

**Friends of Baxter State Park**  
**Position Statement on Climate Change**  
**Approved May 2018**

**Summary**

Friends of Baxter State Park is concerned that climate change is threatening the natural ecosystems of Baxter State Park and public enjoyment of the Park's backcountry recreational opportunities. We are concerned that climate change will adversely affect the ability of the Baxter State Park Authority and staff to carry out the mission Governor Baxter established in the Deeds of Trust. Friends urges action at the global, national, state, local, and individual levels to reduce carbon emissions to lessen the threats of climate change to Baxter State Park.

**Background**

The effects of climate change associated with greenhouse gas emissions – among them destabilized weather patterns, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and migration or loss of plant, animal and insect populations – pose a substantial threat to the health, prosperity and safety of all Americans. The costs of dealing with these effects are real, growing, and already burdening taxpayers, families, businesses, all levels of government, and nonprofit organizations. They threaten the security, economy, health, and infrastructure of our nation and state.

While study of the impacts of climate change in Maine and elsewhere have often focused on coastal areas, there will be consequences for the mountains of northern Maine that are very real and of great concern to Friends of Baxter State Park. Katahdin, Maine's highest peak and the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, lies within Baxter State Park. Elevation within the Park ranges from 570 feet near Abol Deadwater to 5,267 feet at the summit of Katahdin. Temperatures and weather conditions vary greatly within the Park's 209,644 acres. Although it lies roughly midway between the equator and the pole, the exposed alpine ridges and headwalls of Katahdin have a climate similar to the Arctic. Because of these variations, the Park contains plants, animals and insects at the northern and southern limits of their ranges. Relatively minor changes in the climate of the Park will result in significant changes in its ecosystems.

Friends of Baxter State Park has taken steps to begin to address the impacts of climate change on the Park. For instance, the Plants of Baxter State Park project established a comprehensive baseline inventory of flora against which future changes can be measured. We are concerned that, in response to global climate change, the unique ecosystems of the Park will change in ways that may threaten the existence of those ecosystems, and may ultimately affect the ability of the Park Authority to carry out the mission Governor Baxter assigned it when he established the Park for the benefit of the people of Maine. Our concerns include the following:

- Ongoing changes in temperature and precipitation levels will require significantly increased infrastructure needs, such as road, bridge and culvert construction, and trail building and maintenance activities.
- Changes will likely impact the ecological diversity of the Park as species shift northward and higher in altitude due to warming conditions. Currently, Katahdin has 19 rare alpine species that are not found elsewhere in Maine.

- More frequent and increased storm severity will necessitate higher building standards and costs and more emergency repair activities. It may also increase the likelihood of later opening dates, safety issues, emergency park closures and camper cancellations negatively affecting public perception of the Park.
- Changes in temperature and precipitation will impact forest practices in the Scientific Forest Management Area and alter the makeup of that forest. The ability of the Park to carry out Governor Baxter's objectives for the Scientific Forest may be reduced by both sets of changes.
- Overall warming temperatures will have potentially negative impacts on the Park and its staff. For example, by encouraging earlier opening and later closing dates, staffing costs are likely to increase while training and off-season maintenance opportunities decrease. Shorter, warmer winters will challenge winter supply and maintenance activities at backcountry sites.
- Changes in traditional recreational seasons and opportunities for Park users may affect income and public support, for example, due to the spread of dangerous pests and the decline of certain popular cold weather activities, including winter camping and climbing, skiing, and snowmobiling.
- The organizational costs of time, effort, and financial outlay necessary to identify and analyze climate-driven changes in the ecosystems of the Park and to plan for and implement policies necessary to deal with those changes will stretch the resources of the Authority and Park staff, possibly to an unsustainable level.

### **Policy recommendations**

Friends of Baxter State Park stands ready to work with the staff of the Park, ecologists, foresters and other interested parties to identify anticipated changes on the Park due to climate change, outline a plan of action to monitor and address those changes, build public awareness, and work with policy makers at all levels of government to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Beyond that, Friends of Baxter State Park strongly urges the following actions:

- We urge Congress to embark immediately upon a course of action that acknowledges the serious threat posed by climate change and begins to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to an acceptable level in a clear, transparent and efficient way.
- We urge the State of Maine to act to reduce carbon emissions by developing appropriate policies and through cooperative agreements with neighboring states and provinces.
- Although it functions as more of a carbon sink than an emitter, Baxter State Park has a part to play as well. We recommend the Park examine its operations and develop emission reduction policies where possible. Furthermore, we urge the Park to use its position of influence with visitors to educate them about the impact of climate change on the Park's fauna, forests and ecology, and the role the Park with its undeveloped forests serves in combatting emissions.
- On an individual level, we urge each of our members and their families to examine their daily lives and take appropriate and meaningful actions to reduce their carbon footprint; and, further, to look for opportunities to influence their friends and neighbors to do the same.

## **Rationale**

Baxter State Park, Katahdin, and the tradition of conservation and low-impact recreational use that they symbolize are an important part of Maine culture. It is important that Friends of Baxter State Park take a position on this, a defining issue of our time. We hope that in doing so we can inspire other individuals, organizations and governments to consider appropriate actions of their own.

An overwhelming majority of scientists and economists have concluded that climate change has severe environmental impacts and economic and social costs. Climate change is being incorporated into the business models of businesses large and small, into insurance underwriting, and into military and security planning. The risks continue, however, and more must be done. Common sense dictates that prudent action taken now will be far less costly and more effective than dealing with the consequences of a delayed response. Doing so will create a healthier environment, more stable business climate, and more secure social structure in our state, region and nation. Failure to act is causing lasting harm. The effects of climate change are at once global in their importance and local in their impact. Successful action to address them must, therefore, proceed on many levels at once.

There are several existing proposals under discussion at the national level to reduce greenhouse gas levels. These include expansion of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, establishment of a national carbon fee and dividend, carbon tax plans, greenhouse gas sequestration proposals, and other regulatory, market-incentive and technical/scientific approaches. Rather than supporting a specific proposal, Friends of Baxter State Park urges that members of Congress work collaboratively to recognize the seriousness of the problems that climate change presents and develop a comprehensive policy to deal effectively with them. Given the seriousness of the problem and the lack of a clear plan of action on the part of the Executive Branch, it is incumbent on Congress to take the initiative as an independent branch of government and to act responsibly on this critical issue.

While real solutions to the problems caused by climate change require global and national-level actions, there is much that regional entities and state, county and local governments can do as well. Some local governments have acted establishing policies that begin to address the problem. But more needs to be done, especially at the State level.

Finally, although the challenge of dealing with the problems of climate change can seem overwhelming to an individual, there are meaningful actions that each of us can take to reduce our carbon footprint. Members of the Board of Directors of Friends of Baxter State Park are committed individually to doing so. We ask the citizens of Maine – and our members and their families wherever they live – to join in those efforts, and resist the tendency to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem. We urge you to believe, as we do, that the individual acts we take can make a difference. The *Maine's Climate Future* report (University of Maine, 2009) put it this way: “Reducing human and ecosystem vulnerability to harm and increasing resilience in the face of change is both an economic and a moral imperative.”