

Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands
Tumbledown Public Lands and Mount Blue State Park Plan
Summary of Resources & Issues/Concerns/Needs/Opportunities

Tumbledown Public Lands

Summary of Resources

- Fee ownership and acquisition history:
 - Most of the Tumbledown Public Lands were acquired through **two major purchases** in the early 2000s. The core of the Unit totals 9,967 acres.
 - **Nov. 2002: 3,778 acres on the northern part of the Unit** in Twp. 6, including Tumbledown and Little Jackson Mountains (3,470 ft) and the Stockbridge Branch valley to the north were acquired from Hancock Land Co.
 - **Aug. 2004: 6,063 acres on the southern part of the Unit** in Twp. 6, including Jackson Mountain (3,568 ft), and 126 adjoining acres in Phillips were acquired from Mead-Westvaco Oxford Corp. 50-acre inholding with a gravel pit along the north side of Weld/Byron Road, west of Tumbledown Brook.
 - **Other parcels:** A 423-acre parcel abutting the State Park lands east of Webb Lake was acquired from the Trust for Public Lands in 2002, as part of a conveyance that added similar acreage to the State Park lands on Webb Lake. That parcel is managed as part of the State Park. The 2004 Mead-Westvaco purchase also included 167 acres at Bald Mountain in Perkins Twp., about 10 miles to the south.

- Public Access and Roads:
 - The Unit is easily accessible to a large part of the population of the state, being within a few hours drive of the larger cities and towns in southern and central Maine. It is about a 30-mile drive from Farmington, and about 20 miles from Rumford, two of the larger towns in the region. It is about 60 miles (1.5 hrs.) from Lewiston/Auburn and Augusta, and 100 miles (2 hrs.) from Portland. Paved state roads reach within a few miles of the Unit.
 - **Primary Access:** Access to the Unit is via the Byron/Weld Road (labeled as the No. 6 road on older maps) which crosses the southern part of the Unit. This gravel road was not conveyed with the surrounding lands and is maintained by the town of Weld. The Unit boundary is about 4 miles west of Rt 142 (Weld Road) in Weld and about 3.5 miles east of Rt. 17 in Byron
 - **On-Unit Roads:** There are no roads open to the public on the BPL owned lands, and few management roads. No timber management has occurred, so all management roads predate the Bureau.

- Recreation and amenities:
 - **Pedestrian trails:** There is a network of hiking trails on the Unit totaling 12.5 miles, most of which follow old logging roads for much of their length and predate the Bureau's ownership. All include steep sections on the higher elevations and are moderately difficult to difficult trails. Most converge at Tumbledown Pond. The trails are maintained by MBSP and Maine Conservation Corp trail crews.
 - **Brook Trail:** 1.5 miles; the shortest and most popular trail to Tumbledown Pond. Starts out with a gradual gain in elevation then becomes steep for the final 1/3 of the route. A parking area has been provided on the south side of the Byron/Weld

road and additional parking is available on the roadside. There is a kiosk and vault privy at the trailhead.

- **Loop Tail:** 2.1 miles; a strenuous trail with very steep sections climbing the mountain requiring rock scrambling. A 0.2 mile spur leads to the summit of Tumbledown Mountain. A parking area is provided along the Byron Weld Road.
- **Parker Ridge Trail:** 2.9 miles; begins at the Brook Trail trailhead then follows the Unit boundary east before turning to climb the ridge to the pond.
- **Little Jackson Mountain trail:** 3.5 miles; branches off the Parker Ridge trail to climb to the peak of Little Jackson Mountain (3,434 ft), the highest point on the Unit. A 1.1 mile connector, the Pond Link Trail, takes hikers to the pond.
- **Blueberry Mountain trail:** 1.1 miles; an out-and-back trail beginning on private property and climbing to the 2942 ft peak on the east side of the Unit.
- **Campsites:**
 - No designated campsites; several “rogue” campsites at Tumbledown Pond have developed over the years. There are heavily used at times, commonly by large groups.
 - Plans are in the works for installation of moldering privies near the pond/campsites.
- **ORV trails:**
 - **Snowmobile trails:** A designated club-maintained snowmobile trail follows the Byron Road across the Unit. This route connects two major trails, ITS 89 to the east (in Weld) and ITS 117 to the west (in Byron).
 - **ATV trails:** There are no designated ATV routes on the Unit. However, an ATV route follows a road across the conservation easement lands to the north, along East Branch Swift River.
- Historic/Cultural Resources:
 - The hike up to Tumbledown Pond has been a local tradition for generations and has been enjoyed by hikers from all over the region for decades, since when the land was in paper company ownership.
 - There is no record of archeological sites on the Unit; State Historic Preservation Office will be consulted.
- LUPC Zoning:
 - All of the Unit above 2,700 feet elevation is zoned P-MA (Mountain Area Protection subdistrict). The area within ½ mile radius of Tumbledown Pond is additionally zoned P-RR (Recreation Protection subdistrict). Several steep areas on the south faces of Tumbledown and Little Jackson Mountains as well as a small area on the east face of West Mountain (south of Weld/Byron Road) are zoned P-SG (Soils and Geology Protection subdistrict). There are several small wetlands, both perched on high ground below the peaks and at lower elevations, zoned P-WL1, 2, or 3 (Wetland Protection subdistricts)
- Leases:
 - CMP has a lease for a telecommunication tower on Little Jackson Mountain.
 - Camplot lease (1/2 acre) on Jackson Pond dating from before SOM ownership, accessed by old road and unofficial trail from north side of Unit (Stockbridge Branch).
- Hunting and trapping:
 - Both occur on the unit. No bear bait sites.

- Special Resources:
 - **Wildlife:** Nearly the entire Unit falls within the cooperative Beginning with Habitat Program's **Tumbledown to Mount Blue Focus Area of Statewide Significance** (these are areas that biologists have identified as containing unusually rich concentrations of at-risk species and habitats). Important resources within the focus area include the multiple peaks over 2,700 feet, ridgelines, high elevation ponds, and the largest example of an Alpine Ecosystem that has been documented in the state (~1,000 acres). Four rare or exemplary quality natural communities (see next bullet), four rare plant species, two rare animal species, and over four hundred acres of Significant Wildlife Habitat have been documented within the focus area. The cliffs on Tumbledown Mountain have been known to support nesting pairs of peregrine falcons.
 - **Natural Communities/Rare Plants:** MNAP has mapped several exemplary natural communities on Tumbledown and Little Jackson Mountains
 - exemplary **Subalpine Fir Forest** on the higher elevations of Little Jackson Mountain and north and west on the ridgelines.
 - Exemplary **Rock Outcrop Ecosystem** and **Acidic Cliff community** on Tumbledown Mountain
 - A small exemplary **Spruce-Pine Woodland** on the peak of Blueberry Mountain.
 - Three **rare plant species** have been documented in and near the open summit communities and one at Tumbledown Pond.

- Ponds:
 - **Tumbledown Pond:** ~9 acres, maximum depth about 22 feet. Stocked by IF&W annually via aerial release. Not rated in the 1987 Wildland Lakes Assessment. Special fishing regs include: use or possession of live fish as bait is prohibited. In the fall season (Oct 1-Nov 30), fishing is allowed with artificial bait only and all fish caught must be released at once. Closed to ice fishing.
 - **Jackson Pond:** A small (2 acres) pond perched on the north slope of Jackson Mountain. The pond is not stocked and may be fishless. Site of camplot lease (see above).

- Timber Resources:
 - **Harvest History:** Timber harvest operations occurred on much of the lower elevation lands during the decades in which the lands were owned by paper companies. It appears that the area south of Tumbledown and Little Jackson Mtns were harvested less recently than the areas to the north. Harvests were more frequent and heavier than on other BPL lands in the region. No timber harvests have occurred under the Bureau's ownership.
 - **Potential "Regulated" Acres:** Preliminary examination indicates perhaps 50-60% of the Unit may be suitable to be classified as regulated acres. (Regulated acres are actively managed for timber production, as a primary or secondary use; these may not include all operable acres on a Unit, due to the presence of sensitive or rare/high value natural communities, trails and other recreation amenities, and other factors.)
 - **Access:** Several management roads branch off the Byron Road onto the Unit; another runs along Stockbridge Branch on the north side of the Unit (beginning on the abutting easement). Several other management roads are on the east part of the Unit; ROWs were conveyed across two abutting parcels; access across adjacent private land is not clear in other cases.
 - **Timber Inventory:** Data from the 2011 statewide timber inventory on BPL lands indicated the following on the potential regulated acres:

- Timber volume averaged 23 cords per acre (moderate stocking by BPL standards)
- There is a diverse mix of tree species but hardwoods make up nearly three-quarters of the volume, a considerably higher percentage than other BPL lands in the region
- Top 3 hardwood species: paper birch (25%), yellow birch (13%), sugar maple (12%)
- Top 3 softwood species: spruce (11%), fir (10%), hemlock (4%)
- **Growth potential:** The operable land is probably of good fertility, able to produce quality hardwoods as well as spruce and pine (currently about 2.5% of volume, with 17% being red pine, uncommon on other BPL lands in the region)

Issues/Needs/Opportunities

1. *Hiking Trail Maintenance:*

- The trails receive regular maintenance throughout each hiking season by BPL staff and others under BPL direction. This includes routine maintenance such as brushing out/lopping branches and small growth, removal of blowdowns and cleaning out of water bars.
- More extensive work is conducted as needed, such as constructing rock steps and (in the case of a section of the Brook Trail) rerouting damaged trail.
- The very high use levels and steepness of the trails will continue to present challenges in maintaining stable, sustainable, safe and enjoyable trails.

2. *Rogue campsites and management of camping:*

- Current situation: Visitors have created several campsites and stone fire rings in the vicinity of Tumbledown Pond and have built fires in other bare rock locations. (Open fires are not permitted on BPL lands outside of approved campsites.) This use has been ongoing for many years and has resulting in substantial and steadily expanding vegetation damage and loss, soil erosion, and development of numerous “social trails” as well as large fire scars on prominent rock faces. Several large camping groups of 10 or more people are a common occurrence and some groups are drawn to the area for a “party” atmosphere.
- Negative impacts: The Bureau recognizes the value and attractiveness of camping at this relatively accessible yet uniquely scenic high elevation pond location. However, it is imperative that steps be taken to halt – and potentially repair – loss and damage to vegetation and soils and other adverse impacts on this special environment. The amount and type of camping activity occurring, and the building of fires, will only worsen the damage over time and are not appropriate to this fragile environment and highly scenic setting.
- Initial BPL ideas regarding potential management responses:
 - Ongoing efforts at educating visitors about BPL rules and low-impact behaviors are important and perhaps can be expanded/supplemented
 - Clear need for a more regulated and controlled camping opportunity at Tumbledown and to initiate a shift in “culture” away from the prevalent large-group “party” mode.
 - Protection of the fragile high elevation environment may require a limited number of hardened sites or tent platforms.
 - In conjunction with development of designated campsites, reducing the number of overnight visitors may require development of a campsite reservation system.
 - Each potential response/solution has pros and cons for the natural resource as well as practically and administratively. These need to be thoroughly discussed with stakeholders and the visiting public to arrive at the best combination of actions.

3. *Timber Management*

- The Bureau needs to assess where timber harvesting might occur, as a primary use or compatible secondary use, recognizing recreational and aesthetic values, particularly in the vicinity of the trail network, and visual concerns as viewed from peaks/high ground.
- No harvesting will occur above 2,700 feet (P-MA zone), although it is permissible with special permits.
- To protect visual resources, Visual Class II would need to be applied to areas visible from the high peaks and ridges. These areas are managed to avoid any obvious alterations to the landscape as seen from those viewpoints, with openings of a size and orientation as to not draw undue attention.

4. *Administrative Issues:*

- Continued collaboration and coordination between BPL Parks and Lands divisions in management of Unit.
- Staffing to conduct trail maintenance and management oversight of camping activity and to provide a visible presence on site.
- Potential operation of campsite reservation system by MBSP staff

Mount Blue State Park

Summary of Resources

- Fee Ownership and Acquisition (Maine's largest State Park):
 - **1955: Original Park Property, 4,921 acres** – the federal government transferred to the State numerous parcels it had acquired during the Great Depression, for use as a State Park. (Park began under a License Agreement with USDA in 1939, Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corp had begun development under federal ownership.)
 - ~400-acres on Webb Lake that now host the campground and beach and other developed facilities
 - ~3,200 acres in Weld at Center Hill and Mount Blue
 - ~1,310 acres in Avon on Mount Blue
 - **1967: First Addition** – State purchased 17-acre shoreline parcel on Webb Lake
 - **1988: Second Addition** -- State purchased 84-acre parcel near Center Hill in Weld
 - **2001-02: Major Expansion, 2,844 acres** -- State purchased a 376-acre parcel in Weld adjacent to the campground parcel, 2,324-acre parcel in Weld between Center Hill and Mount Blue, and 144-acre parcel in Temple, on Gammon Ridge south of Mount Blue.
 - **2004: Last Additions, 354 acres** -- State purchased 2 parcels totaling 96 acres in Weld and 258-acre parcel in Avon on the east side of Mount Blue.
- Access and Roads:
 - **Primary Access:** From the south via Routes 142 and 156, which connect to Route 2 at Dixfield and Wilton. From the north via Route 142 which connects to Route 4 at Phillips. West Side Road provides access to the campground parcel and Center Hill Road provides access to the Headquarters area on the east side parcel (both paved roads.)
 - **Roads in the Park:** North of the Headquarters, Center Hill Road becomes a gravel road and leads to the Center Hill day use area. Mount Blue Road (gravel road maintained by the State) branches off Center Hill Road and leads to the Mount Blue trailhead.

- Water bodies:
 - **Webb Lake:** 2,146 acres, with a well-developed shore hosting numerous homes and camps. In addition to the State Park on the west shore, hosts a boy's camp on the east shore.
 - Provides a primarily warmwater fishery (smallmouth bass, white perch, sunfish and chain pickerel). Water quality is marginal in summer for coldwater fish due to warm temperatures and low dissolved oxygen; however, IF&W stocks brook trout, brown trout and landlocked salmon in the lake each fall (as well as brook trout in the Webb River downstream in the spring).
 - Special fishing regulations: 2 fish limit on trout; 2 fish limit on bass, only 1 may exceed 14 in; Oct 1 – Nov 30: Artificial lures only, all trout and salmon must be released immediately. Open to ice fishing Jan 1-Mar 31.
- Special Resources:
 - As noted above for Tumbledown, most of the public lands that will be address in this plan are within the Tumbledown to Mount Blue "**Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance**", identified by the State's Beginning with Habitat program due to the concentration of rare plants, animals, natural communities and significant wildlife habitats.
 - Two "**Rare and Exemplary**" natural communities have been mapped by MNAP in the park: a 120-acre area of mature Oak – Northern Hardwood Forest on the south side Center Hill, and a 50-acre area of Subalpine Fir Forest on the upper elevations of Mount Blue.
- Wildlife:
 - **DWAs:** Small LUPC-zoned deer wintering area south of Center Hill.
 - **Rare fauna:** The Subalpine Fir Forest on the upper elevations of Mount Blue is habitat for Bicknell's Thrush (species of Special Concern in Maine). Bald eagle nest sites have been recorded on the shore of Webb Lake.
 - **Wetlands:** There is a sizeable wetland identified as Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird habitat, partially on park land west of Mount Blue.
- Recreation and Amenities
 - Campground: Over 130 campsites for tents and RVs, including several suitable for large RVs. Campers are provided with potable water, several restrooms, and a shower building. RV dump station available.
 - Beach: Large sand beach with grassy backshore area, picnic shelter and sites, within walking distance of campground. Served by lifeguards during the peak summer season.
 - Other developed facilities associated with campground: nature center, amphitheater, playground, 2 Adirondack shelters, and open field for tent camping.
 - Boat Access: Boat Ramp at the campground, 2 lanes, with 6 vehicle/trailer parking spaces and a floating boarding dock.
 - Non-motorized Trails – Campground area:
 - **Swett Brook Trail:** 2-mile loop trail circling the campground
 - **Hopping Frog Trail:** ½ mile nature trail from the Nature Center and back
 - other short linkage trails
 - Non-motorized Trails – Center Hill Mount Blue area:
 - **Center Hill Nature Trail:** ½ mile loop to top of hill accessed from day use area
 - **Mt Blue trail:** 1.6 mile up and back trail from parking area at end of Mt Blue Road; open summit with viewing tower providing views in all directions
 - **Multi-use trails:** 18 miles of trail, some on Mt Blue Road and old roads, open to pedestrians, ATVs, bikes, horses

- **Winter trails:** 15 miles of groomed ski trails with several long and short loops ranging from ½ mile to 10 miles in length. Two snowshoe trails. All accessed from HQ area and providing varied terrain and scenery.
 - Snowmobile and ATV trails: Several miles of designated snowmobile and ATV trails cross the park parcels east of the lake, connecting the park to areas to the east, west and south via the regional trail networks. A snowmobile trail also provides access to the lake on the Webb Lake parcels, coming into the park on the parcel added in 2001 and following the main road from the entrance to the boat ramp area.
 - Other developed facilities associated with Headquarters area: parking area with picnic sites overlooking Webb Lake basin, across the road from HQ; winter ice rink, yurt warming space, toilets.
- Hunting and trapping:
 - Both occur in the Park. Hunting is permitted October through April; special regulations apply. Trapping requires written permission from the Bureau.
- Leases:
 - ME Office of Information Technology (OIT) has a 40 year lease for a radio communication facility (tower, antennas, equipment shelters, power supplies etc.) at ½ acre site on Mount Blue summit. In 2011, old fire tower was replaced with existing tower with viewing platform.
- Timber Resources:
 - Under a 1955 MOA between Parks and the Department of Forestry, MFS conducted timber management on the Center Hill/Mt Blue parcels before they were developed for park purposes (MOA cancelled in 1972).
 - In 1966, State sold stumpage rights on 1,000 acres of park land to a local timber company, for 30 year period, in exchange for a 17-acre parcel of land on Webb Lake with beach frontage. Timber harvest operations occurred on much of the that area, ending in ~1994.
 - Currently, state statutes limit timber harvesting on State Park properties to operations conducted to **improve wildlife habitat; reduce risk from insects, disease, or fire; enhance aesthetic or recreational values; or as demonstration forests.**

Issues/needs/opportunities

1. *Recreation*

- Request for glade skiing on Mount Blue

2. *Wildlife/Special Resources*

- None identified to date

3. *Administrative Issues*

- None identified to date

Bald Mountain Lot (Public Reserved Land)

- Acquired in 2004, along with the south half of the Tumbledown Public Land
- 167 acres, peak at east boundary of lot is accessed by non-BPL trail crossing private land from parking area on Rt 156. Unofficial trail continues along ridgeline onto lot.
- Several exemplary natural communities have been mapped by MNAP on the highest elevations of ridgeline, on and off the BPL lot
 - Low-elevation bald, mid-elevation bald, rock outcrop ecosystem

Issues/Needs/Opportunities

- Potentially formalize trail and trail management agreement with abutter
- Evaluate current trailhead/parking