



## **Baxter State Park Authority Meeting**

**10:00 am, Friday, October 3, 2025, Kidney Pond Library, Baxter State Park**

Approved by Authority Vote (Date): \_\_\_\_\_ Chair Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Attendees:**

**Baxter State Park Authority:** Chair and MFS Director Patty Cormier, Attorney General Aaron Frey

**Office of the Attorney General:** Assistant Attorney General Lauren Parker

**BSP Staff:** Director Kevin Adam, Chief Ranger Matthew McGuire, District Ranger Rob Tice, Trail Supervisor Brennan Turner, Maintenance & Transportation Supervisor Keith Wehmeyer, Campground Ranger Alex Mangus, Office Specialist Georgia Manzo

**BSP Advisory:** Chair Brant Miller, Vice Chair Rick Bray, Carla Ritchie, Charlie Jacobi, Julianna Hansen, Sam Wright, Cameron Trubey, Eric Hendrickson, Herb Fithian

**BNY Mellon:** Baxter Park Endowment Manager Michael Daley

**Baxter Park Wilderness Fund Trustees:** William (Chip) Weickert, Jensen Bissell, John Loyd

**Friends of Baxter State Park:** Executive Director Aaron Meguire, Board President Josie Quintrell, Board Vice President Hope Rowan, Youth Program Coordinator Cass Stewart, Stewart Thomsen, Linda Thomsen

**Guests:** Tristan Sleeper, Beth Bradley, Sam Harris, Samuel Dulek, Kent Fletcher, Mike Perry, Elaine Hendrickson, Sue Lussier

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

**Consideration of the July 9, 2025, BSPA meeting minutes: AG Frey moved to approve the minutes, and Chair Cormier seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion carried, 2-0.**

**BSP Portfolio Overview (Michael Daley):** There was a meeting of the BSP Investment Committee on Thursday, September 25 at the office of Committee Chair Brian Noyes, in which the asset allocation and performance of the portfolio, and the overall environment were discussed, along with how much the market has bounced back since “Liberation Day” when tariffs took effect and the market was down 20% on the heels of that announcement. The market is now approaching record highs across most indices, which is a significant turnaround. For context, in May, the value of the portfolio was approximately \$117 M (consolidated), and performance was -1.00% through the end of May; now the market value is \$131 M (consolidated) - an 11% return YTD. That highlights the importance of not trying to time the market; it’s very unpredictable. Instead, our philosophy is to stay invested over the long term and stay tilted toward risk assets, which over time produce strong returns.

Market returns across asset classes through August were highlighted as compared to YTD and reflect September’s strong results. Non-US markets have done exceptionally well, up 30% YTD. The S&P 500, as of the end of August, was up 10.8% and is up 15% as of yesterday. The three key drivers of returns are earnings, interest rates, and inflation, and all three are currently favorable.

**BNY Wealth's forecast:** The S&P 500 year-end 2025 price target is between 6,300 and 6,700, and we're at the upper end of that target. BNY's 2026 target is between 7,100 and 7,500. It is believed markets will perform well and earnings will continue to increase. From a portfolio perspective, what BNY Wealth is recommending to clients, including Baxter State Park, is a small overweight to risk assets. This is versus a long-term neutral policy allocation. In practical terms, for the Baxter portfolio, that means a policy equity weight of approximately 60%, and we're at 63% in the portfolio. We're implementing tilts where it makes sense. One detractor in the portfolio is that we've been underweight in non-U.S. equities (emerging and international markets). As mentioned, they are some of the better-performing markets in 2025, but BNY Wealth doesn't think that will continue. US markets are better positioned, and US companies are so much more efficient, especially with the growth and implementation of AI, so we're very comfortable with our current positioning.

**The overall asset allocation of the portfolio** is 63% in equities (diversified across US and non-US equities, large-cap, mid-cap, small-cap), 22% fixed income (US Bonds, and a small allocation to non-US Bonds). A part of the portfolio frequently discussed by the Investment Committee is the private investment portfolio, which includes Private Equity and Private Credit strategies. The goal, ultimately, is 15% allocation within that slice of the portfolio - currently at 13%.

**The Investment Policy Statement (IPS) Ranges:**

Equity: 50%-70% (Policy Target 60%)

Bonds: 15%-35% (Policy Target 25%)

Alternatives: 0% - 25% (Policy Target 15%)

Mike reminded the Authority that BNY Wealth continues to manage the BSP Portfolio within the constraints provided in the IPS.

**Performance - Total Portfolio:**

Year-to-date returns (consolidated) as of the end of August are 8.6%, and preliminary returns for the end of September will add another 3.5% for a total YTD through yesterday of 12%. Going into any year, the expectation is approximately 6% per year over the long term.

**Donations Report:** Kevin Adam reported that donations for the period May 21, 2025, through September 23, 2025, totaled \$122,115.40, with \$120,500.00 of that being donations of \$1,000 or more. **AG Frey motioned to accept the donations report as presented, seconded by Chair Cormier. Motion passed 2-0.**

**State Government Program Evaluation Report:** Kevin Adam reported that every eight years, each agency in state government is required to provide a report to the committee of jurisdiction, and for Baxter Park, that is the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. The last report by BSP was done in 2017. Lori Morrison took the lead on this report requirement and submitted it to the Authority for review and feedback. AAG Lauren Parker asked to add to Section 2. A: Enabling Authorization, a full list of the Private and Special Laws relative to Baxter State Park.

**Baxter Park Wilderness Fund Update:** Trustee William (Chip) Weickert reported that the Baxter Park Wilderness Fund Trust (BPWFT) has done very well this year. Its current market value is just under \$41M, earning approximately 16% thus far this year. It has more exposure to U.S. and non-U.S. stocks than the Baxter Park Endowment/Trust Funds. The Trustees are scheduled to provide a total of \$460,000 to Baxter Park through this fiscal year. Donations to the BPWFT are down just slightly this year. Chair Cormier expressed appreciation to the Trustees for their management of the Fund and its immense benefit to the Park.

**Austin Cary Lot Update:** Kevin Adam reported that Nava Tabak has developed a prospectus that has been shared with prospective entities, such as land trusts, and has received some inquiries. As interested parties come forward, options will be evaluated based on the conditions in the prospectus, and recommendations will be brought back to the Authority.

**Brent Randall Proposal to allow Adventure Motorcycles in BSP:** Kevin Adam received a proposal to allow adventure (dual sport, street legal) motorcycles in Baxter Park from Registered Maine Guide Brent Randall. There is a growing popularity with adventure motorcycling. Kevin reviewed this proposal with Lauren Parker, and a response was sent to Mr. Randall, explaining that motorcycles and ATVs are not allowed in the Park, and that Governor Baxter was very much opposed to their presence in the Park. John Loyd and Jensen Bissell reminded the Authority that in 1986 and the early 90s, a series of hearings were conducted throughout the state around the question of motorcycles in the Park following requests from the United Bikers of Maine, and the Authority at that time reaffirmed that motorcycles are not appropriate for use in the Park. AAG Lauren Parker explained that initiating a motion on this is not necessary because there is a rule in place that prohibits this use. Procedurally, if the Authority were interested in entertaining this proposal, it would vote to initiate the staff to begin the rulemaking process and bring the proposal back to the Authority. If the Authority is comfortable with the rule and the prohibition, a vote is not necessary today.

E-bikes are another issue that is being discussed. We've been allowing Class 1 and Class 3 bikes (pedal assist), but not Class 2, which exceeds a certain number of miles per hour and allows full throttle operation - no pedals. BSP rule says no motorized trailbikes. An electric pedal bike is motorized. We've been closely following National Park rules, and the staff will be discussing this issue in the near future. Some visitors are using e-bikes to get into areas like South Branch Pond to hike Traveler, reaching out to spots not ordinarily reachable during mud season.

### **Overview of Park Operations:**

**Finance:** FY25 (ending June 25, 2025), there was a \$6,686 (10.5%) positive variance, due in part to the timing of SOM trust disbursements, interest income received on the SOM Trust, Park-generated income, and an increase in the Baxter Park Wilderness Fund Trust annual disbursement.

Revenue fell short of budget projections as it relates to sales tax payable, firewood sales, and SFMA contributed revenue (poor markets). Personnel Expenses showed a positive variance of 2% and All Other Expenses a positive 7%. Capital expenses - \$452,185 include building, equipment, and infrastructure expenses (and the Daicey Pond Project). The capital reserve account is over \$200,000. This will be available for emergency needs, and we'll continue to build that account until it is at a satisfactory level.

**Daicey Pond Project:** This project is now completed. The total cost of the project was \$484,199, which was 89% of the high estimate. Notably, the actual cost of materials was 32%, slightly surpassing the budgeted 29%, while labor costs were lower at 57% compared to the anticipated 60%. General operational expenses were aligned with the budget at 11%.

**Human Resources:** There is one open part-time maintenance position. Except for Katahdin Stream, Kidney Pond, and Daicey Pond campgrounds, which close on October 22, the campgrounds will close on October 15, and a limited number of gate staff and extended roving rangers will end their season on November 30. BSP successfully transitioned to PRISM on September 8.

**Reservations:** Planning is underway for the winter lottery, to be held on Monday, November 3. On October 18, the Reservations office will close on the weekends for the off-season.

**Information & Education:** A variety of educational programs led by Interpretive Specialist Cassandra Knudsen and Intern Tzevi Aho were held in the Park and among others included "Paleo in the Park", "TreeID and Forest Ecology", and "Nocturnal Wildlife".

Visiting Artist Lauren Richelieu was in residence at Kidney Pond in September and created drawings and paintings of flora and fauna in the Park. She presented a public program on her work as a science illustrator and held an open house on the second weekend of her stay.

Natural Resource Director Nava Tabak has posted updated digital maps on the BSP Website, which were produced by Community Geographics for the Park. Additional map replacements on the website will take place over the winter, along with providing these updated maps to the public via the Avenza app. Major revisions are being done to National Geographic's map of BSP and the surrounding areas, which has long been out of date.

**Natural Resources and Research:** Multiple research and natural resource monitoring efforts have been taking place in the Park:

- Research on the glacial history of Katahdin (multi-year project, UMaine)
- Rare plant surveys (Maine Natural Areas Program and Native Plant Trust)
- Roaring Brook mayfly taxonomy (ME IF&W, 4 of 5 sampling trips)
- Water quality at South Branch Pond (ME DEP, 2 of 3 sampling trips)
- Bat stationary acoustic surveys (BSP staff for ME IF&W, 10 sites)
- Bat mobile acoustic survey (ME IF&W)

- Alpine plant phenology monitoring (BSP staff)
- Alpine plant climate resilience research (UMaine and UVM, completion of 2024 project)

Park staff and visitors have participated in the iNaturalist program, observing 824 species, and 48% of the observations reached the status of research grade.

Park staff completed multiple surveys for invasive knapweed, hand-pulling the plants in both the north and south ends of the Park, and, along with a volunteer, have also been pulling up bristly locust roots. The BSP Advisory will be volunteering tomorrow for bristly locust removal on a site targeted on the Roaring Brook Road.

The Maine Audubon Society's annual loon count was organized in the Park by Cassandra Knudsen, with 45 volunteers on 27 lakes and ponds (mostly within the Park), tallying 61 adult loons, 8 chicks, and 4 nests, an increase over the 2024 counts on the same number of water bodies, which is encouraging, though more surveying is necessary for a more meaningful picture of the long-term population trends.

Summit and Trails Intern Dan Tamburro completed an inventory of signs in Katahdin's alpine areas and several additional high-elevation areas in the Park. This inventory will assist Park trails and natural resource staff in planning for sign replacements, additions, and removals to improve protection of natural resources and trail infrastructure on Katahdin and other areas above treeline. Dan also inventoried private canoes stored in the Park at various locations, to facilitate the renewal of registration or removal of unregistered canoes. Rob Tice added that there are about 30 canoes in the Park that are grandfathered, and 17 of them are not currently compliant. Rob will be hiking into a few of the ponds today to determine their access and develop a plan to haul them out this winter by snowmobile.

**Scientific Forest Management Area (SFMA):** Markets are extremely weak right now. We have a new harvest contract with Acadian Timber (KFM), and the plan is to harvest in the winter, starting in November, and those plans can change depending on market conditions. A compressed schedule to minimize road maintenance and other costs will be necessary. The SFMA Advisory Committee will tour the SFMA on October 10.

**Maintenance:** Maintenance & Transportation Supervisor Keith Wehmeyer reported a busy summer and early fall. Aside from normal maintenance, the Park inherited fire equipment from the Maine Forest Service, and the maintenance team spent considerable time setting up and servicing it so it could be on standby during the high fire danger months. In the field, maintenance and repair of staff housing is ongoing. Park Carpenter Jesse LaPorte's projects included leading the re-roofing of the garage at the Togue Pond Ranger Camp, along with volunteers and roving rangers, and rebuilding the front wall at the Trout Brook Farm garage. Jesse was the lead on the replacement of the porch at Kidney Pond Cabin 5.

Keith Wehmeyer has been planning and prioritizing cabin work at Kidney Pond and working on a

schedule for the winter months. Logs that have been harvested for this project are being peeled, and some framing on porch roofs is being done. Work on the library is also planned.

Keith continues to work with Stream Restoration Specialist Alex Abbott, surveying problem stream crossings that are undersized. Alex will provide recommendations for stream restoration and how to improve crossings long-term. Keith added that Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument has been replacing stream crossings and is using pre-cast concrete structures. Keith drove over one of their bridges, and it was hard to tell it was there (gravel-topped). Baxter Park is planning to use these pre-cast, open-bottomed concrete crossings. Currently, the bridge at Kidney Pond has minor scour issues beneath its abutment, and one at Nesowadnehunk Stream, which is a gabion basket abutment, has significant scouring issues due to some high water events. Jim Foster, a former DOT Bridge Engineer, now a private contractor, along with Keith, looked at both of these bridges, and he had some recommendations to armor the bank there significantly because the stream is trying to push beyond. Patty added that this winter, the Maine Forest Service will release a Stream Best Management Practices guide for trails and smaller streams.

**Trails:** Trails Supervisor Brennan Turner reported that this year has been a strong combination of repairing or replacing bridges or boardwalks that are expiring, have expired, or failed, and attending to overgrown remote trails that had a lot of deferred maintenance, specifically the Northeast Trail and the Frost Pond Trail. The Upper South Branch Mountain Trail had a long boardwalk section that flooded and had been damaged by beavers, and was replaced, and the trail crew replaced the first two sections of the Sandy Stream boardwalk that had collapsed. The Elbow Pond boardwalk that had been flooded out by beavers is now twice as long. The Upper Saddle Brook Bridge at Chimney Pond was replaced, and the trail crew finished the OJI alignment, which included new bridge construction. Ordinarily, we don't add bridges to our trail network. This was an exception because it's close to the trailhead, and managing the resources to build the bridge is quite simple; and it replaced an extensive amount of bog-bridging that was in a low-lying flood zone and was washing away every year.

Chief McGuire added that the Maintenance and Trail teams are small, and they accomplish a great deal during the busy summer. They do a great job.

**Field Operations and Law Enforcement:** Campground Rangers have been scraping and painting structures, clearing blowdowns, and constructing canoe racks. They assisted with the re-roofing of the Togue Pond Garage, which was long overdue. Rangers have been assisting with water level monitoring and continue to provide Preventive Search and Rescue (PSAR) for hikers hitting the trailheads, which helps reduce the number of incidents that might occur. They are also responding to calls for service for late, overdue, or injured hikers, and campground rangers and roving rangers have been assisting with mountain patrol. This program is both for data collection for resource protection purposes and for public safety.

There has been a prevalence of flat tires and disabled vehicles this year, and there's one rock in particular between Abol and Katahdin Stream that a number of vehicles have succumbed to. We will continue to let motorists know to abide by the speed limit.

We've made significant progress in our wildfire prevention, and Chief McGuire acknowledged District Ranger Rob Tice, who has been the Park's fire management officer and liaison with MFS. Fire danger has been very high, and the Park has been at a Level 2 preparedness for most of the summer and had a two-week backcountry fire ban, and in late August had a parkwide fire ban one weekend due to the existing drought conditions, high gusting winds, and low ground moisture. Rob and Matt have been participating in statewide fire briefings with the Maine Forest Service to keep them apprised of our resources should they have to respond to the Park and to help us stay aware of what is available statewide.

Supervisory and Law Enforcement Rangers prepared for and coordinated the Summit Project and the K100, and led monthly "Toolbox Talks" focusing on safety in the workplace and proper tool use, conducted vehicle crash investigations, assisted with disabled vehicles, supervised SAR incidents, and provided logistical support for their staff. Summonses and warnings have been down, and that is due in part to educating our visitors that starts when they make their reservation and continues when they enter the Park.

Sarah Grebleski has been chosen as the Park's newest law enforcement ranger. Sarah has worked the last two seasons as a backcountry campground ranger at Chimney Pond. She will start some field training here and then potentially go to the criminal justice academy in January, or at least start the State's law enforcement pre-course in January.

**Appalachian Trail:** Supervisor Bruce White continues to do a great job handling our influx of AT hikers into the Park through the kiosk at Abol and at Katahdin Stream. Numbers are down 18% at this juncture, with 1,287 AT hikers registered through August. This decline is likely due to the damage caused by Hurricane Helene last fall along the southern portion of the AT corridor. There will be another bump soon as hikers make the push ahead of the closing of the mountain.

Katahdin Stream Rangers Pete Sweeney and Corey James conduct "Finish Well" talks at The Birches at 5 pm every night during the height of the season. Messages are all about respecting other hikers, Park staff, the mountain, and the Indigenous people who consider it a sacred place. ATC Ridgerunner Hailey Lynch and BSP's Ridgerunner Don Bolduc provide information to hikers at the AT kiosk at Abol Bridge. Their presence has likely contributed to the reduction in AT Hiker incidents.

Search and Rescue was punctuated by the Kedierling SAR in June. The three-day incident demonstrated effective coordination between BSP and its partners, including the Maine Warden Service, the Maine Forest Service, the Maine Army National Guard, and the Maine Association of Search and Rescue.

Through September 15, the Park has had 66 SAR incidents, with 36% (24) occurring in August alone. This is the first time since 2016 that August has been the busiest of the three primary summer months. The preponderance of SAR incidents this season is due to falls, lower extremity injuries, dehydration, exhaustion, and exceeding ability.

The Keiderling incident and the Kosc incident garnered media attention this season. The Koch incident involved a helicopter rescue off Knife Edge (two separate parties overnighted). There was a knee injury, and assistance from the MFS and ME Army National Guard was required. It was asked if the Park considered billing the party for the costs of the rescue (Koch incident). Kevin Adam responded that this didn't rise to that level of necessity. Matt McGuire added that it was not willful. There may be a case that arises that does warrant it, and there's a law under Title 12 that allows for charging for search and rescue costs.

We're running into incidents where Park Visitors' iPhones are inadvertently generating pre-programmed distress messages. These calls, dispatched through Houlton RCC, reported a forest fire, an airplane crash, and two motor vehicle accidents. None of the incidents occurred as reported, but required significant staff effort and resources to respond and verify. This is a nationwide trend. We will look at our initial protocols to see what we can rule out prior to a search. It was asked if, since it is an automated text, does it appear differently to the 911 dispatcher than legitimate calls. Rob Tice responded that it does come in as an automated, non-responding number, so we try to text back to the number and can't get a lot of useful information back.

Seven MASAR teams have provided standby and active service this season, and Rob Tice continues to coordinate the schedule for this very important resource.

**Advisory Member Recommendation:** Kevin recommended Brian Olsen for the open BSP Advisory position. Brian is a trained wildlife biologist and conservation biologist with a Ph.D. in biological sciences from Virginia Tech, with particular expertise in ornithology. Brian has been serving as Professor of Ornithology at UMaine since 2008. Kevin added that Brian will be an excellent resource and certainly broadens the subject matter expertise on this committee. [Brian couldn't be here today, but earlier mentioned that his ability to contribute would be first and foremost as a wildlife biologist and conservation scientist, and he is also an avid outdoor user, hiker, backpacker, and trail runner, all of which give him multiple lenses through which to view the Park.] Chair of the Advisory Committee, Brant Miller, highly recommended the appointment. **AG Frey motioned to approve the appointment of Brian Olsen to the Advisory Committee, seconded by Chair Cormier, and the motion carried 2-0.**

**Executive Session (Katahdin Lake Wilderness Camps): AG Frey moved pursuant to Title 1 Section 405(6)(C) and (E) of the Maine Revised Statutes to go into executive session to discuss the status of the Katahdin Lake property. Chair Cormier seconded, and the motion passed 2-0.**

**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).**

Meeting Adjourned at 11:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Georgia Manzo  
Office Specialist