

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
January 24, 2025, MINUTES *(Approved, as amended 03/14/25)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at Franconia Notch State Park, Park HQ. Vice-chair Kirsch called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., with a quorum present. Jace Wirth, FNSP/Cannon Mountain General Manager welcomed everyone and said that Cannon opened on Nov 30th and is ahead of where they typically are with strong skier visitation. Everyone introduced themselves.

PRESENT were Vice-chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Phil Bryce/Public; Derek Ibarguen/WMNF; Ryan Presby for Cog Railway; Commr Sarah Stewart/DNCR, Chris Thayer/AMC and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road.

Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/MWC counsel; Drew Bush/MWObs, Dick Bouley and Earl Duval/Cog Railway; Tobey Reichert/MWAuto Road; Alissa Tanner/WMNF Deputy Supv; Dir Brian Wilson/DPR; Patrick Hummel and Camryn Casey/Mt Washington State Park; Albi Fioravante/DNCR Capital Projects Administrator; Rob Bermudes and Tim Lewis/members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Wemyss made a MOTION to accept the minutes of Nov 15, 2024; seconded by Mr Presby. Mr Thayer requested an amendment to the minutes. The minutes were approved as amended.

Master Plan. Dir Wilson said that the onsite visitor survey will be relaunched when the park opens for the season. The UNH public opinion survey will be picked back up post-holiday and Rep Paige has been involved. Mr Fioravante provided an update on the summit assessment work by Tighe&Bond. DNCR provided comments on their early findings to help target and focus their work. DNCR and Tighe&Bond are planning to make a presentation at a NH Fish & Game conference later this year. Commr Stewart asked that Tighe&Bond attend the March 14 MWC meeting to present their draft findings and that the NHFG presentation materials be shared with the MWC prior to the conference. Vice-chair Kirsch would like the MWC to be more involved and has offered his assistance. Mr Fioravante will include Mr Kirsch in the meetings scheduled with Tighe&Bond.

Dir Wilson said that, with the amount of ground disturbance that has occurred on the summit and no current plans for digging, the Division of Historical Resources said that an archeological review is not necessary.

Fees paid to the State. Dir Wilson is streamlining the Special Use Permit process to improve timelines and more consistent application of fees. Most events occur at Hampton Beach and Mount Washington. The Division looks to balance concerns over carrying capacity, the displacement of park visitors and loss of park revenue with the importance of these high-profile events. Mr Bryce agreed that some events are large fund-raisers that displace park visitors and said that an event's scale is an important consideration. Permittees are required to provide their financial statements for the event. The value of public lands was relayed to the House Finance Committee during DNCR's operating budget presentation. The Division needs to be a responsible steward of parklands and able to sustain itself under its self-funding model.

Dir Wilson reports that the Hampton Beach Accessibility Study is done and that the report contains initiatives that can be applied to all public lands and projects, such as DOT's Ocean Blvd realignment work. Vice-chair Kirsch said that the Master Plan contains accessibility goals and may be included in the summit assessment recommendations.

Capital Improvements. Mr Hummel said that staff continues to fine-tune the winter operation of the wastewater treatment plant. Dir Wilson commends the team, the engineers and project managers on their success as he grapples with the infrastructure challenges throughout the park system. Mr Thayer acknowledged the shared reality that all the summit partners have in providing public restroom facilities in difficult environments.

Mr Presby asked about the Tip Top House work. Mr Hummel said that the electrical work will restart in the Spring and that the historical research and displays are ongoing. DNCR's Curator can provide an update to the MWC at the June meeting in the Tip Top House. The intent is to provide visitors with a "step back in time" experience. Mr Thayer suggested that there are opportunities for collaboration between the summit partners and experts in the field, such as Mary Adams, who helped to develop Granite State Stories programs that included a story about Mount Washington.

Mr Hummel said that the new water system is in its second winter season and is performing well. Additional protection against lightning strikes were put in place.

Park Ops. Using entries from the 2024 visitor log, which is voluntary, Mr Hummel developed a map that shows the home countries of the est. 350,000 visitors. Excluding Canada, 85 countries are represented. Mount Washington is a global destination. By June 16th, visitors from all 50 states of the US were entered into the visitor log. MWObs Extreme Weather reporting, Div of Travel and Tourism and advertising by summit partners help to promote Mount Washington. Mr Presby said that the Cog's world map becomes full of push pins over the season.

Mr Hummel provided a flyer for the "Beyond the Book" event this Saturday at the Medallion Opera House in Gorham. The event includes a panel discussion with Ty Gagne and other backcountry experts, including NH Fish and Game and the Mount Washington Avalanche Center. Donations will benefit the NH Outdoor Council. Dir Wilson said that the BEA Office of Outdoor Recreation is developing a "Wildly Responsible" campaign to promote recreational safety. He will ask them to present to the MWC at a future meeting.

Mr Hummel said that they recently replaced one of their trucks and that they plan to expand the retail area in the SAB. Over the 2024 season, they sold over 16,000 hot dogs, 12,000 apparel items and 650 drinks. The Gorham facility has helped to improve the logistical challenges of their retail program. Dir Wilson said that Mount Washington state park's retail program is up by 11% over last year.

Negotiation of agreements. Dir Wilson will meet with the Mount Washington Auto Road to discuss the new lease agreement for the summit parking lots. The job offer for the in-house attorney position was declined and the state is now in a hiring freeze. A new attorney from the AG's Office was recently assigned to DNCR.

Promotion of summit. Dir Wilson is working with staff to launch an interpretive campaign and series of events to celebrate the Division's 90th anniversary. A major push is planned for Memorial Day weekend and may include a statewide scavenger hunt challenge. He is open to ideas and collaboration with partners.

Protection of natural resources. The environmental assessment from Tighe&Bond will include recommendations for this effort. Mr Fioravante reported that Tighe&Bond has performed fieldwork and desktop inventories and staff interviews. Their report will include impacts on sensitive areas during specific seasons and from specific recreational activities. The report can be a tool for monitoring and for visitor outreach and education. The MWC has benefited from the research presentations made at its meetings and Tighe&Bond will be placed on the agenda.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer said that they are working on final revisions of the 2025 partnership agreement with the MWObs. Their new [All Out: AMC Action Plan](#) for 2025-2030 was just released. AMC is planning for their 150th anniversary celebration in 2026, that will include their largest outdoor relay event stretching from VA to ME. AMC's 2024 Trails Program on WMNF includes 300 miles of trail adopted; 1,405 blowdowns removed; 238 rock steps, 70 timber steps and 45 bog bridges built for a total of 23,425 trail work hours with 293 individuals. Their FY24 SAR report includes 29 response calls where first aid was provided; 463 total service hours; and 68,524 interactions at the huts with 490 people unexpectedly spending the night for SAR purposes and 3,065 people changing their plans for the better. The overall number of AMC calls decreased by 30% from 2023, with a 19% decrease in dispatch call time. This is a result of NHFG's increase in "no response" calls – calls that are mitigated over the phone with no field response needed. For FY24, there were 154 White Mountain Info volunteers that provided 681.6 hours and interacted with 33,750 people. The 31 Alpine Stewards volunteered 950 hours and interacted with 6,913 people.

Auto Road. Mr Reichert said that it's been a slow winter operating season with less snowfall. The tollhouse and bridge work projects are done and ready for Spring opening. The projects will reduce traffic off Route 16. Mr Wemyss reported that their solar array project will go live in the coming months and is intended to completely power the hotel. The Auto Road will install informational displays in the hotel about their renewable energy programs.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby said that the lack of snow has decreased snowmobiling. They are waiting for DOT approval on a snowmobile trail to the base station. Winter projects include maintenance and equipment overhauls. The Cog will be on NH Chronicle next week. Two [UNH engineering interns](#) have enjoyed hands-on, start-to-finish work experience at the Cog. Waumbek Station now has electricity that is on a timer. In the past, hikers would break in and start up the propane heaters to warm up. Cog staff would find melted items on the heaters that were left running. They are still working with the State and Bretton Woods Telephone to connect the fiber optic cable at the summit. This would enable the Cog to communicate with its locomotive engineers when they reach the terminus at the summit.

MWObs. Mr Bush provided his report, attached.

WMNF. Mr Ibarguen said that they are conducting infrastructure project planning to include a new Saco Ranger Station. Saco station receives over 60K visitors. With little snow, the Avalanche Center have had no incidents. The Madison Gulf pedestrian trail bridge failed inspection and is closed. They are working with the Natl Park Service on solutions and a re-route as part of the AT. They are taking part in the [Sense of Place](#) speaker series designed to raise public awareness of forest management and natural resource work. Events are held in Plymouth and North Conway and all are invited.

AOB. Vice-chair Kirsch and Mr Bryce are continuing their research into indigenous culture and Mount Washington. Their research includes the First Light organization out of ME that Rep Paige mentioned at a previous meeting.

Mr Lewis calculated that MWSP's sale of 16,000 6" hot dogs lined end-to-end would measure 18 miles, equaling three Cog round-trips to the summit and an up-down-up about half way on the Auto Road.

The next MWC meeting is scheduled for March 14, 2025, at 10 a.m. at MWObs in North Conway.

The proposed 2025 MWC meeting schedule is:

January 24, Franconia Notch State Park, Park HQ	May 9, TBD	October 17, TBD
March 14, MWObs, No. Conway	June 13, Tip Top House, Mount Washington State Park	November 14, DNCR Gorham Office
April 11, TBD	September 12, TBD	

Adjourn. Mr Wemyss MOTIONED to adjourn; SECONDED by Commr Stewart. The meeting adjourned at 12 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.

Drew Bush Mount Washington Commission Report for 1/24/2025:

- It's been awhile since we last met, but starting right after our last meeting we had a wonderful press event and reception to announce the installation of 5 new automated weather stations on the Western side of Mount Washington. A huge thank you to the Mount Washington Cog Railway Company for hosting and doing an excellent job facilitating the event and a trip to Waumbek Station for our guests. Most of you likely saw the huge amount of press generated, and we are thankful to all the members of the commission who attended including the AMC, David Paige, our state officials, and many others.
- We're excited to welcome two new interns this summer from NOAA's Center for Atmospheric Research at Howard University. This center provides a hub for 12 different Historically Black Colleges and Universities to educate students in meteorology, and we'll be partnering with the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Gray, ME on this brand new joint internship.
- Speaking of internships, we're excited that our first research intern shared jointly with the Appalachian Mountain Club and Hubbard Brook Ecosystem Study started work this January. Our second communications intern will begin in late February, and together they will begin producing the first annual almanac of climatology and biology of the White Mountains. We're really excited about the potential of this project and its likelihood to bring in even more partners in future years.
- We continue work to bring more research back to Mount Washington, with plans to bring the leadership of the US Army Corps Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory up to the summit next Friday. We're also aiming to bring the senior leadership from Eversource Energy as we work to expand our partnership in helping them better forecast and predict disruptive weather. Finally, we brought researchers from UMaine up yesterday to talk on a number of research and education projects, some including CRREL.
- We've been working to really bump up the number of schools we bring the mountain, with partners at both the Mt. Washington Auto Road and the Mount Washington Cog Railway Company. We made a strong push to all of NH, Eastern VT, and Southern Maine for winter field trips. Already we have tripled the number of trips from last year, with that number to increase by June. Making the mountain accessible to young children is a key area of growth that I believe we all share an interest in – and one that the first grant proposal I submitted in this new year was focused upon.
- I've been reaching out to partners for a planned visit by Governor Ayotte on February 28. We're hoping each of you can join us to talk about all the issues facing Mount Washington, and all the incredible work that we are doing. Thanks to help from Mount Washington State Park, we'll have capacity to bring a large group up likely including Executive Councilor Joe Kenney.
- Finally, you all may be curious as to why you are not seeing on our agenda today to have an informational session on what a UNESCO World Heritage site designation might mean. I have enjoyed speaking with many of you on this topic. And we'll plan to discuss it at our March meeting, with information sent to each of you ahead of time, a short presentation by Senator Shaheen's staff, and a chance to ask all of our important questions.