

Position Statement
Friends of Baxter State Park
Hiking Trails

Issue: Planning, maintenance and restoration of hiking trails within and adjoining Baxter State Park

Background: The Friends of Baxter State Park believe that the trail system is the primary and most important way visitors interact with the wilderness values of the park. We understand that use patterns, budget constraints and competing interests may have limited the ability to maintain the trail infrastructure at optimum levels, which would maximize resource protection. Trails throughout the park, especially in the fragile and somewhat compromised alpine zone, offer both management challenges and opportunities for extraordinary wilderness experiences and should be given a very high priority in the management of the park. The addition of the Katahdin Lake lands offers opportunity and challenges for development of new trails to complement the existing system. The Friends welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of a comprehensive, long range, trail management plan for Baxter State Park.

Related issues include long-range planning and increased financial capacity.

Friends Policy:

1. We support the development of a hiking trails management plan that:
 - A. springs from the wilderness values described in the deeds of trust and other documents;
 - B. includes completion and ongoing review of a comprehensive inventory of trail conditions;
 - C. is based on state of the art knowledge of carrying capacity, with clear goals and objectives for acceptable resource conditions;
 - D. considers a balance between hardened trails that protect the resource and primitive trails that provide a wilderness experience.
 - E. considers options such as temporary seasonal closure as a management tool;
 - F. gives priority to maintaining existing trails and careful consideration of new trail development according to established criteria for adding or removing trails from the system; (see Policy Statement North Peaks Trail dated July 12, 2004)
 - G. considers the option of loop trails to disperse impact and maximize the visitor's experience;
 - H. includes non-intrusive hiker education as an important management tool;
 - I. considers thoughtfully and carefully any option of trail connections to/from lands abutting the park with identification of positive and negative impacts to the resource;
 - J. prioritizes work needs and the means to achieve them, with the highest priority (as already identified by park staff) being the ecologically sensitive, heavily used alpine zone.
 - K. considers a moratorium on trail development to any additional alpine areas or alpine summits that currently have no trails.

2. We believe that the park should offer a wide range of trail experiences based on existing natural and cultural resources and visitor use levels, and that all trail experiences should be characterized by a high level of wilderness value. This includes the entire spectrum from extensive trail-less areas to the development of appropriate wheelchair accessible trails. We also believe that large blocks of trail-less land offer unique visitor experiences, but more importantly, they protect resources relatively undisturbed from human use.

3. Because the trail system is so integral to the visitor experience, we believe that to the extent possible, a discrete park budget for trails should be established and increased. The Baxter Park Authority could consider options for development of outside funding up to and including procedures for addition of unencumbered funds to the endowment and should explore options for grants and increased volunteer and in-kind contributions to support park priorities in trail maintenance and construction.

Rationale- The above statement is in accord with the mission and objectives of the Friends of Baxter which are based on the Deeds of Trust and supported by additional writings and speeches of Governor Baxter. Percival Baxter addressed his vision of access and clarified his interpretation of the term “natural wild state” in the letter dated January 10, 1945 addressed to then Governor Horace A Hildreth and both houses of the Maine Legislature:

I want pleasant foot trails built and attractive camp-sites laid out in the valleys, by the brooks and on the shores of the waters. Everything in connection with the park must be left simple and natural....Every section of this area is beautiful each in its own way. I do not want it locked up and made inaccessible; I want it used to the fullest extent but in the right unspoiled way.*

The Friends of Baxter believe that the above policies support development of a long term trail management plan which preserves the natural order for its own sake, unspoiled by negative human impact. Implementation of such a plan will continue to provide opportunities for persons to gain perspective and insight in the “forever wild” setting envisioned by Governor Baxter.

Actions- The Friends of Baxter will:

- A. continue to urge BSP Authority to accept unencumbered outside funding for park priorities and to seek or accept grant money if this option becomes available;
- B. increase our volunteer trail efforts in the park;
- C. participate in the ongoing trails planning effort; and
- D. continue to educate ourselves about trail history, current conditions, maintenance and management, funding needs and options for meeting those needs.

* Formal Communications (1945), pp. 118-119 in Percival P. Baxter’s Vision for Baxter State Park: An Annotation Compilation of Original Sources (2005), Vol. 1 Deeds of Trust.