

TUMBLEDOWN CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

Mt. Blue, Tumbledown, and the Weld region lie within the Western Mountains of Maine's ten million acre Northern Forest. Spectacular peaks, popular hiking trails, productive forests, alpine ponds, important wildlife habitat, and Webb Lake define this unique area.

Less than a day's drive for 70 million people in the Northeast and just hours from Boston and most of Maine's population, the region is increasingly popular among outdoor enthusiasts.

Tumbledown Conservation Alliance has launched a new website: tumbledown.org

SPRING 2024

Bruce & Dianna Farnham Retire from their Duties at Mt. Blue State Park

Last year, after 35 years as Mt Blue State Park Manager, Bruce Farnham, along with his wife Dianna, a regular presence at the entry booth, retired from their rigorous duties. The couple were early and active supporters of the Tumbledown Conservation Alliance. Co-ordinating the many groups active in securing the lands around Tumbledown and Mt. Blue for preservation was a major achievement. Before his retirement from the park, he consulted on the Tumbledown/Mt. Blue Management Plan. In past TCA newsletters Bruce regularly reported on trail and stewardship efforts at the Park and Tumbledown.



The ski trails on Mt. Blue, the ice rink and The "Take It Outside Family Fun Day" all started under Bruce's tenure. He was totally immersed in the community of Weld and served 31 years on the Volunteer Fire Dept., 25 of those years acting as a

First Responder. Folks in town were always glad to see him coming in an emergency. Likewise we all hated to see the Farnhams leave Weld to take up residence in Presque Isle. Only the best of luck to you, Bruce and Dianna!

New Ranger for Mt. Blue State Park

Gary Best, Southern Regional Manager,

Casey Smedberg has been promoted to Park Manager at Mount Blue State Park. Casey has seven seasons of experience at Mount Blue State Park, ranging from working as a lifeguard at Webb Beach to all aspects of operations at the busy Mount Blue Campground Entrance Booth to maintaining campsites and bathhouses and enforcing rules. She also has park management experience that she has gained as the Park Manager II of Ferry Beach State Park, where she demonstrated excellent organizational, administrative, and leadership skills. She successfully completed Ranger Academy Rule Compliance and Enforcement, and Ranger Academy Interpretation. She is finalizing her Ph.D. in English Literature at the University of Connecticut, has an M.A. in English Language and Literature from Villanova University, an M.A. in Medieval Literature from the University of York, England, and a B.A. in English Language and Literature and Political Science from Gordon College. Casey is a go-getter



who accomplishes projects at a high standard. She has a passion for the stewardship of the natural and cultural resources at Mt. Blue State Park. She greatly appreciates the park's dedicated staff and has a knack for finding ways to improve the visitor experience. This promotion is well deserved. Please join me in congratulating Casey Smedberg on this promotion, welcoming her back to Mt. Blue State Park, and wishing her continued success.

Environmental Stewards 2021-2022

by Bruce Farnham

The Tumbledown Conservation Alliance continued to assist in the funding of Americorps Environmental Stewards for Tumbledown Mountain in 2021 and 2022. TCA has been a supporter of this plan since 2011. Elena Gonzalez was the Steward in 2021 and Aerial Oncita filled the position in 2022.

These two seasons saw the development and implementation of the management plan for Tumbledown Mountain. The Environmental Stewards were instrumental in educating the public on the scope and need for the management plan. Working with the Tumbledown Rangers they promoted leave no trace principles and monitored use on the mountain.

One of the main changes to come out of the plan was to prohibit camping on Tumbledown for at least the first five years of the plan. The Stewards helped the public understand and ease into the needed change. Camping was kept to a bare minimum largely due to their efforts.

Elena and Aerial also worked with the staff at Mt. Blue State Park and on park hiking and winter ski and snowshoe trails when not busy on Tumbledown. They also coordinated volunteer work days on the Tumbledown hiking trails.

The Environmental Stewards provide an important link between the Bureau of Parks & Lands and the users of the Tumbledown Mountain range and Mt. Blue State Park. They have always been on the front line of public interactions providing information and guidance as well as preventing problems before they have a chance to occur. Their knowledge and input helped to facilitate the completion of a comprehensive management plan for the Tumbledown Lands. The *Management Plan* will provide resource protection and management guidance for the *Tumbledown Public Land* in T6 North of Weld, Phillips and Weld.

Human Feces, Unauthorized Fires Lead to Closure of Tumbledown Mountain Camping

by Ellie Wolfe for the Sun Journal, June 25, 2021

WELD – Tumbledown Mountain is now closed to overnight campers after an increase in discarded equipment, fire damage, tree-cutting, trampled vegetation and feces on the popular mountain in western Maine.

Overnight camping has never been designated at the summit, though the site has a long history of informal camping dating back to before the state owned it. Despite the mountain not being officially sanctioned for camping, the practice has been overlooked by authorities for years.

However, on Friday, the state announced that because of poor behavior by campers at the mountain's various unauthorized sites, including a significant increase in littering, damage to vegetation and "leaving behind human and dog feces" over the past 18 months, the practice was banned.

"Growing season is much shorter due to the high elevation, so the mountain is much more susceptible to damage and doesn't recover as quickly," Bill Patterson, deputy director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands, said. "Vegetation cannot be replaced, and the situation is obviously worsened when you throw in unorganized camping."

The summit's ecosystem is "fragile," according to The bureau news release announcing the ban,



Campers at this illegal campsite on Tumbledown Mountain used nearby live trees as firewood (Courtesy Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands)



And the “habitat for native plants and wildlife is especially susceptible to damage due to the harsh climate and thin soils.”

Discarded equipment included tents, coolers, beer cans and clothing. The fires were unauthorized, and campers also sometimes played loud music which was a further disturbance, according to the bureau.

A large rock on Tumbledown Mountain in Weld is scarred by an illegal camp fire

2023 Tumbledown Environmental Steward Summary

by Jared Briar

As usual, Tumbledown Public Lands has experienced its predicted flow of hikers from all over Maine and beyond. From your rugged adventurers to small families, you can find just about every type of person climbing this beautiful landscape—and it is easy to see why.

From the breath-taking views to the interesting plants and animals found along the trail, the area has no shortage of material for exploration. The trail system expands not only to Tumbledown Mountain but also Little Jackson and Big Jackson Mountains as well. This allows hikers to keep coming back multiple times and experience something different with each trip.

Quick Statistics

So, what did the MCC Steward do during the summer/fall this year? Here are some quick statistics:

146 fallen trees removed from trails: A majority of these came from the Parker Ridge and Little Jackson Trails

16 areas naturalized: This refers to the restoration of spots near a trail where hikers have made a social path, usually out of confusion or to cut a trail corner.

2760 feet of waterways cleared: Any waterbars or streams that were clogged were cleaned of leaves and debris.

53 gallons of trash collected: Cans and personal hygiene products were the most common finds. When hikers leave trash, the MCC Steward must collect the trash and hike it down off the mountain.

49 fire pits removed: Most were found scarily close to cliff edges off trail.

Quick Observations

While some aspects of a Steward’s importance can easily be demonstrated through numbers, the impact made through interpersonal communication can only be shown by how the hikers feel after the interaction with stewards and rangers. Speaking with nearly all trail-goers is a vital role and arguably one of the most important functions of the MCC Steward. By providing information and education to the public, the MCC Steward helps prevent accidents, damage to the land, and unsafe situations. The information gained through these conversations also allows the state park to better develop the educational offered at the Mt. Blue Nature Center. These programs help prevent problems and unsafe situations from ever occurring in the first place.

Some brief observations from the summer:

- The endless amount of rain this year: It was no surprise the wet summer affected literally everything, but especially the trails. There was not one trail that did not have some sort of major flood damage.
- Campers: As of 2020, Tumbledown Public Lands had closed overnight camping in an attempt to slow down the fast erosion. The encounters with rogue campers tend to be calm. Assuming they missed the four "No Camping" signs at both trailheads, education on why this rule was instated leaves most hikers with a respectful understanding.
- Mountain top activities: Once up near the pond, most people will usually rest near it or close by. Otherwise, you'll find people usually swimming, exploring around the ridge, and engaging in other laidback activities.

Future of Tumbledown Public Lands

This land will continue to get used to an extreme level. There seems to be no slowdown in sight. Future stewards and rangers should apply educational assertiveness when out on the lands. One cannot expect blunt enforcement to have any positive impact unless in very certain situations, since this will endanger the safety of both parties. Additionally, outreach events at the state park or local colleges can greatly spread the awareness of proper hiking and conservation of nature in general.

In conclusion, stewards and rangers of Tumbledown Public Lands play a crucial role in managing what goes on within the woods. Each member has contributed in their own way to keeping these lands as clean and as chaos-free as possible. Continued evolution of programs and trails throughout the years can save Tumbledown, along with other public lands in Maine.

Franklin County Commissioners Accept State Proposal for Repairs to the Byron Road

Re-printed with permission of Annie Twitchell,
Editor, Daily Bulldog, Sept. 21, 2023

FARMINGTON— THE Franklin County Commissioners accepted a proposal from the State of Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) to perform repairs on the Byron Road, the access point for Tumbledown Mountain and associated trails.



A washout on Byron Road, June 2023.

The Byron Road in Township Six North of Weld suffered damages in a heavy rainstorm in late June.

That was the only section of road that was damaged in Franklin County, so the county did not reach the minimum damages threshold to be eligible for federal disaster funding. Neighboring Oxford County sustained enough damages to be eligible for those funds.

The BPL requested to hire a contractor to grade the entire county-owned road, install culverts, and a section of ditching. The cost of repairs is estimated at \$15,000. The Bureau of Parks and Lands initially proposed grading the Byron Road but as they scoped out that project they determined that additional work, of installing two 18-inch diameter, 50-foot long culverts and ditching 275 feet, would be wise to ensure the grading work holds. These improvements are in the area of the Wagner lot on Byron Road. The BPL has committed to contributing up to \$5,000 annually towards the road for the next five years, so this expense would mean they would not contribute to the roads next year or the year after, County Administrator Amy Bernard said. County Road Commissioner, Mike, Pond, has

reservations about the plan, saying he was unsure if the 18-inch culverts would be adequate for the length and purpose.

The County Commissioners said they would like to talk with BPL to consider increasing the size of the culverts, but ultimately voted to approve the proposal for BPL to have the work performed.

**Please check out the new TCA website:
tumbledown.org
info@tumbledown.org**

TCA's new Website Designer, Paul Haberstroh

A Weld resident, Paul serves as a Computer Connections Teacher for Franklin County Adult and Community Education. He can be found in the Weld Library every Tuesday from 3-5 pm ready to help residents solve their phone and computer issues.

He designed TCA's newly unveiled website which contains the content of the original but with modern updates. The previous website could not be displayed on cell phones. The new site has the option of donating to TCA by PayPal or credit card. A flood of stunning, high resolution photos were submitted by hikers and friends of the mountain for this latest version.

The Mount Blue State Park Tumbledown Team

by Casey Smedberg, Mt. Blue State Park Manager



Jared Briar
MCC Steward



Michelle Darling
Tumbledown Ranger



Jamie Cantin
Interpretive Park Ranger

Imagine this: you are Mount Blue's Tumbledown Ranger. You begin your morning with a brisk hike up Tumbledown's Brook Trail. You placed chain-saw in your pack before you left—those trees that came down across the trail in the storm last night won't saw themselves, after all! The additional weight of the chainsaw and all the safety gear is maybe a good thing, since it's probably going to rain again later; at least the increased exertion will keep you warm. On the way up the mountain, you find another wash out from the heavy rain. You'll need to report that back to your supervisor, who will likely ask the MCC Steward to have a look at it and develop a plan to, at the very least, prevent further erosion. MCC trail crews may even need to get involved. After sawing out the tree near the top of the trail—blowdowns never seem to be close to the trail-head where they can be reached easily—you turn

and make your way half a mile or so back down the trail. From here, it will be a full day pruning and lopping that area where you know those pesky branches have begun to encroach on the trail. After some lopping, you break briefly for lunch, during which time you write yourself a note to remind your supervisor that the sign marking the trail to Tumbledown's East Peak needs replacing.

Sandwich finished, you continue with your loping, stopping periodically to converse with any hikers passing by. Many want information on the trail, the flora and the fauna, and local trail and weather conditions.

As it gets later in the day, you decide to head back to the trail head—pausing, of course, to collect the pile of beer cans you saw on your way up

the mountain. You always keep a trash bag in your pack for just such an occasion. Trash retrieved, you reach the trailhead around 3:30 PM, just in time to encounter a group of five hikers in sandals, with only one small Poland Springs plastic water bottle among them. They have no map but are instead guided by the AllTrails app—which promptly ceased working the moment they lost cell service. You stop to talk with them and explain the importance of proper footwear, adequate water, knowing your route and carrying a map, and beginning a hike early enough in the day to allow your party to make it out of the woods before dark. Finally, you round off the day by grabbing your bucket and brush out of the truck and scrubbing the toilet in the outhouse at the trailhead. Good news: everyone mostly managed to aim inside the riser today!

The description above may for most of us seem like a physically strenuous, dauntingly busy day. For the Mt. Blue Tumbledown Ranger, this is a normal day. Consider also that this description mentions none of the more serious issues that the Tumbledown Ranger sometimes handles or assists with handling: rescues; bear sightings; unauthorized fire pits that, on a few memorable occasions were left burning and were found just as they were spreading to trees; first-aid rendered; confrontational hikers; and extreme weather. All of this is simply what it means to be a ranger up on Tumbledown, as thousands of hikers continue to visit this mountain each year.

While those of us at the state park love to see people appreciate all the land has to offer, the reality is that high public usage continues to create challenges. The dedicated efforts of the team involved in caring for Tumbledown and the surrounding area are vital now more than ever.

This year, no qualified candidates were available for the Tumbledown Ranger role until August, when Michelle Darling, last year's Tumbledown Ranger, was able to reprise the role. Michelle, who returned after completing another commitment out-of-state, was a godsend. She is phenomenal at engaging with the public and educating them about hiking safety, and her presence on Tumbledown created noticeable results in public outreach.

Prior to Michelle's arrival, our Maine Conservation Core (MCC) Steward, Jared Briar, was our main presence on Tumbledown. Jared was Mt. Blue's MCC Steward in 2020, so he was able to hit the ground running as soon as he arrived this spring.

He knows these mountains inside and out, and his trail work skills are second-to-none. Though Jared certainly did his share of education through his interactions with hikers, his specialty is trail work. In a year with so many major washouts, I don't know what we'd have done without Jared. He was also excellent at documenting trends on the mountain.

The information that Jared recorded on trails and trends allowed Mount Blue's Interpretive Ranger, Jamie Cantin, to better develop educational programs meant to address some of the issues occurring on the mountain. Her "Ten Essentials of Hiking" program, which ran in the Mount Blue Nature Center, taught hikers what they should and shouldn't bring on a hike. Her informal discussions with park guests were perhaps just as important, as she was able to gauge physical ability and preparedness and recommend hikes accordingly.

Through the educational efforts of Jared, Michelle, and Jamie, many problems up the mountain were prevented from ever happening in the first place. A big thanks also goes to Weld Fire Department for working with us to help identify where we could improve our educational offerings, always with the goal of decreasing the number of incidents that occur on the mountain. Additionally, we owe a debt to the MCC trail crews, who were out working on Tumbledown throughout the summer. It's also worth keeping in mind that this is only the view of things from the Parks portion of the Bureau of Parks and Lands. Talk to our colleagues in the Lands department, and you'll find another set of people working to make the mountain what it is. Maintaining Tumbledown and the surrounding landscape is truly a team effort, and anyone who loves Tumbledown should be grateful for the work of these people who care so deeply about the land and the safety of those visiting it.



Maine Bureau of Parks & Land Planning Rehabilitation of Lower Brook Trail

The Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) has applied for a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant for fund trail rehabilitation on the Tumbledown Brook Trail.

The Bureau is proposing that approximately 1 mile of the lower portion of Brook Trail (from the trail-head) be rerouted. This section of trail is experiencing severe erosion, and in the summer of 2023, the tread surface collapsed due to intense storm events.

A professional trail contractor will design the proposed reroute. The reroute will likely be machine-built, and the construction of the trail will use sustainable trail-building practices and incorporate several hardening structures to help protect the newly constructed tread surface. The location of the proposed trail reroute has not been finalized. Relocating the Brook Trail and rebuilding it will ensure a more sustainable trail as extreme weather events continue to inundate trails and recreational infrastructure. A proper closure of the existing lower portion of the Brook trail will also be included in this work; the failed portion of the trail will be rehabilitated. The LWCF grant funding would provide BPL with \$500,000 to improve and rebuild the Brook Trail and match a Recreational Trails Program grant for another \$500,000 for a total of \$1,000,000 to invest in the long-term sustainability of the Brook Trail.



A section of the lower Brook Trail that was washed out after the 2023 storms

Tumbledown/Mount Blue Region Management Plan

The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands has adopted the first management plan for the Tumbledown/Mount Blue Region. This plan will provide resource protection and management guidance for the Tumbledown Public Land in T6 North of Weld, Phillips and Weld, as well as at Mount Blue State Park in Weld, Avon and Temple, and the Bald Mountain public lot in Perkins over the next 15-year period. These Bureau properties cover nearly 19,000 acres. Conservation easements held by the Bureau on more than 10,000 acres of working forest abutting these lands are also included in the plan.



Maine Forest Ranger documenting camping damage at Tumbledown Mountain

Tumbledown/Mt. Blue State Park Management Plan Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee for the Tumbledown/ Mount Blue Plan was composed of a diverse set of individuals that added to the Bureau’s understanding of the subject public lands—on topics such as its resources, the people who use it, the management issues, and the interests of various recreational and other groups.

The Bureau worked with the Advisory Committee to develop a draft plan. The Final Plan was adopted by February 1, 2022 by the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry based on the recommendation of the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands.

A significant recommendation to come out of the Plan was to prohibit camping on Tumbledown. In past TCA newsletters we reported on environmental damage on the mountain, particularly near the pond, with significant erosion and vegetative damage from cutting wood for already prohibited fires. It will still take years for the area to recover. Please do your part in this effort!



ATV Alert!

According to Manager Casey Smedberg, Mount Blue State Park’s trails will soon drop the designation as “multi-use.” Unless something drastic changes in the next season, it’s looking like these trails will be for hiking, skiing/snowshoeing with possibly mountain biking in places. We’ll no longer be open to ATVs on the trails, and will discourage horses (still fine for them to launch from headquarters and ride up the road, but a lot of the trails are a broken horse leg waiting to happen). The standard for an ATV trail now requires that we accommodate over 60” side-by-sides, and the trails simply aren’t built for that. They’re also in disrepair to the point that in places they aren’t suitable even for smaller four-wheelers. We have wash outs and beaver activity in so many places. Supervisors came out to view them last month, and the decision was made to close them to ATVs next season.

Members of the Tumbledown/Mt. Blue State Park Management Plan Advisory Committee

Name	Organization or Affiliation/Title
Ron Davis	Webb Lake Association
Rick Davol	Weld Winter Wildcats Snowmobile Club
Richard Doughty	Town of Weld Selectboard, Chairman
Lisa Drapeau	Weld Resident
Erica Dubois	Forest Society of Maine
Dave Howatt	IF&W Region D-Fisheries
Charles Hulseay	IF&W Region D- Wildlife
Corey Hutchinson	Town of Weld Fire Chief
Jan Hutchinson	Town of Carthage Selectperson
Dan Mitchell	River Valley Riders ATV Club
Travis Pratt	Weld Resident
Michelle Wynn	Tumbledown Conservation Alliance

Tumbledown Conservation Alliance Donation Form

Yes! I want to help TCA to ensure continued access for hiking and other recreation and to protect wildlife habitat, the forest resource and the beauty of the Tumbledown/ Mt. Blue area.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel _____ Email _____

\$55 _____ \$100 _____ \$500 _____ \$1000 _____ \$5,000 _____ Other \$ _____

Please make checks payable to “**Tumbledown Conservation Alliance**” and mail to TCA, PO Box 24, Weld, ME 04285. Tumbledown Conservation Alliance is a 501 (c) (3) public charity and all contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

THANK YOU!

Your Donations are so important!

In 2000 Tumbledown Conservation Alliance (TCA) was organized to help protect lands around Tumbledown and Mt. Blue State Park. Over the years TCA has also contributed nearly \$100,000 specifically to support at least 11 environmental stewards, as well as trail work over 7 seasons.

Your contributions have made this possible and will help us continue important support for stewardship on the mountains and to stand vigilant if any acquisition opportunities arise or projects that require our assistance.

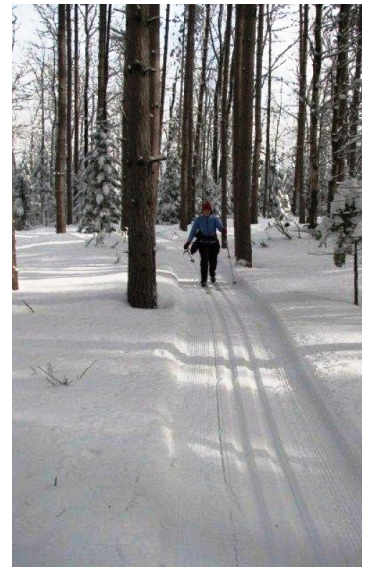
Please check out our new website at **tumbledown.org** if you would prefer to safely donate a contribution with PayPal.

“Thinking Winter Hiking?”

We often received queries in springtime as to trail conditions. You should know that the entire Byron Road from Weld to Byron is not maintained for winter travel. Sometimes loggers keep parts open and it may seem passable for cars, but what may be okay on a frozen morning may not be so by afternoon. You may get stuck.

The same is true for the trails. There is usually still a lot of snow in the mountains well into spring. You might think it’s a nice day and it is so

easy to walk on firm snow, but by the time you want to come down, you could be sinking to your thighs with every step. If you only dressed for spring-like temperatures, you could be in trouble. Too many people have had to be rescued in these conditions. A cell phone is not an excuse for bad decisions.



Text BLUE to 888-514-7527

In the winter, there is a text alert system for Mount Blue’s ski and snowshoe trails, which sends out descriptions of trail conditions.



PO. BOX 24, WELD, MAINE 04285

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

"Our role is to care for Maine's treasured outdoor spaces so that the thousands of hikers who love and respect the mountain will find a more enjoyable environment today and for generations to come."

Deputy Director of Maine's Bureau of Parks & Land, Bill Patterson

