

**Testimony of Lori Morrison, Director of Administrative Services
Baxter State Park**

**Before the Joint Standing Committees on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs
and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

Hearing Date: February 28, 2023

**LD 258 “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund
and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain
Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the
Fiscal Years Ending
June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025”**

Good afternoon Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Sachs and Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Lori Morrison, I am the Director of Administrative Services for Baxter State Park. I am here today to testify in support of LD 258, the Governor’s Biennial Budget proposal for State fiscal years 2024 and 2025. This testimony addresses each item and proceeds sequentially from pages A-129 through A-130.

Baxter State Park is an independent quasi-state agency and a large charitable trust and not part of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. Beginning in 1931, Governor Percival Baxter generously gifted this world-class wilderness and outdoor recreation destination to the State of Maine to hold in trust for the benefit of the people of Maine. Park entrance is free to Maine residents.

Each of 28 gifts of land from Governor Baxter was accepted by acts of the legislature and included in the Private and Special Laws of the State of Maine to collectively form what is now Baxter State Park. Governor Baxter created a park where the protection of natural resources takes primacy over recreational opportunities, and the landscape is protected in a “Forever Wild” condition. He also described the governance structure he wanted to oversee the Park, called the Baxter State Park Authority. The Authority consists of the state’s principal officers in the professions of the law, forestry, and fish and wildlife management, specifically the Maine Attorney General, the Director of the Maine Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Governor Baxter intended for the Park to remain financially independent through a trust created in 1927 and upon his death, he donated a large portion of his estate, which grew into an endowment capable of funding one-half to two-thirds of our annual operating budget. The entire budget for Baxter State Park comes from Other Special Revenue Funds, using no General Fund dollars.

The Park’s primary source of revenue is the trust Governor Baxter established. Other sources of revenue for the Park include visitor fees and revenue from sustainable forest management in the

Scientific Forest Management Area in the northwest corner of the Park. Thus, approving the Park's proposed initiatives would have no fiscal impact on the General Fund.

The initiatives proposed in this budget are intended to build our capacity to continue welcoming visitors to Baxter State Park without compromising our ability to maintain this "Forever Wild" landscape according to Governor Baxter's wishes, as the donor of this trust.

The first initiative on **page A-129** continues and makes permanent one Public Service Manager II position, that enhances the leadership team at the Park and is currently a limited-period position established by financial order.

The second initiative on **page A-129** provides increased allocation for general operating expenses to cover cost increases required to continue the same level of services for the protection of natural resources and recreational public access throughout Baxter State Park.

The third initiative on **page A-129** provides funding for Risk Management insurance rate increases.

The fourth initiative on **page A-129** provides a one-time allocation to replace roofs and aging rental lean-tos, and upgrade cabins to improve the visitor experience.

The fifth initiative can be found on **page A-130**. This provides a one-time allocation to replace aging fleet vehicles owned and maintained by Baxter State Park.

The sixth initiative on **page A-130** provides a one-time allocation to maintain infrastructure and for capital improvement projects in Baxter State Park. Maintenance of the aging road infrastructure is necessary to comply with best management practices for safety and efficiency, and to provide habitat connectivity in stream systems.

The seventh initiative on **page A-130** provides a one-time allocation in FY24 to purchase safety equipment to support alpine zone trail rehabilitation projects on Katahdin.

The final initiative on **page A-130** provides for increased allocation to replace minor power equipment.

This concludes my testimony on our 2024-2025 biennial budget. I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have at this time.