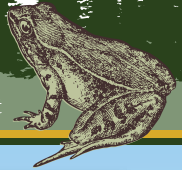


Forever Wild

Newsletter of Friends of Baxter State Park Summer 2013 Supplement



Executive Director's Column

by Aaron Megquier

Governor Baxter's ethic of *Forever Wild* is apparent throughout the *2013 State of the Park Address*, delivered by Park Director Jensen Bissell at the Friends of Baxter State Park Annual Meeting on April 27, 2013.

I am struck by how well this *Address* articulates the balancing act that Park staff must continually perform. We all know that wilderness comes first and people come second in Baxter State Park. Countless daily decisions are required, however, to make sure this is as true in the Park as it is on paper. Much of the 2013 Management Plan (available on the Baxter State Park website) is devoted to explaining how the *wilderness first* ethic is maintained for everything from visitor outreach to wildfires. The Park has made great strides; but as Jensen notes in his *Address*, there is always more to be done.

On that note, you will read about a couple of new initiatives: the Plants of Baxter State Park Project and the effort to relocate old, fall-line trails, beginning with the OJI Trail. Friends of Baxter State Park is pleased to actively support both these projects that help promote wilderness values and using the Park *in the right unspoiled way*, just as Governor Baxter intended.



In 2004, Park visitors enjoyed this view of Katahdin as they passed through the Togue Pond Gatehouse. With the current discussion on vista management under consideration by Park Staff, this may be possible again one day.
– Photo © Bill Bentley

State of the Park Address

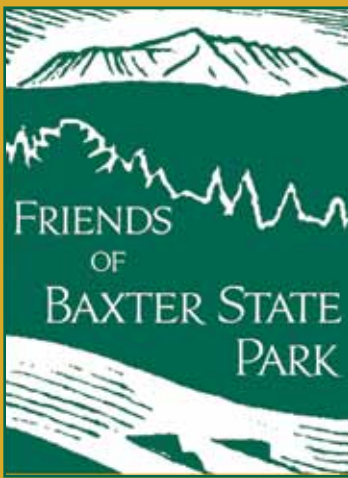
by Jensen Bissell, Baxter State Park Director

The State of Baxter State Park is Good! Over the past several years we have been diligently working on a number of efforts related to the Park's mission components:

- **Protecting Park Resources**
- **Providing Recreational Opportunities**
- **Conducting Exemplary Forest Management**
- **Maintaining Park Property**
- **Providing for Staff and Public Safety**
- **Managing Fiscal Resources**

Numerous changes to the Park's organizational structure, position descriptions, and standard operating procedure have been completed in order to build resilience and efficiency into our work as well as to clarify and streamline communications with Park visitors and in working relationships of staff teams in the Park.

We have made substantial strides in providing easier and more predictable access to the Park through the reservation system with adjustments to reservation policies, the implementation of on-line availability, and the Day Use Parking Reservation process for Katahdin-access trailheads. With the provision of on-line reservations in sync



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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.

with the rolling reservation system, we consider the reservation system changes to be complete, at least for the time being, and will turn our attention to streamlining the process at the Park gatehouses to improve tabulation of visitor data and to speed, simplify, and clarify the registration process.

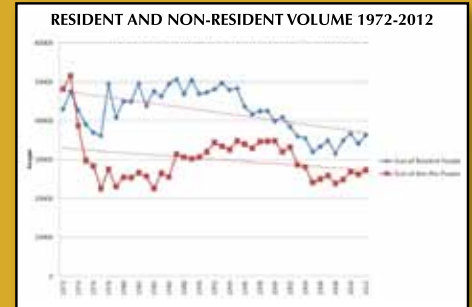
Several changes implemented to Park rules are aimed at improving protection of Park Resources and Public Safety, including changing the penalty for a rule violation from a criminal to a civil penalty, and limiting the maximum size of groups hiking in the Park to 12.

Slowly, but steadily, we have been implementing changes in our approach to visitor use in the Park – helping visitors develop an awareness and understanding that the Park is a **wilderness** and that the **resource has authority**. During their time in the Park, their safety is their individual responsibility.

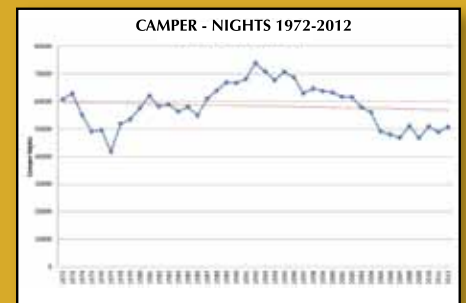


Maintenance Ranger Matt Martin shows a sign in progress like ones that will be placed away from the trailheads at the point where, in the event of a litter evacuation, the carry crew should call for ambulance dispatch. The signs will thus serve a dual purpose – an important message for the hiker as well as for rescue personnel. – Photo © Park Staff

The Park has a sound dataset of Park use indices gathered consistently over the past 40 years. After a 10-year period of declining visitor use beginning around 1995, Park use has been trending upwards since 2005. Predicting future activity based on past use can be a dangerous and flawed approach to planning. Visitor use can be influenced by many combinations of short and long term factors including weather, fuel prices, landscape scale natural events, and cultural and generational trends and preferences that are very difficult to predict. Careful review of historic trends in this dataset can generate important considerations in future planning and reflect the effects of past policy and procedural changes, but humility and a critical perspective should be maintained.



Other than the first two years of the data record, Resident Use had consistently outpaced Non-Resident Use. Resident Use began a significant period of decline in 1996 while Non-Resident Use did not begin to decline until around 2000. In 2005-2012, both Resident and Non-Resident Use rates have been trending upwards.



Highly variable over the period of record, the highest point in the Camper Nights graph is almost double the lowest point, which may be more correlated to summer weather patterns than Camper Use data as campers still arrive at the campground in bad weather but don't stay as many nights. Based on reservations so far, the 2013 Camper Nights volume is projected to match the average annual volume for the period of record.

We have been modifying our annual work plans to include several long-term initiatives that will better protect Park Resources. In 2013, we plan to complete the first replacement of a large (greater than 5' in diameter) culvert on the Park road system. Along with three major bridges, the Park road system includes more than 15 culverts 6' or larger. In the 40 or more years since these culverts were installed, the options, technology, and engineering involved in their replacement has grown exponentially. Hopefully, the replacement of the culvert at Black Brook in the northern portion of the Park Tote Road will mark the start of a continuous effort to review and rehabilitate the Park access road infrastructure.

Hiking trails are the heart of Baxter State Park. Our 220 miles of hiking trails have evolved on the Park landscape over a long



Many of the Park's trails follow the shortest route from trailhead to peak - often straight up the fall line - and are subject to continual erosion. Following the pilot trail re-location on Mount OJI, parts of the Marston trail as seen here may also be relocated. - Photo © Bill Bentley

period of time with an endless stream of good intentions driven by a love of hiking in the Park's Wilderness. Maintaining these trails in our landscape and with our forest and vegetation cover is a real challenge. In recent years, we have almost doubled the human and fiscal resources directed to the maintenance of Park trails. In 2013, we will be initiating a more comprehensive review of the Parks trail system utilizing the Trail Evaluation Matrix and data provided by the recent Trail Inventory to evaluate and plan the application of trail maintenance efforts in the years ahead.

Also in 2013, we expect to complete the first effort at significant **trail relocation** in the Park. Many of the trails in the Park were located, cleared, and established by hardy and efficient Mainers, focused on getting from point A (the

trailhead) to point B (the peak) as directly as possible. Many of the Park trails travel on the fall line or directly upslope. With significant hiker-traffic and precipitation, these trail segments pose considerable erosion concerns. In many instances, our trail maintenance efforts have not been able to keep pace with the unceasing effects of rain and snowmelt traveling straight downhill on a fall line trail. In other instances, original trail locations utilized former landslide zones to reduce the trail clearing effort. These zones are often unstable and unsafe for the average Park hiker. With the completion of the OJI Trail Relocation Project and the data provided by the Trail Inventory, the Park will have experience, as well as cost and time data, to apply to planning a series of relocation projects over the coming decades. With each successful relocation, resource protection is improved, the long-term maintenance requirements of the trail system are reduced, and the availability of Park trails to the average hiker is increased.

In 2012, we began work on two long-term projects with significant potential for the Park. With the engagement of Botanist and Executive Director at Maine Natural History Observatory (MNHO) Glen Mittelhauser, **the Plants of Baxter State Park Project** has begun an inventory of the flora in the Park. The initial surveys conducted during the summer of 2012 yielded more than 100 plants previously unrecorded in the Park and provided information for the logistics and direction of the second season of surveys during the summer of 2013. Baxter Park is a constantly changing place. Most of this change is driven by natural

forces, but increasingly change is fostered or augmented by human activities. As managers, we find it hard to plan intelligent actions in response to change if we don't know how the landscape is changing. The completion of the Park's **plant inventory** will provide a benchmark against which to

measure future change in the Park.

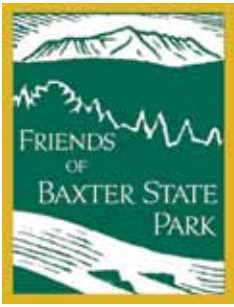
In addition to the plant inventory, Don Cameron of the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) conducted trial work to explore the possibility of developing accurate **mapping of natural communities** in the Park. Using T5R9 as a trial township, Don and his crew spent 28 days in the Park and covered a wide area in the township including 90 miles of survey line - often in very remote backcountry areas. The work Don accomplished provides the basis for planning to complete this mapping in the Park over the next decade.

The importance of effective communication with Park visitors and volunteers cannot be overstated. We continued our efforts in 2012 to improve the Park website as an increasingly important communications tool. The active and very effective Baxter State Park Advisory Committees (BSP, SFMA, Investment, and Research) continue to provide critical feedback in the policy and procedure development process. We will continue to work to develop current and effective means to communicate with Park visitors before, during, and after their visit in various media including email, our website interface, and video. We have and will continue to spend considerable time working on improving our process and procedure for the orderly and considerate development of Park policy and procedures for both visitors and employees.

Along with these ongoing efforts to address current issues and concerns, we are actively working on effective methods of identifying and controlling the effects of incremental human-driven change in the Park. With a clear mandate to maintain the Park **"primarily as Wilderness and recreational purposes are to be regarded as of secondary importance..."**, it is critical to recognize the power of incremental change. As a species, we are hard-wired to control and improve our surroundings. Our nature and inclination to improve things expresses itself continuously through the ideas and suggestions of Park visitors and staff - a short trail here, a small building there - each idea posed with the best of intentions for the Park, benign, unassuming, and apparently beneficial in and of itself. Hundreds of minor changes, made and implemented over decades, have the potential to change the Park and



Heavily eroded sections like this one on the Mount OJI trail will be avoided in the current trail re-location effort. - Photo © Charlie Jacobi



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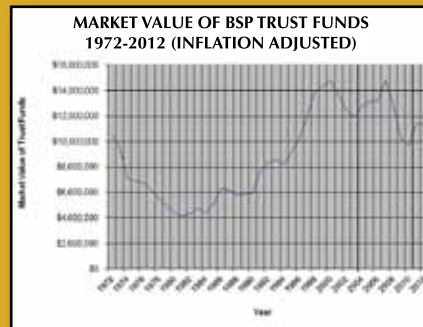
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Thank you!

erode the Wilderness in ways none of us would imagine. The careful assessment of the potential of incremental change will be a challenge for Park management in the administration of the Park Trust.

The opposite of incremental change is **catastrophic, landscape-scale change**. This change, except for the instance of war and perhaps climate change, is usually driven by nature and includes periodic change events like large-scale wind and rain events leading to blowdown; droughts contributing to forest fires; severe weather events such as tornados, hurricanes, ice storms, and episodic forest insect and disease epidemics such as the spruce budworm. Landscape-scale catastrophic change usually includes large elements of uncertainty, inconvenience, personal loss, and even fear. We definitely don't like landscape-scale change. Regardless of whether we like it or not, history strongly suggests that the occurrence of landscape scale change is not a question of "if" but only of "when." Consequently, we have worked in the management plan on preparing the Park for landscape-scale change. This preparation includes the development of clear and or-



The Park's endowments have successfully weathered the recession now have a higher real value than when they first became available to the Park in 1972.

dered decision trees and guidance documents that can be applied during and after the change event. Emergency-action planning and fire and wind-throw salvage plans are examples of this kind of planning.

As always, we will continue to work closely with Investment Advisors and Managers to ensure that the Park's endowment fund can continue to provide sustainable and reliable purchasing power as the base for the Park's operational budget. The test of our efforts came with the market crash of 2008 and the ensuing "great recession."

The Park has successfully weathered this test. After 40 years of funding approximately 60% of Park operations, in real terms (adjusted for inflation), the Park's endowments have a higher value now than when they first became available to the Park in 1972.

Careful endowment management is not the only reason for the Park's sound fiscal condition. In part, this success is due to the careful management of Park-generated revenues such as camping fees and non-resident entrance fees. Careful and prudent fee adjustments in accordance with the biennial fee-review protocol, in combination with changes to the reservation system that streamline access to the Park by visitors, has improved revenue streams from these sources. Park revenues have also been bolstered by steady revenues from the sale of sustainably managed forest products from the Scientific Forest Management Area (SFMA). Lastly, the emergence of significant and perpetual donors like the Baxter Park Wilderness Fund and the Friends of Baxter State Park have helped the Park apply needed resources to trails, infrastructure, information and education, and other important components of Park management.