



**Policy Statement
Friends of Baxter State Park
North Peaks Trail
Adopted July 12, 2004**

1. Issue: Closure of North Peaks Trail Below Treeline

2. Background: A portion of the North Peaks Trail, that which goes from treeline down to the Northwest Basin Trail, was closed by the Park in 2002 for several reasons. First, the proposed establishment of the International Appalachian Trail continuing from Katahdin through the park created concerns of illegal camping throughout the heart of the park and increased use on this section of trail. Because backcountry sites are often reserved well in advance, it was felt that through-hikers, already requiring a higher level of management for climbing Katahdin, would simply ignore camping rules and hike through without reservations, camping wherever they chose. Second, the North Peaks Trail is a very low use trail. With limited resources to maintain trails, the park found it difficult to justify continued maintenance. Third, the trail was characterized as a high maintenance trail.

Related issues: Long range planning; cultural resources; International Appalachian Trail.

3. Friends Policy Position: The Friends of Baxter State Park urges the Park to reopen the entire North Peaks Trail.

4. Rationale – how this position supports the FOB mission:

The North Peaks Trail offers a quiet alternative to the heavy trail use around Katahdin itself. Low use trails offer the solitude integral to a wilderness experience and contribute to the diversity of trail experiences recommended in the Park Management Plan. We believe the trail allows hikers to enjoy the park in the “right, unspoiled way,” and thus adds to the wilderness character of the Park for those willing and able to discover it. When combined with the Davis Trail, the North Peaks Trail offers a long distance, day use loop hike from Russell Pond with outstanding wilderness characteristics. The North Peaks Trail represents an appropriate balance of protecting natural resources while facilitating visitor use.

The Friends shares the Park’s concern about spillover and illegal camping from through- hikers of the International Appalachian Trail. However, with the North Peaks Trail closed and not maintained, some of these determined hikers may continue on the Davis Trail anyway since it is an alternate route. The difference of a few miles means much less to them. In time, we believe this spillover can be mitigated by the following actions, many of which are already in place. The

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establishment of a designated IAT route outside the park to the east will steer most continuing hikers in another direction. Education of hikers by the Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC), Baxter State Park (BSP) staff, and guidebook authors will help also. Since ATC and BSP staff contact most through hikers as they enter the south end of the Park, only the few, true renegades are likely to continue into the Park without camping reservations.

The Friends also shares park concerns about the burden of maintaining hiking trails, a tremendous challenge. Our understanding is that although use of this trail is low, the resource impacts and maintenance requirements are also low. The Davis Trail, as an alternate route to Russell Pond, has more use and more problems with erosion than the North Peaks Trail. Leaving the North Peaks Trail open offers an opportunity to spread use out a little. Although the above treeline section remains open, as a dead end path, it will likely receive even less use than previously. It may even tempt less experienced hikers to continue on the closed section of trail, a potential safety problem.

In summary, we believe: 1. the North Peaks Trail is a valuable part of the park trail system that adds to wilderness experiences; 2. that IAT hikers can, in time, be managed effectively; and 3. that the North Peaks Trail is not a great maintenance burden

5. Action taken or proposed (as passed in a motion and vote of board)

The Friends position will be communicated in writing to Park staff, the Authority, and the Advisory Committee.