

**Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Bureau of Parks and Lands
Advisory Committee Meeting – Tumbledown-Mount Blue Management Plan
February 26, 2020, 6:00 to 8:00 pm
Weld Town Office**

MEETING NOTES

1. Welcome and Introductions, Purpose of Meeting

Plan Coordinator: Jim Vogel, Senior Planner, Bureau of Parks and Lands

Other BPL Staff Present: Bruce Farnham, Mount Blue State Park Manager
Liz Petruska, Director of Acquisitions and Planning
Tim Post, Western Regional Manager
Rex Turner, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Ben Webb, Forester, Western Region
Brian Milligan, Recreational Trail Coordinator (ATV)

Advisory Committee Members: Rick Davol, Richard Doughty, Lisa Drapeau, Dave Howatt, Charles Hulse, Corey Hutchinson, Jan Hutchinson, Erica Debois, Dan Mitchell, Bob Withrow (alternate), Michelle Wynn

Members of the Public: About 16 attended; see attached sign-in sheet.

Following introductions Jim reviewed the agenda and the materials provided to Advisory Committee members, which included notes from the Public Scoping meeting, a plan area map, data on Tumbledown use, and scoping notes which provide a summary of the main management issues the plan process will address. The scoping notes will be used as a guide for this first Advisory Committee meeting and will help the group begin to look at a range of issues and potential solutions for moving forward.

2. Tumbledown Public Lands – Review of Resources and Issues/Needs/Opportunities; Discussion of Potential Management Recommendations

A. Summary of Resources. Jim reviewed the Summary of Resources as outlined in the February 2020 Scoping Notes:

- The property was acquired through two major purchases in the early 2000s.
- The unit is unique because it is so accessible to a large part of the state’s population
- Primary access is via the Byron/Weld Road which was not conveyed to the state. There are no on-unit roads open to the public and only a few management roads that predate the Bureau’s ownership.
- A 12.5-mile network of hiking trail provides pedestrian access. Detailed information on trails is provided through Maine Trail Finder.
- There are no designated campsites but a history of rogue campsites at Tumbledown Pond.

- Motorized use by ATVs and snowmobiles is focused on the road and the conservation easement lands to the north.
- BPL doesn't yet have a lot of information on the Historic and Cultural resources but did find an old map which showed a road all the way to the mountaintop.
- LUPC zoning, especially related to portions of the property above 2,700 feet (P-MA zone), will come into play when discussing resource allocations.
- There are 2 leases on the unit that pre-date the state's ownership: a CMP telecommunication tower on Jackson Mountain and a ½-acre camplot lease on Jackson Pond.
- Hunting and trapping do occur on the unit, but BPL doesn't have much knowledge about the level of use. There are no bear bait sites.
- A key part of BPL's mission is protection of special natural resources. The area has been looked at closely by the Maine Natural Areas Program and is part of an area of statewide significance. We're lucky to be starting the plan process with good information in hand.
- There are two ponds on the unit and Tumbledown Pond is stocked annually by aerial release. Shiners have been in the pond for about 10 years and are likely to persist now that they're there.
- BPL's Chief of Silviculture reports that the property was included in a 2011 statewide inventory of BPL's forest lands. Current stocking is 23 cords per acre which is moderate by BPL standards. Jim will be working with the BPL Forester for this unit to collect more stand level data. Jim explained that BPL does not receive money from the general fund; timber harvesting and income sources from the land support all of the Bureau's recreational activities.

There were no questions from the Committee or the public about the summary of resources.

B. Issues, Needs and Opportunities.

Advisory Committee members, BPL staff and members of the public reflected on the following:

- Trails. The report provided by the 2019 Environmental Steward highlights challenges with the trails. BPL inherited the current trail system and wouldn't have made them so steep if they were designing them anew. There is already a lot of work done to maintain them, but the report acknowledges that more work is needed; this will be a big focus of the plan.
- Use data. BPL has several years of use data with 2019 providing the most complete pictures. The numbers provided are based on mid-day vehicle counts, using a multiplier of 2.5 people per vehicle, which provides a "snapshot" of use levels but not a full-day count. The average is 164 people on weekends and holidays, which is 4 times as much as weekday use. But even some weekdays see high use – the maximum recorded was 49 vehicles. This is not statistical level counting, but it provides a realistic picture of use. Although BPL does not have data from elsewhere to compare, the feeling is that these are "front country" numbers in a backcountry setting. BPL also has some data from trail counters on the Unit.

- Camping.
 - BPL's rule about camping on Public Lands is that you can camp anywhere, but you can't have a fire or cut live vegetation. The MFS Forest Ranger did some enforcement on fires when they went up with the Environmental Steward last summer. BPL has been thinking about the rogue camping situation for several years and working to document the impacts. The agency feels that it's an unattractive use but also acknowledges that it's hard to slow it down because it has limited options for control. BPL is looking to the planning process to consider solutions (everything's on the table right now) and to have a conversation about finding a result that protects both public uses and critical natural resources.
 - The group agreed that just because the use has been going on a long time is not a reason to let it continue. To change the culture is difficult, but the key is to be persistent and to start – we can't keep kicking the can down the road. We might not get to zero camping, but you can get a long way just by having more of a presence. The culture of partying is difficult to change but it should be part of the mission to do so. Linda Bean's closure of the field and lean-to on her abutting property is an example of success over time.
 - Should consider moving camping away from the summit to protect those fragile areas. Could also consider a limited number of hardened sites or tent platforms at the summit – the key will be to make a designated number and enforce it.
 - BPL has done the ground work with a soil scientist and gotten permits to put moldering privies in at 2 sites. None are right next to the pond, but the locations are near the summit. There was some concern that privies at the top would draw more people to camp there. If they were further down, then that could help keep camping off the top because people will want to be closer to the privy.
 - Group use – there are bigger groups coming from all over to camp there, including boys and girls camps. Would it be worthwhile to contact camps in the area to say that level of use is not allowed? Feeling is that these large groups are coming from far away too and so it's impossible to know who to reach out to.
 - The group discussed trying to limit use by limiting parking, but BPL doesn't own the road and so can't control parking along the shoulders very easily. Other popular sites such as Walden Pond in MA and Old Rag in Shenandoah NP charge for parking and have a person to monitor and enforce rules. There may be other lessons to be learned from management of Chimney Pond in Baxter State Park and, although there too the park has more enforcement authority and resources.
 - Would a reservation system work? It's not a typical approach for Public Lands but is worth considering. With limited cell phone service at the base the logistics might be difficult. In other places as soon as reservable sites fill up people just put their tents anywhere – the idea of a system is nice, but you need someone up there to enforce things long enough to switch the behavior. The proximity of the park presents an opportunity for people to make reservations there. That would also provide an important point for first contact and a chance to educate people on proper etiquette.

- Common theme on all these threads is the need for enforcement. Could a season-long caretaker be considered, similar to Bigelow? Need the consistency of a physical face. Presence in recent years has been limited to an Environmental Steward who is over at Tumbledown 4-5 days a week during hiking season. Last year there was also a Park Ranger who spent 80% of his time there, so someone's there 7 days a week at some point during the day. On a few occasions they went at night with a Forest Ranger because they have the power to write a summons for illegal fires.
- It seems like camping activity has gotten worse in recent years. The fact that the state bought the land and made it open to the public is a contributing factor. Additionally, there are just generally more hikers today all over than there used to be, and more interest has been generated from articles and internet promotion that is not linked to the state's outreach.
- The hope is the planning process will result in public buy-in. It's unlikely that the solution will make everyone happy but it's obvious that overuse is having a negative impact. Maybe a phased approach is worth considering.
- Leases. How long is the lease with CMP? Typically BPL's leases with CMP are for 20-25 years but BPL will verify. There was some surprise that the Jackson Pond camp was an official lease. BPL confirmed that is part of its camplot lease program and is renewed every 5 years. BPL will visit the camplot lease site in 2020.
- Wildlife
 - Tumbledown was an important site for a northeast region peregrine falcon reintroduction initiative back in the late 1980s. It's still used by falcons and is checked annually by a BPL/IF&W biologist who reported activity in 2019. It's important that human activity is kept away from the site during nesting and until the birds fledge. There is generally not a conflict with people because they nest on sheer cliffs. Keeping a good buffer is something to note in the plan and monitor over time, especially if rock climbing continues as an allowed recreational use.
 - Is Bicknell's Thrush present? There is definitely suitable habitat. Because it's an enormous task to survey that habitat at that elevation, IF&W's practice is to assume the birds are present wherever the high elevation and habitat occur.
 - There is some evidence of Spring Salamander. It's unlikely that recreational uses will impact this, but their habitat should be considered if timber harvesting occurs.
 - Harvesting and Habitat – Given the prevalence of heavy harvesting throughout the state, is there potential for this unit to meet a growing need for later-successional habitat? Yes, there is less and less habitat for interior species on the landscape, which makes it more valuable as a resource. BPL's general rule of thumb for timber management is to promote late-successional species so even active management for timber will be towards that goal.

3. Mount Blue State Park – Review of Resources and Issues/Needs/Opportunities; Discussion of Potential Management Recommendations

A. Summary of Resources. Jim reviewed the Summary of Resources as outlined in the February 2020 Scoping Notes:

- The original park parcels were federal land (farms purchased by USDA in the 1930s) that was granted to the State of Maine in 1955. Additional land was added over a span of 50 years with the largest acreage added in the early 2000s, around the same time the Tumbledown lands were acquired.
- There is good public road access to the park and 2 gravel roads within the park boundaries.
- Camping in the park is located on the shores of the 2,146-acre Webb Lake which provides a primarily warm water fishery. The lake is stocked with brook trout, brown trout and landlocked salmon each fall.
- A good portion of the state park lands is also within the MNAP Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance and two Rare and Exemplary Natural Communities have been mapped in the park.
- Important habitat includes a mapped Deer Wintering Area, Bicknell's Thrush habitat; and a sizeable wetland identified as Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird habitat.
- Recreation amenities on Webb Lake include a 130-site campground, a large sand beach with picnic shelter, other developed facilities associated with the campground and nature center, a boat ramp, non-motorized trails around the campground. At Center Hill and Mount Blue, there are 18 miles of multi-use trails, 15 miles of groomed ski trails, several miles of designated ATV and snowmobile trails, a parking area and picnic site overlooking Webb Lake across from HQ, and a winter ice rink and yurt warming hut.
- Hunting and trapping both occur in the Park.
- ME Office of Information Technology has a 40-year lease for a radio communication facility on the summit of Mount Blue. In 2011, the old fire tower was replaced with the existing tower which includes a viewing platform, along with the radio equipment.
- By statute, timber harvesting can only happen on park lands for limited reasons. Some timber management was done on the Center Hill/Mount Blue parcels by Maine Forest Service before they were developed for park purposes. In 1966 the state sold stumpage rights on 1,000 acres, for a 30-year period, in exchange for a parcel on Webb Lake; the harvesting sparked some controversy and ended in 1994. BPL conducted some harvests more recently; one purpose was to open up some viewpoints at Center Hill.

B. Issues, Needs and Opportunities.

Advisory Committee members, BPL staff and members of the public reflected on the following:

- Trails – The trail system at Mount Blue is impressive, with intersecting loops and winter use along with both motorized and non-motorized trails. The variety of trails is notable. There was some discussion about ATV use being in flux. The Town of Weld is talking about lifting the road restriction and a warrant is proposed for town

meeting that would allow the Select Board to authorize ATVs on public ways. Even if passed, development of this use would be a long process and the Town would want to have BPL involved. The town of Byron allows ATVs on some roads and people want to use the Byron road to go from Weld to Byron and in order to use trails to get gas and food at the local store in Weld village.

- Communications Tower – Discussion covered the importance of also using the tower to enhance local communications. Franklin County does have a radio repeater on the tower that can be used for park staff and for the fire department and is providing good communications for those entities. How about cell phone coverage since the area is a dead zone? Anything commercial would open up another can of worms for the state and it's not necessarily the right place because of its elevation and there's no power or telephone lines.
- Glade skiing – The Backcountry Alliance sent some background materials and a proposal for BPL to consider. BPL's current position is that this is something new for the Bureau and wouldn't be a conversation that's exclusive to the Tumbledown/Mount Blue planning process. This is increasingly a topic at both Sunday River and Sugarloaf. Recommendations from the group include staying away from conifer stands near the top and limiting trails to the deciduous stands if they're going to do anything; Would like to avoid taking down large trees to build trails. Should take safety into consideration; the backcountry is a very difficult place to rescue someone but that's part of the allure. There were concerns that the same overuse that happens at Tumbledown in the summer could happen in the winter on the Center Hill side. There's only room for a few cars now, would you need a lot to accommodate 20 and what kind of pressure does that bring? On the flip side, there's less appeal for camping in the winter time so rogue campsites probably wouldn't be as big a problem. Next steps on this issue is a larger conversation at the Bureau level and Jim will keep the Advisory Committee informed.

4. Bald Mountain Lot – Review of Resources and Issues/Needs/Opportunities; Discussion of Potential Management Recommendations

Advisory Committee members, BPL staff and members of the public reflected on the following:

- Trail and Parking – This was mentioned at the Public Scoping meeting, but BPL hasn't had a chance to look further into the current situation. The trail got extended onto the BPL lot recently unbeknownst to BPL. Maybe that extension could be formalized through the planning process. There was some concern about access through a side road and conversation about concerns by the abutting landowner. There are erosion issues with the trail; it is in need of a redesign.
- Timber Management – BPL harvested the property in 2018 because it had an opportunity to go in through an abutter. There are no plans to go back in anytime soon.

5. Next Steps

There's not a specific schedule set for the next meeting, but it will likely be towards the end of spring. There are enough complicated issues to consider that it might be worthwhile to

meet just to address the camping topic. Overall though, this is just the beginning of the conversation.

The meeting was adjourned at 8 pm.

Attachment: Sign-in sheet.

Tumbledown Public Land / Mt. Blue State Park Management Plan
 Advisory Committee Meeting
February 26, 2020 ~ 6:00 PM
 Weld Town Office

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Name	Organization	Please sign in below
Ron Davis	Webb Lake Association	
Rick Davol	Weld Winter Wildcats Snowmobile Club	Rick Davol
Richard Doughty	Town of Weld Selectman	Richard Doughty
Lisa Drapeau	unaffiliated	[present] J.D. (signed on back)
Dave Howatt	IF&W Region D - Fisheries	D. Howatt
Charles Hulsey	IF&W Region D - Wildlife	[present] J.V.
Corey Hutchinson	Town of Weld Fire Chief	[present] J.V. (signed on back)
Jan Hutchinson	Town of Carthage - Selectperson	Jan Hutchinson
Erica Kaufman	Forest Society of Maine	Erica Kaufman
Dan Mitchell	River Valley Riders ATV club	[present] J.V. (signed on back)
Travis Pratt	unaffiliated	
Michelle Wynn	Tumbledown Conservation Alliance	Michelle Wynn

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PLEASE SIGN IN ON THE NEXT PAGE