

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION

June 14, 2024, MINUTES (Approved 09/20/24)

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the Mount Washington Observatory Administrative Offices in North Conway. Chair Bergeron called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., with a quorum present.

PRESENT were Chair Ed Bergeron/Public, Vice-chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Phil Bryce/Public, Chris Ellms/Public, Carrie Gendreau/Senate; Derek Ibarguen/WMNF; David Paige/House; Wayne Presby/Cog Railway; Brian Wilson for DNCR, Chris Thayer/AMC and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/Counsel for MWC, Drew Bush/MWObs, Ryan Presby/Cog Railway, Patrick Hummel/Mt Washington Park Manager, Albi Fioravante/DNCR Capital Projects Administrator, summit partners and members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Ellms made a MOTION to accept the minutes of May 17, 2024; seconded by Mr Kirsch. Mr Thayer offered corrections to the minutes. The minutes were approved, as amended.

Master Plan. Dir Wilson thanked Mr Fioravante for spearheading the considerable work that went into the Summit Assessment contract. It is expected to go to the Governor and Council for approval at the June 26th meeting. A copy of the contract will be shared with the MWC once it is made public. Mr Kirsch asked that the consultants speak before the MWC at the September meeting. Mr Fioravante said the project updates will be posted on the DNCR website. DNCR will request approval from legislature that capital fund balances for the project be carried forward.

Fees paid to the State. Dir Wilson reported that of the 179 special use permits issued by the Division in 2023, 14 permits were for events at Mt Washington State Park. The number of events held at the summit exceeded the number of events held at Franconia Notch State Park. Mr Hummel will provide a summary of the 2024 events at the October MWC meeting.

Capital Improvements. Mr Hummel said that the new wastewater treatment plant will be delivered to Gorham next week. They expect the plant to be operational in early July, after “seeding” the plant with activated sludge. Removal of the old water tanks and aesthetic work is being done. Dir Wilson said that next Tuesday, DNCR’s capital budget request for FY2026 & FY2027 will be presented before legislature as part of the Governor’s capital budget hearings. He met with the Capital Project Overview Committee last week to provide updates, including the Tramway project. DNCR’s \$37.5M capital budget request includes a placeholder of \$3M for Mt Washington for the FY2028-2029, assuming project recommendations generated from the assessment work. A new Governor administration will prompt another review of the budget in the fall.

Park Ops. Mr Hummel reported that the park opened on May 24, with estimated attendance and retail operations on par with last year. The season’s first major event is tomorrow’s Delta Dental race. Parks and summit partners have established better the health and safety procedures, especially in response to weather conditions. Parks will determine if weather conditions require an adjustment to or the cancellation of an event. Communications and advance planning are essential to ensure a safe and successful event. Other planned events include Minis on Top, Race the Cog, ATV Day and Seek the Peak. State Police will be meeting with staff to discuss safety and emergency response protocols.

Negotiation of agreements. Dir Wilson said that there are several agreements in various stages of review, including DES Air Monitoring, Bretton Woods Telephone fiber optic connection, MWObs third and final lease renewal option, and the Auto Road lease for the summit parking lots. Parks is working towards have the lots appraised. Bretton Woods Telephone will be repairing and connecting into the existing fiber optic conduits at the summit.

Promotion of summit. Mr Thayer suggested having the State’s Division of Travel and Tourism Development (DTTD) attend the MWC 10/18 meeting to discuss how we could collaborate with DTTD on statewide messaging campaigns to inform visitors and hikers about safety when recreating outdoors. Members discussed outdoor safety, visitor behavior, communication strategies, and strategies for tracking hikers in case of an emergency, such as the use of backcountry permits and trailhead sign-in logs.

Resource protection. The annual removal of invasive dandelions in the WMNF has begun and will be conducted at Mount Washington in July. Resource protection and conservation programs such as this and the alpine butterflies will

be included in the assessment work. Mr Presby said that the Cog app will also include information about these conservation efforts.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer reported the following: they are staffed; visitation is increasing; huts are open; trail crews are working; and conservation and research efforts continue, including the federal-funded study on snow monitoring. Trail work includes the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail that was damaged by rain. Media Day is on July 11th, with a panel discussion on search and rescue stories to help get messages about weather and safety to hikers.

Auto Road. Mr Wemyss reported that: they opened two weeks early; Memorial Day weekend was slow; and the Delta Dental foot race event is this Saturday. Their bridge construction project will be done in August and they are also renovating the tollhouse.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby reported that: Bretton Woods Telephone completed its fiber optic line installation along the track and will repair and tie into the fiber optic line at the summit; UNH interns are working on a Capstone Project to develop an electric “speeder” car and project findings will be applied towards developing an electric locomotive; and work continues on base construction projects, including paving, drainage, laying a track to their maintenance shop and exhibits. They are working with the State on installing an electrical connection at Waumbek Station.

MWObs. Mr Bush reported the following: a visit to the summit by U.S. Senator Hassan is being planned; work on several maintenance projects; coordination with Parks on their Seek the Peak event and safety work; a medical certification program for youth educators; the North View camera is back online; collaboration with the Auto Road and Cog Railway for public weather station tours offered as part of ticket packages; a joint internship with the USFS at the Avalanche Center and collaboration using the new Mesonet stations; a variety of initiatives with the Omni Mount Washington Resort; a joint internship with AMC and Hubbard Brook for the development of the first almanac on the climatology and biology of the White Mountains; and a meeting on the Northeast Snow Survey work to monitor snow, weather, and flooding in the Northeast. Their proposal to expand their partnership with the National Weather Service for improved weather forecasting is a federal FY2025 priority. Mr Bush invited the MWC to join in on their Seek the Peak event and Après Hike Expo.

WMNF. Mr Ibarguen reported that: the season is off to a good start; their seasonal work force has returned; trail projects, include the Ammonoosuc Trail in collaboration with the AMC and AmeriCorp; Granite State Ambassadors are informing visitors about safety when visiting the White Mountains; storm damage assessments, including along Rte. 302; Search and Rescue (SAR) operations coordinated by NH Fish and Game with local SAR volunteers providing SAR assistance; and fundraising by the National Forest Foundation that enabled the hire of staff at the Gorham office. The work at Glen Ellis Falls is expected to be completed in October. The project is an example of a “return to form” sustainable design.

Sen Gendreau said that the Granite State Ambassador (GSA) program is a great resource for getting information out to visitors. A representative of the GSA will be invited to attend a MWC meeting to share information about their program. In response to Sen Gendreau’s question, Mr Ibarguen said that the use of marijuana is illegal on WMNF lands. Mr Ryan Presby will coordinate with the WMNF staff regarding a rogue trail on the Jewell Trail.

AOB. Mr Kirsch and Mr Bryce said that they are working with various contacts about the Native American historical and cultural connection with Mount Washington. They will provide an update on their efforts at the September meeting.

The 2024 MWC meeting schedule is:

January 19, FNSP HQ	May 17, Omni Mt Washington Hotel	October 18, AMC Pinkham Notch
March 22, Auto Road Visitor Center	June 14, MWObs Offices, No. Conway	November 15, DNCR Gorham Office
April 19, <i>Cancelled</i>	September 20, Tip Top House	

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

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.