



July 9, 2025

Baxter State Park

From: Reservation Sub-Committee

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To: BSP Authority,

Proposal for Reservation Process Change

Effective January 1, 2026

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Current Policy and Process

Reservation policy: Summer camping reservations are made on a four-month rolling calendar beginning January 15th each year.

Process: A reservation can be made (online, by phone, in person, or by mail) for the first night available in the 4-month rolling window. Reservation extensions for subsequent consecutive nights are allowed by calling the reservation office or requesting them in person on the day of, or after the 4-month rolling window opens. Extensions can be made for up to a total of 7 consecutive nights in the same campground and up to a total of 14 consecutive nights in the Park.

Change Proposal:

1. **Proposed changes to reservation extension length:** A reservation can be made for up to an additional 3 consecutive nights beyond the first night reserved in the 4-month rolling window, at the same campsite. A change in campground or campsite within the same campground constitutes a new reservation and must be made on

the day it opens in the 4-month rolling reservation window. Backcountry sites are excluded (and may still be extended for the full 7 days).

- 2. Change to allow for extensions to be made online:** In addition to reservation extensions by phone or in-person, reservations can be made online for the additional 3 nights beyond the first night available in the 4-month rolling window. Backcountry campgrounds and sites, group sites, and bunkhouses are made by phone only. This will not be changed
- 3. Change to the 12:01 a.m. opening time for online reservations:** Online reservations will open at 6:00 a.m., Eastern Standard Time, 4 months prior to the day of the reservation.

Problems the changes aim to address:

1. Leapfrogging: Moving from one campground or site to another during a consecutive stay within the Park with the purpose of using an extension to reserve a desirable campground/site before the 4-month opening window at that location. Then, before the beginning of the reservation, contacting the Park to cancel the portion of the reservation used to get the extension.
2. Reservation Phone Line Capacity: The current policy allows online booking of one night of camping within a rolling 4-month window. To extend reservations, visitors must call the reservation office, which often leads to high call volume. The Park has 16 incoming lines and 3-4 staff members answering calls. During reservation peak months like June, July, and August, when booking for Friday and the weekend or holiday, the demand can exceed available resources, with as many as 400 missed calls in the first hour and a half of the office opening.
3. Many visitors (both Maine residents and nonresidents) have expressed dissatisfaction with the 12:01 a.m. opening time for online camping reservations, as most tend to be sleeping at that time.

Impacts

1. Impact of Leapfrogging: The most frequent complaint from visitors is that the Park does not enforce the 4-month rolling window policy. This perception leads to dissatisfaction and mistrust in Park's handling of this policy. While "leaping" forward in the 4-month rolling window (either to a desired date in the same campground/site, or moving to another campground/site) is permitted through extensions, it creates an unfair advantage for those who are adept at booking with extensions and canceling all their reservations except for the date they intended to secure, which falls outside the allowable range of the 4-month rolling window. Frequent last-minute cancellations of the earlier dates (that were used to secure later dates in the reservations) likely lead to higher vacancy rates at sites that would otherwise be utilized by other visitors.

2. Impact of Phone Line Capacity: During peak months like June, July, and August, when booking for Friday and the weekend or a holiday, the demand can exceed available resources, with as many as 400 missed calls in the first hour and a half of opening. Visitors become frustrated and complain about poor customer service, and “give up” on trying to secure phone reservations and extensions.
3. Visitors feel defeated and give up on trying to secure camping reservations because it is unreasonable to be expected to stay awake until 12:01 a.m. to book. Additionally, when calling the reservation phone line at 8 a.m., it can take hours to get through and speak to a customer service representative.

Root Cause:

1. The current policy unintentionally allows visitors to use extensions as a means for “leaping” the 4-month window, creating inequities. This was not the intent of the policy when it was created many years ago, but visitors found this loophole to “leap”. The current extension policy allows for a total of 7 consecutive nights in the same campground and up to a total of 14 consecutive nights in the Park.
2. The current policy requires visitors to call the office after booking a camping reservation to extend the reservation. Visitors are also calling to receive guidance on their upcoming trips and to reserve backcountry sites. This overburdens the phone system and requires resources beyond what the Park can provide.
3. 12:01 a.m., opening time for online reservations, is unpopular because visitors report it is too late to stay up or too early to wake up.

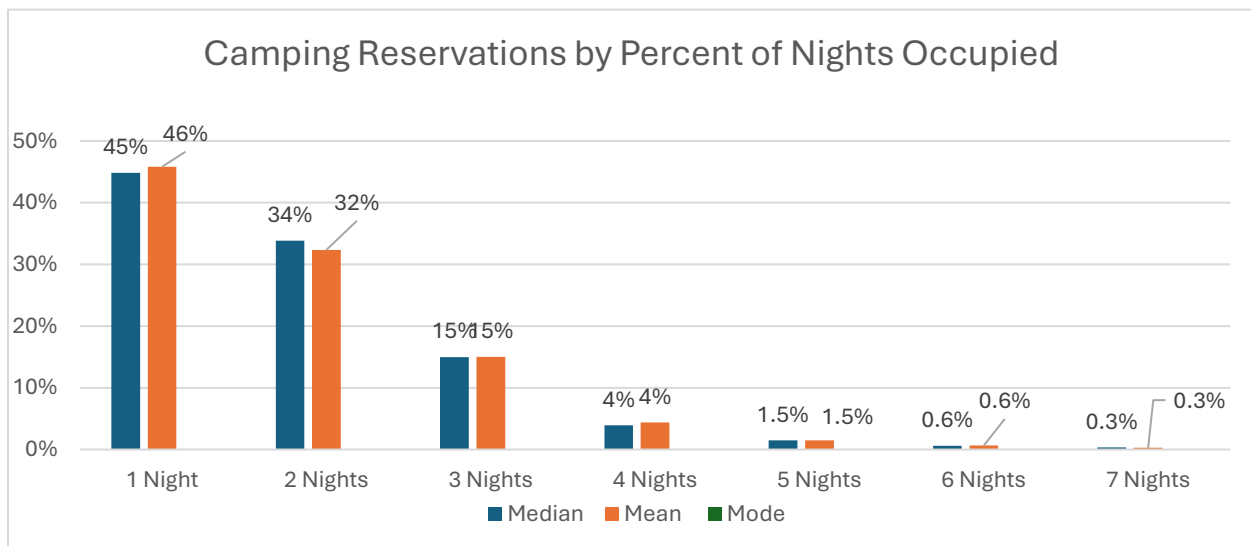
Implementation plan:

1. Implementation goal, January 15, 2026, for the start of the 2026 summer reservation season
2. Park Services Manager to work with Starfruit Solutions, the Reservation Software Vendor, on programming changes, also creating a test server environment. May 2025 – November 2025
 - a. June 2025 – October 2025 – Programming, testing on a test server, and verifying public readiness
 - b. Testing complete by October 31, 2025
3. Subcommittee finalizes proposal: 5/21/2025
4. Present to the full Advisory Committee for review, 5/30/2025, Advisory to provide final input on proposal: 6/15/2025
5. Present the proposal to the Baxter State Park Authority: 7/9/2025.
6. July- July 2025 – Develop communication plan with Nava and Cassandra.
August 2025 – January 1, 2026 – Targeted Communications

- i. BSP “What’s New in 2026”
- ii. Identify for change all printed and online material
- iii. Social Media content developed
- iv. Staff training
- v. External collaborator communication
- vi. A letter regarding changes to be sent to visitors via US mail and through an email campaign

Data:

- A. An analysis of the 2024 median, mean, and mode of camping reservations shows that the majority of camping night occupancy is for 1 to 2 nights. It was also observed that visitors tended to purchase a one-night camping reservation when DUPRs were not available. The committee believes that a 2-night stay is likely the highest occupancy rate when considering that many one-night reservations are made by visitors who plan to only climb and do not intend to stay overnight. The mode was reviewed and determined not to be significant for reporting. Daicey Pond occupancy was not included due to the closure, it is noteworthy to say that it may have slightly impacted the median and mean.



- B. The analysis of the 2024 no-show rates across various campgrounds was reviewed. Russell Pond- 33%, Katahdin Stream – 25%, Abol – 23%, Chimney Pond - 21%, Roaring Brook – 20%, South Branch – 13%, Nesowadnehunk – 12%, Kidney Pond 4%. Daicey Pond was not open in 2024 however, occupancy data is consistent with Kidney Pond.
- Note: No-show rates at the Katahdin Trailheads were generally higher than at other locations, with the exceptions of Chimney and Russell Pond. This trend may be linked to visitors utilizing camping reservations instead of a DUPR (KTP). Additionally, this observation aligns with the earlier-mentioned statistics, which indicate that 45% of reservations were for one night, but that is high because visitors were using a one-night reservation as a DUPR. When

leapfrogging, visitors book at Nesowadnehunk to start their trip most frequently but will also use any available campground/site to achieve the desired result.

C. The analysis for 2024 campground occupancy by desired site was reviewed and is as follows. (2023 occupancy was used for Daicey Pond) Kidney Pond – 92%, Daicey Pond – 90%, Roaring Brook – 90%, Chimney Pond – 88%, Katahdin Stream – 86%, Abol – 85%, Nesowadnehunk - 72%, South Branch - 72%, Russell Pond – 48%, Trout Brook Farm – 40%. Backcountry sites were reviewed but are excluded from this proposal.

D. Visitors who utilized the Park for 14 consecutive days were reviewed. In 2024, 6 parties stayed for the full 14 consecutive nights.

E. The following avenues were used to secure the 26,707 reservations in 2024:

- Phone reservations: 48.83%
- Online reservations: 41.51%
- Mail-in reservations: 4.60%

Additional and less frequently utilized reservation methods were:

- In-person at the counter: 1.61%
- Togue Pond Gatehouse: 1.43%
- Over the radio via a ranger: 1.42%
- Matagamon Gatehouse: 0.60%
- Note: Backcountry campgrounds and sites, group sites, and bunkhouses are made by phone only. This will not be changed.

F. Other resources studied and reviewed:

- Rec.gov, rules, policies, and booking/slide window
- Allocating Recreation with Fairness at the Forefront: A Research-based Planning and Management Guidebook
- Visitor complaints
- Patterns of visitors recorded at multiple sites during each stay. The average stay was two nights per campground, which was consistent with the average nights reported above in A. The assumption that visitors were utilizing a camping reservation as a DUPR (KTP) may be overinflating the percentage of visitors who reserved for a 1-night reservation.
- A survey was sent to BSP staff, who overwhelmingly supported the proposal.

G. The reservation subcommittee reviewed resident/non-resident data to determine if changes should be considered to support an advantage to Maine residents. The subcommittee determined that a change would not be recommended at this time. The data reviewed was as follows.

Analysis of Campground Occupancy: A Comparison Between Resident and Non-Resident Users

Our findings indicate that residents account for 54% of campground occupancy, while non-residents make up 46%. Notably, non-residents show a higher percentage of usage at the Katahdin Trailheads. One possible explanation for this trend is that non-residents are often more successful in securing camping sites, especially considering that they can only purchase Day Use Pass Reservations (DUPRs) for Katahdin Trailheads (KTPs) two weeks in advance. To further understand the impact of these trends, we will study the changes to KTP non-resident rules that was implemented in 2025.