

Kennebec Highlands Advisory Committee Meeting
Mt Vernon Community Center
June 28, 2007
6:30-8:30 PM

The Kennebec Highlands Advisory Committee met for its first meeting to discuss the preliminary draft of the Kennebec Highlands Management report on the evening of Thursday June 28th 2007. The advisory committee includes adjacent landowners, BRCA members, ATV club representatives, recreational advocates, and town and state representatives. The goals of the meeting were to (1) review the initial plan draft focusing on *general access, types of experiences, protection of special resources, and variety of uses*; (2) to gather the advisory committee's initial comments on the plan, and (3) for the public to have an opportunity to provide their opinion on the evenings proceedings.

Welcome/Introduction

Will Harris, Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) welcomed the group and described where the planning process stands at this point. The May 17th scoping meeting was an open meeting for the public; its goal was to hear issues and concerns about the Highlands, as well as hopes for future uses. With the benefit of that input, a first draft of the plan has been developed for review and comment tonight. After tonight's comments, more changes will be made a second draft prepared, which will be the subject of another advisory committee meeting in about a month.

Will explained that, because this the first plan for the Highlands, it will require a significant amount of additional work. Though a September 2007 deadline has been set for the plan, he indicated that some things will have to be left open for future refinement, including:

1. The status of relationships to adjacent landowners
2. The status of roads, which requires deed research and consultation with surrounding towns
3. Trail information, as it will take a while to locate all of the trails at the site

At this point committee members, staff, and the public introduced themselves.

The following individuals are on the advisory committee, those with a star (*) by their name were unable to attend the meeting:

Name	Town		Name	Town
Brian Alexander	Rome		John K Jones	Mt Vernon
Roy Bouchard*	Belgrade		Dave MacLeay	Rome
Sue Burns*	Vienna		Michael Saharic	Belgrade Lakes
Stan Caban	Rome		George Smith*	Mt Vernon
Chris Currier	Manchester		Bill Swan	Belgrade Lakes
Pete Hersom	Gardiner		Roger Wing	Vienna
Gary Keilty	Readfield		Hank Washburn	New Sharon
Deane Jones	Mt Vernon			

The following staff from the Bureau of Parks and Lands attended and are available to answer questions regarding the project.

Name	Title	Contact Information
Cindy Bastey	Plan Coordinator	287-4963; Cindy.Bastey@maine.gov
Bud Newell	Mgr., Community Grants and Rec.	2874962; Bud.Newell@maine.gov
Pete Smith	Mgr., Western Reg. BPL Office	778-8233; Peter.D.Smith@maine.gov
Brian Bronson	ATV Coordinator	287-4958; Brian.N.Bronson@maine.gov
Tom Dinsmore	Property Records Specialist	287-5008; Tom.Dinsmore@maine.gov
Joe Wiley	Wildlife Biologist	287-4921; Joe.Wiley@maine.gov

In addition, Frank O Hara and Antje Kablitz of Planning Decisions Inc attended and assisted in the planning and facilitation process.

Project Overview

Cindy Bastey gave an overview of the draft plan. She indicated that there were still significant issues that the State needed to address, including (1) ownership and access to Vienna Mountain; (2) the varying number of roads and rights of access; and (3) the number, location and use of trails throughout the Highlands. At this point, Vienna Mountain is the “hole in the donut” in the Highlands project. State officials need to understand ownership in the area in order to prepare access and conservation options for the mountain. In many cases, the ownership and maintenance of the roads are unclear, as well as their precise locations, which creates questions about rights of access. BPL is now gathering deed and town data on the roads. There are numerous trails throughout the Highlands with varying degrees of use and upkeep. Cindy stressed the need to catalog all existing trails and their uses, as well as the needs and desires of the interested parties needs for future trail use. She suggested a separate meeting prior to the next draft release to discuss trails and trail use with a smaller group who could provide her with the most up-to-date and reliable information. ATV and snowmobile club members should join in this meeting so as to clarify existing and proposed paths through the land.

Cindy then went on to describe four major areas of interest, as discussed in the May 17th meeting, that pertain to the future development of the Highlands: *general access*, *types of experiences*, *protection of special resources*, and *variety of uses*.

General access relates to the acquisition and/or creation of public use roads and the possible development of addition perimeter parking lots. The draft proposes that road access remain limited: no general-purpose public use roads through the unit are proposed. However, there may be a need to provide vehicle access to and parking areas from which boats can be carried to Boody, Kidder and McIntire Ponds.

Cindy then discussed *types of experiences*, essentially dividing the Kennebec Highlands into three general use areas: “remote”, “semi-remote” and “general use” (Preliminary Plan, Allocation Map 2, p 50). A remote area or “quiet area” was proposed to include Kidder, Boody and McIntire Ponds in the northwest portion of the Highlands. This area would be kept free of motorized traffic allowing people to backpack into one or two campsites and to hand-carry boats

to the ponds. The “general use” area includes existing trailheads, any future trailheads and the Dolley property, where BRCA proposes to develop an educational center. Cindy indicated that this area would be a good site for both interpretive trails and disabled-accessible trails, similar to those provide at Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park. The rest of the Highlands property would be considered “semi-remote” allowing for a variety of uses and leaving room for future decisions about particular sites or trails to meet specific needs. Cindy noted later in the evening that these designations do not limit other uses of the land (such as timber harvesting) but simply indicate the predominant character of the areas.

With regard to the protection of natural resources, Cindy provided the committee with a brief overview of significant archeological and wildlife/plant habitats (Preliminary Plan, Allocation Map 1, p 49). In particular, she pointed out the waterfowl and wading bird habitats around all of the area ponds, the wildlife riparian zones around significant streams, deer wintering areas, the unpatterned fen ecosystem around Beaver Pond, and the rare plant site near Watson Pond. She also spoke about erosion control, a significant topic at the previous meeting, indicating that BPL is required to control erosion and protect water quality under its own management policies, forest certification standards and state law.

Cindy's final points were in regards to the variety of uses permitted on the Kennebec Highlands. The draft recommends that all types of activities be permitted including boating, fishing, hunting, trapping, camping, hiking, ATVs, snowmobiles, and bicycles. The goal is to provide all users with safe and enjoyable experiences. It is desirable to provide separate opportunities for motorized and non-motorized uses when possible. The Dolley site could provide access and activities for a variety of users including schoolchildren and the differently abled. Cindy indicated that hunting and trapping are permitted activities, but the carrying and discharge of loaded weapons are restricted on marked trails and in some other areas. She discussed the alternatives of allowing people to carry boats into ponds, to store boats on site, or to use State-provided boats free of charge. With regard to camping, Cindy indicated that there is at least one some unofficial campsite on the unit and camping without open fires is permitted under BPL rules. There is some discussion formalizing a hike-in campsite in the remote area of the Highlands.

Cindy also presented a concept sketch of proposed ATV trails, which would provide the through-connection that is sought by many of the area clubs. The trails would allow connection to trails south and north of the unit; the northern route would eventually tie into the Jay-Farmington rail trail.

Advisory Committee Discussion

Antje Kablitz then opened the discussion to the advisory committee. Committee members were asked to provide comments to the plans proposals for access, use, environmental protection and any other concerns, questions or comments they had about the plan itself. Responses included:

Questions regarding management of general access roads

- Who is going to police the road next to the Blueberry Hill and control access?
- Who is to say that people will not go and party at campsites? You are creating a campsite that is not policed.

Comments regarding general access roads

- It's fine to have access, but not truck access
- The plan limits access for ATV's and snowmobiles, but the clubs are the only ones maintaining roads – the fewer roads open to them, the fewer maintained trails there will be for everyone
- Public access via the Roxy Rand Road will drastically change traditional patterns of use – that road was never a public road; it was intended only for woodlot management, not to allow public to come and go. Anglers use the road before it dries out, causing damage to it. Traditionally, woodsman did road maintenance.
- Gating the roads could improve safety and maintenance. In some places, roads are actually gated and closed for a certain period to allow the roads to dry out. Could be tried at McIntire Pond. Might anger some fishermen, but better than no access. Close until June 1.

More on gating:

- Need to let local people have a key.
- Problem – if you gate the road, some people will drive around on the blueberry fields
- Like the idea of gates, know the destruction of trucks.

Policing people who do not follow trail laws

- Snowmobilers just run over signs to stay on marked trail, no one to police them.
- Cannot do anything even if you catch someone – nothing happens to people – if they would be disciplined for what they did, we would be better off.
- First thing you need to address is abutting landowners – they are traditionally the “policers” of the area, so it is important to keep them engaged and informed.

Situations that need to be policed:

- 30 or 40 ATVs in a weekend, not in a club, tearing the place up.
- ATV club relocated trail to Flying Pond store – did a great job – someone knocked over sign and drove over the trail and ruined it
- 4 wheel drive truck in April ruined roads
- Right now, there are still ruts in the road on the Vienna Mountain Road from people who have been driving through – some get out of their trucks and shoot.
- ATVs wreck road and often go over private property.
- ATVs have done a number on the Suicide Hill trail.

Parking lot issues: Currently trailer parking is available at Blueberry Hill -- ATVs and snowmobiles go there – However, there are no signs prohibiting trailer parking in Highlands parking lots. Traditionally these lots are reserved for hikers only but because there is no sign saying you cannot park trailer there, people do.

Other Questions

- How much public comment will there be on the issues that cannot be resolved this summer?

Answer from Cindy: The advisory committee will be engaged in the process of development of the plan throughout the process beyond the September deadline.

Comments regarding environmental sensitivity and archeological sites

- Access to Kidder Pond from McIntire Pond means crossing Beaver Brook at a very sensitive point – if you're going to go that way you need to build a new bridge
- If we allow unlimited vehicle access to primitive sites, they will disappear – as happened on Watson Pond Road, where people pulled up and took off granite
- 2 hand dug streams or canals – drain Kidder into Vienna, Upper Beaver Brook – should be additional areas of historic interest

Comments regarding uses

- On Boody and Kidder, one acceptable alternative is permission to store personal boats in there. Alternatively, we could have something like Baxter Park, where canoes owned by the park are stored for public use, without charge if they are put back where they are supposed to be put.
- Get boundary markers out on the state-owned property to help people avoid private property. Could also mark watersheds that are part of the Highlands.
- Like the concept of remote access to ponds, but concerned about vehicle access points to these ponds.
- If you did have remote camping, make it a 1-2 mile trip to get there: would cut down on the beer-drinking crowd
- People in remoter areas police themselves or the next person does it for them. There is no trash on the long trails,
- Beautiful flat places for camping on further side of Kidder Pond– better than site people used to drive to.
- No fires should be allowed in primitive areas – you don't need a fire ever
- With regard to providing State owned canoes in the pond sites – the cost of replacing boats that may be stolen is cheaper than creating a road to reach the ponds by car.

Comments on the plan and the planning process

- Prepare an overlay to match up all trails on one map to see how uses might interact.

Comments on trails for people with different abilities and disabilities

- Access for an aging population – to northwest of Blueberry trail, Round Top, good place to create an easy access trail with possible switchbacks up Suicide Hills,– 34 inch wide trail. Over time, it would be nice to put down stone dust, like a carriage trail, low slope with flat areas to rest – cross-country ski use in the winter, too.

- For people in wheelchairs, need a trail that is packed, not stone dust – should ask people in wheelchairs.

Comments on ATV use

- Suicide Hill is not an ATV trail now, so it is not being maintained. If it were an ATV trail, the clubs would maintain it, improving condition and cutting down on unwanted usage.
- How does it work with ATV clubs maintaining state land?

Answer from Brian Bronson: State provides clubs with grants for the maintenance and construction of trails. Funding comes from vehicle registration.

General Public Comment

The floor was then opened to the public to comment on the plan, Cindy's presentation and the comments of the committee. Responses included:

- Access to McIntire Pond– the pond is a favorite place for fishing and may soon be a trophy fishing spot. It's OK to gate until June 1, but to close completely would be an issues for the stocking of the pond by the state– would state still stock?

Answer from Joe Wiley, DIFW staff at BPL: Vehicle access is needed because tank trucks are used to stock the pond. Also, in the short term, it is a study pond, the State is doing netting and sampling for recommendation on making a trophy pond. State would need similar vehicle access at least for the short term. In addition, alternatives such as flyover stocking are much more expensive.

- ATV clubs not looking for rights to romp through everywhere – what's on map (Map 3) is just about perfect for us—once we had permission, we would maintain, you would see a big difference
- ATV clubs help maintain rail trail, to benefit of joggers and hikers. Also, ATV clubs are a resource for landowners; we help landowners who have issues.
- Looks like a lot of trails for ATV and snowmobilers now – concern that the loop makes it into a racetrack. Where are ATVs coming from and going to?

Answer: ATV would like to stay away from blueberry fields altogether in order to discourage people riding through the fields. ATVs would stay on logging roads all the way through. They are just looking for a way through the unit without disturbing other uses to tie into New Sharon and to get to Farmington.

- Small Woodlot Owners Assn of Maine (SWOAM) had roughly 200 acres donated along Beaver Brook. Would like to connect trail system. Has there been an assessment of land trusts in the area that might connect? SWOAM will be putting interpretive trails in on east side of Watson Pond Road – across from cemetery.
- Will there be a time line drawn up – 15 years – what comes first, last, priorities?

Answer: Yes, there will be a timeline. Priorities will depend on funding allocation and the recommendations of this committee. There will be reviews and status reports of the plan every 5 years. Also in the next 2 years, additional studies and recommendations will be made for management of the Highlands.

Wrap-up

Thanks to people who showed up – ATV clubs appreciate civility of all who attended in creating an open dialogue

Requests

- Need for a microphone to understand comments

Answer from Deane Jones: Microphones can be provided by area radio club at no charge. Contact: Ron Lockwood, Don Kanegie (sp?). They would be happy to provide sound system-could record and play meetings on local access as well.

- If people have photos of sensitive areas, please bring them to the meeting

Cindy ended the meeting by soliciting dates and times for a working meeting on trails. It would be a roundtable discussion where those with knowledge about and interest in trail use in the Highlands could provide the State with information on existing trails and the development of new connections. A meeting date was finalized and all members of the advisory committee and public in attendance were invited to join.

WORKING MEETING ON TRAILS

Tuesday, July 10th 2007

Mt Vernon Community Center

6:30 PM – 8:30PM

THANK YOU!

Meeting Attendance

Brian Alexander, Advis Com	Rome	Mike Ayotte	Mt Vernon
Stan Caban, Advis Com	Rome	Robert D Dalot	Jay
Chris Currier, Advis Com	Manchester	Hal Garnett	Mt Vernon
Pete Hersom, Advis Com	Gardiner	Ed & Priscilla Hinckley	Vienna
John K Jones, Advis Com	Mt Vernon	Ann Kielty	Readfield
Gary Keilty, Advis Com	Readfield	Matt & Becky Lemieux	New Sharon
Dave MacLeay, Advis Com	Rome	Hilary Smith	Mt Vernon
Michael Saharic, Advis Com	Belgrade Lakes	Patty Cormier	Norridgewock
Bill Swan, Advis Com	Belgrade Lakes	Mort Moesswilde	Jefferson
Hank Washburn, Advis Com	New Sharon	Nick Whittemore	Farmington Falls
Roger Wing, Advis Com	Vienna	Norma Wing	Vienna
Deane Jones, Advis Com	Mt Vernon		
From BPL: Will Harris, Cindy Bastey, Brian Bronson, Tom Dinsmore, Joe Wiley, Pete Smith			
From Planning Decisions, Inc.: Frank O'Hara, Antje Kablitz			