

No action taken on Mount Washington, Baker River name change requests

By John Koziol Union Leader Correspondent Jun 23, 2023

BRETTON WOODS — Saying they didn't have enough information to do their "due diligence" on a proposal to rename Mount Washington back to "Agiocochook," its Native American name, members of the Mount Washington Commission on Friday decided to continue the matter to a future meeting.

The members of the commission, which by law "consults and advises the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources in the management of the summit property owned by the State of New Hampshire," speculated what form the information might take, including a presentation to it and the public, but took no action on any specific path.

The commission and other stakeholders are currently weighing in on a review of the name change that was proposed to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) by Easton resident Kris Pastoriza.

Saying that George and Martha Washington were slave holders and that George Washington also ordered the massacre of Native Americans during the Revolutionary War, Pastoriza wants the BGN to go back to Agiocochook, which is Abenaki for "Home of the Great Spirit."

Separately, the BGN, per another request by Pastoriza, is also considering changing the name of the Baker River to Asquamchumauke, which is Pemigewasset for "crooked water from high places."

Pastoriza noted in her application to the BGN that Thomas Baker led a militia expedition against Native Americans in which he and his men killed several people and then scalped them for a bounty. A New Hampshire highway marker says that in addition to naming the river for him, the then-Massachusetts Colony in 1712 also promoted Baker from lieutenant to captain.

In an email after Friday's commission meeting, Pastoriza wrote that "if the Mt. Washington Commission members don't find the time to read the application and the supplement by their next meeting, they shouldn't consider the proposal."

She doubted whether "a summary presented at a meeting," would convey all the information the commissioners needed or give them "time to think and do some more research on their own, since they would presumably have questions after reading the application and supplement."

Assuming the above meeting was open to questions from the public, "The public would also need to have read the application to comment meaningfully," she added, "Unless there are some Washington scholars around."

Before the commission settled on its May 19 position as its current position, there was discussion about which commissioner should act as a spokesperson to the media.

Howie Wemyss, who represents the Mt. Washington Auto Road, said the commission has nothing to say yet.

“We’re not ready to comment. Period,” he said, because the commission had not done its due diligence.

Assistant Attorney General Allen Brooks, who is counsel to the commission, told the commissioners that there was no “hard and fast deadline” for them to respond to the BGN.

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