

Jensen Bissell
Director, Baxter State Park
64 Balsam Drive
Millinocket, ME 04462

18 October 2009

Dear Jensen,

Given that, during the upcoming winter season, the Park staff and Advisory will begin review of its Management Plan and will be considering trail maintenance and development, the Friends of Baxter State Park (FBSP) would like to take this opportunity to call your attention to the documents we have developed over the past several years concerning Hiking Trails and also the status of the North Peaks Trail. These FBSP Position Statements are attached, and even though some time has elapsed and some things have certainly changed, our present positions remain largely consistent with these documents.

Hiking Trails

We continue to believe that long range vision and planning will result in maintenance and development decisions that will both protect the resource and offer recreational users a quality wilderness experience. We urge you to consider that different categories of trails have different purposes and that those purposes dictate management and maintenance decisions. Roaring Brook, Hunt and Abol are heavily used, hardened and designed to move many people up the mountain as efficiently as possible. Other, less heavily used trails, move people from one point of interest to another as simply and efficiently as possible. They still require some maintenance but are of great value to those who seek a more secluded wilderness experience. We agree that acquisition of the Katahdin Lake parcel adds a unique opportunity to develop a spectacular system of low elevation trails that will appeal to a wide spectrum of users. We also ask that existing trails not be abandoned because maintenance has apparently become prohibitive until all possible options have been carefully considered. Many individuals and long time users of the Park have identified certain trail segments or campsites as personal favorites. Loss of access to those particular areas is like the loss of a dear friend. Unless continued use of an area will result in unacceptable levels of resource degradation, the Friends urge that abandonment not be considered as a first alternative. For example, downgrading the maintenance of a trail segment that is lightly used would allow continued access for a dedicated few while controlling cost. Perhaps there are other options. An up-to-date and publicly available comprehensive inventory of trail conditions could spur more individuals to volunteer as trail stewards thus freeing Park staff for the more technical work on hardened trails and in the alpine zone. These are just a few suggestions. The Friends would again like to offer any assistance we can in developing a comprehensive long-range Trail Management Plan.

North Peaks Trail

History

In light of the above, the Friends also ask that you reconsider the status of the North Peaks Trail, one of the oldest and most cherished trails to the summit of Katahdin. John Neff in *Katahdin, An Historic Journey* (pp. 208-212) offers a brief history. In 1846, Everett Hale and William Francis Channing used the approximate route to reach the summit during an early scientific expedition. They were followed in 1849 by members of the Aaron Young Botanical Survey. John surmises that, "Both of these parties were certainly aware that this track, although considerably longer, offered a more gradual way to reach the high peaks." (p. 208) In 1884-85, with visions of wealthy sports, saddle trails, and a profitable resort, the Tracy and Love logging

operation laid out and opened the Tracy Love Trail on the present route of the North Peaks Trail. Mr. Tracy claimed to have ridden a horse to treeline in 1885. In 1886, a small group from AMC used the trail to reach the summit in preparation for a larger group the following year. Later logging operations, fires, and development of alternative summit routes made the trail less attractive to recreational users. As resort dreams faded and use declined, the trail grew in and became difficult to locate. Myron Avery found it barely visible in 1924. Development of the camps at Russell Pond in the late '20s brought renewed interest and a nephew of the original Tracy reopened the trail in 1927. The trail was reworked in 1930 and again in 1939. It was used more in the 1940s as the Howe Trail or the Howe Peaks Trail.

Although the trail was never heavily used, it remained a great favorite of some dedicated hikers who enjoyed the solitude and scenery. It provided an attractive alternative to the more crowded summit approaches from the east and west. In 2002, the section of the trail from treeline down to the Northwest Basin Trail was closed because of high maintenance needs, low use, and a perceived threat that the International Appalachian Trail (IAT) would use the route with potential for illegal camping and increased use resulting in resource damage and additional maintenance costs. Until then, it may have been the oldest continuously used trail up Katahdin.

FBSP Position

Friends of Baxter State Park has long held the goal of reopening this trail. (See the attached 2004 Position Statement concerning the North Peaks Trail.) The International Appalachian Trail has been routed to the east of Baxter State Park so those concerns are no longer an issue. In combination with the Northwest Basin Trail, the North Peaks Trail provides a secluded loop trail allowing access to above treeline and/or to the summit from Russell Pond and may offer a safer descent option when the weather is bad. It is a viable alternative to the Northwest Basin Trails steep, often wet, and eroded descent to Davis Pond. Friends support the use of loop trails because they offer the hiker a more private opportunity to enjoy the wilderness values of the Park, especially in remote areas, and lower the pressure on any single section of trail thus providing protection for the resource.

FBSP Proposal

Friends of Baxter State Park would like to explore with you options for ways to reopen the trail and to offer whatever assistance is required. We could work with you to secure the necessary funding and/or provide labor. Although the trail is currently blocked by numerous blowdowns, in the past, there were no significant erosion issues on the trail due to light use, reasonable grades, and thin or absent soils. Even though the old trail is becoming difficult to locate, there is a GPS record of its location. We could assist in reflagging the trail. We have members who currently volunteer to assist with trail work in the Park and several who are certified to use chainsaws. We could help clear the blowdowns. We could even enter into an agreement whereby the Friends could become Trail Steward of the North Peaks Trail, assuming responsibility for opening and maintaining the trail under the supervision of Park Staff. We would be very appreciative if you would consider these offers and let us know how we can best help reopen this historic, popular route.

Sincerely,

Anne Huntington
Chair, FBSP Policy Committee
70 Lincoln Point Rd.
Wayne, ME 04284
207-685-3014 anne.huntington@att.net
inc: two FBSP Position Statements: Trails & North Peaks Trail