

Testimony of Anne Huntington

Baxter State Park Advisory

In opposition to L.D. 294

“An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority”

February 13, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Commission of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Anne Huntington. I’m a former member of the Friends of Baxter Board of Directors and currently a member of The Baxter State Park Advisory Committee. My volunteer work for the Park ranges from mapping aquatic plant beds to sorting and archiving historical documents. I’ve been a visitor to the Park since 1970. Today I’m speaking for myself in opposition to L.D. 294.

I strongly believe that L.D. 294 as written will have a negative impact on Governor Baxter’s Deeds of Trust which have successfully governed management of the Park for the past 80+ years. He created the three-member Authority whose members were chosen because they had the specific professional skills in law, forestry, and wildlife management that are necessary to manage the Park and who would always be available within State government. Adding a member to the Authority, resulting in a total of 4 members, will result in occasional tied votes which could in some instances be extremely problematic and may not actually be the best way to address the needs of the Wabanaki. But more important, if this Bill passes, it will result in changes to Governor Baxter’s carefully crafted Deeds by establishing a precedent that the legislature could pass bills which would bypass the Authority and which the Authority might not sanction.

The legislative approach has been tried, but has failed, several times under differing circumstances, most significantly in 1967 when a Millinocket Representative introduced a Bill which would add two members to the Authority, one each from Greenville and Millinocket. The sponsor’s purpose was to increase local representation in the hopes that local hunters and fishermen would have fewer restrictions on the use of Park land. That effort failed as have several other attempts by the legislature or various agencies to bypass the Authority. The most recent was an attempt to legislate approval of takeoffs and landings on fully enclosed Park lakes. That was just a couple of years ago.

During his lifetime Governor Baxter was adamant that The Baxter State Park Authority not the Legislature was to have sole responsibility for decisions concerning the Park. Since Baxter’s death in 1969, members of the Authority, with support from Park Staff and many others, have sustained that mandate. Federal and State agencies in accord with the deeds have no, or in

the case of employee benefits extremely limited, jurisdiction. Approval of L.D. 294 would set a dangerous precedent that the Deeds of Trust may be casually ignored.

L.D. 294 would require that a fourth individual, “one member of a federally recognized Indian nation, tribe or band in this State”, be appointed to serve on the BSP Authority. I believe strongly that the Maine Wabanaki have been treated extremely poorly by the State and by many individuals for many years. I wish I had known more earlier. I fully support encouraging their participation in Baxter State Park protection, management, and use. After all, the Governor’s Trusts were designed to benefit all people in the State, and the tribes certainly have a significant historical interest. However, given my concerns above, I do not support changing the number of members nor the makeup of the membership on the Authority. I believe there must be alternatives that would meet the historic and current needs of the Tribes and not potentially endanger the Deeds of Trust. My suggestions to the Authority would include:

- A. Add a position for a tribal member to BSP Staff. This person could help train Park staff, educate visitors through interpretive activities and act as a liaison between the tribes and the Advisory/Authority.
- B. Add one or more tribal members who are familiar with the Park to the BSP Advisory. The 15 member Advisory Committee, developed in the early ‘70s, assists the Park by working closely with the Park Director and other Park administrators to provide an active forum for discussion, review, comment and critique in the formation and revision of policies procedures and operational systems. As a long time Advisory member, I would certainly welcome assistance.
- C. In addition to the Advisory, there are several sub-committees that support Park management. These include the Scientific Forest Management Area Advisory Committee, The Baxter State Park Director’s Research Committee, and the Baxter Park Investment Committee. These groups of dedicated volunteers are composed of individuals with either a wide range of Park experience or specific technical expertise. The committees operate at the pleasure of the Authority and provide helpful advice on emerging Park Policy or operational concerns.
- D. An update to the Park Management plan could address multiple possible options. I know I’d welcome help with an update and will suggest that the Advisory recommend that the Authority include a liaison in that process.

These are just my suggestions. I’m sure that there are probably more options and that several of these suggestions could be carried out concurrently.

It’s been almost one hundred years since the Governor’s first purchase. The Authority has had 3 members for most of that time and the system has worked well. Let’s set a goal to make it through the next hundred years without jeopardizing the Deeds of Trust.

Thank you, Anne Huntington Wayne, Maine annehuntington173@gmail.com