

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
March 22, 2024, MINUTES *(Approved as amended 05.17.24)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the Mount Washington Auto Road Visitor Center in Gorham. Chair Bergeron called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m., with a quorum present. Commission members and attendees introduced themselves.

PRESENT were Chair Ed Bergeron/Public, Vice-chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Phil Bryce/Public, Chris Ellms/Public, Carrie Gendreau/Senate; David Paige/House; Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Brian Wilson for DNCR Commissioner, Chris Thayer/AMC and Tobey Reichert for Auto Road. Also in attendance were Jack Middleton/Emeritus, Allen Brooks/Counsel for MWC, Drew Bush/MWObs, Patrick Hummel/Mount Washington State Park Manager, summit partners and state park staff, and members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Presby made a MOTION to accept the minutes of Jan 19, 2024; seconded by Mr Kirsch. The minutes were approved, as written.

Master Plan. Summit Assessment. Dir Wilson reported that DNCR is in contract negotiations with the selected consultant for the summit assessment work. Negotiations include refining the Scope of Work, public involvement, recreation interests and carrying capacity. The contract will be submitted to the Governor and Executive Council for approval and the work will start in the spring.

Fees paid to the State. Dir Wilson said that the Division's new Chief of Staff is reviewing the status of all agreements, including the Auto Road lease for use of the summit parking lots, the MWObs lease of space in the SAB, and AMC Lonesome Lake Hut in Franconia Notch State Park, so as to understand and streamline the process.

On behalf of the MWObs and in accordance with its lease, Mr Bush requested \$7,875 from the Mount Washington Fund's restricted account for summit museum display maintenance and replacement. Mr Bush provided copies of the Funding Request that outlined the equipment needed to perform the necessary upgrades and maintenance of the exhibits. A MOTION to accept and approve the request for \$7,875 from the Mount Washington Fund's restricted account, as presented in the Funding Request was made by Mr Presby and SECOND by Mr Thayer. Mr Bush said that a portion of the summit museum admission fees are deposited into the restricted fund and that the balance is \$189K. The motion was ADOPTED by unanimous vote.

Capital Improvements. Dir Wilson said that DNCR is working on its capital budget request that is due to the Dept of Administrative Services in April. The request includes Cannon Mountain's Tramway and a placeholder for projects at Mount Washington state park that will be based upon the findings of the summit assessment. The Division will continue to build awareness that, although the Division operates under a self-funding model, it needs financial support for its capital projects.

The project contractor visited the ESTP manufacturer located in Ontario. The visit enabled discussions on the technical features of the treatment plant, which will be delivered and installed on the summit in June. The old water storage tanks will be removed off the summit and Mr Hummel will coordinate with summit partners to keep the public informed and mitigate interruptions.

Park Ops. Mr Hummel gave a presentation on winter operations, including 150 mph winds last week, new fuel storage tanks, plumbing and flooring maintenance, the Information Desk overhaul, food service upgrades, and new signage. Congressman Pappas visited the summit on Feb 27th and shared a short video of his visit. The ESTP operator position is still open. The NH National Guard held joint SAR (Search and Rescue) training with the Nova Scotia Royal Navy. Park staff anticipates an increase in

visitation for the solar eclipse on April 8th. State agencies have interoperations plans in place for the event.

The Division acknowledges the recent loss of former State Parks Director Rich McLeod. Dir McLeod worked with the MWC and legislators to help Mount Washington state park and summit partners recover from the summit powerhouse fire that occurred in the 2003.

Dir Wilson said that the National Park Service approved the SCORP (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan) that is required under the LWCF program. The Division administers the federal LWCF program that provides funding for outdoor recreation projects to municipalities and for state parks. The SCORP provides deliverables for statewide recreational needs, including considerations for climate impacts, visitor experience and public access.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer said that the agreement with MWObs is almost done. Occupancy was strong in January. Caretaker service huts will start in May, although the Galehead Hut will open later. AMC is working on interior and minor maintenance and repair projects. The AMC hosted an SAR event last Sunday that included over ten SAR teams. They continue to collaborate with the WMNF on research projects, such as the 5-yr alpine vegetation monitoring required as part of their hut leases and the Northeast snow survey conducted with other partners. The Franconia Loop Trail project received a regional award and is in its third year of planned work. After snowmelt, they will assess storm-related damage on the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail. Mr Thayer reported that in 2023, AMC's 215 trail volunteers logged 9,000 hours and interacted with 46K visitors.

Auto Road. Mr Reichert said that their capital projects for this year includes a new tollhouse and the bridge replacement. They are completing restroom renovations in the Visitor Center. The Auto Road will be able to assess winter storm damage once the snow melts. Their Eclipse Tours for 48 seats sold out within an hour and a half.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby reported that they received their DES Alteration of Terrain permit for drainage and culvert work and will start the 3-year project beginning this summer. The fiber optic line will be laid this April. They are working with UNH's engineering department and student interns on a Capstone Project to convert a locomotive to electric that will be used as an emergency vehicle. The Cog Railway has other renewable energy projects that they have submitted to the NH Dept of Energy. They have completed a rough draft of their APP.

MWObs. Mr Bush took a moment to reflect on the recent passing of former Parks Director Rich McLeod and of former MWObs Executive Director Guy Gosselin. Dir McLeod was instrumental in establishing the close bond between the state park and the MWObs. Mr Gosselin provided energy, integrity and vision to many aspects of today's MWObs.

The MWObs worked with Park staff on a variety of initiatives, including medical and safety training and protocols. A generous donor has helped to fund some of the maintenance projects that includes the bunk window fire egress, storm windows and tower drainage. Mr Bush thanked Park staff for jointly hosting the visit by Congressman Pappas. The MWObs partnership with the Cog continues, including weather station tours and the installation of five new autonomous weather stations using NBRC funds. Joint initiatives with the Auto Road, the AMC and WMNF are ongoing. The agreement with the AMC is near completion. With the Auto Road, researchers from the US Army Corps of Engineers came to test autonomous vehicles. They will meet with the US Air Force in April about conducting weather instrument testing on the summit. And, they are working with US Senator Shaheen's Office on expanding their partnership with NOAA.

The first winter school trips via the Cog and Auto Road went well and there is a waitlist for trips this Spring. They have applied for close to \$120K in grant funding to help schools pay for the field trips.

The MWObs is planning 2024 Total Solar Eclipse events on April 6-8 in collaboration with the Omni Mount Washington Resort and Coleman State Park. The 90th Anniversary of Big Wind Day is on April 12 at Tuckerman Brewing Company. A Climate and Sustainability night at the Maine Mariners game is on April 5th. And, the 24th Annual Seek the Peak is July 20th with a variety of activities, hiking, games and competitions.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman was glad that a winter trip to the summit was not needed this past season. Townsquare Media will be conducting repairs and maintenance on the WHOM building this summer.

AOB. The 2024 MWC meeting schedule is:

January 19, FNSP HQ	May 17, Bretton Woods Ski Area	October 18
March 22, Auto Road Visitor Center	June 14, MWObs, No. Conway	November 15, DNCR Gorham Office
April 19, AMC Highland Center	September 20, Tip Top House	

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.