



FOREVER WILD

Newsletter of Friends of Baxter State Park Spring 2020 Vol. 19 No. 1



Executive Director's Column

by Aaron Megquier

We hope this finds you and your family safe and healthy. This issue of Forever Wild was significantly delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic as it unfolded over the past several months. We've combined the winter and spring issues, and added the latest news from Baxter State Park as of the end of June. The summer issue will be hot on the heels of this one, and should be in your hands by mid-August.

Like countless organizations around the world, we have cancelled our gatherings over the past several months, as well as for the immediate future. Our Annual Meeting on April 4th was the first to go, followed by a party celebrating our 20th anniversary being planned for mid-July. Our Board meetings have transitioned to Zoom, and our staff are all working from home. We are closely following Maine's phased reopening, and what it means for our organization and Baxter State Park. We cancelled our Maine Youth Wilderness Leadership Program for this summer with heavy hearts, and offered our 10 participants a spot in next year's program. We are forging ahead with a modified (and socially distant) version of our Baxter Youth Conservation Corps, and will have more updates on that in our upcoming summer issue.

With the situation changing fast, news that is printed and mailed often lags behind the times. If you have not yet signed up for our email newsletter, now is a great time to do it. It's easy to subscribe on our website at www.friendsofbaxter.org – just scroll down to the bottom of the homepage and type your address into the signup form. We look forward to staying in touch.



As many of us are separated from the people and the places that matter to us most, we take comfort in the knowledge that Baxter State Park is still there and flourishing, waiting for our next adventure.

– Photo © Jym St. Pierre

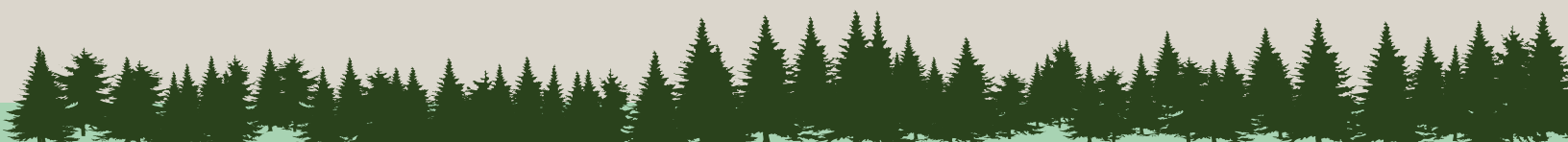
Baxter State Park in the Time of COVID-19

by Aaron Megquier

We know that many of our members have questions about visiting Baxter State Park during this time of global challenge and uncertainty. Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Baxter State Park has been using the best available science and public health information to guide its response and help protect visitors, staff, and local communities. The Park remained open for walk-in day use in May and June. Vehicle access resumed on June 15, and the Park recently opened for camping on July 1. Hiking trails above treeline were closed for resource protection during May and June, but have now opened as of July 1 as well. Bunkhouses are closed for the remainder of the season, and Park Headquarters in Millinocket will remain closed until further notice.

Although most park facilities are now open, visiting Baxter State Park during a global pandemic requires some extra planning and preparation. Friends worked with Park staff to develop a list of Frequently Asked Questions about visiting Baxter State Park this season. For the full list of questions and answers, please visit friendsofbaxter.org/covid. Here are answers to some of the most commonly asked questions:

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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.

Membership Matters

by Sarah Holland, Administrative Manager



This year marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of Friends of Baxter State Park. Many of our founding members are still active in the organization and deserve a great amount of appreciation for their efforts. All these years later, the group they created is flourishing. We rolled into 2020 with record-breaking membership numbers. With 272 new members in 2019, we now have over 1200 active members. Our members come from all over Maine and New England as well as across the country. We continue to have several enthusiastic members outside the USA, including Germany, Italy, Canada, and Mexico.

All ages – from 3 to 96 – and all walks of life are represented in our membership. It's fun to get notes from people about why they join. Often, they recount a recent visit to the Park, or a particular climb, or recall many fond memories of the Park over the years. They talk about the rejuvenating effect of connecting with wilderness, the strengthening of bonds, and the conquering of personal challenges. Of course, many comment on the unique beauty of Baxter. They know these wild places are rare and need dedicated enthusiasts to protect them for future generations. Therefore, they join us in our mission to preserve and protect Percival Baxter's legacy. Whether you have been a member for two decades or just joined this year, thank you for your membership!



In Memoriam

Billy Fay

March 5, 1952 – January 22, 2020



Billy was a gifted photographer who generously donated his images every year for the Baxter State Park calendar. This spectacular photo of clouds over South Branch Pond was published as the large image for September in the 2016 Baxter State Park calendar.

– Photo © Billy Fay

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Q: Should I still visit Baxter State Park during the pandemic?

A: Baxter State Park recognizes the critical importance of spending time in the outdoors for our well being. The CDC recommends you visit parks and outdoor recreation areas close to home to prevent the spread of COVID-19. If you choose to visit Baxter State Park, please plan carefully and follow current public health guidelines to reduce the risks to yourself, other visitors, Park staff, and local communities.

Q: How should I prepare for my visit?

A: Please stay home if you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, if you believe you may have been exposed to the virus, or if you don't feel well. Please bring hand sanitizer and a mask or cloth face covering in addition to your normal hiking or camping gear. Supplies in local communities may be limited, so please plan ahead and bring everything you need with you from home.

Q: How do I practice physical distancing in the Park?

A: Please maintain at least six feet of physical distance from all other Park visitors and staff. Avoid congregating in indoor or partially enclosed areas, such as ranger station porches. If you meet another hiker or group on the trail, please stay on the trail, pass quickly, and wear a mask.

Q: How do I wash my hands?

A: There are no sinks or running water in Baxter State Park for hand-washing. All Park visitors should bring and carry hand sanitizer that meets CDC guidelines (>60% alcohol). It will not be provided in the Park, and may be in short supply in local communities. Please use hand sanitizer before and after handling high-touch surfaces like hiking registers, outhouse doors, and ranger station doors, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, and prior to eating.

Q: Do I need to wear a mask?

A: All Park visitors must carry a mask or cloth face covering, and wear it whenever maintaining physical distancing guidelines is not possible, including when passing other hikers along the trail.

Q: Will my campsite be disinfected prior to my arrival?

A: Tent and lean-to sites will not be disinfected. Please avoid bringing scented disinfectant products from home - the CDC does not recommend their use on porous wooden surfaces at campsites, and they may attract bears and other wildlife. High touch surfaces in cabins will be disinfected by Park staff between parties. Outhouses will be cleaned and disinfected at least twice daily.

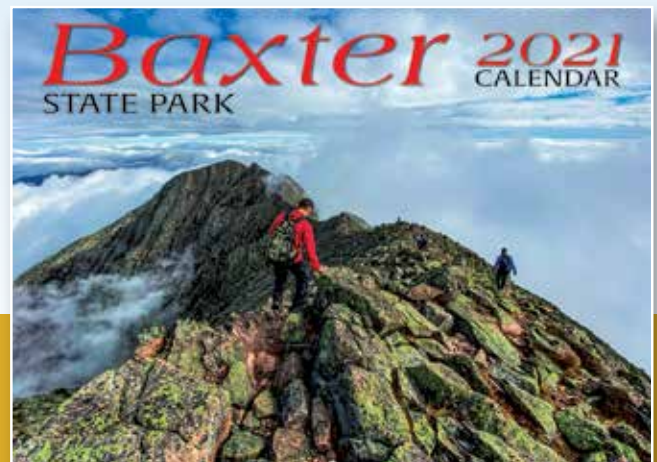
Q: Anything else I should know?

A: Please use extra caution during your visit. Wilderness rescues, dangerous in normal times, are even more so now, and require large quantities of protective equipment that is in short supply. Use good judgment and take responsibility for your own safety. Our staff, search and rescue volunteers, and local hospitals thank you. Please understand that all of this is subject to change as the pandemic unfolds.

Friends will continue to publish updates and the latest news in upcoming issues of *Forever Wild*. For more frequent updates, please subscribe to our email newsletter at www.friendsofbaxter.org, follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/bspfriends, or on Instagram at www.instagram.com/friendsbaxter.



With its cheerful yellow blooms appearing soon after the snow melts along stream banks and floodplains, Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*) is one of the earliest blooming wildflowers in Baxter State Park. – Photo © Deidra George

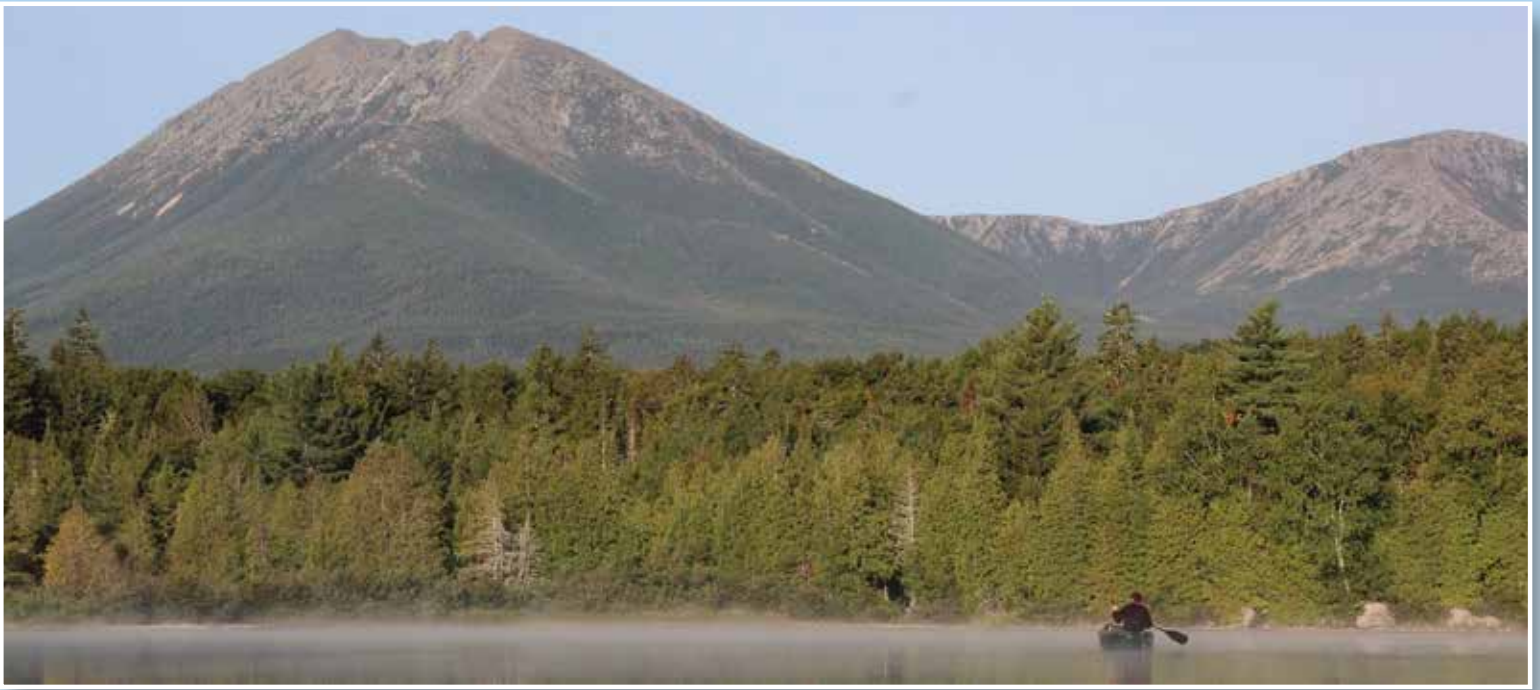


–Calendar cover photo © Ken Wadness

2021 Baxter State Park Calendars for sale

Our 2020 Baxter State Park calendar is hot off the presses and available for purchase! The cost is \$17 including tax and shipping. You can order online at www.friendsofbaxter.org, mail a check to PO Box 322, Belfast, ME 04915, or call (207) 505-5779. All proceeds benefit Friends of Baxter State Park.





A summer paddle on Katahdin Lake with the Knife Edge and the east side of Katahdin dominating the skyline.

– Photo © Jym St. Pierre

President's Column

by Ellen Baum

Like so many of us, I have been bending under the weight of the news that keeps coming our way. As I write this in mid June, COVID-19 has been with us for most of 2020, and while systemic racism has been around for centuries, it has reached a new crisis point. These double pandemics have shaken me to my core, as I struggle both to shield myself – and my loved ones – from the virus and to take meaningful action against racial inequality. And on top of that to think about how one is a **Friend** to Baxter State Park in the midst of this.

At this mid-June writing, we have canceled the Maine Youth Wilderness Leadership Program for this year. In doing so, we followed the lead of Chewonki, our program partner, which canceled all of its in-person summer programs. We have offered this year's 10 wonderful students a place in our 2021 program and fully intend to do more planning as the year goes on.

We scaled back the Baxter Youth Conservation Corps, both in number of participants and activities. We will have area young people in the Park, just not in groups of ten, as in previous years, where they cannot help but breathe on each other and laugh with each other as they move 900-pound rocks together. Those trail building activities will need to wait a year.

For anyone aligned closely with any organization, there is a deep sadness to stop what you are doing, even if it makes all the sense in the world. The decision makes us ask: who are we if we can't offer the excellent programming that we know touches lives?

But it takes only a few deep breaths to shift the view and answer that question from many perspectives. We are acting responsibly. We calibrated our risk and did what we felt the data and advice told us to keep participants, their families, and their communities out of harm's way. It's not clear why, in mid June, Medway, right there in the Katahdin region, had more COVID cases per thousand residents than Portland. We do not want more towns in the region to have this distinction, and we certainly do not want to be the origin of a community outbreak.

We can ease into the reality that we are not essential, though we have created and built a vital role for ourselves. Our mission — *to preserve, support, and enhance the wilderness character of Baxter State Park in the spirit of its founder, Governor Percival Baxter* – says it clearly. The biggest threats the country and state are facing as I write – COVID

and racial injustice – are not endangering the wilderness character of Baxter State Park. Katahdin has been around for a very long time – the rocks for hundreds of million years, the specific features just since the last glaciation, well over 10,000 years ago. The mountain and its environs are not going anywhere. They were here before humans came, and they will outlast us.

There is evidence from around the world that wildlife is doing really well during the COVID pandemic, as humans retreat. Articles about Khao Yai National Park in central Thailand as well as from Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks here in the U.S. report that the animals are thriving as humans back off. Undoubtedly, I would find more if I looked harder. This, too, was on Percival Baxter's mind when he gave the Park to the State: "(It) ...shall forever be kept and remain in the natural wild state...shall forever be kept and remain as a sanctuary for beasts and birds." Baxter State Park's reduced human numbers are very likely having measurable wildlife impacts too, as well as giving the Park a chance to improve roads and infrastructure, responding to the reality of needed road repair and bridge and culvert replacement.

The flip side of this is that nature is such a good place to collect one's wits while social distancing. So there has been a clamoring to make more, not fewer, places available for people to meet their friends at a distance as they hike, swim, fish and process all that is happening in the world — or not process, but simply absorb the natural world, taking advantage of the restorative qualities that come from being in the outdoors. It certainly has been important for me both for the restorative side as well as for the chance to have person-to-person engagement beyond my immediate household and the onslaught of electronic meetings and calls.

It is here, this connecting with nature, where Friends can step up its attention to equal justice. As the world, our country and Baxter State Park return to normal, Friends can continue to work closely with partners in the state to reach out to *all Mainers*. The privilege of climbing Katahdin, or Traveler or The Owl, playing in the water at Ledge Falls, skiing along Wassataquoik Stream, or bird watching at Pogy Pond belongs to all of us. We look forward to moving on this with our ears wide open, ready to learn, and with the knowledge that success on this front makes us all winners.



Update from Baxter State Park by Eben Sypitkowski, BSP Director

By the time you read this, we will understand more about how our efforts at physical distancing, masking, and good hand hygiene have affected the trajectory of this pandemic. As we've worked to reopen the Park and mitigate the risks associated with this novel coronavirus, we've come to understand that so much risk mitigation is up to individual behavioral choices. How conscious am I about keeping my distance? How responsible am I about wearing a mask? How vigilant am I about my hand hygiene? How aware am I of my own health? Lots to consider, even here in a vast wilderness.

We've worked to mitigate the risks we can, disinfecting surfaces, installing signs, and reducing overall day use capacity. The rest is up to you, and I know that you who love the wilderness will be responsible and vigilant out there. You recognize that this year may not be the best one to visit the Park – whether out of concern for our rural public health system, our first responders within the Park, or your own health – and you know that the Park will be there next year. You know this because you've helped to make it so by supporting the Friends and the Park in our collective mission to ensure that Governor Baxter's magnificent obsession remains the wild landscape he intended it to be.

In a June speech on the U.S. Senate floor in support of permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Maine Senator Angus King invoked the persistence and vision of Governor Baxter's effort to create a Park around Maine's greatest mountain. He spoke of Governor Baxter's actions as "one of the greatest acts of private philanthropy in the history of the United States...the legacy of a lifetime." He said, as we are all acutely aware as lovers of Baxter State Park, "setting aside special places...is a sacred trust."

As he advocated for permanent federal funding for the outdoors, Senator King also talked about how he came to understand that deferred maintenance is a form of debt to be paid in the future, which makes it more costly. We've been thinking about this as it pertains to our aging, somewhat underbuilt road system. Essentially a ring around the highly flashy mountain streams in our mountainous area, our road system has been kept as a narrow and windy dirt path with many turnouts, as Governor Baxter wanted. This



Road damage following an intense 4.5" rainfall event in the north end of Baxter State Park.

– Photo courtesy of Baxter State Park

doesn't mean we can't also make the road a resilient piece of infrastructure built to withstand the higher intensity storms that we see in our time of climate change.

The Park Tote and Roaring Brook roads have more than 30 stream crossing structures, many of which were installed in the 1970s according to the standards of the day. Many of these structures are barriers to aquatic organisms including brook trout, and most are too small to withstand these higher intensity storms. Last year, the Park started to sort out how to replace these with open-bottomed structures that would facilitate fish passage and withstand larger rain events without washing out the road. We understood that should we lose passage on the Tote Road, not only would visitor access be limited or impossible, but it might stay that way for a while if we couldn't get contractors on site immediately. We would also end up paying a premium for a rush job.

Our debt to our road system came into focus this past May 21, when four and a half inches of rain fell in less than 3 hours in a band across the north end of the Park that included the South Branch Pond road. This left about 2,500 feet of the two-mile road passable the next day when Rangers tried to head in by pickup. It also left a three-foot deep chasm where Dry Brook, which typically goes under the Tote Road near the Trout Brook Crossing, went over it instead, carrying large logs and moving person-sized boulders into the woods. Park staff and contractors were able to repair the damage in a few days, but this was an acute reminder of the power of water flowing downhill at speed. What if the same storm hit further

south in the Park, where the watersheds are even steeper, flashier, and have less water storage capacity?

During the COVID disruption, we recognized that we had a unique opportunity to get started on addressing these issues. Resource Manager Mike Pouch worked tirelessly to inventory and prioritize our needs, considering factors such as the ecological ramifications of improving stream habitat connectivity and the vulnerability of our infrastructure. Maintenance staff Frank George and Matt Martin worked tirelessly to haul more than one thousand yards of Nesowadnehunk gravel to support contracted operations on Abol Hill and the Roaring Brook Road. Before you come to camp this summer, we will have made significant improvements on almost two miles of perennial water issues at Abol Hill, installed an appropriately-sized bridge to replace a failing four-foot culvert on the Roaring Brook Road, and staged another for fall completion.

We have much more debt to pay off – another twenty-some crossings are slated for replacement – but we are underway on this important work, fundamental to our mission of preserving and protecting the natural resources and the visitor experience within this sacred trust. Senator King said that in passing the Great American Outdoors Act, Congress is "making a contribution to the well-being of Americans for generations to come." Your support of Governor Baxter's sacred trust helps us to ensure that the restorative Park experience will be there for generations to come as well. Thank you and have a safe summer!

The Five M's that Shaped a Man

By Larry Moores

In the Military Special Operations Forces community, there is a focus on building a solid foundation on which to grow flexibility in order to conduct many different types of combat operations. Our personal lives are very similarly built on a solid foundation, so that we grow accordingly through our childhood and adult lives. Thinking back to my first memories of Baxter State Park and how my experiences there would shape my future, I would like to share with you my journey through five "M" stages of my life. Each M stands for a very special place that had a profound impact on my upbringing and later adult focus. The five M's that I will highlight are *Meriden* (Connecticut), *Maine*, *Mount Katahdin*, *Mogadishu* (Somalia), and *Marshall Auditorium* (at Fort Benning, Georgia).

Meriden and Maine: Following our father's separation from the U.S. Air Force, we lived in Meriden, Connecticut to start our formative years of life and education. Each summer as school ended, our parents would take us to Maine for vacation adventures with numerous relatives that would have an enduring impact on us. My brother and I spent all of our time outdoors. Building our skills in hunting, fishing, climbing and testing limits would be our summer goals.



Larry Moores, age 8, looks out over a world of possibility from Baxter Peak on Katahdin. — Photo courtesy of Larry Moores

Mount Katahdin: The summer of 1972 was the first adventure that truly pushed us to test our love of the outdoors and our physical selves. At eight years old, I was one of the youngest climbers to reach the summit of Mount Katahdin and I remember the challenge today as clear as ever. Our family would summit Mount Katahdin several times over the next few years and our interest in the outdoor lifestyle would continue to grow.

Mogadishu: At 17, I enlisted to start a career in the U.S. Army Rangers, where I built on my early lessons of climbing, orienteering, fitness, and teamwork. The Rangers utilize the ultimate playground

for all things outdoors in every environment around the world to test one's skills and abilities. Combat operations with the Rangers would also test my foundations in both training skills and leadership abilities. The summer of 1993 would serve as the ultimate test for Task Force Ranger as we were deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia and would subsequently fight in the Battle of the Black Sea (Black Hawk Down). Every member of our elite team would have the foundation of serving, leading and fighting for our Ranger brothers truly tested to its limits. Our team's rock-solid foundation was tested but not broken against insurmountable odds in one of the largest battles since the Vietnam War.

Marshall Auditorium: Marshall Auditorium at Fort Benning, Georgia is a centerpiece for every major ceremony and graduation at the US Army Infantry Center (now the US Army Maneuver Center of Excellence). Forty-five years after our first family adventure to the summit of Mount Katahdin, and thirty-five years to the day I departed Meriden for the US Army, I would return to Marshall Auditorium for an induction ceremony into the United States Army Ranger Hall of Fame. That ceremony represented the ultimate team award that recognized a career-worth of Rangers involved in foundation creating, team building, leadership development, and never-ending challenges.

Life is full of experiences and opportunities to shape your future. Baxter State Park and a trip to the summit of Mount Katahdin should certainly be added to your list. When I stood as an 8-year-old at the summit of Mount Katahdin I looked out at the breathtaking beauty of Baxter State Park and surrounding areas and thought of the places I might go. Never did I imagine my Maine journey would lead from Meriden to Mogadishu to Marshall Auditorium, but it certainly started at Mount Katahdin.

Retired Maj. Larry Moores served with the 75th Ranger Regiment during the Battle of Mogadishu, depicted in the film "Black Hawk Down." Following his retirement from the Army, Larry has remained with the defense industry and also has served with Veteran focused nonprofits. He is currently an OSD SOF and Army Analyst working on integration of High Energy Laser (HEL) Weapon Systems for the Joint Warfighter. Larry also serves as an Ambassador to the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. His cousin, Cathy Brown, is the Outreach and Communications Coordinator for Friends of Baxter State Park.



Retired Major Larry Moores with Mosby. — Photo courtesy of Larry Moores



Taken from Nesowadnehunk Field Campground, this spectacular photo of the Milky Way – complete with meteor – shows some of the darkest skies in the United States.

– Photo © Brittney Fairfield

The Night Sky

By David Little, Author of *Art of Katahdin*

In the fall 2019 issue of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's magazine *A.T. Journeys*, the challenging subject of seeing the night sky "in the Wild East" and the status of light pollution measured on the Bortle scale* are addressed with regard to the AT in Maine, and the Rangeley and Katahdin regions. The editor-in-chief adds that "there are some remaining spaces where the landscape, and the wildlife that relies on it, still thrive on a rhythm of natural night darkness."

In his essay Dr. Tyler Nordgren states that "there are literally fewer than a dozen regions in the continental U.S. that are still Bortle class 1 (the darkest skies available on Earth)." He goes on to say that "While most of these pristine skies are in the Western U.S. along the Continental Divide and Pacific Crest Trails, one is in the East and it is in the area around Katahdin at the northern end of the Appalachian Trail in Maine." Nordgren concludes "As our ideas of conservation have expanded to include not just the rock at our feet, but the water that flows through it, the plants and wild life that make it their home, and the clear air that allows us to breathe and enjoy it, the night sky above is the latest addition."

Editor's Note: Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument became the first International Dark Sky Sanctuary on the east coast of the US in early May.

* From Wikipedia: "The Bortle scale (named after John E. Bortle) is a nine-level numeric scale that measures the night sky's brightness of a particular location. It quantifies the astronomical observability of celestial objects and the interference caused by light pollution."

Baxter State Park Trivia

When was the current height of Baxter Peak ascertained, and by whom? Please send trivia answers to Sarah Holland at admin@friendsofbaxter.org

Answer: Trivia Question in Fall Newsletter

In our fall newsletter, we asked: "Twenty years ago several Maine people gathered around a kitchen table to discuss the future of Baxter State Park. A year later this group formally became Friends of Baxter State Park. Among them were John Neff, John Loyd, and others. One was a well-known Maine author (now deceased) who championed all thing environmental in the now-defunct *Maine Times*. Her voice still echoes across Baxter State Park and Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. Who was she?" Answer: Phyllis Austin



Friends of Baxter State Park

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Dues and contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

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Thank you!

Hope Springs Eternal

