

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
December 16, 2016 MINUTES *(Approved 04-28-17)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) was held at the White Mountain National Forest Headquarters in Campton.

Call to Order. Vice-chairman Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, having a quorum of members, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Members present were Dir. Phil Bryce/Div. Parks and Rec (DPR), James Wrigley designee for Walter Graff/AMC, Mark Ericson/Townsquare Media, Paul Fitzgerald/for Public, Martha McLeod/Public, Rep Karen Umberger/House, and Roger Simmons as designee for Tom Wagner/WMNF. Jack Middleton/MWObs and Howie Wemyss/Mt Wash Auto Road arrived late due to an accident.

Also present were Allen Brooks/AG Office, Nate Camille/MWSP, Chuck Henderson/US Sen. Shaheen's Office, Tom Mansfield/DRED Architect, Justin Preisendorfer/WMNF, Edith Tucker/Reporter, and Torene Tango-Lowy/MWC clerk. Ed Bergeron/MWObs and Sharon Schilling/MWObs President arrived late due to an accident.

Minutes. Rep. Umberger moved to accept the minutes of June 17, 2016; Mr. Fitzgerald seconded. The minutes were approved as written.

Master Plan. Rep. Umberger gave a brief review of the subcommittee's work, including its recommendation that DRED conduct an assessment of the Yankee Building. Mr. Mansfield provided an overview of DRED's FY 2018-19 capital budget request that includes \$200K toward the assessment and fire safety measures. Mr. Mansfield said the Yankee Building is structurally sound, but the assessment will confirm its condition. Discussion continued.

Dir. Bryce will provide the MWC with a copy of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the building assessment. He will also seek funding sources for additional fire safety measures. Mr. Henderson requested a list of communications lessees.

The MWC discussed conducting a capacity study of the summit using a consultant hired through the State's RFP process. Discussion continued, including the visitor experience, carrying capacity, limits of acceptable change, social and biophysical impacts, resource stewardship, facility development to accommodate increases in visitors, how restrictions in capacity might have different impacts to individual summit partners, and funding for the study.

The City of Colorado Springs partnered with the USFS to develop the Master Plan for Pike's Peak. Mr. Preisendorfer said the USFS partnered with the University of Vermont for several studies related to visitor numbers and capacity. He will provide the MWC with the link to the study.

Fee Collection. Dir. Bryce reviewed and the MWC discussed the FY 2016 Profit and Loss Statement for the Mt Washington State Park, see report. Mr. Brooks, attorney for the MWC, is reviewing the MWObs lease payments that are deposited to the Mt Washington Fund and will provide information to the MWC. Rep. Umberger said that the Mt Washington Fund is a dedicated fund that is generally not audited or detailed, but that the MWC is charged with monitoring the Fund. Dir. Bryce said that DRED has an internal auditor who is currently auditing the Hampton and Cannon Fund accounts, but can conduct an audit of the Mt

Washington Fund. Dir. Bryce said that, unlike the other Parks dedicated fund account, the Mt Washington Fund does not contribute back into supporting the state park system. Currently, much of the revenue in the Fund goes to paying for the land acquired from Dartmouth College. The MWC seeks clarification of the debt service and Dartmouth purchase, and the cost of the power line categorized in the P&L report under "Power."

Capital Improvements. DRED Architect Tom Mansfield reported on the capital improvement projects for the summit: a) FY2010-11 concrete repairs are ongoing, but the most urgent work on the observatory tower is complete; DRED has had difficulty getting bidders for this work; b) FY2016-17 the sewage treatment plant is operating at 5000 gal/day and DRED is assessing options for modification, adding onto, or installing a new treatment plant for processing 7000 gal/day; the water system will be moved closer to the Sherman Adams Building (SAB); c) FY 2018-19 \$936K is budgeted for the sewage treatment plant, but the proposed work may not reflect the findings of a capacity study; funds are budgeted for the Yankee Building; d) FY2020-21 a placeholder of additional funds are proposed for the Yankee Building.

Members continued to discuss sewage treatment-related issues, including the viability of a sewer line installed along the Cog track. Mr. Mansfield said that the engineering consultant involved in the installation of the power line estimated that such a sewer line was not feasible due to the pitch of the line, the flow rate of the sewage, and what would be required to slow the flow rate.

Park Operations. Dir. Bryce announced that Mike Pelchat retired on October 31st after four decades of service to the State: his service is truly appreciated and he will be greatly missed. Mr. Camille will serve as the interim Park Manager. A copy of the Park Manager supplemental job description was distributed and Dir. Bryce asked members to send comments to him directly.

Mr. Camille provided his report on operations, including: a) a new 6000 gal. concrete tank was installed for storage of sewage during peak flow periods; b) emergency repairs to the drinking water system were made last month; c) installed signs to assist hikers and Auto Road visitors to find the SAB under foggy conditions; d) the hire of a key seasonal employee who has medical skills and is an electrical apprentice; and e) planned winter and spring maintenance and repairs.

Partner Reports. Auto Road. Mr. Wemyss reported that their goal is to spread out their visitors over the course of the day. This past season holds a record 178,000 visitors, bypassing the 1978 record. They are changing their events and reviewing their processes to address traffic issues on Route 16. The Glen House Hotel will break ground in April.

Cog Railway. Mr. Presby reported 111,800 riders this past season. They will add a sixth bio-diesel locomotive with an air-ride, climate controlled coach. They had to limit parking in August and October due to increased use of the lots, including use provided to hikers. The Cog Railway is presenting to the local planning board their proposal of a 35-bed hotel located at the Skyline switch. They will construct a sewer line for the hotel and can expand its design to accommodate the State's needs.

MWObs. Mr. Bergeron introduced the new president, Sharon Schilling. The MWObs is revising its process on research to focus on education, and are working to publish their research efforts. They announced that Slim Bryant, long-time snowcat operator, is retiring.

Townsquare Media. Mr. Erickson reported that they are making the usual repairs to their equipment. He asked about the maintenance of the state-owned Armstrong Tower that needs painting.

WMNF. Mr. Simmons and Mr. Preisendorfer reported on WMNF activities, including staff transitions, upgrades to their radio system and the bridge work at Tuckerman Ravine. In 2015, 200 lbs. of dandelions were removed off the summit, 60 lbs. were removed this past year, and the work will continue in 2017 through an agreement with DRED. They assist NH Fish and Game with backcountry search and rescue during the summer (15-20 rescues/season), and conduct winter rescues through their Snow Ranger Program (20-25 rescues/season). They are looking at hiker impacts to the alpine areas and are leading a discussion group on the high use on Franconia Ridge and strategies for managing use of the area. They are considering fee increases and simplification of their recreation passes.

AMC. Mr. Wrigley reported a strong year for their hut system. They withdrew their hut proposal at Crawford Notch. They were involved in 60 search and rescue operations, involving 750 volunteer hours, but generally average 50-60 rescues a year.

Agreements. Mr. Wemyss reported that the Auto Road has a new agreement with the State for the use of the summit parking lots. Discussion regarding reimbursement by the State for damage to the Auto Road from the State's snowcat is ongoing.

Promotion of Summit. Members returned to the topic of the increasing number of visitors, overuse of the summit, limits to use, and the use of marketing to redirect visitors.

Natural Resource Protection. WMNF spoke of their trailhead steward program, a joint effort with the AMC, State Parks and NHFG, for the purpose of reducing hiker impacts to the resource and provide hiker education to reduce the need for search and rescue, including the Leave No Trace and Hike Safe programs.

Other Business.

The tentative 2017 meeting schedule is as follows:

- ~~March 17, 2017~~ at 10 a.m., location TBA, *rescheduled for April 28, 2017*
- June 16th at 10 a.m., Tip Top House (weather permitting)
- September 15th at 10 a.m., Tip Top House (weather permitting)
- December 15th at 10 a.m., location TBA

Adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m. Thank you to WMNF for hosting this meeting.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.