



Baxter State Park Authority Meeting

10:00 am, Wednesday, July 9, 2025, Room 400, Burton Cross Building, Augusta

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

Office of the Attorney General: Assistant Attorney General Lauren Parker, Intern Thacher Carter

BSP Staff: Director Kevin Adam, Director of Administrative Services Lori Morrison, Natural Resources Director Nava Tabak, Office Specialist Georgia Manzo

BSP Advisory: Vice Chair Rick Bray, Herb Fithian

Friends of Baxter State Park: Josie Quintrell, Jerry Bley

Guests: David MacDonald

Chair Cormier called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. with a welcome and introduction.

Consideration of the May 30, 2025, BSPA meeting minutes: AG Frey moved to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Camuso seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion carried, 3-0.

Reservations Policy (Lori Morrison): Last year, the Reservations Subcommittee identified a priority list of issues that cause complaints in our Reservation system, including the Katahdin Trailhead Pass (KTP), formerly the Day Use Reservation Pass (DUPR), which was addressed in the fall of 2024. The subcommittee reconvened in January to focus on the issue of reservation “leapfrogging”. The incidences of leapfrogging have progressively increased over time, and social media has played a part. As an example, a reservation is made on March 6 for July 6 for day 1, based on the 4-month rolling reservation policy. The following day, the reservation is extended for a total of 14 days. The extension includes 6 more days in the same campground, extending another 5 days in another campground, followed by extending the final Friday and Saturday, the desired dates, at a cabin at Daicey or Kidney Pond. Then, following the extension, that person cancels all of the reservations except for the Friday and Saturday cabin, which was on days 13 and 14 of the reservation. This situation allows people to leapfrog beyond the 4-month rolling window and limits availability for others to reserve sites. This also creates unnecessary work for the reservation staff. Visitors have expressed frustration and anger that the current system is not equitable. This proposal also addresses phone congestion resulting from the high volume of calls to extend reservations. The Park’s phone line capacity (16 lines and 3-4 staff answering the calls). Data shows days when there are over 400 missed calls in the first hour and a half of the day. The demand far exceeds the Park’s resources to manage this volume.

These proposed policy changes are data-driven and aim to address issues and enhance the visitor experience. The BSP Advisory Committee has reviewed this proposal, as well as the staff and leadership at Baxter Park, and it received immense support..

Current policy and process:

- Camping reservations are made on a 4-month rolling calendar beginning January 15.
- A reservation can be made **online, by phone, in person, or by mail for the 1st night** in the 4-month window (except for backcountry, bunkhouse, and group sites - phone only).
- Extensions for consecutive nights are allowed **by calling the reservations 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 7 consecutive nights in the same campground and up to a total of 14 consecutive nights in the Park.** Loopholes in this policy are causing leapfrogging.
 - Frequent last-minute cancellations lead to higher vacancy rates at sites.
 - Misconceptions that Park staff are not enforcing the policy have caused dissatisfaction and mistrust.
 - Inefficient use of the Reservation Staff's time (cancellations, refunds, administrative work)
- **12:01 a.m. EST** opening time for online reservations
 - Visitors frequently complain that this is an inconvenient time. Most people are sleeping.

Proposed Changes:

- Camping reservations can be made **for up to an additional 3 consecutive nights** beyond the first night in the 4-month rolling window, at the same campsite.
 - Beneficial to staff and visitors (reduces congestion issues).
- A change in campground or campsite within the same campground **represents a new reservation** and must be made on the day it opens in the 4-month rolling window (Backcountry sites, bunkhouses, and group sites are excluded; those may still be extended for 7 days. Reservation extensions **would also now be made online (or by phone or in person)** for the additional 3 nights.
 - Backcountry sites, bunkhouses, and group site reservations will still be made by phone call only.
- Online reservations will open at **6 a.m. EST**, 4 months before the day of the reservation.

The changes will aim to address the following issues:

- Leapfrogging
 - It still can happen, but it will be minimized
- The reservation phone line capacity is being stretched to the point of inefficiency.
 - Demand exceeds capacity during peak months. The change will allow staff to assist callers more effectively and reduce frustration.
 - Callers are “giving up” trying to make a reservation.
 - Staff will have more time to answer questions and provide a better visitor experience.
- The one-minute-after-midnight reservation opening time. It is an inconvenience and causes dissatisfaction among residents and non-residents.

The subcommittee did not want this process to seem punitive, but rather to be seen as a convenience for scheduling vacations and booking flights due to their confirmed reservation at the Park.

Park Services Manager Bryan Buhler is working with the reservation software vendor on the programming changes and building a test server. This process has begun in order to finish testing by October 31 to implement these proposed changes on January 15, 2026, for the 2026 summer season. If the Authority chooses not to proceed, it can be put on hold until 2027. Nava Tabak and Cassandra Knudsen will work with Lori and Bryan to develop a communication plan, targeting October through December 2025. This committee will remain standing.

Chair Cormier asked about the no-show numbers and how this will affect them. The no-show rates at campgrounds with trailheads are generally higher, and it is hoped that the changes made to the KTPs will reduce the no-show rates, as some are directly related to people reserving a campsite as a KTP with no intention of staying there. Additionally, if people can secure the desired campsite without needing to extend it the next day, pending availability, they are less likely to cancel. Nava added that in the scenario where the first 12 days are canceled, whether or not those get re-booked depends on when they are canceled. If they cancel the next day, it's likely the site will be rebooked, but the chance of rebooking decreases if the cancellation is delayed closer to the reservation date. There will likely be some vacant sites. Note: if a camper doesn't show up the first night, nothing happens, but if the camper doesn't show up the second night, it is considered a "no-show" and the site can be rebooked unless the camper called to explain (i.e. a family emergency, and they plan to be there the third or fourth night) in which case the site would be held for them. When a reservation is made, the visitor is required to agree to the terms and conditions, and the no-show and refund policies are very clear. Lori will check the email confirmation received by the visitor to ensure it includes the consequences if, for some reason, they do not show up.

Commissioner Camuso motioned to accept the changes to the Reservation Policy as described beginning January 1, 2026, seconded by AG Frey. Chair Cormier prefaced her favorable vote with a request that a report of the outcome of the changes be provided to the Authority in September of 2026. The motion passed, 3-0.

Operations Update: Kevin Adam focused this report on the search and recovery of Tim and Esther Keiderling. On Sunday, June 1, Tim and his daughter, Esther, entered the Park through the Togue Pond Gate and signed the trail register at Abol at 6:30 a.m. The weather was classified as Class 4, and at the peak, the temperature was 30°F with 30-40 mph winds, and the wind chill was 19°F with rain, sleet, freezing rain, and hints of snow. We know they summited by the images in their phones. Approximately 40 hikers were on the Abol/Hunt trails (those trails intersect), but only seven people hiked to the top of Katahdin that day, including the Keiderlings. The trail had opened on Friday.

That night, the Abol Campground Ranger informed the Duty Officer that a vehicle had been left in the day-use parking lot, and the next morning it was still there. (It isn't unusual for vehicles to still be in the day use parking lot at any or all of the three trailheads, and the majority of them are gone by morning or the hikers are off the mountain.) Tim Keiderling's wife called Monday morning to say she had not heard from them. Once it was determined it was the Keiderling's vehicle (rental), the process of asking hikers to notify rangers if they see or know them began. Between 10 am and 11 am, phone numbers were retrieved from hiking rosters and the reservations list, and at noon on Monday, two hikers were contacted who had passed them and talked with them on Sunday (mid-morning), about a half mile away from the summit, and from what they observed, the Keiderlings were likely pre-hypothermic at that point. By the end of Day 1 (Monday), the Maine Warden Service, Maine Forest Service, and Maine Army National Guard were able to search by air, as well as with canine teams. On Tuesday, June 3, searchers were flown to the top of Katahdin to save time. On Tuesday, around 1:00, the canine team found Tim, deceased, not far off the Saddle Trail, 3/10 of a mile from the summit. The search focused on Esther at that point, utilizing experienced personnel with technical skills (it was suspected she was not on or beside the trail). On Wednesday, she was found deceased between the Saddle and Cathedral trails.

Kevin spoke highly of the coordination of the agencies and the efficient transport of searchers to the top of the mountain. The new Warden Service mapping program (Caltopo) is outstanding and saved time reaching the search areas. Radio communication is always difficult in this terrain, and a MASAR Team member relay was set up on Knife Edge. Interactions with the Keiderling family were positive. Media communications went well. The after-action meetings produced some useful information for future searches, and the Critical Incident Stress Debrief identified areas for change. Commissioner Camuso thanked Kevin Adam for keeping the Authority informed, and for his experience with these situations, and thanked the BSP staff and the agencies involved. These incidents are hard on staff, and debriefs are important.

Within days of the Keiderling search and recovery, multiple hikers were benighted, and an exhausted hiker was rescued and short-hauled by MFS. Law enforcement activity included two cars hitting rocks between Abol and Katahdin Stream on two different days, disabling the vehicles and blocking the road. One of the BSP Enforcement Rangers hit a deer, damaging the vehicle. A hiker who had committed violations in the Park was stopped by one of our enforcement rangers. It was a very contentious stop, and he attempted to leave the stop early and, in the process, ran over the Ranger's foot.

An urn was found on Katahdin, and it was finally determined by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) that the ashes within were those of a mammal, but were not human remains, and will be disposed of.

On Thursday, June 12, Versant worked on their lines locally, resulting in power brownouts and brief power failures at BSP headquarters, which caused our internet to fail, disabling phones and our ability to take phone reservations. Tim Deetz determined that the brownout damaged

GoNetSpeed's (our internet provider) firewall and caused BSP's firewall to lose its programming. People could still make reservations online (separate from our internet), but they could not call in to make reservations on June 13. A surge suppressor will be installed on BSP's server box, which will reduce the likelihood of this happening again.

Katahdin Lake Wilderness Camps: AAG Lauren Parker reminded all that at the last meeting of the Authority, it was voted to send a letter from Chair Cormier on behalf of the Authority to Charles Fitzgerald. The June 4, 2025, 30-day notice of termination of hold-over tenancy at the Katahdin Lake Parcel in Baxter State Park was sent, and Mr. Fitzgerald received the letter. In response, the Authority received a memorandum from David MacDonald, who is here on behalf of Charles Fitzgerald.

Lauren had a question about one sentence in the second paragraph of the memorandum: "Charles has signed a revised, 'clean' document, and is prepared to offer it to Kevin following the upcoming Authority meeting, pending your decision." Lauren asked David if Charles is offering that to the Authority today? David responded, "Good question." Adding, "They hope the sequence of events would be that the Authority would pause the termination proceedings, giving them a couple of days to remove some personal belongings from the main lodge, and Kevin would accept the donation on Monday, and then give them 30 days to complete the lease and if that isn't done and Charles doesn't sign the lease or agree on it, give him another 90 days to remove belongings from a couple of the buildings. He's 90 years old, in New York, hasn't been on the site, but is prepared to move very quickly, but in sequence, so we don't frustrate his interests. Lauren asked, "Is it something you have here with you, because in the normal course of donations to the Park the donor sends a signed check and it is presented to the Authority through reports from BSP, there is representation that the donor has decided to give the gift, instead of seeking what feels more like preliminary approval such as "we'll give you \$5,000 if you vote....". David said, "The schedule of meetings has been one of the challenges - to get the sequencing right. The intent is there, the document is here, it is signed, maybe the Authority can vote to authorize Kevin to accept it on Monday, but that's your decision. I am explaining how, logistically, we would like to see the next few days go. And, I can share with you the signed document I am holding."

Commissioner Camuso asked if Charles had someone nearby to move those personal objects. David responded that some friends have offered to help, adding, "If the approval is given to accept some and retain 3-4 buildings, he (Charles) would move a few things to his personal cabin so we are not frustrating the intent of the deed or taking something after you (the Authority) had accepted the deed." David showed the Authority the signed document.

Executive Session (Katahdin Lake Wilderness Camps): Commissioner Camuso moved pursuant to Title 1 Section 405(6)(C) and (E) of the Maine Revised Statutes to go into executive session to discuss the use of real property and the acquisition of personal property at Katahdin Lake, and the legal rights and duties of the Authority as to accepting gifts and leasing status at Katahdin Lake. AG Frey seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed 3-0.

Authority, staff, and counsel emerged from the Executive Session and did not take any votes, and only spoke of the matter at hand (Katahdin Lake Camps). Commissioner Camuso moved to refer

this matter to the Attorney General's office, seconded by AG Frey, with no further discussion. All were in favor, and the motion passed 3-0.

David asked if there was any anticipated timeframe on how that might play out. AG Frey responded that we had a timeline set up in the lease that's now expired. Mr. Fitzgerald received the (June 4) letter, so that's the timeline, and he or his representative can contact the Attorney General's office to talk about next steps.

Austin Cary Lot: Nava Tabak reminded the Authority that at the last Authority meeting, we had mentioned that the bill to get legislative approval to convey the Austin Cary property to another entity had come out of committee as Ought to Pass" and shortly after, it was voted on by the legislature, approved, and signed by the Governor on June 9, and will take effect June 24. That is where the matter stands, and we are requesting direction from the Authority on the next steps.

Executive Session (Austin Cary Lot): Commissioner Camuso moved pursuant to Title 1 Section 405(6)(C) and (E) of the Maine Revised Statutes to go into executive session to discuss the disposition of the Austin Cary Lot. AG Frey seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion passed 3-0.

Authority, staff, and counsel emerged from the Executive Session and did not take any votes, and only spoke of the matter at hand (Austin Cary Lot). Commissioner Camuso moved for the Director of Natural Resources to pursue options to sell the Austin Cary Lot, seconded by Chair Cormier, with no further discussion. All were in favor, and the motion passed 3-0.

Meeting Adjourned at 1 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Manzo
Office Specialist