

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
November 17, 2023, MINUTES *(Approved 01/19/24)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the DNCR Gorham Office. Vice-chair Kirsch called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., with a quorum present. Commission members introduced themselves.

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

Minutes. Mr Wemyss made a MOTION to accept the minutes of September 15, 2023; seconded by Mr Presby. Mr Wemyss and Mr Ibarguen requested minor amendments to the minutes. The motion to approve the minutes as amended CARRIES, with two abstentions from Mr Bryce and Mr Thayer.

Master Plan. Summit Assessment. Dir Wilson said that the Summit Assessment RFQ was release on Wednesday. He thanked the MWC for their input to tie the RFQ more strongly to the intent of the Master Plan. The deadline for questions related to the RFQ is Dec 8th, qualification statements are due Dec 13th, with a contract award on Feb 2, 2024. Albi Fioravante introduced himself and will serve as the project administrator. He agreed to share questions received by interested consultants with the MWC and other project updates via the Parks [RFPs & Projects website](#). Members interested in serving on the RFQ selection committee are to contact Chair Bergeron and Vice-chair Kirsch.

Fees paid to the State / Capital Improvements / Park Ops. Patrick Hummel said that there were no new updates related to Special Use Permits. He reported that their season wrapped up in Oct. The two new 40K-gal. water storage tanks were installed and are operational. The wastewater treatment site is prepped, and the new treatment plant will be installed in the Spring. Nate Camille may travel to the plant manufacturer in Canada to discuss its technical specs. The old water tanks will be removed, and staff will complete the aesthetic work after the wastewater treatment plant is installed.

Mr Hummel thanked Christa Rousseau and Camryn Casey for making the final interior touches to the new Gorham Office. Once the entrance sign is done, Parks will hold a grand opening and have the office serve as a community resource. The office is cost-shared by MWSP and the Great North Woods region.

The Sherman Adams Building (SAB) closed on Oct 15th, with approx. 354K visitors. Visitation is slightly down due to the weather, but retail rallied and is slightly up from last year. Mr Hummel will continue to pursue the hire of a wastewater treatment operator after the holidays. He and several staff went to Pike's Peak in CO to meet and consult with the staff there. Mr Hummel will present his findings at the next MWC meeting. The Pike's Peak facility is 3-years new after a 15-year planning process. Although there are similar operational challenges, they see ½ to 1 million visitors. The land is owned by the USFS and is operated by the Town/County. Visitors travel to the summit by auto road, cog railway or a 20-mile hike. Their wastewater treatment plant is housed indoors. Mr Hummel said that the SAB was built with the same s.f. public space as the previous building and did not allow for future growth.

At the next MWC meeting, Mr Hummel will report on his participation at the Ron Walker Leadership Development program at Clemson University. MWSP staff are doing winter tasks: reflooring the staff quarters, painting, installing winter trail signs, gift shop updates, retail product orders, new POS system, and new radios. Renovation of the Tip Top House continues in coordination with the Bureau of Historic Sites. Commr Stewart said that the new Curator starts on Dec 15th and will develop policies for DNCR's historical items and artifacts; and can assist with historical and cultural displays.

Leases & Agreements. Dir Wilson said 2024 will be a busy year:

- a) Mt Washington Auto Road lease of summit parking lots expires June 30, 2024
- b) AMC lease of Lonesome Lake Hut expires June 30, 2024
- c) DES lease for space in the Yankee Building expires June 30, 2024
- d) MWObs lease for space in the SAB expires September 30, 2024

Dir Wilson is recruiting for a Chief of Staff position. Mr Bush answered Mr Bryce's question: the MWObs is running its EduTrips program and will apply for permits from Parks for hiking/climbing guided trips.

Promotion of the summit. Members discussed the renaming proposal submitted to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (BGN). Mr Kirsch has been unable to have Native American members speak to the proposal. He and Chair Bergeron drafted a resolution for the MWC to consider: *"The U.S. Board of Geographic Names (Board) of the U.S. Geological Survey has asked the Mount Washington Commission (Commission) to respond to a proposal, received by the Board in February 2023, that asks to change the name of Mount Washington to Agiocochook (Proposal). The Commission has reviewed the Proposal and finds that the materials filed with it do not contain information sufficient to justify the requested name change. The Commission does not support the Proposal."*

Mr Presby met with an Abenaki member and gave her contact information to Mr Kirsch to see if she would be willing to speak to the MWC. Rep Paige supported the resolution and said that the MWC needs to commit to including the indigenous perspectives into the history of the mountain. Members discussed the resolution further: should we state that we neither support nor oppose the proposal? the response is nuanced; there is a lack of information; we aren't closing the door to reconsideration; a name change will impact businesses who use the name "Mount Washington"; more research is needed; the Master Plan calls for including indigenous culture into the history of the mountain. Mr Bryce said that he has seen interpretive signage at historical sites that acknowledge Native American cultures prior to European settlement and will share that information. Rep Paige MOTIONED to support the resolution, SECONDED by Mr Ellms. The motion CARRIES with one abstention from Mr Ibarguen.

Protection of natural resources. Kyra Salancy/AMC presented the AMC's volunteer alpine stewardship program that provides outreach to hikers, and monitors and protects alpine flora, fauna (alpine butterflies) and natural resources in the MWNF, Mt Washington, and Franconia Ridge. This effort is in collaboration with the WMNF and the AT Conservancy. Hiker outreach includes safety, weather and natural resource protection information. In 2023, they logged 392 hours; 1,365 hiker contacts; 167 plant observations; 8 minor first aid assistance; 38 cairns repaired; 48 decorative cairns removed; 142 linear ft. of scree wall repaired, and 10 water bars/overflow cleaned. Ms Salancy answered questions and the MWC thanked her for the presentation.

Partner Reports. AMC. Mr Thayer said occupancy is slightly up despite the weather impacts. Facility improvements include solar at Zealand hut and Crawford Notch Highland Center; bathroom renovations at Greenleaf hut and gender-neutral bathrooms. Carl Svenson, the veteran JBI pilot who died in a helicopter crash on Oct 8th, will be greatly missed. AMC and the MWObs are collaborating on a northeast snow network that will cover ME, NH and VT. AMC and the WMNF are working on a two-year project for the Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail.

Auto Road. Mr Wemyss said that he was not able to get an update from Tobey Reichert in time for the meeting, but the Auto Road is closed for the season.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby said that this is the fourth year that they have offered winter trips to Waumbek Station for year-round operations. They are obtaining a DES AOT permit for the base station project.

The Cog Railway is up from last year in visitorship and revenue, breaking their 2021 record. They are working on winter maintenance projects and planning for their Spring projects.

MWObs. Mr Bush reported that they held their Fall Gathering at Tin Mountain Conservation Center where John Gianforte, Dir of UNH Observatory, gave a talk on the 2024 total solar eclipse. MWObs and WMNF Avalanche Center will launch its joint internship program. They also have a joint internship with AMC to focus on the climatology and biology of the White Mountains region. Mr Bush is seeking grant funding for school-based field trips with the Auto Road and Cog Railway over the next three years, starting this winter with citizen science work on snow observation. The MWObs is submitting over \$350K of funding, including providing 800 backpacks containing weather-related educational materials to area school kids. Their winter EduTrips are booked and will work with Parks for Special Use Permits for the guided climbing trips. They've received 87 applications for the 12 openings they have for teacher development. Their diversity internship and partnership with Howard University and NOAA continues to grow. The MWObs is working to modernize and expand the Mt Washington Regional Mesonet for real-time forecasting data, working with Eversource and SkiNH. They launched their new website and welcomes feedback from the MWC members.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman said that they were rained out several times making it difficult to conduct their summer maintenance projects. He did, however, get the main antenna back up and operational. Next year, they will work on the auxiliary WHOM facility.

WMNF. Mr Ibarguen said that they are in winter mode and have hired two additional snow rangers. Colleen Mainville is their new public affairs officer. He will have Ms Mainville connect with DNCR's public information officer.

AOB. The 2024 MWC meeting schedule is:

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| January 19, FNSP HQ | May 17 | October 18 |
| March 22 | June 14 | November 15, Gorham Office |
| April 19 | September 20, Tip Top House | |

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.