

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
November 15, 2024, MINUTES *(Approved as amended on 01/24/25)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the DNCR Gorham Office. Following counsel from Mr Brooks, Secretary-Treasurer Phil Bryce called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., with a quorum present. Mr Bryce asked for a MOTION to elect a Pro Tempore Chair for today's meeting. Mr Wemyss nominated Mr Bryce, seconded by Mr Ibarguen. The motion PASSED by unanimous vote.

PRESENT were Phil Bryce/Public; Chris Ellms/Public, Carrie Gendreau/Senate; Derek Ibarguen/WMNF; David Paige/House; Ryan Presby for Cog Railway; Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media; Commr Sarah Stewart/DNCR, Chris Thayer/AMC and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road.

Also in attendance were Allen Brooks/MWC counsel; Jack Middleton/MWC Emeritus; Dick Bouley and Earl Duval/Cog Railway; Patrick Hummel, Christa Rousseau and Camryn Casey/Mt Washington State Park; Albi Fioravante/DNCR Capital Projects Administrator; Rob Bermudes and Tim Lewis/members of the public.

Minutes. Sen Gendreau made a MOTION to accept the minutes of October 18, 2024; seconded by Mr Ellms. The minutes were approved as written.

Master Plan. Mr Fioravante said that the summit assessment work continues. As part of the data collection effort, the DNCR Division of Historic Resources (DHR) found "no impact" to historic sites during their project reviews of the first sewerage treatment plant in 2021, and of the recent ARPA-funded projects at Mount Washington State Park. Mr Thayer had provided to Tighe&Bond the contact information of additional subject matter experts as part of their outreach to the greater Mount Washington community. Tighe&Bond is scheduled to provide a project update at the next MWC meeting in January.

DNCR's Curator and the Bureau of Historical Resources, in consultation with Mr Hummel, developed preliminary plans for the Tip Top House renovations. They are balancing the "historical feel" of the Tip Top House and modern museum displays.

Fees paid to the State. Mr Hummel said there were 19 Special Use Permits (SUP) issued for events held at the park in 2024, and most were repeat events. Media events are sometimes complex, due to short lead-times and coordination. Mr Wemyss asked about the guidelines for permits. A link to the Division's administrative rules for SUPs will be provided. Mr Bryce said that Greg Keeler, Parks Public Information Officer, could assist with improvements to the SUP program for media events. He said that the Division must balance between supporting special events and mitigating the impacts on visitors and the park.

Capital Improvements. Mr Hummel reported that the water system and sewerage treatment plant projects are closing out. The treatment plant manufacturer provided more technical training to park staff in October and the system is operating in winter mode. The plant can meet the current needs at the summit and staff is working to manage the fluctuations in use. The Gorham contractor and Underwood Engineering has been great.

Mr Thayer asked about DNCR's capital budget request. Commr Stewart said that the budget will be tight and that replacement of the Tram is a high priority. She recognized the maintenance needs at the summit and expects that the recommendations from the Tighe&Bond report will help inform the capital project needs. The members discussed potential opportunities to highlight the improvements made at the summit.

Park Ops. Mr Hummel provided a slide presentation of the 2024 season, including the completion of the Information Wall Panel, the relocation of the plaque honoring the 10th Mountain Division, medical training exercises with NH State Police and MWObs, live radio broadcast of the WHOM Morning Show, retirement of Anita Taylor (22 seasons) and Guy Jubinville (13 seasons), search and rescue, FY24 retail revenue up 3%, 2024 attendance of approx. 353,189 (May 23-Oct 20), 29.3" snowfall in October, shift change by Cog Railway on Oct 17th, and his message to field staff to not just work in the park, but to take the time to be in your park. The Tighe&Bond assessment may have recommendations for improving visitation counts. The capacity of the main floor for the Sherman Adams building is 495.

Negotiation of agreements. Commr Stewart said that final signatures are being obtained for the one-year lease with the Auto Road for their use of the summit parking lots. She will follow up on the contract with Bretton Woods Telephone for fiber optic services at the summit. The Master Plan called for more involvement by the MWC with respect to leases and agreements at the summit.

Promotion of summit & Protection of resources. DNCR will provide a presentation on the Tip Top House renovation and museum displays when ready. The Tighe&Bond assessment work includes public involvement and participation and will conclude with recommendations for promoting the summit and for the protection of unique flora and natural resources.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer thanked the partners who made the visit by Sen Shaheen’s staff a success. The AMC and MWObs are reviewing their next agreement. They are looking forward to attending the Cog Railway event celebrating the new Mesonet stations. Lonesome Lake, Zealand Falls, and Carter Notch are under self-service operations. In late October, they hosted the Northeastern Alpine Stewardship gathering at the Highland Center. AMC has launched its 5-year strategic plan effort and are working on their end-of-season reports.

Auto Road. Mr Wemyss said they ended their season up from last year. Their major projects are near completion, including the solar array, the bridge project and reconfiguring the tollhouse entrance to efficiently get cars off of Rte. 16.

Cog Railway. Ryan Presby said that they had a great season, even with the two week shut down in October to do track work. They are connecting electricity to Waumbek Station and are preparing for the Mesonet system installed along the Cog Railway to be brought online next week.

MWObs. Mr Middleton said that Drew Bush is doing a great job and the MWObs is very busy, including a research project that takes laser readings of the sky from Bretton Woods.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman reported that they installed a new transmitter in the WHOM building. As mentioned previously, he is in talks with Parks about the need for a new replacement building next year. It may be possible to use a storage container placed at the southeast side of the summit property. Townsquare Media appreciated that Parks was able to host WHOM’s live Morning Show broadcast.

WMNF. Mr Ibarquen apologized for missing the MWC Sept meeting as he was in CA to help battle the wildfires, then in Oct he was in NC to help with cleanup efforts from the flooding caused by Hurricane Helene. The Avalanche Center will be ready with staff beginning Dec 1. By transitioning staff to permanent seasonal employees, WMNF was able to stabilize its workforce. Hiring will be limited due to budgets, but they have wonderful partnerships, including the National Forest Foundation. Mr Ibarquen cautioned everyone that the fire danger is high.

AOB. Mr Bryce opened the floor to public input. Mr Bouley said that the MWC is fortunate to have two legislators on its board, Rep Paige and Sen Gendreau, who can keep in communication with legislature. Sen Gendreau thanked Mr Bouley and said that it’s been a pleasure and honor to be on the MWC. Mr Lewis said that permitting media access to the summit and summit issues, especially when major news events occur, is extremely important for the public interest.

The next MWC meeting is scheduled for January 24, 2025, at 10 a.m. at Park HQ, Franconia Notch State Park.

The proposed 2025 MWC meeting schedule is:

January 24, Franconia Notch State Park, Park HQ	May 16, TBD	October 17, TBD
March 14, TBD	June 13, Tip Top House, Mount Washington State Park	November 14, DNCR Gorham Office
April 11, TBD	September 12, TBD	

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

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.