



Baxter State Park Authority Meeting Minutes
Kidney Pond Library, Baxter State Park
10 am, Friday, May 31, 2024

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

Attendees:

Baxter State Park Authority: Chair and MFS Director Patty Cormier, ME IF&W Commissioner Judy Camuso, Attorney General Aaron Frey

Assistant Attorney General: Carey Gustanski

BSP Staff: Director Kevin Adam, Natural Resources Director Nava Tabak, Director of Administrative Services Lori Morrison, Acting Chief Ranger Rob Tice, Trails Supervisor Brennan Turner, Maintenance & Transportation Supervisor Keith Wehmeyer, Park Services Manager Bryan Buhler, Supervisor Enforcement Ranger Laura Whitney, Office Specialist Georgia Manzo

BSP Advisory: Chair Carl Carlson, Vice Chair Carla Ritchie, Charlie Jacobi, Bob Baribeau, Rick Bray, Brant Miller, Tom Bradbury, Sam Wright, R. Michael White,

Friends of Baxter State Park: Executive Director Aaron Megquier, President Josie Quintrel, Vice President Hope Rowan

Baxter Park Wilderness Trust: Trustees John Loyd, Jensen Bissell

Other Guests: Susan Loyd, Herb Fithian, Julianna Hansen, Breena Bissell

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

Consideration of the March 8, 2024, BSPA meeting minutes: Commissioner Judy Camuso moved to approve the minutes, and Chair Patty Cormier seconded the motion. No discussion. Motion carried, 2-0. (Attorney General Frey arrived later).

Baxter Park Wilderness Fund (BPWF) Trust Update: Trustee Jensen Bissell thanked Frank Trautmann for establishing this generous gift several years ago to protect the legacy of Governor Percival Baxter and Baxter State Park, and since then a small group of people has cared for it with the intention of growing the fund. Generally characterizing the Fund's Trustees as "a cautious group", Jensen shared that the BPWF balance is currently \$33M and is primarily made up of equities and low-cost index funds, and through careful administration, currently provides Baxter Park with \$100,000 per quarter or \$400,000 annually. Chair Cormier thanked the trustees, adding that their cautious approach is paying off.

Donations Report: Lori Morrison introduced the report for the period of October 14, 2023, through May 24, 2024, with donations less than \$1,000 totaling 3,445.75 and donations \$1,000 and over, including two BPWF contributions, and the proceeds from the Friends of Baxter sign auction, totaling 205,578.34 for a grand total of \$209,024.09. **Commissioner Camuso moved to approve all donations of \$1,000 and over with a thank you to Friends of Baxter and the BPWF trustees, and the motion was seconded by Chair Cormier. No discussion. Motion carried, 2-0.**

Advisory Committees - New Appointments: The Authority reviewed written bios on the nominees for the Research, SFMA, and Investment Committees. Nava Tabak recommended the appointment of **Chuck Loring** for one of the two open seats on the SFMA Advisory Committee. This committee has 3-year terms but does not have a limit on the number of terms a member may serve.

Moving on to the Research Committee, Nava explained that this smaller group currently has nine members, and with fewer restrictions on the number of members and no term limits, **the Authority was asked to consider five extremely qualified researchers to join this committee: Sheenell Webb, Gabe LeMay, Ron Butler, Malcolm Hunter, and Laura Kenefic.** Both the SFMA and Research Committees consist almost entirely of members who have served for a very long time, so it is hoped that overlapping new members who bring new, other, or continuing expertise to serve with the existing long-term members will maintain the continuity of knowledge of the Park.

Lori Morrison announced that Carl Gercke recently stepped down from the Investment Committee, and thanked Carl in absentia for his service of 20+ years, adding that the Investment Committee is very pleased to present committee member nominee **Jessamyn Larabee North** to the Authority for consideration for this vacant seat. Jessamyn is from Maine, has visited Baxter Park, and is excited to have been asked to serve on the committee.

Lastly, Kevin Adam introduced **Julianna Hansen** for consideration for one of the vacant seats on the BSP Advisory Committee. Julianna provided her background which includes having worked as a Wilderness Educator in the Park in 2012, and later as a campground ranger at Roaring Brook and Katahdin Stream, educating the public about the unique nature of Baxter Park. Julianna has been a Park volunteer, and views joining the Advisory as further strengthening her commitment to Baxter Park.

Tom Bradbury, Tom Goetz, and Bob Baribeau are stepping down from the BSP Advisory and were applauded for their many contributions, sharing of talents, and years of service.

Commissioner Camuso moved to accept the slate of nominees as presented for the Research, SFMA, Investment, and BSP Advisory Committees, and the motion was seconded by Chair Cormier. No further discussion. Motion carried 2-0.

BSP Advisory Subcommittee Updates: Charlie Jacobi updated the Authority on the work of the **Commercial Use (CU) Subcommittee**, who worked through the winter to craft four draft documents for consideration by Park Staff, the full Advisory Committee, and ultimately, the Authority. They include a policy statement, application form, permit conditions, and an end-of-season CU annual use form to better inform the Park of commercial use (volume, activities, seasonal use, feedback, etc.). These draft documents will be reviewed by Park staff within a timeline that provides for roll-out to commercial users before the end of the year.

Carl Carlson added that the **Statement of Purpose (SOP) Subcommittee** is in a similar place in that the SOP is being reviewed and the next step is for the subcommittee to meet with Park Staff to finish the review of the document for it to be presented to the full Advisory and ultimately to the Authority for consideration.

Park Operations Update: (See the 5/24 Memorandum from Director Kevin Adam for the full update):

Human Resources: Lori Morrison announced that Jessica Wheaton started as Business Administrator on March 17, quickly adapting to her role which involves managing Human Resources and certain accounting functions. Jessica is a valuable member of the Park's administrative team and we are pleased to welcome her.

The Park started with 30 vacant positions which resulted in 6 internal transfers, 2 internal promotions, and 22 external hires. In the absence of a Human Resources staff person before Jessica joined the team, this recruitment process was a big lift and truly was a collaborative effort across areas of responsibility. Lori expressed gratitude and congratulations to everyone who helped with this successful effort. Nine candidates were interviewed the week of May 24 for the Chief Ranger position. Second interviews will be scheduled in the coming weeks.

Lori introduced Bryan Buhler who joined the Baxter team on March 4 as the Park Services Manager. Bryan oversees 14 staff at the Visitor Center, the Reservations office at Headquarters, and Togue Pond and Matagamon Gates. Bryan hit the ground running and has revamped the customer representatives' training process and is conducting ongoing training and reviewing processes.

Winter camping closed on April 1. **Statistics** showed there was still a lot of opportunity to enjoy winter activities in the Park. Examples included Chimney Pond at 35% capacity, Kidney Pond at 28% capacity, and Abol at 6% capacity. Currently, in the rolling reservation system, 2024 reservations by site for the period from 5/15 - 9/22 show that there is still capacity at each location. Examples included Katahdin Stream at 61% capacity, Chimney Pond at 81% capacity, Kidney Pond at 76% capacity, and South Branch Pond at 40% capacity. The closure of Daicey Pond has likely impacted Kidney Pond's stats. Director Cormier asked how this compares to last year's capacities. That comparison will be compiled and shared at a future meeting.

Financials for Jan-March, FY24 -Q3 - Revenue is \$3,984,000 - (2% negative variance as compared to budget) - primarily due to user fees that fell below expectations. Total revenue reflects the \$89,000 disbursement received for the Daicey Pond Project. Personnel expenses are under budget by 11%. In Q2, there was a positive variance of 14.9%. This quarter reflects the unbudgeted 6% wage increase as a result of contract ratifications granted in January. We also hired personnel during that period. All Other expense category is under budget by 16%. In the Q2 report, All Other was 40% under budget and it was noted at the time that the variance was related to the timing of expenses, and that is now coming in line. Capital expenses as of March were at \$159,175, and 55% of the capital allocation was utilized in Q3.

Revenue for the Daicey Pond Project is \$89,000 through endowment disbursements in March and April, and Expenses of \$34,892 (6% of the total budget).

IT Update: Dovetailing with Director Adam's focus on commercial use, Tim Deetz has been making changes to how data is collected for commercial use and has created a methodology for analyzing data that the field personnel collect at the request of the Director. Tim also replaced the six-year-old server at headquarters, adding a second UPS to the primary rack to support the new server and

better distribute the electrical demand of devices. Over the winter there were solar deficiencies that were not anticipated, and there was a large draw from the firewall access switches. Configurations were made to improve this and provide longer last time.

Information and Education: Nava Tabak updated the Authority on the selection of this year's Visiting Artist, Jacyndy LaDeau, who will stay at Kidney Pond for two weeks in September. She is a landscape artist and a fungus specialist and plans to do some detailed drawings of various fungi in the Park. The Park's Wildnotes News has been released and includes our scheduled summer programs. We have staff and non-staff experts helping to present these programs to Park visitors.

I&E staff worked with Bruce White and volunteer Rick Bray to prepare for and staff a BSP booth at the Eastern Maine Sportsmans' Show. In April Nava and Rick Bray staffed a table at the 4000 Footer Club annual awards event in Exeter, NH, a valuable opportunity to educate peak hikers. At this event, Nava discussed the special history, mission, and features of the Park, to assist future visitors in planning their trips and respecting Park rules and policies.

Along with various educational sessions conducted at spring training, I&E staff distributes a monthly newsletter for staff outlining programs, events, and featured topics - this month's being National Trails Day, highlighting Lester Kenway and his pioneering trailwork in the Park. For Natural Resources in the Park, Nava and Cassandra have created a dedicated iNaturalist project for Park staff submissions for May through October and demonstrated the app at spring training. In under a month, there were well over 1,000 observations from 14 staff and two volunteers. Half of those observations are considered "research grade" meaning that other people have confirmed the identifications and researchers would feel more comfortable drawing on those publicly available data.

Along with many research projects ongoing in the Park, the Maine Natural Areas Program is starting a project to relocate rare plant populations across the state and has identified several in the Park. State botanist Don Cameron spent a lot of time in Baxter Park and has retired, and we are excited that new state botanist, Eric Doucette will be coming to the Park for this project.

SFMA: Baxter Park is working with researchers from UMaine who are part of the Maine Adaptive Silviculture Network to set up 1-2 sites in the SFMA. There's also some late succession and old growth modeling taking place and we're working with that researcher to do some ground truthing, starting in the SFMA. Summer harvest in the SFMA will start soon.

Nesowadnehunk Stream Study: There's a four-mile-long stretch of this stream that runs parallel to the Tote Road between Kidney Pond and Nesowadnhunk campground. Recurring issues such as flooding, road closures, and road damage have occurred and Keith Wehmeyer and the maintenance team have done numerous repairs. There are also erosion concerns. We want to allow the stream to continue readjusting for a healthy aquatic habitat.

Two years ago, BSP contracted Acadia Civil Works (joined by Field Geology Associates), who completed their report for BSP this past March. Their charge was to look at this entire stretch of road, tell us what's going on from the perspective of the stream, and what our options are with rough estimates (modeled on 100-year occurrence events, though climate change and a higher occurrence rate will be considered). Field Geology Associates produced a geomorphic assessment of the stream

including information on how it was altered for log-driving, how it has naturally changed, and where the stream wants to go. They did a hydraulic analysis on the flood plain, high-flow versus low-flow areas. Recommendations were separated into four sections of the stream. Range of costs, logistics, resiliency, and shorter-term versus long-term investments were all provided, and all were for measures beyond what we currently do when the road washes out. Keith Wehmeyer added there's a one-mile stretch of road that has gone underwater 4-5 times in the past two years and after the storm this past December the entire section of road was significantly under water. This presents environmental and safety concerns and is a huge burden on staff. We want to address this stretch of road as part of the Park's entire road management and Shane Miller has been working with Keith to prioritize roadwork parkwide.

Trails: An entirely new seasonal crew has been hired and is busy clearing trails on the north end with help from Park Rangers to determine areas of need and prioritize accordingly. Brennan has formalized and re-structured chainsaw training and has provided 17 campground and trail crew rangers with Class B Chainsaw training thus far. Flood-damaged bog bridging repairs are ongoing as are normal tasks of repairing trails and improving structures.

In 2022 Brennan met with the BSP Advisory to discuss the Nesowdnehunk Stream Crossing at Daicey Pond. The Sentinel Mountain Trail used to connect Daicey Pond and Kidney Pond Campgrounds, but the various bridge iterations have washed out and the stream bank has changed rapidly. Baxter Park partnered with UMaine's civil engineering department to assess the feasibility, possible designs, materials, and cost of a walking bridge, and we received the report in late April and Staff will review it.

Maintenance: Keith Wehmeyer updated the Authority on the work of the maintenance team including that Matt Martin has concluded servicing the entire Park's propane infrastructure including heaters, refrigerators, ranges, water heaters, and lights. Extensive work is being done on the Park's seasonal fleet along with other routine maintenance on vehicles and equipment, and an overhaul of a 1993 GMC 1-ton truck formerly owned by the MFS. This week, a new outhouse was installed at Slide Dam to replace the one that had been destroyed by high winds, and the installation of roofing panels on the Nesowadnehunk Ranger Station was also done to replace those damaged by high winds.

In late March, Daicey Pond's Building Maintenance Superintendent Paul Sannicandro was hired and immediately he and Keith began interviewing construction crew candidates, hiring four who started in early May. Also in late March and into April, BSP staff traveled into Daicey by snowmobile to move logs to Daicey's more difficult-to-access cabins and demolished Cabin 2. The roof of Cabin 4 was stripped and hauled away. Following spring training, the crew jacked and leveled Cabin 3, and installed new concrete disc footings, posts, and braces, replaced multiple rotted logs, and moved on to similar work on Cabin 1.

Spring road repairs were extensive, and we were fortunate to get dump trucks on the road as early as we did. Keith and Shane will be meeting on Monday with Alex Abbott, a stream restoration specialist, focusing initially on a crossing at Bear Brook on the Roaring Brook Road. He will provide us with information needed to do budgeting and permitting and in conjunction with the stream study we just received, determine how to mitigate this damage.

Enforcement Rangers: Laura Whitney (seasonal campground ranger) was offered the position of Supervisor Enforcement Ranger, overseeing the Chimney Pond/Roaring Brook campgrounds. She will attend Phase 2 law enforcement training in Wells in June. Multiple required training classes for law enforcement staff were held, as well as a Maine Forest Service Incident Management Team-hosted tabletop scenario exercise involving a simulated forest fire that started in Baxter Park. Forty people from multiple agencies attended.

Solar Eclipse: The total eclipse of April 8 saw most of Baxter Parks staff on duty and it was estimated that 50 visitors entered the Park. The snowstorm helped keep numbers down because people could not drive to the gate. Three young men from NH stayed in the Park Sunday night and started to hike Abol and came down to Katahdin Stream after the event and were met by Rangers.

Spring Training: The first week of training focused on new staff, allowing for more creative, focused, hands-on training. Bruce White and Justine Rumaker did a fantastic job developing schedules and training priorities and informing everyone of their roles. They, along with the Leadership Team, Tim Deetz, and others, provided new and returning staff with more efficient and effective training.

Ranger Ralph Heath was remembered by Park Staff during Law Enforcement Memorial Week in Augusta and at a small gathering at Ranger Heath's gravesite with family, friends, and retired BSP staff.

Executive Session: Attorney General Aaron Frey moved pursuant to Title 1 §405 (6) (c) and (e) of the Maine Revised Statutes to go into executive session to discuss with our attorney the status of the lease of the Katahdin Lake Wilderness Camps, the condition of those camps, and the future of those camps and the lease. Commissioner Camuso seconded the motion, and the motion passed 3-0.

Authority, staff, and counsel emerged from the Executive Session having discussed the deliberations mentioned in the motion to go into the executive session and did not speak about anything else, and no votes were taken.

Meeting Adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Manzo
Office Specialist