

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
July 21, 2023, MINUTES *(Approved 09/15/23)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the White Mountain National Forest, Campton office. Vice-chair Kirsch called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., with a quorum present. Attendees introduced themselves.

PRESENT were Vice-chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Phil Bryce/Public, Chris Ellms/Public, Derek Ibarguen/WMNF, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Sarah Stewart/DNCR Commissioner, Chris Thayer/AMC, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/DOJ for the MWC, Dir Brian Wilson/DPR, summit partners and state park staff, and members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Thayer made a MOTION to accept the minutes of June 23, 2023; seconded by Mr Presby. The motion CARRIES, unanimously.

Capital Improvements / Park Ops. Patrick Hummel said the FY2023 financials are being completed. Although the park's retail revenue is down by 4-4.5%, it is their second-best year, and they expect to finish in the black despite increased expenses and utility costs. Attendance to date is estimated at 107,000, down from last year, due to weather. They are working with the Dept of Administrative Services and NorthEast Electrical on a lighting audit to improve fixtures and switch to LED bulbs. Bureau of Historic Sites Matt Flanders is assisting with the Tip Top House restoration. Mr Hummel is working on a vehicle replacement plan and financial forecasting that incorporates the 10% pay increase and Gorham office renovations.

On July 12, the park staff joined the WMNF, Natural Heritage Bureau and other volunteers for the 9th annual dandelion removal effort. Forty people removed 58 lbs. of invasives, including 20 lbs. of dandelions this year. Mr Thayer suggested that ecologist and author Dan Sperduto be asked to speak before the Commission about NH's natural communities.

Protection of natural resources. NH Fish and Game biologist Heidi Holman presented her research on rare butterflies found in the White Mountains. Although there are related species in other alpine areas, the White Mountain Fritillary and the White Mountain Arctic butterflies live entirely within the alpine zones of the White Mountains and are not found anywhere else. The Species Status Assessment reports are on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service worklist to determine if the butterflies should be federally listed as endangered or threatened. The next steps are to complete the recreational impact assessment, model species viability and establish captive rearing protocols and develop educational and intervention strategies. Threats include climate change and disturbance and trampling on the butterflies and/or the host plants caused by off-trail use.

Members discussed ways that they could assist with informing the public about staying on trails through a communications plan, signage, public messaging and the Alpine Steward Program.

Master Plan. Proposal to rename Mount Washington Mr Kirsch provided "Proposed points to consider relating to pending Summit naming petition and Master Plan implementation." He reported that the Dartmouth professor who runs the Native American Studies program declined to assist in informing the Commission on the naming petition, because it is outside of his expertise. Mr Kirsch has not heard back from the NH Native American Council.

Members discussed the following: the Master Plan deliverable to "encourage and participate in a public process of research and investigation to determine the significance of the Summit to indigenous people and, thereafter, identify and considerately incorporate features sensitive to such significance, consistent with the goals of this Master Plan" (see Master Plan, pg. 18); the implications of a name change;

whether other name changes were made within NH, what other information on renaming Mount Washington was received by the Board on Geographic Names; that Mount Washington was named in 1785 five years before George Washington became president; that more than one Native American name has been used for the summit; the British history on the slave trade and that they took the first steps to end slavery; and the premise being used to justify the renaming of Mount Washington and the informational links provided in the petition.

Scope of Work. As discussed at the last meeting, Mr Brooks and Director Wilson revised the SOW by adding language from the Master Plan into the SOW and prioritizing the environmental assessment. The members and summit partners discussed the SOW at length including:

- plan for phased project outcomes;
- will we get bids within the allocated budget?
- set aside the Yankee Building assessment, but assessing all other structures;
- the importance of the visitor survey and visitor expectations and needs;
- recommendations for energy efficiencies;
- attract 3-4 firms and have them propose their approach to the SOW components;
- provide the firms with historical data and existing work products;
- see Master Plan (MP), Sec VI, regarding the intent for implementation;
- does the title of the SOW adequately relay the intent of the assessments?
- should the SOW be shortened to only those items found on pg. 4 of the MP and all other items be in an addendum or marked as “Results of the Assessment will be used to:”
- the MP calls for the assessments to include recommendations, see MP, pg. 4, Para. 2;
- the assessments provide a baseline for improvements and recommendations can only be hypothetical;
- the visitor assessment will inform needed improvements as part of the environmental assessment;
- the assessments are to help plan for the future needs;
- the MP calls for building and infrastructure assessments
- what are the parties looking to do? what is the nature of the recommendations? how will it be used?
- the assessments pose questions and recommendations should be general, not specific,
- the assessments should reveal changes needed on the summit
- the recommendations will be the basis for capital project requests
- organize the SOW as a table? as a topic list used to develop the recommendations?
- the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) requires the consultants to propose how they will accomplish the work
- limit the 1st phase for the assessments, then use excess funds for the next steps
- focus on the critical piece: the assessments, the why, the future needs, the next steps;
- the budget has a two-year timeframe
- the consultants will shape their proposals to fit the MP criteria
- is the point system and weighted scoring appropriate?
- the assessment work is under DNCR’s process, not the MWC
- change SOW Item 2. from “Architectural, Engineering, Environmental, and Planning firms” to read “Applicants”
- add to SOW Item 3. that the key components are “illustrative”

The SOW in the RFQ is to be revised, consistent with the Master Plan, and the assessment will focus on the condition of the natural and structural environment on the summit. Other questions and related

recommendations will not be the focus of the RFQ or the resulting assessment. Mr Brooks and Director Wilson will finalize the SOW and DNCR will launch the RFQ. DNCR will share the RFQ responses with the MWC for comment, then enter into contract negotiations. A subset of the MWC membership may participate in the negotiations, but such meetings are not public.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer expressed appreciation for the support of the summit partners. Impacts from the weather and Search and Rescue operations have been challenging across the state.

Auto Road. Mr Reichert agreed that the weather has caused wash outs and flooding. He reports that their solar project is done, and that they are waiting for Eversource to connect to the system.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby said that bad weather has affected ridership, which is down by 3-5%. They continue to work on engineering plans for base improvements and the development of an electric engine.

MWObs. Mr Bush said their Seek the Peak event was a great success. They exceeded their goal by \$25K and he thanked the summit partners for their support. He congratulated the Cog for a great event with UNH-Bangladesh guests on July 11. The MWObs recently held its Annual Meeting and presented to Jack Middleton the first ever Founders Award in recognition of his extraordinary dedication to the MWObs.

They have installed additional cameras within the White Mountains as part of their weather resources programs, including with the Mount Washington Avalanche Center. Mr Bush continues to collaborate with Mr Hummel on summit ops, including hosting a visit by Senator Judd Gregg in August. The MWObs received a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to conduct an assessment of their collections and museum.

WMNF. Mr Ibarguen said that their Trails Stewards were able to assist the MWObs during their Seek the Peak event. The weather and event location resulted in lower numbers of attendees at the Rainbow Gathering of approx. 2,500 people. Law enforcement agencies were present to help address any incidents and post-event cleanup is being done with the assistance of the Rainbow Gathering members. The bad weather has reduced the number of campers at WMNF campgrounds, but the hiking trails are packed on good weather days.

AOB. There were no comments from the public attendees. The 2023 MWC meeting schedule is:

- Friday, Sept 15 at 10 a.m. at the Tip Top House, Mt Washington State Park
- Friday, Oct 13 at 10 a.m. at the DNCR Gorham office
- Friday, Nov 17 at 10 a.m.

Adjourn. Mr Ibarguen MOTIONED to adjourn the meeting; Mr Ellms SECONDED. The meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.