

**Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Bureau of Parks and Lands
Advisory Committee Meeting (#2) – Tumbledown-Mount Blue Management Plan
September 21, 2020, 6:00 to 7:30 pm
Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams**

Meeting Notes

Advisory Committee Members participating:

Erica Dubois	Forest Society of Maine
Chuck Hulse	IF&W
Lisa Drapeau	Weld resident
Michelle Wynn	Tumbledown Conservation Alliance
Richard Doughty	Weld Selectman
Rick Davol	Weld snowmobile club

Members of the Public participating:

Eliza Townsend	AMC Maine Policy Director
Ben Houde	School teacher; frequent hiker/camper/group leader on Tumbledown
Heidi Nichols	Local resident
Mike Morin	The Access Fund NE Regional Director
Melanie Sturm	NRCM Forest and Wildlife Director

BPL Staff participating:

Bill Patterson	Deputy Director
Liz Petruska	Director of Acquisitions and Planning
Bruce Farnham	Mount Blue State Park Manager
Jared Briar	Environmental Steward Mt Blue/Tumbledown
Tim Post	Western Regional Manager
Rex Turner	Outdoor Recreation Planner
Eben Webb	Forester, Western Region
Jim Vogel	Sr. Planner, Tumbledown/Mt. Blue Management Plan coordinator

Other State of Maine staff:

Justin Schlawin	Ecologist, Maine Natural Areas Program
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Background

This meeting was convened to discuss the issue of camping on the Tumbledown Public Land, and at Tumbledown Pond in particular. This was identified as a major issue during plan scoping and was discussed at some length during the 1st Advisory Committee meeting, held Feb. 26, 2020 in Weld. A few weeks prior to this meeting the committee was provided a summary of two alternatives for addressing camping developed by the Bureau and the pros and cons of each alternative from the Bureau's perspective. One alternative would prohibit camping at Tumbledown Pond (and possibly the entire Unit), and the other would provide a limited, managed camping opportunity at the pond. The alternatives summary document is attached.

Participant were also asked to comment on a potential LWCF application to fund trail work at Tumbledown, possibly combined with work at the Mt. Blue State Park nature center.

Discussion Notes

- Jim – overview of two alternatives: (1) continued camping with parameters, very different from current use, or (2) eliminate all together. Purpose tonight is to help us clarify the tradeoffs and gain a sense of the committee members’ perspectives.
- Jared Briar – even with COVID travel restrictions it was very busy this summer. The demeanor of people was mixed to the “no camping” rule. Some people understood. Others understood once they got an explanation. But there were also some people that didn’t listen to the rules. Staff tried their best to educate but it was hard. With either choice there would have to be increased staff presence on the mountain. More staff presence might be a way to start and then you could make the decision – once the staff presence is established. Just the presence would help mitigate many of the problems like littering and illegal campfires.
- Melanie Sturm – appreciates the issue being raised. NRCM doesn’t have a preference but wanted to raise a concern. On one hand totally appreciate the need to steward the resource and that needs to be a priority. But when you ban camping, we fear that people will just continue to do it. If that’s an inevitability, maybe it makes more sense to manage it well.
- Lisa Drapeau – think everyone agrees we want to protect the mountain. People are going to try and camp no matter what. But we shouldn’t make the rules based on those few that are going to break the rules. Feel that putting campsites up there and building privies will really take away from the majesty of the mountain.
- Richard Doughty – don’t think banning is the answer for the reasons already expressed. Don’t see in any of the options a model that redirects the camping to a spot within the unit but not at the peak. Is that an option that has been explored? Think it should be considered.
- Erica Dubois – reading through this it seems like maybe staff has a preference based on what’s been presented. Would be curious to hear from folks with the Warden Service or others about the feasibility of enforcement. “Significant human waste challenge” – what does this look like? At Chimney Pond (Baxter State Park) they let it freeze and then take it out on snowmobile in the winter. Have you thought through specifically what that challenge looks like?

Jim – hadn’t looked at that option specifically. But work has been done to site two privies up there. Even day use would put a really large burden on those.

Rex – haven’t gone into the solutions in detail; mostly recognizing the challenge. Moldering privies work well to a point. Depending on which way we go we’re going to have to figure out how to deal with it.

Bruce – numbers midsummer on the average weekday we figure there’s 150-200 people on the mountain and 300-400 people on the weekends. These are just estimates and could even be on the lower side.

Jared – 300 on a weekend is not crazy anymore. Car counts average between 70-137. Average is ~ 3 people per car.

- Heidi Nichols – want to speak to the comment about just how many people are hiking Tumbledown. How to manage parking and daily usage, particularly on the weekends. Been up several times this year and its amazing how well its worn, how much garbage and waste is there. Seems like we need to give the majestic mountain a rest and let use settle a bit before a final decision. Seems like it's very much a capacity issue. Curious about former conversations that have taken place about how to manage the traffic. Road is washboarded and could lead to safety issues.

Bill – Jim mentioned in lead off a possible LWCF grant. Looking for some input on whether BPL should do some major upgrades to the trails and parking area so that it doesn't feel like shopping mall, but could address some of the issues that are being talked about here. Also potential to spend some money at Mt. Blue on the nature center. Comment about the place looking a little worn out – we are thinking of ways, potentially big, of addressing that and making it a first class experience. If there was a decision to try some managed camping, funding could be put towards that as well.

- Ben Houde – chip in on human waste issue. Education is going to have to be a big component. Some sort of signage at the trail head and maybe at the top of the mountain about how to properly dispose of human waste. At least in the interim until privies could be installed. Would increase awareness.
- Melanie Sturm – to my knowledge there are no fees on public lands for entering or camping. Is that an option here to defray the costs of infrastructure, sanitation, enforcement?

Bill – don't believe any of our public lands collect fees, except for within NMW which is different. Don't think that's a great fit here. Idea is to make it acceptable and encourage people to visit. LWCF and our Recreation Management Budget (applies to all 600,000 acres) could assist. It would be a substantial precedent and hopefully wouldn't be as necessary.

Rex – statutorily we have the ability but generally we try to minimize and avoid those fees.

- Melanie Sturm – regarding a LWCF application. I assume it's all relative and LWCF is a limited pool of funds. Is there a list of BPL possible LWCF sites and where does Tumbledown fit on that list.

Bill – a great question. We've developed an informal short list of some potential areas that would be good fits. But we haven't done a more comprehensive assessment. Because of the 50% match requirement and the lack of match sources, the program is anticipating having difficulty moving funds. Seeing this as a starting project for the state.

- Lisa Drapeau – last year on the mountain the people from the state park were constantly at the base of the trail and the education piece was great. They've knocked it out of the park the past few years! Commend them for their efforts. Think it's really important that we have access for all and that we don't charge a fee. That are a lot of people in the area that couldn't afford it. A few things different this year – most of the summer camps were closed and their lack of presence was notable. But the use by general public increased. Need to know that it's highly used as a group campsite. If there were to be campsites up there – the issue is whether or not you can enforce it. People will choose to do the right thing or the wrong thing; don't think a sign at the bottom is going to change that. How do we manage the use so it hurts the mountain the least.

- Heidi Nichols – is there a compromise between paying something and access for all. What about a donation box? Wondering if it makes sense to talk about if you're a group more than 2 people (especially camps) that you have to register beforehand and you could charge them. These groups have higher impacts on the summit and pay enough for these camps that they probably could afford to pay a fee. I agree that pristine summit would be nice, but people have to go to the bathroom and it's an issue. Would be in favor of a privy or two up there to control the waste and protect the water.
- Michelle Wynn – got feedback from folks on her mailing list and spoke with several TCA board members. General consensus was people were glad that camping was closed during the summer. Very grateful for the work that the park and the stewards have done over the years. Discouraged by the trampling and destruction of the fragile mountaintop areas. Think that adding camping areas to the summit is not a good choice for the future because it's condoning that kind of overuse with the trampling and vegetation cutting. It takes away from the day use experience for families who want to hike up to see the pond and mountain top – it feels like you're entering someone's camping. If camping does happen on the unit we'd like to see it away from the summit.
- Chuck Hulsey – consulted with Sarah Spencer (IF&W Wildlife Biologist assigned to BPL). Three sensitive wildlife issues:
 - 1) peregrine falcons – human disturbance during nesting, fledging, rearing season - would be something to manage whether there's camping or not. Weekend numbers are stunning.
 - 2) Bicknell's thrush – issue is not human disturbance because the habitat they use is dense, stunted spruce-fir that is very difficult for people to get through. Anything that removes that type of habitat could be a concern.
 - 3) spring salamanders – really a potential concern; these are in quick moving mountain streams. Water quality and habitat could be impacted. They have been documented in streams nearby.

Don't have a position on camping or no camping, but want to see these things taken into account. WMAs – were established for wildlife primarily and secondarily for humans. WMAs are seeing increased use by the public, not as great as at Tumbledown. But IF&W doesn't try to be everything to everyone. Wildlife continues to come first. Camping and motorized recreation (other than what was grandfathered) is not allowed and the public seems to accept that.

Jim – the one data point for spring salamander is at the lower point of Tumbledown Brook. Would that occur at the higher elevations as well?

Chuck – what we do when we have a data point is to assume that they could occur in similar habitat (the length of the stream) unless they have data that says otherwise.

Jim – recently learned there has been regular testing of the pond for years.

Chuck – pond has also been stocked aerially. Most of them make the water.

- Ben Houde – Love Tumbledown. Want to preserve it for future generations. At the same time want to see camping allowed in a way that would still preserve the mountain top and for the wildlife to be safe. Camping on top is a priceless experience. There's a reason people are

drawn to it – sunrise and sunset; star gazing is the best. Can it be done in a way that's practical and in a way that can be managed well. Someone mentioned group fees/registering – interesting. The idea of registering or a group cap, would help provide some accountability for how the mountain is left after that evening. Might be a way to also recruit these groups to help preserve the mountain – not just to make sure they're following the rules.

- Justin Schlawin - quick recap of some of the botanical features that are significant. Several rare plant species on the rock outcrop areas – some are more extensive on Little Jackson but they do occur on Tumbledown. Regardless of the camping question, concerned that the increased activity is causing soil erosion. Soils take extremely long times to build in these environments and once they're washed off it's difficult to regrow. Important that we're addressing the issue of overuse because it is causing some real impacts. The site is resilient as long as it can retain the soil. With good management we can do a good job restoring the area. Mountain had an intensive wildfire in the early 1900s – and lots of vegetation has regrown. Recovery is possible.
- Erica Dubois – wanted to comment on what Chuck was saying. Way back during our winter meeting there were some questions about the level of use by rock climbers on the mountain and what potential impacts might be. Since we have someone here from The Access Fund, maybe he could submit comments to the committee about use – either data or anecdotal. Been on a few of these committees now and there's a lot of local interest and enthusiasm and a lot of concern. Consistently hearing that we all want to see the best possible outcome for the resources but are concerned that the financial resources aren't here to make that happen. Having a local friends group for this mountain could assist the state in raising money for special projects.
- Mike Morin – Don't have solid numbers with respect to usage. Mountain Project – online resource for climbing routes. Thinks use is relatively light in comparison to other Maine locations. More of a backcountry experience, for the more adventurous. Peregrines – climbing community is often a collaborator with monitoring and has experience supporting closures during key seasons. Interested in seeing what kind of plan gets developed around climbing at Tumbledown and interested in having a voice.
- Heidi Nichols – Wondering what potential partnerships might be out there. There are a lot of camps using the mountain. Camp Kawanhee is right on Webb Lake – there's lots of camp power and could we get them interested in community service projects.
- Bruce Farnham – Tumbledown Conservation Alliance has provided funding for the stewards and has provided a lot of support for acquisition and stewardship. A good mailing list and people out there that do care and are concerned.
- Michelle Wynn – There are hundreds of people on the TCA list and continue to contribute annually.
- Erica – would it be helpful for us to see real numbers associated with these options so that we as a group could better advise you. What would it cost? What revenue could reservable campsites bring? What are you looking to get from us tonight?

Jim – gotten a lot of information from the group; not looking for a consensus or conclusion but input to help us continue our thinking on this.

- Bill Patterson – What the level of interest would there be in an off-summit camping experience? We talked a little bit about it internally. Landed on people are there for the sunrise and the star gazing so stumbling back and forth in the dark might not accomplish what people wanted. Also – we don't know whether 3 campsites would be right, but 10. How many people per year and at what cost? Could become like the moose lottery where you're trying your entire life to go camping out there.
- Ben Houde – probably right that a lot of people do camp at the summit because of features of that specific location. Obviously, that creates the overuse problems. If you go with off summit how are you going to keep people from camping on top. Think reasonable people would find a campsite that's a little out of the way – out of the main trail of day users – okay and would cooperate. If it was at the very bottom of the mountain probably wouldn't be a good fit with what people are looking for.
- Richard Doughty – appreciate that people are there for the spectacular experience. But that's not all of the people. There used to be a campsite at the base of the Parker Ridge trail with a boy scout lean-to and it was used extensively. That's not part of this property and that campsite is gone. But if the opportunity is there, some people will take advantage of that. Is a solution that should be considered.

Citizens in the town of Weld petitioned the selectman to open the roads in town to ATV traffic. In the process of looking at that. One of the roads is the Number 6 Road, which provides access to Tumbledown. The other end of that road has ATV access. Not sure what impact it would have on the trails but would definitely impact use of the road which is already overly utilized.

- Melanie Sturm – when is the latest you would like written feedback from the Advisory Committee on this. Need some time to think about the thoughts being shared tonight.

Jim – yes lots to think about and lots of angles. Encourage AC members to send additional comments in the next few weeks. Not an official review period but definitely interested in thoughts people have after tonight. We'll also send notes from tonight around too.

- Jared Briar – the Steward program usually does a portfolio section that tees things up for the next Steward. Planning to have more numbers and averages as part of that – will be documented and could be shared with the Advisory Committee members too. Will capture impact of COVID on use too. Likely to see effects from that for a while. Will try to combine old stewards' data too.
- Ben Houde – background is a teacher and educator. Education is an integral formation of the person. One of the key areas we're focused on is growing in wonder at the world around them. Found by bringing a small group of boys up for the mountain hike – teaches them resilience and toughness in an environment that's still feasible and the reward up top is really life changing for them. Those spectacular moments wouldn't be possible without being able to camp up there. Important for their personal growth. Not really another place like it. Want to have that opportunity in the future.
- Erica – wanted to make sure where we are in terms of the plan process and the document that was shared. Are we still scoping? Is the next thing a draft plan?

Jim – Have been working on the document, leaving a big gap for this issue, which is the most challenging issue. Next step would be getting together as an AC to discuss a draft plan. BPL needs to do further thinking about the issue and options in front of us.

- Jim – announced planned Staff recon hike to Tumbledown Pond – 10 am at the Brook trailhead on October 1st. Advisory Committee members are welcome to come along.

Note: Elizabeth Thorndike, IF&W Region D Fisheries Biologist (replacing Dave Howatt on the Advisory Committee in an acting capacity) provided comments on the camping issue in advance of the meeting. The comments are attached.

Attachments:

1. Summary of Management Alternatives under Consideration for Camping at Tumbledown (BPL)
2. Elizabeth Thorndike IF&W Fisheries comments (9/17/20)

Summary of Management Alternatives under Consideration for Camping at Tumbledown

The Bureau has acknowledged during this planning process that the status quo of numerous campers at Tumbledown Pond throughout the summer and the substantial and worsening impacts associated with this use in the fragile high elevation environment are not acceptable. The management plan will need to provide a new direction that addresses the ongoing resource impacts, the types of recreation experiences to be provided, and the quality of experience for all visitors to the pond.

Bureau staff have discussed potential strategies to address this critical issue, taking into consideration:

- objectives for resource protection (halting or reducing impacts and potential rehabilitation of existing impacts)
- objectives for both day use and overnight recreation experiences
- needs for new facilities and facility maintenance, including sanitary facilities
- BPL resources and personnel requirements, both near and long-term

The Bureau would now like to discuss with the Advisory Committee the two alternatives below, each of which include a summary of the “pros” and “cons” from the Bureau’s perspective.

Alternative 1: No Camping

Close Tumbledown Mountain to camping (or possibly the entire Unit, to simplify administration of the closure)

Pros:

- Visitor experience: Improve the experience for the vast majority of day use visitors seeking to experience the natural beauty of the site but who now confront tents, camping gear and often times a party atmosphere.
- Resource protection: Camping and extended use by visitors is a major source of vegetation trampling and likely the greatest source of the expansion of impacts. Even with designated campsites, campers will likely overflow campsites, build fires, trample paths looking for bathroom sites etc.
- Cost: Reduce the cost and administrative burden of enforcing camping limitations with already limited staff resources. There will be a cost to enforcing no camping but likely far less than enforcing campsite adherence.
- Simplicity: Managing a limited number of campsites in such a popular location is a likely source of conflict among campers and constant potential for overflow levels of campsite use.

Cons:

- Loss of a unique mountain top camping experience.

Alternative 2: Limited camping at designated campsites

Develop a limited number (5-10) of designated campsites at Tumbledown Pond

- Campsites may use tent platforms, or a combination of platforms and traditional campsites
- 2 new privies to be installed (one south of pond, one near existing campsites)
- Open fires would be prohibited
- Potentially with an on-site caretaker during peak season
- Potentially with campsites reservable through MBSP

Pros:

- Continue to provide a unique and much sought-after camping experience.
- Improves the experience from high-density, party atmosphere to one that is low-density, nature focused and family-friendly.

Cons:

- Privies will create a significant human waste management challenge as compared to no camping.
- Cost and complexity of education/compliance is a far more nuanced endeavor compared to a simple no camping policy which can be done by Maine Warden Service and Forest Rangers.
- Will make it more difficult to halt or reduce ongoing resource impacts.

The Bureau will need to judiciously consider the increased investment in resources and personnel that would be required to provide this experience in the broader context of recreation management needs and priorities across the plan area and the Western Region.

We look forward to sharing our thoughts and hearing the perspectives of the Advisory Committee as we work together to determine the best path forward.

Vogel, Jim

From: Thorndike, Elizabeth
Sent: Thursday, September 17, 2020 3:26 PM
To: Vogel, Jim
Cc: Spencer, Sarah M; Grant, Tyler
Subject: RE: Tumbledown/Mount Blue Management Plan - Advisory Committee meeting scheduled

Hi Jim,

I won't be able to attend the meeting but would like to provide fisheries comments. Fisheries would be in favor of camp sites at Tumbledown Pond. From a fisheries management aspect it would bring a unique opportunity for remote high altitude fishing found in few places among the State. Established campsites would have no anticipated negative impacts on the fisheries. Tumbledown Pond is stocked annually with brook trout and stocking can be increased to match increased use or harvest. However, we recognize there are a lot of resources and moving parts at play and ultimately agree with the committee's decisions if in favor or against established campsites.

Thank you for the ability to provide comments.

Elizabeth Thorndike

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From: Spencer, Sarah M <Sarah.M.Spencer@maine.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2020 8:06 AM
To: Thorndike, Elizabeth <Elizabeth.Thorndike@maine.gov>
Cc: Vogel, Jim <Jim.Vogel@maine.gov>
Subject: FW: Tumbledown/Mount Blue Management Plan - Advisory Committee meeting scheduled

Hi Liz,

I hadn't thought of this previously, but looking at the list of names, you should be aware the Tumbledown/Mount Blue Management Plan Advisory Committee is something Dave Howatt had been participating in. This meeting notice is specifically related to the topic of camping at Tumbledown.

Jim- Dave Howatt has left MDIFW and Liz Thorndike has filled that position in acting capacity. Could you add Liz to the communications list?