

# Forever Wild

Newsletter of Friends of Baxter State Park

Spring 2012 Supplement



## President's Column

by Barbara Bentley

One might think that a wilderness area such as Baxter State Park would survive just fine on its own, but Park Director Jensen Bissell makes a clear case that many factors – a number of them beyond our control – come into play in the management of the Park.

These forces – some environmental, social, economic, and even political – make the management of the Park an intricate dance to various, and often competing, rhythms. Achieving harmony requires successful and careful orchestration, something that the recently approved Management Plan will support.

Nestled in the Maine North Woods, the Park's wilderness character depends on the state of neighboring lands and their management. As large as it is, the Park's ecosystem extends well beyond the Park's boundaries.

While collaborating with the Park on projects in support of the Park's mission remains a prime focus of Friends of Baxter State Park and is greatly facilitated by the Park's recent planning efforts, given the changes and challenges Bissell so clearly outlines in this address, educating Park visitors and the public at large about the value to all of us of wilderness areas such as this remains one of our principal objectives. We invite your participation and support.



Looking northwest from Katahdin toward Doubletop, the hiker sees beyond the Park boundary to neighboring Chesuncook Lake (Gero Island on the extreme right) and Maine's North Woods.

– Photo © Bill Bentley

## State of the Park Address

by Jensen Bissell, Baxter State Park Director

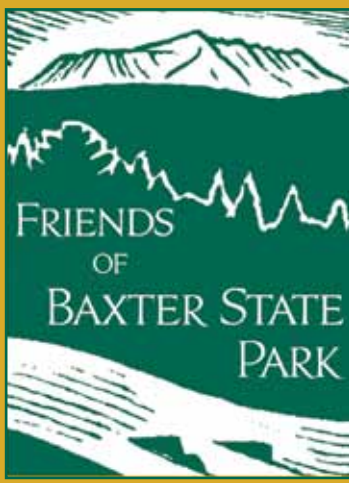
**In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.**

– Eric Hoffer

We owe the current *State of the Park* to both the dedicated staff who manage, maintain, and protect it and to the caring visitors who enjoy it in the “right, unspoiled way.” While we work hard on current management and operations, more and more of my attention is drawn to challenges now visible on the horizon. In this *State of the Park* discussion, I hope to summarize our current condition and provide an overview of emerging concerns.

In short, the current *State of the Park* is GOOD! I can sum it up fairly quickly:

- With the recent Authority approval of the Park's Management Plan, we now have an active, living document to provide guidance in long term planning and policy direction in the Park.
- While financial conditions for the Park aren't easy, our finances are workable and sufficient to support the Park's mission. Most importantly, careful analysis con-



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Friends of Baxter State Park is a 501(c)(3) organization working to preserve, support, and enhance the wilderness character of Baxter State Park in the spirit of its founder, Percival P. Baxter.



Ingenious engineering, lots of muscle, and long hours go into replacing bridges like the one here on Nesourdnahunk Stream near Daicey Pond.

– Photo © Park Staff

cludes that our history of spending from Trust endowments has been conservative and sustainable.

- We have completed a number of key adjustments in the Park's organizational structure and job classifications that will improve the Park's ability to attract and retain quality employees within a more efficient Park operation.
- We have substantially increased and improved the training program for Park employees. In-house candidates for Park positions now compete easily in training and certification with candidates with experience in other State and National resource management agencies.
- The Park has utilized independent support and unrestricted donations to address important infrastructure needs in the Park including additional effort in the maintenance, relocation, and reconstruction of hiking trails and the regular replacement of aging bridges, culverts, and facilities on Park roads and in Park Campgrounds.
- The Scientific Forest Management Area has completed its third certification as a sustainably managed forest under Forest Stewardship Council standards, and management of this important Maine resource continues to improve each year.
- We have significantly improved the Park's workplace safety and will continue to cultivate a culture of safety in the Park staff.

**Prediction is very difficult,  
 especially about the future.**

– Niels Bohr

While the current *State of the Park* is good, many challenges face us in maintaining this status in the years ahead as we move into an era of social and ecological change that may be unprecedented in modern times. The forces effecting change are not necessarily predictable in scope or pace, but we must do what we can to position the Park to accept and adapt. Here's a short list of what likely lies ahead:

As I write this, it is 79 degrees in Millinocket. It is the 22nd of March. This is both very unusual, and very troubling. This weird weather may be simply an anomaly of normal climate variation, but it's difficult not to suspect that more serious and long-term changes to our regional climate may be underway. Nothing will affect the Park more. A changing climate can usher in changes in the Park's forests and vegetation, including changes in the current limits of "treeline" and all of the currently rare



On ledges of basin headwalls, botanists in the early 1900's found the tufts of the *Diapensia*, one of the plants monitored by the Park today for its survival in the alpine zone.

– Photo © Park Staff

natural community types that exist on the Tableland of Katahdin. A changing climate will bring new vertebrate and invertebrate species to the Park that could not previously survive the harsh and long winter conditions. The distinction between the arrival of species formerly endemic to areas south of the Park and invasive exotics relatively new to North America may blur as both could result in startling changes to existing natural systems. The introduction of new animal and plant species (and the departure of some portion of the existing flora and fauna) will result in the reorganization and rebalancing of natural systems within the Park.

**We are living in a period of the world's history when the mingling of thousands of kinds of organisms from different parts of the world is serving up terrific dislocations in nature.**

**– Charles Elton**

With a different climate will come questions about Park operations. For the last half century the Park has provided opportunities for summer camping from May 15 to October 15. A changed climate will very likely prompt serious reconsideration of these dates. Increases in annual rainfall, or the intensity of rainfall events, may result in increased trail and road maintenance needs and may affect the ability of wilderness hikers to travel safely across waterways in the Park. Reduced winter snow depths or undependable winter snows will necessitate alternative plans for resupply of materials to backcountry campgrounds like Russell Pond and Chimney Pond. Access to the Park by winter campers and day users will have to change if snow is absent or unpredictable.

Increased intensity of natural events is also a change factor of great concern. The Park has recently completed an

emergency management plan to address logistics and resource protection planning in the event of a widespread high wind, fire, or heavy flooding event in the Park. In preparation for the high winds and rainfall predicted with arrival of Hurricane Irene in late August of 2011, the Park evacuated visitors for the first time in 40 years.

As developed countries on the planet intensify their search for sources for oil and the technology to refine it, higher fuel prices may begin to affect the ability for potential Park visitors to reach the Park. With no significant mass transit system reaching the proximity of the Park, and as the effort and expense necessary to reach Togue Pond or Matagamon Gate increases, visitors who come to the Park may stay longer.

**It can be safely said that when it comes to actual work on the ground, the objects of conservation are never axiomatic or obvious but always complex and usually conflicting.**

**– Aldo Leopold**

As change agents affect the Park more distinctly, an already complex management effort will become only more so.

The necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities of the staff tasked with managing the Park will likely increase. At the same time, the percentage of our general population willing and eager to spend months of the year living in rustic housing working in an outdoor environment seems to be steadily decreasing. The Park will need to be imaginative in finding new and innovative ways to attract, retain, and motivate the work force critical to the Park's mission pillars of resource protection, recreation management, exemplary forest management, and property and fiscal maintenance.

Improvements in technology have been influencing the Park's management and administrative processes for decades. With the advent of wireless technology, the refinement of solar energy systems and the proliferation of powerful, handheld, and very portable devices, the influence of technology as a force of change is accelerating. While opportunities exist for the Park to streamline processes and free staff for more important work, the Park must squarely confront the issue of defining the limits of appropriate and acceptable technology use within the Park.

Technology and human nature have combined to produce substantial changes in the structure and complexity of the Park's trust endowment portfolio. The increasing complexity and the inherent risks of modern endowment management will continue to require careful attention and calm, sage, management with an unruffled long-term view.

The past decade has seen unprecedented changes in land ownership all around the Park. New owners and different and novel management objectives will continue to challenge the Park to forge new, collaborative relationships with our many neighbors. Eventually, a new paradigm of land management in northern Maine may emerge, but indications suggest that time is yet in the future. In the meantime, the Park must remain adaptive and continue to form mutually beneficial and respectful working relationships with adjacent landowners.

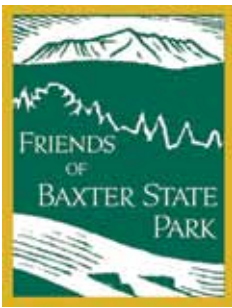
**Buy land, they ain't making any more of the stuff.**

**– Will Rogers**



*Black Brook Camps are among the several rustic cabins that house Park employees during the summer season.*

*– Photo © Park Staff*



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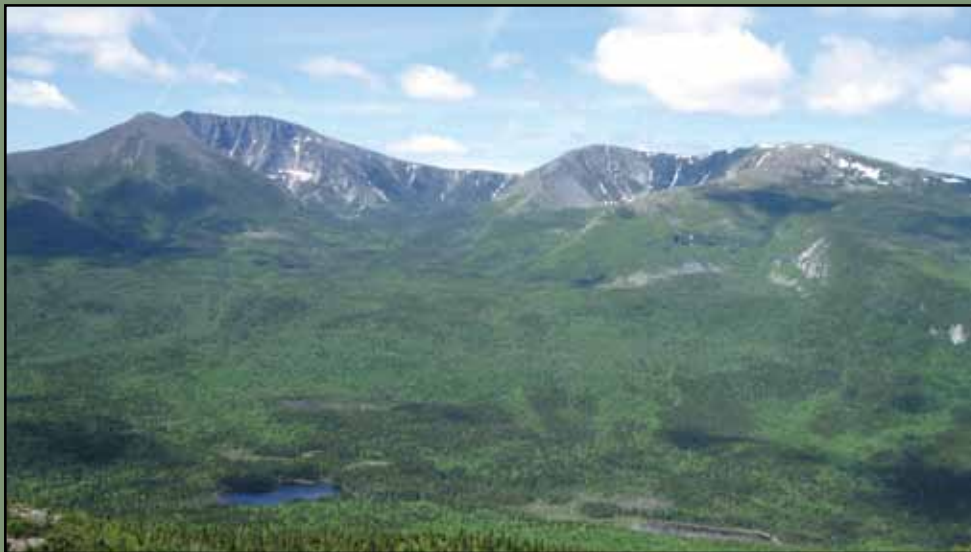
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*Thank you!*



The view from South Turner, with Whidden Ponds in the foreground, shows the triple-cirque structure of the Katahdin massif – South Basin, Great Basin, and North Basin (L to R).

– Photo © Park Staff

It is true, other than some minor volcanic regions on the planet, we have all the land we are likely to have. Of all the land available, only a tiny percentage has been preserved as wilderness. At just under 210,000 acres, the Park accounts for a little over 1% of the roughly 17 million acres of land in Maine. Such a small

amount of wilderness should be precious. Once lost, it is very hard to recover. Yet if history is an accurate guide, pressures to motorize, develop, access and make the Park's wilderness generally more convenient, will continue in the future. These pressures are most often presented in subtle, incremental ways. Wilderness is by

nature inconvenient. It is almost always hard to get to, and can be wet, windy, buggy, steep and rough. Wilderness is a personal and hands-on experience. No matter how much technology infiltrates our lives, when it comes to wilderness, there will never be an “app” for that. Percival Baxter wished that the Park always “be maintained primarily as a Wilderness.” For the thousands of Mainers who value the Park's wilderness and wish it to be available for their children and grandchildren, we must remain consistent in our commitment to maintaining the Park in its “Natural Wild State”.

These are just a few of the emerging concerns we will all be working on in the years ahead. As with the natural systems of the Park, these concerns include many complex interconnections and a decision in one area will likely have effects in other areas. Managing a complex area like Baxter State Park can be a real challenge – but what a wonderful challenge to have!