

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
September 20, 2024, MINUTES *(Approved 10.18.24)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the Tip Top House, Mount Washington State Park. Chair Bergeron called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m., with a quorum present.

PRESENT were Chair Ed Bergeron/Public, Vice-chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Chris Ellms/Public, Carrie Gendreau/Senate; David Paige/House; Wayne Presby/Cog Railway; Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media; Dir Brian Wilson for DNCR, Chris Thayer/AMC and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road.

Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/MWC Counsel, Jay Broccolo/MWObs, Ryan Presby/Cog Railway, Patrick Hummel/Mt Washington Park Manager, Colin Capelle/DPR Chief of Staff, Albi Fioravante/DNCR Capital Projects Administrator, Jen Widmark/DNCR Curator, Elizabeth Jurgilewicz/DHS Specialist, summit partners and members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Kirsch made a MOTION to accept the minutes of June 14, 2024; seconded by Mr Presby. The minutes were approved, as written.

Master Plan. Mr Fioravante gave an update on the summit assessment work, including the assessment on buildings and systems, and the environment. Mr Kirsch would like to be involved in the environmental assessment. The contractor Tigne & Bond will present their work at a MWC meeting. A copy of the assessment schedule will be sent to the MWC members.

Members discussed the draft Visitor's Survey that was developed by the consultant and UNH. The survey will be distributed via weblink, onsite, social media, QR Code, press release and summit partners. The option to select the "Cog Railway" will be added to Question 7. Respondents are to reflect on their most recent visit. Any other comments on the survey should be sent to Dir Wilson by Sept. 27th.

Fees paid to the State. A financial analysis of the Special Use Permit program is underway and Dir Wilson will provide a report at the October meeting. The financial success of the permittee's event speaks to the power of holding events at a state park. The analysis will be used as part of the division's next Strategic Plan and its finances.

Capital Improvements. Mr Hummel said that the consultant will reach out to Fish & Game, Natural Heritage Bureau, AMC and WMNF as part of the environmental assessment work. The facilities assessment will include the tank farm and fuel storage. The new wastewater treatment plant went "live" on Aug. 9th and is working well. Post-treatment water discharge is within DES parameters. Other projects include work next to the observation deck, the water storage tanks, tank cleanout, and landscaping. Parks staff is planning for seasonal closing and winter prep.

Park Ops. Mr Hummel reported that the season has been a good one with attendance on par with last year and retail up slightly. They have new radio units and plan to replace two vehicles. The information wall in the Sherman Adams Building is done and staff helped the WMNF and AMC with dandelion removal by pulling up 60 lbs. Most of the Special Use Permit events were activities that are held annually. Sen. Hassan visited in June and WHOM held a live broadcast in July. New windows are being installed in the Yankee Building. The memorial plaque honoring the 10th Mountain Division of World War II, "The Ski Troops," was re-installed in front of the SAB with a ceremony held on Aug. 13th. A second fatality, due to hypothermia, occurred in August. Drones are being used in Search and Rescue trainings. Drone operators must be licensed due to the "restricted airspace" of the White Mountains.

Negotiation of agreements. Dir Wilson said that DNCR is still reviewing the new lease with the Auto Road. Mr Wemyss said that the Auto Road informed DNCR of its need to renew the lease in May, the lease expired in July, and the Auto Road has had to do a work around for its financing. Dir Wilson said there's been a backlog of contracts, but that DNCR is in the process of hiring an in-house attorney.

At Mr. Presby's inquiry, Dir Wilson said that he would look into the status on the Bretton Woods Telephone fiber optic contract. Dir Wilson reported that the lease with the MWObs is in place. The lease was a renewal with no changes to its provisions.

Promotion of summit. DNCR Curator Jen Widmark reported on the interpretive work for the Tip Top House. She and Bureau of Historic Sites program specialist Elizabeth Jurgilewicz are researching the history and lore, developing plans for graphics and improved lighting and a footpath. Dir Wilson said that the Dept of Business Affairs, Div Travel and Tourism Development has contracted with Blaze Partners to develop sustainability and safety messaging as part of the “Leave No Trace” campaign. Dir Wilson will ask to have someone from DTTD and the Office of Outdoor Recreation to attend a MWC meeting.

Resource protection. Mr Thayer also took part in the dandelion removal work and said that he interacted with the public who took great interest in this multi-agency collaboration effort.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer reported that AMC continues its collaboration with MWObs in research, radio communications and displays. Occupancy is on pace with a strong fall expected. Staff at AMC campsites report that visitation is ahead, but short of pre-pandemic numbers. Search and rescue incidents are at 71 incidents to date; there was a record of 99 incidents in 2023. Mr Thayer attended the NH Outdoor Council meeting where there were 180 volunteers and agencies in attendance, including NH National Guard, WMNF, and NHFG. In partnership with the MWObs and WMNF, the weather and climate study show that the White Mountains are getting warmer and wetter, see flyer. AMC, MWObs, WMNF, and Hubbard Brook are offering internship opportunities for 2025, see flyer. NHPR ran a story about AMC’s naturalists working on the Appalachian Trail. Field crews are working on trails through mid-November, including privy replacements and the Franconia Ridge Loop Trail.

Auto Road. Mr Wemyss reported that they are having a good summer, up 6.8% in visitor counts. The bridge project is near completion and they will open the new, realigned tollhouse entrance next spring. The summit stairway will be completed by next spring and the Auto Road is working on a solar project.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby reported on a strong season: August was slower, but they are up overall. Projects include new displays at the base station, power to Waumbek Station, and completion of the fiber optic line along the track. The Cog will close from Oct 27 to Nov 12 to replace the tracks from the base and maintenance facility to Marshfield Station. Sen Gendreau congratulated the Cog Railway on its 155th year celebration.

MWObs. Mr Kirsch reported that the Seek the Peak event went well with an additional 100 hikers taking part. They exceeded their goal and raised \$230K for the Observatory. They thanked the Auto Road for hosting their Après Hike Party at Great Glen Trails Outdoor Center. Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the event. MWObs and the AMC are seeking two interns to work on an almanac on climatology and biology of the White Mountains. The USFS and Nature Conservancy is interested in expanding this program. An intern will also be assigned to WMNF’s Avalanche Center. The MWObs has assisted Parks with improvements in the Sherman Adams Building, including bunkroom window replacements funded by a generous donor and replacement of lighting and thermostats. They launched three new summer programs: Storm Scouts summer day camp, Peak Perspectives teacher development and Medical Training Overnight for youth educators. They are installing five new Mesonet stations to cover both sides of the mountain, including installations on the Cog Railway’s side and with Dartmouth College on Mount Moosilauke. Mr Kirsch commended the Auto Road and Cog Railway for their efforts on clean energy initiatives.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman reported that the WHOM building is 20 years old. They are looking to replace and down size the building as soon as possible. They will talk to the state about the possibility of moving to the south side of its current location to mitigate any interruption in its broadcast services.

AOB. Mr Kirsch said that he and Phil Bryce are continuing their work on Native American history as it relates to Mount Washington.

The 2024 MWC meeting schedule is:

January 19, FNNSP HQ	May 17, Omni Mt Washington Hotel	October 18, AMC Pinkham Notch
March 22, Auto Road Visitor Center	June 14, MWObs Offices, North Conway	November 15, DNCR Gorham Office
April 19, <i>Cancelled</i>	September 20, Tip Top House	

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.