

MAINE BUREAU OF PARKS AND LANDS (BPL)
Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
22 State House Station - Augusta, Maine 04333-0022

MEETING NOTES

**FLAGSTAFF REGION MANAGEMENT PLAN – FIVE YEAR REVIEW
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (AC) MEETING**

Farmington, Maine
December 11, 2013
5:30 – 8:00 PM

COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND THE INTERESTED PUBLIC PRESENT

AC Members

Dick Fecteau, MATC
Chris Beach, High Peaks Alliance
Eliza Donoghue, NRCM
Claire Polfus, ATC
John McCatherin, CV Outdoor Assoc.
Bob Luce, Town of Carrabassett Valley
Bill Munzer, JV Wing Snowmobile Club
Peter Smith, CR NEMBA
Charlie Woodworth, Maine Huts & Trails

Interested Public

Bob Weingarten (Friends of Bigelow)
Dave Cota (Town of Carrabassett Valley)
Lester Kenway (MATC)
Larry Warren (Western Mountains Corporation)
Jay Robbins (Arnold Expedition Historical Society)

DPPL STAFF PRESENT

Will Harris, Director of BPL
Kathy Eickenberg, Chief of Planning
Jim Vogel, Management Plan Coordinator
Peter Smith, Lands Manager - Western Region
Steve Swatling, Bigelow Preserve Manager

Rex Turner, Recreation Planner
Brian Bronson, ATV Coordinator
Tom Charles, Chief of Silviculture
Joe Wiley, IF&W Wildlife Biologist assigned to BPL

INTRODUCTIONS AND MEETING OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

After a welcome by Director Harris, introductions were made by members of the Committee and BPL staff, followed by a brief statement by the Plan Coordinator of the meeting's objectives and goals: 1) to review additional details on implementation of the Flagstaff Plan recommendations and on timber management in the Bigelow Preserve not provided at the August 15 AC meeting, 2) to review and receive AC input on non-motorized trail proposals first presented at the August 15 AC meeting and about which additional information has been provided, and 3) to review and receive AC input on two new items; a proposed motorized trail crossing of the AT on the Redington Lot, and two potential sites BPL is considering for a new boat launch on the east side of Flagstaff Lake, all of which were featured on the agenda (Attachment A). Attendees were asked to focus comments on their opinion of the overall merits or concerns they might have with the proposals, and their estimation of whether a particular proposal was beneficial or desirable. It was explained that the Bureau would draft any changes to the Plan that would be necessary to accommodate proposals that the Bureau determines will move forward. Those draft amendments would be

distributed to the AC for review, as well as presented at a public meeting, followed by a comment period. Attendees were also advised that comments on the proposals being discussed at the meeting could also be submitted to BPL in writing.

REVISED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Jim Vogel provided a brief review of the revisions that have been made to the Five-Year Plan Review table, which focused on providing more information where “actions taken” had been reported as “no activity this period, and on new information inserted on Bigelow Preserve timber management and accomplishments (AC members were provided the revised table in advance of the meeting). Dick Fecteau expressed concern about the recommendation for a lease to be issued for the “Wing Camp” and questioned the public interest in executing a lease for this property. The Bureau responded that it has been our policy, when acquiring properties with existing leases, to continue those leases (postnote: this is also required by statute, 12 MRSA §1852); that we have not made contact with the campowner since the Plan’s adoption, that we have recognized the need to resolve the issue, and have set a deadline to execute a lease by the end of 2015. .

REVIEW OF NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL PROPOSALS

Jim Vogel used a PowerPoint presentation (see Attachment B sent to the Committee prior to the meeting) to review the non-motorized trail proposals first presented by the trail proponents at the August 15 AC meeting, and about which additional details have since been provided by the proponents, and to present the Bureau’s initial response to each proposal. The presentation made use of annotated trail maps and field photos. Comments from the AC were solicited for each proposal.

Western Mountain Corporation (WMC), Coburn Gore to Kingfield Trail

Chain of Ponds area: The presentation highlighted BPL concerns about the feasibility of the trail route at the south end of Chain of Ponds. WMC had, responded to those concerns in an email distributed to the AC (Attachment C), proposing potential engineered solutions to the most difficult portions of the route along Rt. 27 and in the vicinity of the Lower Pond dam. At the meeting, Larry Warren of WMC also indicated a desire to keep the proposed trail route within view of the historic Arnold Trail, although it would not follow it exactly to protect historic resources that may be present. Various entities present at the meeting and involved in a project to enhance and protect the Arnold Trail spoke about related efforts to potentially expand state property at Chain of Ponds to the Canadian border and also south to the existing ownership.

Stratton area: The presentation highlighted the desire of BPL to limit additional trail development in the Bigelow Preserve, as proposed by WMC for this area, in keeping with the Flagstaff Plan and BPL policy for management of the preserve, and to co-locate the proposed trail on the management road/snowmobile trail between Stratton Pond Road and the Range Trailhead, which the 2007 Plan designated as an approved mountain bike route.

Maine Huts and Trails – Stratton Brook Hut Connector Trail -

The BPL presentation described the approximate route of the proposed trail hiking and ungroomed ski trail, which would cross the Carrabassett Valley Lot before joining an old road at the CMP powerline corridor and proceeding across Stratton Brook and connecting to the 60s haul road/Stratton Brook bike and ski trail. Dick Fecteau asked where the bridge was proposed; the response was given that it would presumably be in the vicinity of the former road crossing (some remnants of the former truck bridge are still present). He also asked if BPL had approved clearing and signage for bike use of the “Dead Moose” section of management road/snowmobile trail (MH&T signage has been noted on the road.) BPL responded that the

MH&T signage, which BPL has noted, is not approved, and any clearing in excess of that required for the snowmobiling trail also has not been approved..

BPL's presentation included information on a MH&T proposal to allow mountain bike use on the Hemlock Trail on the east side of Flagstaff Lake. Charlie Woodworth of MH&T confirmed that MH&T is no longer pursuing the proposal given the several concerns and constraints expressed by BPL. Dick Fecteau commented that the trail maps posted at MH&T trailheads incorrectly depict the Hemlock Trail as open to bikes; BPL responded that it will work with MH&T to correct this problem.

CR-NEMBA Trail Proposals

"Dead Moose" Trail: BPL proposed to allow bike use on this route to facilitate important connections to the bike trail network on abutting lands. It was again noted that some unauthorized posting of MH&T trail signs has occurred on this road.

"Esker" Trail/AKA 60s Road/Stratton Brook bike and ski trail: The presentation described the requested reroute of this existing trail to mitigate for planned use of the road as a haul road, and noted a concern with the availability of resources to construct a rerouted trail prior to the harvest. BPL proposed to collaborate with CR-NEMBA on a rerouted "single-track" trail; staff explained that 2 seasons remained for the trail work to be done before the harvest work would begin.

"Birthday Hill" Trail: The BPL presentation expressed concern about a lack of ride-able connections to trails to the east, on abutting property, to justify its designation for bike use. Peter Smith of CR-NEMBA responded that the road does connect to the Carriage Road via an ATV trail, and that route is already in use by bike riders, which motivated the request to have it officially designated as a bike route. BPL also indicated its concerns about allowing bike use of the proposed management road in order to provide a "challenge ride", particularly on connecting management roads extending upslope. CR-NEMBA acknowledged the concern and gave assurance that no allowance for riding off the existing management road as mapped for the proposal was intended or desired, and this could be addressed with signage. It was suggested that the ATV trail could be followed rather than designating a new trail on a BPL management road.

"Jones Pond" Trail: The presentation described the request for a "reroute" of the existing approved bike route on a management road/snowmobile trail to "provide a better riding experience" and a "longer loop option." BPL suggested limited reroutes around problem areas on the already authorized snowmobile trail, Pete Smith of CR-NEMBA commented on the importance of this trail in linking communities (e.g., Stratton to Carrabassett Valley), which is an important regional objective, and indicated that a limited reroute of the trail could be acceptable.

"Backside" Trail: The presentation described the request to authorize bike use of the 5 mile management road/snowmobile route connecting East Flagstaff Road and West Flagstaff Road, a half-mile of which crosses The Horns Ecological Reserve. BPL summarized its concerns, which included potential overdevelopment of the generally quiet backcountry of the northern slope, the presence of a large beaver dam and wet areas that make the route currently unsuited to bike use, and constraints on potential trail work with machinery in keeping with the Bigelow Preserve Act. Steve Swatling also noted that the area is heavily used in the fall hunting season, with hunters using the route to walk deep into the backcountry. Pete Smith (CR-NEMBA) expressed respect for BPLs intent of keeping summer recreational use of this area less intense than what may be occur on the more accessible south portion of the Bigelow Preserve.

REDINGTON LOT MOTORIZED TRAIL PROPOSAL

BPL has been aware of a long-standing interest on the part of various regional motorized trail groups and others for a new motorized trail crossing of the Appalachian Trail (AT) on or near the Redington Lot that would link the Caribou Valley to the Barnjum area. In the week before the meeting, the High Peaks Alliance submitted two documents to BPL describing a desired AT crossing on the Redington Lot at the existing management road crossing AT and its importance to the motorized trail groups and as part of a regional trails plan recently drafted by HPA. The documents also comments on policies and resource allocations contained in the Flagstaff Plan that would need to be addressed to allow the proposed crossing. To support the meeting discussion of this issue, the AC was provided with a set of 4 color 8.5 x 11 maps (Attachment D), depicting the existing management roads and resource allocations on the lot, and snowmobile and ATV trails in the surrounding region. Jim Vogel highlighted the Special Protection and Remote Recreation allocations on the lot that were designated to protect the AT trail and hiker's experience, and also noted the private forest lands surrounding the lot that any connecting motorized trail would also need to cross.

Several minutes of discussion provided the group with details regarding historical motorized use of an AT crossing adjacent to the Redington Lot. Brain Bronson described how the route was not recognized as an authorized snowmobile or ATV trail, and how discussion of an AT crossing in this area had historically been associated with a crossing at West Saddleback Mountain, which was accomplished a few years ago through a land swap with NPS. Additional discussion centered on the history of blockage of roads on adjoining forest lands managed by the Wagner company, which may have been initially installed at the state's request; Claire Polfus of ATC described the location and probable timing of recently installed blockages based on her recent field visits.

Chris Beach spoke for several minutes to explain HPAs interest in the proposed trail connection and the priority within HPAs recently completed High Peaks Region trails plan of providing trail connectivity from Crocker Mountain to Barnjum. In particular, Chris highlighted the importance of an interconnected regional trails work to the economic development of the region as it transitions from a forest product to an outdoor recreation-focused region. Chris described the "core vision" of the HPA to develop a greater trail density in the region, with planned connections among the various motorized and non-motorized trail systems that would be accessible from any High Peaks community. The large US Navy land ownership west of the Redington lot was pointed to as a block to potential trail development in the region, as was the AT [given the importance to the NPS and the AT trail community of limiting trail conflicts and motorized trail crossings]. The goal was expressed to achieve a minimum number of crossings of the AT while preserving the remoteness of the region. The trail corridor where it would cross the AT on the lot was described as combining all trail systems – snowmobile, ATV, skiing, mountain biking, and hiking.

Continued discussion touched on the current ownership of the lands to the north and south of the Redington Lot, what lands were on the market, and the potential for conservation acquisitions in the area. HPA asserted that it should be assumed that current ownership will change prior to the next 5-year review. Larry Warren commented that the picture regarding ownership and possible acquisitions will become clearer during the Crocker Mountain plan development (to begin early next year).

Dick Fecteau brought up an agreement signed by seven local ATV clubs during the negotiation of the West Saddleback AT crossing that accepted a limit of 4 specified ATV trail crossings of the AT, which did not include the Redington area crossing. Dick further described that during his prior role as a director of the

Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust (MATLT), MATLT had proposed the High Peaks region as an important focus area, with an inner area preserved as remote backcountry without motorized use, and an outer section with motorized use. Dick further commented that if the wildlife refuge were to come to fruition, the core high peaks area would become a prime backcountry area, and that Wagner has increasing put up barriers to motorized use independent of state requests to do so.

Chris Beach explained that the November 2010 ATV crossing agreement, which he drafted, was not accepted by NPS, which wanted to maintain focus on the West Saddleback crossing. He also noted that regional trails planning was a key element in a proposal for a new federal wildlife refuge that would help protect the AT in the region. The concept of motorized trails crossing the proposed refuge was described as an integral part of the preliminary refuge planning, and a fully aligned with USFWS and other sources of funding for the potential refuge.

Bill Munzer of the JV Wing Snowmobile Club commented that snowmobiler lost an important connection adjacent to the Redington Lot that they had used for a number of years when the West Saddle crossing was negotiated, and which he did not realize was an unauthorized AT crossing until it was blocked..

EAST FLAGSTAFF LAKE BOAT ACCESS OPTIONS

Jim Vogel presented two options under consideration for new boat access on the east side of Flagstaff Lake, referring to a handout provided to the Committee (Attachment E). The first site is at the Little Bigelow trailhead parking area (a former gravel pit) near Bog Brook, within the Bigelow Preserve, where the nominal carry-in access might be converted to basic trailer boat launching. The second site under consideration is the area of shoreline in the Spring Lake lot or on the Dead River Peninsula, south of the dam, where a basic trailered boat launch would be constructed. These options were described as being under consideration due to parking constraints at the existing Bog Brook boat access (which FERC has directed Brookfield to work with BPL to address), and the conversion of the boat access site at the Long Falls Dam day use area to carry-in access only. Further development of these options is expected to occur in the course of continued discussions with Brookfield regarding cooperative recreation management at Flagstaff Lake, as required by the FERC Project License.

Dick Fecteau contested the viability of the Little Bigelow site, questioning whether trailered boats could back down the distance that would be required to reach the water, whether the water would be too shallow after reservoir drawdown to allow the launch to function, and whether it could be constructed with minimal impact on the site. Dick also questioned the need for trailered boat access on the east side of the lake. A comment was made about the possible impact of a new boat access on traffic on the lake; Pete Smith (BPL) and another attendee pointed out the motorized use of the lake is very low at present and would likely remain so due to the nature of the lake..

PROPOSED CHANGES TO BPL FOREST MANAGEMENT

BPL Director Will Harris provided a 10 minute description of a proposal to increase the level of harvesting on BPL lands, developed as a result of a recent timber inventory that showed the annual rate of growth of timber stands was exceeding BPL's harvest level, resulting in concerns about lost economic opportunity. He explained that the proposal would gradually increase harvest levels and that the Bureau would do so as informed by and consistent with its current management policies and plans. Chief of Silviculture for the Bureau, Tom Charles, pointed out that how harvest levels are adjusted will vary from Unit to Unit, as each has different resources, conditions and management plan recommendations.

NEXT STEPS AND OTHER COMMENTS

Because the meeting room had to be vacated at 8:00 pm to allow another group to use it, it was not possible to extend the meeting after Will concluded his presentation, and there was no opportunity to address next steps or take additional comments. [In lieu of this, an email message was sent to AC members on December 13 encouraging them to submit any additional comments to BPL in writing, with a deadline set at the end of the month. Subsequent email messages will provide additional details on next steps, which will include a public meeting at which draft Plan amendments will be presented and comments taken.]

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:05 pm.

*Respectfully Submitted by
Jim Vogel*

ATTACHMENTS

- A – Agenda
- B – BPL PowerPoint Presentation – Non-motorized trail proposals and initial BPL response
- C – WMC response to BPL concerns regarding proposed trail at Chain of Ponds
- D – Maps, Redington Lot and motorized trail network in vicinity
- E – Potential New East Flagstaff Lake Boat Launch Sites