

Friends of Baxter State Park
Position Statement on the Permit System for AT Thru-hikers in Baxter State Park
Adopted May 8, 2017

Issue

The mission of Friends of Baxter State Park (FBSP) is to preserve, support, and enhance the wilderness character of Baxter State Park (BSP). For over 80 years, Katahdin has been the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail (AT). Most thru-hikers celebrate the end of their 2,185-mile hike responsibly, with a sense of reverence for a very special place. However, a small but growing number of AT thru-hikers are celebrating in a way that negatively impacts the Park's wilderness values, as well as the experiences of other visitors. The number of thru-hikers has also increased dramatically, from 359 hikers in 1991 to 2,733 in 2016. On February 1, 2017, Baxter State Park issued this statement on its decision to cap the number of thru-hikers per year:

Use of the Park by A.T. long-distance hikers has increased an average of 9% annually over the past 25 years. In 1991, the total number of recorded A.T. long-distance hikers in Baxter State Park was 359. In 2016, 2,733 A.T. long-distance hikers registered in the Park, an increase of more than 700% from 1991. Even in the last year (2016), 23% more A.T. hikers registered in the Park than in 2015.

In order to protect the natural resources of Katahdin and the visitor experience at Baxter Park, the Baxter State Park Authority has managed hiker access to Katahdin and Baxter Peak for several decades under a limited use model - with the exception of A.T. long-distance hikers. All Park visitors, both resident and non-resident, with the exception of AT hikers, work within a system that limits daily hiker access to Baxter Peak on Katahdin.

Based on the significant growth rates of the A.T., the Baxter Park Authority has determined that the time has come to include A.T. hikers in the same model respected by all other Katahdin hikers. This plan includes commercial, camp, school, guided and other organized groups entering the Park on the A.T. and planning to hike Katahdin via the A.T.

In 2016, Baxter Park initiated an A.T. Hiker Permit Card process that required A.T. hikers in Baxter Park to acquire a permit card. This process will continue, but to improve our management of A.T. long-distance hikers in the years ahead and to be consistent in our management of all of BSP visitors wishing to climb Katahdin, the number of permit cards available to A.T. long-distance Hikers in 2017 will be capped at 3,150.

Position

1. FBSP fully supports BSP staff and the BSP Authority in carrying out the Park's mission, which places resource protection first and recreation second.
2. FBSP supports the decision of the Baxter State Park Authority to include AT thru-hikers in the limited use model used for all other visitors to Baxter State Park.
3. FBSP supports the decision of the Baxter State Park Authority to implement a permit system for AT thru-hikers, including an annual cap on permits, with the understanding that the cap will be revised annually as needed to adequately protect the wilderness values of Baxter State Park, and that the permit system will be revised as needed to achieve the highest level of compliance from the AT hiking community.
4. FBSP is committed to an ongoing outreach and education campaign that will help this permit system succeed, and reduce the overall impacts of AT thru-hikers on the wilderness values of Baxter State Park.