

**Maine Department of Conservation, Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL)
Western Mountains Region Management Plan
Public Meeting on the Final Draft**

December 14, 2010

University of Maine Farmington Thomas Auditorium
5:30-8pm

Minutes

Amy Hudnor, BPL planner, gave a presentation on the planning process, BPL's resource allocation system and the recommendations in the final draft management plan.

Public Comment on Grafton Notch State Park and Mahoosuc Public Lands Draft Recommendations

Ken Hotopp of the Mahoosuc Land Trust spoke about many issues—regional, state, and global—that should be considered in Mahoosuc management. Climate change impacts on forests and wildlife and the potential threat of biomass harvesting on carbon levels should be considered. The forest quality in the Mahoosuc region, including on state lands, is not exemplary, with erosion, low forest floor nutrients, lack of structure in streams, and fragmentation from roads as issues. The percentage of wild areas in the Mahoosuc region—about 20,000 acres compared to 600,000 total acres—is about 3.3%, and is inadequate to sustain natural systems. Larger core wild areas are needed with connective areas between them. The public lands are key to this effort and more backcountry non-mechanized designation is needed in the Mahoosuc plan. Wildlife riparian buffers need better standards. BPL has limited ability to plan adequately for the region. Accounting of bird species is random and impacts of beech bark disease are not analyzed. MLT has requested more backcountry non-mechanized areas and better riparian protection and visual areas, and these requests have not been acknowledged.

Kevin Slater of Mahoosuc Guide Service thanked the Bureau for incorporating previous comments on recreation. Areas around the Wright Trail parking lot and upstream along the Bull Branch should be backcountry non-mechanized, however, should include the ability to have grooming for Nordic skiing. The Bull Branch valley has early and late snow. A ski corridor is desirable between the Bear River and the Androscoggin River valley. Additionally, the Nordic ski interests need to know who will be the coordinator to work with from the Bureau on designating ski routes.

On the topic of improving information, Kevin suggested the Bureau web information could be upgraded to give up-to-date information on timber harvesting and other information so it can be used as a recreation planning tool. Landon Fake mentioned that most users get information from the Bethel Chamber of Commerce, so the Bureau could coordinate with them in information delivery.

Jeremy Sheaffer of The Wilderness Society recommended designating all acres above 2,500 foot elevation in Mahoosuc as Backcountry Non-mechanized.

Surran Tayler directs the Nordic ski program for the Maine Handicap Skiing, and would like to see the Bull Branch area open to Nordic ski grooming, but not snowmobiling.

Lindsay Bourgoine of the Appalachian Mountain Club requests more extensive no-harvest zones above 2,500 foot elevation, particularly in the Baldpate area. More extensive wildlife protection is also needed.

Lester Kenway of the Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) said that the current management in the Baldpate area is serving their needs well, and MATC is happy to participate in the Grafton/Mahoosuc Trail Coalition proposed in the plan.

Public Comment on Richardson Public Lands Draft Recommendations

Norm Rodrigue of Union Water Power (UWP) oversaw the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license and settlement agreement process for Upper Dam. He said the parties in the FERC settlement did not want access to Upper Dam to change, and wanted the use to be primarily fly-fishing. Changing the gate system on the public lands will increase the level and type of use at Upper Dam, thus violating the settlement agreement. Upper Dam is on private land, and increased use will lead to safety concerns, litter, and trespass. Fly-fisherman should remain the primary users as they are good stewards. The current public land gate system was already worked out with the Bureau and is a fair agreement. In order to make the gate system easier to understand, the Bureau should do a better job at informing the public, not change the system.

Dick Cole of NextEra Energy spoke in support of UWP statements about honoring the settlement agreement. Another factor is that the dam has a 'high hazard' classification.

Paul McGuire, a campowner, supported UWP comments. He added that litter has been a problem at Upper Dam.

David Brown, a campowner, said there is no need for extra traffic and trash on the private property at Upper Dam.

A member of the public who did not state his name said that the state should not allow some people on public lands and not others. If there remains a gate, the Bureau staff and campowners alike should have to walk in.

Kirby Holcombe of Rangeley Region Guides and Sportsmen's Association supports the Bureau proposal of removing gate 2. The 1.3 mile walk back from the dam to gate 2 is almost all uphill. Traditional uses of Upper Dam have not just been fly-fishing—there have been other day uses for a long time.

Mike Ferguson said that as an ATV rider he supports letting the public drive in—however, he sees the benefits of the current gate system for UWP and NextEra, who have a business to manage. The Bureau recommendation would definitely increase traffic.

Public Comment on Bald Mountain Public Lands Draft Recommendations

Mike Furguson asked if the potential new club snowmobile trail on Bald Mountain would go all the way to the lake. Amy Hudnor of the Bureau said that the plan is more conceptual and the exact location of the trail would be worked out by the Bureau and the snowmobile club later. Skip Varney of the Bureau's Off-Road Vehicle Division said the idea was that the trail extend all the way to Mooselookmeguntic Lake.

A participant who did not give his name said the plan should allow for upgrades to the telecommunications tower, so there can be better cell phone reception in the region.

Public Comment on Four Ponds Public Lands Draft Recommendations

Mike Furguson said education and signage is needed to keep ATV riders from using the authorized snowmobile Appalachian Trail crossing (ITS117) on the management road east of Sabbath Day Pond. There is an intersection for ATV riders south of the Four Ponds public lands called the 'turn-table'. At this intersection, Four Ponds campowners turn left to make their way to their camps, and other ATV riders turn right. However, some ATV riders see the tracks from campowners and turn left to go to Four Ponds, thinking it is a designated route. Signs are needed at the turn-table.

Lester Kenway said MATC has been working with Maine Huts and Trails on designating an AT crossing, but a crossing has not been located yet.

Dick Cole suggested adding hunting to the vision statement for the Four Ponds Unit. He also asked questions about the potential for a boat access facility on Beaver Mountain Lake and a question on Bureau timber management.

Public Comment on Rangeley Lake State Park Draft Recommendations

Shelby Rousseau of Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust asked a clarifying question about whether users of a potential trail system between the South Bog property and the park would have to pay a park use fee. Gary Best, Bureau Assistant Regional Manager for State Parks Southern Region, said that it would be expected that users of a trail system in Rangeley Lakes State Park would pay a park day use fee.

Public Comment—General

Freeman Tibbetts spoke about wind power proposals in the Western Mountains of Maine and shared with Bureau staff CDs of aerial photography he took on a flight over the mountains. He wants to show the impacts happening to the mountains where wind turbines are going and save other mountains from these impacts.

The meeting was adjourned at 8pm.