

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION
September 15, 2023, MINUTES *(Approved as amended 11.17.23)*

A regular meeting of the Mount Washington Commission (MWC) took place at the Tip Top House, Mt Washington State Park. Chair Bergeron called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m., with a quorum present. Commission members introduced themselves.

PRESENT were Chair Ed Bergeron, Vice-chair Rob Kirsch/MWObs, Chris Ellms/Public, Carrie Gendreau/Senate, Derek Ibarguen/WMNF, David Paige/House, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Drew Scamman/Townsquare Media, Sarah Stewart/DNCR Commissioner, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Also in attendance were Mark Lucas/DOJ designee for the MWC, summit partners and state park staff, and members of the public.

Minutes. Mr Kirsch made a MOTION to accept the minutes of July 21, 2023; seconded by Mr Ellms. The motion CARRIES, unanimously.

Master Plan. Summit Assessment. Commr Stewart said the Summit Assessment RFQ was updated to incorporate the Commission's comments and will be released in early October. DNCR will meet with the applicants and get consensus for the top pick. The contract must be approved by the Governor and Executive Council. DNCR will keep the MWC informed of the progress.

Fees paid to the State. Patrick Hummel reported that there were about 16 Special Use Permits issued this year. He can provide more information on these events, if necessary. Earl Duvall said that the Cog Railway and Bretton Woods Telephone met onsite to discuss the feasibility of restoring fiber optic service to the summit. A proposal from Bretton Woods Telephone will be provided to DNCR. Mr Presby said that this would be a phased project. Commr Stewart added that the existing conduit would be used for the fiber optic cable and digging would not be necessary.

Capital Improvements / Park Ops. Mr Hummel said that, during the various construction projects, the public is kept informed about access to summit facilities through the park website. The new water system will be ready by winter. Delivery of the new sewer treatment plant is delayed to next year, but the existing plant is still serviceable.

Park attendance is down by 7% due to weather conditions and retail down by 6-7%, but Mr Hummel hopes for a strong fall season. Oct 16th is the targeted closing date. The wastewater treatment operator position is still open for recruitment. Park staff are conducting their pre-winter preparations, such as septic pumping and fuel deliveries. The radio equipment is being replaced.

Mr Hummel reported on the progress of the Tip Top House renovations, including updated electrical service and lighting, and new static displays that will provide its history. Mr Kirsch thanked the park staff for preparing the Tip Top House for the Commission's meeting.

Leases & Agreements. Commr Stewart said that the one-year lease with the Auto Road is being signed by the parties. The provisions are the same as last year and will enable the parties to continue negotiations for a new lease of the summit parking lots. Mr Hummel reported that the improvements to the DNCR Gorham Office is nearing completion. It will house the offices of the Great North Woods regional supervisor and Mt Washington retail staff in the winter.

Protection of natural resources. This topic will be addressed by the Summit Assessment.

Partner Reports. Auto Road. Mr Reichert said that the rainy summer has impacted visitor counts, but that the Labor Day weekend was good. They will pave their base parking lot if weather permits.

Cog Railway. Mr Presby reported that the Cog Railway submitted an Alteration of Terrain permit to DES for the addition to their maintenance shop, including drainage, parking lot, and septic improvements. They are working with UNH on a Capstone Project to build an electric engine. Their visitation is down by only 1.5%.

MWObs. Mr Bush thanked the Cog Railway for their help with the NH Teacher of the Year event awarded to a teacher from Alvirne High School, Hudson. The Obs was awarded a \$500K grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission for upgrades of their weather stations in Coos County and construction of 18 new stations. The Cog Railway has pledged a cash match to help leverage this funding. The Obs has also received \$150K from EPA to establish a Northeastern network of mesonets to monitor mountain weather in coordination with UNH and the AMC. They will share an internship with the Forest Service next summer to publish a report on the climate of the White Mountains. They will also share an internship with the AMC for marketing, research, education and mountain safety initiatives. Mr Bush is working on grants for educational field trips to the summit and will coordinate these trips with summit partners. The IMLS grant work to conserve archival materials will start in a few weeks.

Townsquare Media. Mr Scamman reported that he has had difficulty accessing the summit equipment due to weather. Inspection of the main tower is scheduled, weather permitting. The WHOM and internet relays are working.

WMNF. Mr Ibarguen said that they are working on general projects, including the redesign of the Glen Ellis Falls bathroom to improve the visitor experience. As mentioned by Mr Bush, they are partnering with other entities to develop joint opportunities, such as internships. Jeff Fongemie was promoted to Director of the Avalanche Center. The WMNF is participating in the emergency operations center with the State in preparation for Hurricane Lee.

Public Comments. Mr Rob Bermudes asked about the Commission's position on the summit renaming proposal. Mr Kirsch said that he had provided a list of "Proposed points to consider relating to the pending Summit naming petition and Master Plan implementation" at the last meeting. He has requested more information from the NH Commission on Native American Affairs, but they have not responded. The petition is confusing and the facts are not yet known about the relationship of the mountain to tribal communities. Mr Bermudes will, as an individual, submit his comments on the renaming petition to the Board on Geographic Names. Mr Presby was concerned about missing a deadline for submitting comments. Mr Wemyss said that it needs thoughtful consideration based on information. Commr Stewart said that several state agencies, including DNCR, have submitted comment against the name change. Mr Ibarguen said that the WMNF is still reviewing the petition. Rep Paige said that there is more than one way to address the history of slavery other than a name change. Sen Gendreau spoke to some within the Abenaki Tribe, but they did not wish to speak to the issue. Mr Bermudes said that he spoke to a professional who works with native tribes who said that the various tribes are fractional and, therefore, hesitant to represent and speak on the issue.

Mr Robert White said that he is part of the World Trails Network and that they recently worked on the Old Bridle Path trail in partnership with the State and WMNF. US Senator Shaheen helped to obtain federal grant funding for trails projects by the World Trails Network and other trail organizations. They had 120 volunteers provide 800 hours of labor for trail work. He worked through DNCR's Volunteer Program staff Eric Feldbaum and Andy Crowley.

AOB. The next MWC meeting is Friday, October 13 at 10 a.m. at Franconia Notch State Park HQ.

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.