

## Fall Quarterly Meeting, Wheeler Pond Camps

**Barton, Vermont, October 15, 2023**

**Attendees** – Sue Winsor, Paul Trojano, Bart Selle, Jeff Morris, Cathi Brooks, Beth Barnes, Linda Caamano, Victor Caamano, Janet Steinert, Kevin Williamson, Hope Crifo, Geoff Commons, Michael Chernick, John Predom, and Michael DeBonis (GMC Executive Director)

**Welcoming Remarks & Call to Order** – NEKGMC President John Predom called the meeting to order at 12:47 PM. John offered these comments:

All the rain. Our trails here in the NEK held up well, though because of the soft, wet ground we had more blowdowns and overgrowth than I can remember in previous years. Our trail adopters diligently were out keeping the trails clear and I saw great reviews on social media on trail conditions, other than muddy.

Jean Haigh Cabin build is happening this summer and volunteers responded when requests were sent out for help. Lots of building materials have been moved and installed with a planned November finish.

Looking back at Summer Events it's heartwarming to see the smiling faces of participants. The Vermont Symphony Orchestra/ Moose Bog and Northern Frontier/ Northeast Kingdom GMC Jay events stand out as creative ways to get out and have fun while meeting others with similar interests.

The call for volunteers to support Northwoods Stewardships Westmore Mountain Challenge was met with a resounding response. Hikers and Northwoods are thankful and grateful for our support.

Our Long Trail Day hike plans fell through because of a severe weather forecast. This is an event we truly look forward to every year. Our team Kingdom Express raised the 2nd most funds as a team in support of the Green Mountain Club and Vermont Trails. We were surpassed on Long Trail Day by team Psyched to Hike.

Thank you all for being part of the Northeast Kingdom Section of the Green Mountain Club,

**Secretary's Report** – NEKGMC Secretary Michael Chernick reviewed highlights of the section's summer quarterly meeting held at Lenny's Camp in Holland.

Motion [Paul Trojano /Cathi Brooks] moved to accept the minutes as presented

*Approved unanimously*

**Treasurer's Report** – NEKGMC Treasurer Angela Smith submitted in advance the section's latest quarterly financial statement. In her absence, NEKGMC Secretary Michael Chernick reviewed the highlights.

### Northeast Kingdom Section ~ Green Mountain Club

Quarterly Financial Statement As of October 5, 2023

Operating Account

Beginning Balance (as of 07/07/23) \$5,280.77

Income

Dues Sharing

June (posted 08/02/23) \$71.25

July (posted 09/15/23) \$107.50

August (posted 09/22/23) \$118.75

Expenses

Burke Mountain Clubhouse (Donation) \$125.00

Northwoods (Donation) \$500.00

John Predom (Reimbursement Business Cards) \$32.84

Cathi Brooks (Debit Card – Reimbursement Maps) \$37.84

Beth Barnes (Reimbursement – BBQ) \$54.69

Ending Balance \$4,827.90

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Certificate of Deposit

CD#1 ....4489/Matures 01/12/2024 @.40% \$1,600.86

CD#2 ....3785/Matures 06/27/2024 @.40% \$1,760.07

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Grand Total All Monies \$8,188.83

Angela Smith ~ Treasurer

The section accepted the report and anticipates much higher interest rates on the CDs upon their renewal next year.

**Main Club Report** – NEKGMC Director Cathi Brooks reported on the September 2023 Main Club Board meeting which met in Stowe. Among the major points related to Main Club activities were the following:

Flood Communications Summary and Highlights:

- *Social Media:* Reached at least 113,580 people with 32 social media posts on Instagram, Facebook, and Instagram stories (July 9 – July 22).
- *Email:* Two emails to our entire distribution list of 17,000 had an average open rate of 57%, and average Click-Thru rate of 4.75%. GMC's average open rate is 52.17% and [non-profit averages](#) are around 28.59%.
- *Web Traffic:* We created a dedicated July Flood Updates page to keep the information front and center. Visitor Center handled about 100 phone calls, 30 emails, and 82 in-person visits related to the flood and hiking advice.
- *Media Requests:* We were interviewed or quoted in 8+ articles about the flooding impact, including Backpacker, The Trek, WCAX, VTDigger, Seven Days, and Vermont Public. Mike spoke with Vermont All Things Considered host Mary Beth Engisch for a 7-minute segment about the club's climate change mitigation strategies. As with mud season, we saw our messaging spread far beyond our own accounts. The hiking community treated us as the voice of authority and passed our guidance of when, where, and how to hike on to the broader public. Full Flood Communications Report Flood Communications Report.pdf

Other Accomplishments

- Raised nearly \$15,000 from individual contributions and secured a \$20,000 match for Long Trail
- Scheduled four guided hikes and “trail magic” activities for various audiences for the rescheduled Long Trail Day
- Welcomed a new Development Coordinator – Tori Dobbs – who brings a strong background in corporate giving, event planning, and database management.
- Spearheaded by Lily LaRegina, we held our annual photo contest resulting in nearly 700 photos from about 125 participants, our most ever. As of 9/1, 304 people had voted in the annual Hikers’ Choice category.

#### GMC Priorities for Fall 2023 Quarter

- Continuing the momentum of Long Trail Day fundraising by introducing a trail sign raffle giveaway and \$20,000 match. We hope to raise \$60,000.
- Engage business members, corporate sponsors, and local businesses to engage in Long Trail Day via corporate sponsorships, employee teams, and/or gifts in kind.
- Keeping the hiking and leaf-peeping public informed with fall hiking guidance during what has become GMC’s busiest and most variable season
- Distribute a fall flood recovery fundraising appeal
- Use newly approved programmatic messaging to create talking points and training for consistent GMC communications statewide (rack cards, business cards, social media guidelines, Power Point Templates, etc.).
- Create and implement a GMC awareness marketing campaign through social media and marketing platforms.
- Create and distribute high quality Long Trail News publication, electronic communications, and social media posts that share GMC’s hiking resources with the public and highlight the important work being done in the field.

#### GMC Headquarters Phase II – Herrick Rebuild

The Herrick rebuild has experienced some interruption of progress due to the July 2023 flooding and ongoing rain. The weather has disrupted contractor scheduling and workflow, thus causing our project to be delayed. However, even with the delays, much has been accomplished, including:

- Demolition of the existing Herrick space in early July.
- Preparation and cutting of our timber frame structure, which is complete and stored at the contractor’s facility.
- Preparation and cutting of insulated wall panels for the building envelope, which is complete and stored at the contractor’s facility.

#### Land Protection -Update

- Long Trail: 83% (128 miles) permanently protected, 13% (20.5 miles) partially protected, and 4% (6.7 miles) unprotected.
- Long Trail/Appalachian Trail: 99% (100 miles) permanently protected, 0.8% (1 miles) partially protected, and 0.2% (0.2 miles) unprotected.
- Side Trails: 73% (126.75 miles) permanently protected, 20% (34 miles) partially protected, and 7% (12.5 miles) unprotected.
- Appalachian Trail in Vermont: 89% (36.75 miles) permanently protected, 10% (4 miles) partially protected, and 0.7% (0.3 miles) unprotected.
- 1000-ft Long Trail System Corridor: 78% (365 miles) permanently protected, 4% (21 miles)

partially protected, and 18% (85 miles) unprotected.

The Main Club Board meeting also reviewed the proposed Strategic Plan, the adopted Strategic Conservation Plan, continued the discussion on Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion initiatives and policies, reviewed the proposed Code of Conduct as well as Club finances. Due to inflationary pressures, the budget has been revised with selective tightening, but all major initiatives remain intact.

**GMC Executive Director** – Mike DeBonis, who attended at the NEKGMC Fall Quarterly Meeting, offered comments to the section members. He reported that Long Trail Day raised over \$67,500.00 from all donors and over \$8,000 from sections. The NEK Section raised \$2,325, which was the highest amount that any section raised. This sets a tone for further fundraising and for continuing social fundraising events. GMC is wrapping up the field season. The special projects crew will be at the Jean Haigh Camp in an effort to complete the project. This was a very productive year from a construction perspective. The crews did really well (especially with the flood and staffing issues).

**Westmore Mountain Challenge** – Northwoods Stewardship Center has offered NEKGMC the opportunity to serve as an event sponsor and exhibit gear at the Mad Brook Shelter stop.

**Jean Haigh Camp Plaque** – Cathi Brooks reviewed various texts and ideas for the plaque honoring Jean to be placed at the camp. An event dedicating the camp will occur in the spring. Jean's daughters will be the first overnight visitors.

**Forest Parks, & Recreation (FPR) Report** – Luke O'Brien

In his absence, Luke O'Brien the regional FPR Recreational Office submitted the following report of recent activities in St. Johnsbury District:

Thank you for reaching out for an update on trails activities on state lands. I want to thank you and all of the NEKGMC volunteers for your help caring for trails in the Northeast Kingdom. Your work is incredibly valuable and very much appreciated. Do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions about a particular trail, maintenance issue, or other matter involving state lands in our district.

For an update on activities this year, I've provided a summary below. As you can imagine, the list is not comprehensive, and projects are often completed only partially as time, funding, and staff capacity allows. Still, I've endeavored to offer an update on what we did this season and what we hope to accomplish in the year(s) ahead. This season, our District (Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans Counties) received less funding than in years past and had fewer large trail projects. As a result, we focused on more broad-based maintenance, smaller crew and volunteer projects, and work accomplished by a small field staff. Although we received less damage than other parts of the state, our work was also disrupted by the July floods.

2023 Field Season Report

- Vail Pond- parking and access trail improvements completed by Northwoods Watershed Crew.
- Northern Trail Roving- 10 days of NorthWoods crew maintenance at Wheeler Mountain, Burke Red Trail, Pisgah North Trail, Bluff Community Trail, and northern Bluff Ridge.
- Peacham Bog Loop- tread improvements completed by NorthWoods Backcountry Crew.
- Burke Mountain Red Trail- installed minor trail adjustments to incorporate sidehill tread alignment, grade reversals, and drainages (NorthWoods).
- Accessible Trails- State Trail Crew (STC) maintained accessible trails at Moose Bog, Victory Basin, and Brighton State Park
- Kettle Pond- maintained Kettle Pond Loop and installed new puncheon bridges (STC).
- Brighton State Park- VYCC crew replaced the accessible boardwalk and two viewing platforms on the Boreal Nature Trail.

- Tug Mountain Lean-to- FPR staff raised the Tug Mountain Lean-to in Victory State Forest, installed new stone footings, stained the structure, and removed trash.

## 2022 Shelter Maintenance

FPR staff maintained DSP Red Trail, Bennet Road, and West Peak lean-tos; the Umpire Lean-to on Golden Trail in Victory SF, Bald Mountain cabin, and Peacham Pond lean-to in Groton State Forest. Work generally consisted of staining, roof repairs, and re-setting stone footings. Work is on-going to restore the Coldwater Brook Camp in Groton State Forest; likely to be completed in 2024. Burke Mountain Fire Tower- FPR staff completed replacement of all treads, landings, and cab floor lumber with 2-inch white oak.

## 2024 Season Preview

- Bald Mountain Fire Tower- replace tread, landing, and cab floorboards with oak lumber.
- Burke Mountain Fire Tower- install interior cab railing and wire mesh infill on stairs and landings.
- Burke Mountain Trails- continue work to install grade reversals, trail adjustments, and drainages on upper Red and West Peak Trails.
- Bald Mountain Long Pond Trail- complete trail assessment and prioritize maintenance on upper trail.
- Pisgah South Trail- complete trail assessment and prioritize maintenance on upper trail.
- Sentinel Rock State Park- install additional bridging on woods trails.
- Seyon to Spruce Trail- replace aged foot bridges (2) near Seyon Lodge in Groton State Forest.
- Telephone Line Trail- restore eroded areas damaged in July 2023 storm.
- Trail signs, signposts, blazing and markers- on-going repair and replacement of trail markers throughout district.

I'm sure I missed some projects and/or details. Reach out with any questions. Notably, FPR will be mobilizing a large volunteer effort to replace the wooden elements of the Bald Mountain fire tower. This will likely involve multiple volunteer days with student and community volunteers. Let me know if the NEK Section is interested in supporting this task and I will be in touch with dates and details.

Again, thank you for all your good work.

**Quarterly Membership Reports** – Monthly reports from the Main Club had been inconsistent. There is now a procedure in place to provide consistent reporting. The Website (Main Club) now features new information for new members to join a section.

**Upcoming Events** – Last quarter there were eight successful hikes. But hike attendance is down, which is a problem. There was discussion of forms of publicity and whether biking or kayaking

should be added. Gordon was scheduled to lead a map and compass session. Susan Winsor requested offers of hike leaders. John indicated interest in a Brunswick Springs hike. Paul Trojano offered to lead a Kettle Pond hike after muzzle loading season

**Adopters** – Kevin Williamson, NEK Section trails adoption coordinator reported no changes since last summer.

**Wheeler Pond Camps Update** – We are passing the four-year anniversary of Jean Haigh's passing. It will be nice to complete the new camp that is to be named in her memory. Groups from UVM, North Country High School, and Sterling college provided enormous assistance in stacking wood. We are set for the coming year. 11 NEK Section members assisted with wood stacking. The plan is to create a space for wood near the new camp. The plan is for the new camp to be ADA accessible. For the most

recent reporting period there was a 91 percent capacity for the Hadsel-Mares Camp and 38 percent of the guests were GMC members.

**Section Name** -The section's bylaws provide that the official name of the Northeast Kingdom Section of the GMC. Consequently, the section will continue to be known as the NEKGMC.

**Wilderness First Aid** – The section will continue to offer and pay for wilderness first aid with Andrea Kane as the instructor.

**Membership Coordinator** – The position remains open and interested persons should contact NEKGMC President John Predom.

**Free Night Camp** – As the best section fundraiser for the 2022 Long Trail Day, the NEKGMC is entitled to a free camps' night. The section opted for a night at the new Jean Haigh Camp once the camp has opened.

**Sweatshirts** – New NEK GMC hooded sweatshirts will be ordered.

**Business Cards** -Business cards with QR codes to the website were offered for distribution.

**Next Meeting** – Sunday January 7, 2024, hopefully at the NorthWoods Stewardship Center in East Charlestown.

**Adjournment** – The motion to adjourn was offered at 2:15 P.M.

Motion to adjourn [Paul Trojano/Cathi Brooks]

*Approved unanimously*