

The SFMA also contracted Kevin Osborne to work as a forest technician for two days a week during summer and fall. A crew from Horizon will be returning in the coming weeks to complete approximately eight miles of boundary line maintenance in the north end of the SFMA.

Lands Manager Shane Miller and Natural Resource Director Nava Tabak recently made presentations on a webinar hosted by Friends of BSP about forestry in Maine and in the SFMA. The webinar will be followed by a tour of the SFMA for the Friends of BSP board and general members on October 27th. A recording of the webinar is available on the Friends' website at <https://www.friendsofbaxter.org/sfma>.

### **Law Enforcement:**

The Park has been busy this calendar year. We have had (40+) Search and Rescue responses involving Park staff, Volunteer Search and Rescue teams, the Maine Forest Service Aviation branch, and the 126th Medvac National Guard. In September year-round and some seasonal staff attended a fall protection training hosted by the Maine Dept. of Labor.

Additionally:

- South Branch Pond staff are constructing a new boat dock
- Kidney Pond shop roof was reshingled
- Upgraded emergency spill kits park-wide
- Staff participated in the annual statewide Loon count
- Fire hose testing was completed parkwide and upgrades of equipment continue
- Blowdowns were cut on the Tote Road after wind/ rain events
- Training was provided for staff on fire suppression methods during a prescribed burn of a brush pile at the Rum Service Area
- Nearly daily coverage provided for mountain patrol on Katahdin summit
- New picnic shelters were constructed at Trout Brook Farm
- Several picnic shelters were reroofed throughout the park



-The Director, Acting Chief Ranger, and Acting District Ranger attended training at Husson College with MWS/MFS (Managing Difficult Employees).

**Law enforcement issues include:**

- Filming without a media permit
- Leaving 50+ rocks on the summit
- Importing of plants into the park
- Camping in a closed area
- Dogs in the park
- Motor Vehicle accidents
- Dealing with bear issues in campgrounds
- Oversized groups
- Fishing violations
- Illegal drugs