



State of the Park - 2014

by BSP Director Jensen Bissell

I am pleased to report on the 2014 State of the Park. The Park Management Plan defines six specific elements that make up the Park's mission:

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

I'll start this report with the last mission element, **Managing Fiscal Resources**. One of the many important aspects of the Park provided by Percival Baxter, and perhaps the most important, is the Park's financial independence. Operating from a combination of revenues from services, products, and endowments, the Park requires no publicly legislated funding. The Park's endowment funds provide about two-thirds of our annual operating revenues. Understandably, we apply considerable effort to ensure the funds are properly managed and that our annual withdrawals are at sustainable levels.

A review of the market values of the Park's endowment funds adjusted for the effects of inflation indicates that although significant volatility in market values has occurred, the overall values have been fairly flat since the mid 1990's. This conclusion is supported by several other measures of the endowment's performance, including the Stewardship Index, which measures the overall change in value of the endowments after including reductions for inflation and withdrawals for Park operations. Lastly, we have the trends in Park fees over time, also adjusted for inflation. This review indicates that since the application of the Fee Review Protocol in



Black Brook Culvert

– Courtesy of BSP Photo Files

the early 1990's, the cost of staying in the Park has remained relatively unchanged for the past 20 years.

Most importantly, all of these reviews support the conclusion that the Park's endowments have recovered from the losses of the 2008-10 "Great Recession" and the Park operations were fully sustained during this very difficult economic period. A portfolio and a spending plan that would weather just such an economic downturn as the past six years is what we have been preparing for. The success of the Park's financial management and planning are due in large part to the combination of prudent and sustainable spending on the part of Park staff, and the expert guidance of the Park's Investment Committee. The Investment Committee, a group of skilled investment advisors, serve as volunteers to help the Park manage Park endowments. The importance of this committee to the long-term welfare of the Park is hard to overstate.

The Park continues to work toward **Maintaining Park Property**. Aside from hundreds of buildings in the Park, there is another important set of structures that often go unnoticed – the over 400 culverts that provide drainage for Park roads. We have been regularly working at replacing older or poorly functioning small culverts (under 4' in diameter) with an annual program conducted in the fall. Of more concern are the larger culverts. There are 18 culverts in the Park larger than 4 ft. in diameter and six of these are larger than 6 ft. in

diameter. These culverts almost always provide crossing to larger, perennial streams and the replacement is complex and expensive. In many instances, these culverts can be replaced with more environmentally sound structures that provide unrestricted fish passage and better drainage in high flow events. Many of these culverts (think Abol Stream at Abol Campground) cross roads at points of very high summer traffic, and will require careful planning and likely some disruption to visitor access during the replacement work.

In 2013, we completed the engineering, contract preparation, advertisement, and bid process on our first large culvert replacement project at Black Brook on the Park Tote Road. This northern location is not heavily visited and provided an opportunity for us to test our process without the threat of an extended disruption to visitor traffic. As is turned out, Black Brook was a good choice as a planned four-day project turned into a 21-day effort as unexpected rains delayed and slowed the replacement work. Eventually, the project was completed and we learned a great deal from the process. The new culvert is a "bottomless arch" and replaced two sections of round culvert. The bottomless arch provides unrestricted fish passage without interference to the natural streambed and should provide at least 50 years of service. The project cost in excess of \$80,000. This provides a strong argument for planning annual or biennial replacement efforts to avoid being forced



Kidney Pond Bridge

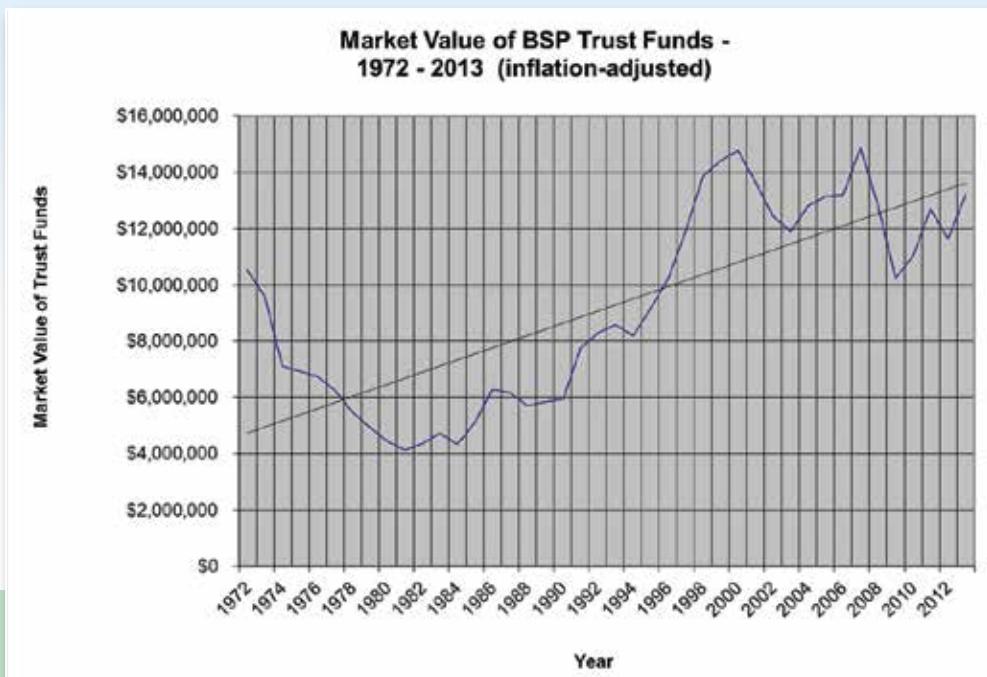
– Courtesy of BSP Photo Files

to conduct more expensive emergency replacements without time for adequate financial or project planning.

We will soon be turning our attention to our next project – the 2014 replacement of the bridge abutments for the Kidney

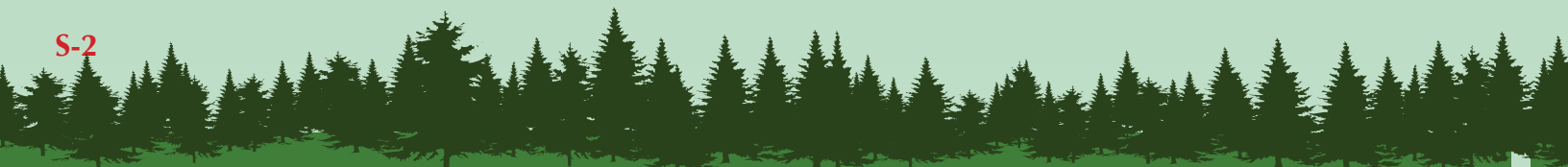
Pond Bridge spanning Nesowadnehunk Stream just west of Foster Field. This work will take place during the summer of 2014 and is planned to finish by moving the Kidney Pond Bridge from its current abutments to the new abutments in October.

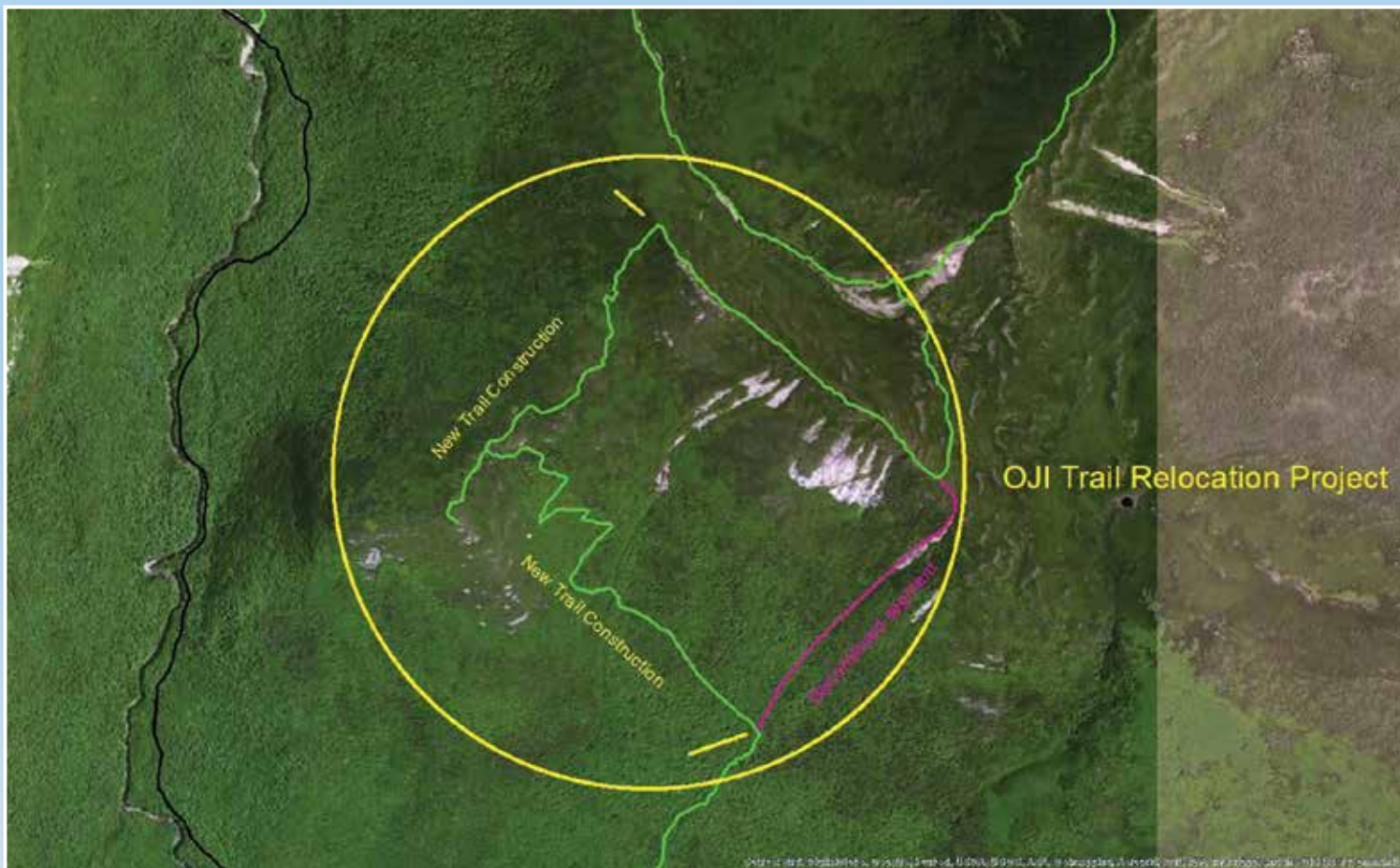
Perhaps our most important mission element is the one listed first, **Protecting Park Resources**. One of our most effective tools in this regard is time. Time, combined with the absence of human impact, has effectively “rewilded” many places in the Park. In some instances however, time alone is not enough. The Park maintains well over 200 miles of hiking trails. Some of these trails are decades and even a century old and were installed in a time before the understanding of trail engineering and design were considerations. Many of these trails are “fall line” trails – traveling directly up (or down) the slope of the landscape. These trails are particularly susceptible to water-based erosion and often become intermittent streams during spring run-off and during high rain events



Value of Park Trust Funds

– Image courtesy of Baxter State Park





– Image courtesy of Baxter State Park

in the summer.

Maintenance on these sections of trail, particularly when they are combined with high hiking traffic, is a never-ending battle that, in my opinion, we are losing. The relocation of high-traffic, fall-line trails to a more designed path that controls trail grade, avoids fall-line orientations and allows ample opportunity to naturally shunt water off the trail treadway is a strategy more likely to succeed over the long term. Trail relocation requires an up-front cost and commitment in exchange for lower maintenance effort and more hiker-friendly trails in perpetuity. Our first formal venture into trail relocation is a significant section of the OJI trail. This relocated trail will be opened to hikers in 2014. Our next two projects are on sections of the Marston and North Brother Trails. This work will begin in 2014 and should be completed in 2015. After that, we may move ahead to the section of eroded trail above Katahdin Stream Falls and below the Hunt

Spur. Many other relocation opportunities lay ahead of us, but each project is a step in the right direction for the long-term protection of Park resources. It is important to note that the up-front costs to trail relocation work are significant. The relocation of the OJI trail cost approximately \$85,000. This initial effort was made possible with the generous assistance of the **Friends of Baxter State Park** in providing Maine Conservation Corps crews to work on the project. The continuing support of the Friends for current and planned trail relocation projects will have a lasting and positive effect on Park resources.

After several years of work, another resource protection effort is nearing completion. For decades, nine Park ponds have been stocked with trout by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. The act of stocking in the “Forever Wild” section of the Park was considered in the Park Management Plan. Based on the longevity of the activity in Park history



– Courtesy of BSP Photo Files

and the limited number of ponds stocked (most without sufficient habitat for natural trout reproduction), the activity was recommended to continue. The Management



– Courtesy of BSP Photo Files



One of the six elements of the Park Management Plan is conducting exemplary forest management in the 30,000-acre Scientific Forest Management Area (SFMA). On July 19, 2013, a tornado ripped through the SFMA, leaving scenes like this behind and heavy damage on the Freezeout and Wadleigh Brook Trails.

– Courtesy of BSP Photo Files

Plan recommended, however, the stocked fish be grown from brood fish taken from Park waters – as “local” a genetic strain of eastern brook trout as possible. With the determined help of IF&W Regional Fisheries Biologist Nels Kramer, this recommendation will be met in the fall of 2014 when the first stocking of Nesowadnehunk strain trout are stocked in Park ponds.

Lastly, as a part of the larger landscape, we have been contemplating the implications of a changing climate on the natural resources of Baxter State Park. Climate change has the potential to challenge the very tenets of the idea of wilderness. Protecting a landscape from significant human intervention – leaving it largely alone – has been perhaps the most effective wilderness management tool the Park has employed over the past 50 years. If human intervention is now causing the climate itself to alter the wilderness landscape,

“leaving it alone” may no longer be a valid tool for creating and maintaining wilderness. Wilderness managers are facing the real question of whether **“human-caused climate change impacts will be more destructive than management interventions undertaken to assist the maintenance of nature’s parts and processes.”**

We have been working to build a defined collaborative partnership with the Appalachian Mountain Club, Friends of Baxter State Park, and Manomet under the umbrella of the Clean Air Task Force. The goal is to initiate a specific work plan that will consider in detail specific to Baxter Park what and how climate change is likely to impact the natural landscape, Park facilities, infrastructure and recreational activities, and what adaptive measures the Park might consider to mitigate or address these impacts.

We’ll be talking more about this work in 2014. In the meantime, we have initiat-

ed a trial extension of the camping season at three popular Park Campgrounds for the 2014 season. The trial will extend the camping season about 10 days for selected sites at Kidney Pond, Daicey Pond and Katahdin Stream Campground. The trial camping season extension will give us some important feedback on the demand for later season camping and if warranted, where additional extensions would best be applied.

Baxter State Park is both a wonderfully simple and a powerfully complex place. Although we often think of the Park as an unchanging landscape – it is anything but that. Nature is always changing. Our relationship to nature is changing as well. This combination promises that the idea of wilderness management will always be interesting and challenging. I’m looking forward to 2014.

