

March 6, 2017

John Scarinza, Chair
Coos County Planning Board
P.O. Box 10
West Stewartstown, NH 03597

P.J. Cyr, Chair
Coos County Zoning Board of Adjustment
P.O. Box 10
West Stewartstown, NH 03597

Re: Proposed Hotel in the Mount Washington Alpine Zone

Dear Chair Scarinza and Chair Cyr:

I represent Keep the Whites Wild, a non-profit organization that is greatly concerned about the preliminary proposal of the Mount Washington Railway Company to construct a hotel above the tree line in the alpine zone on Mount Washington. Such a proposal is contrary to numerous sections of the Coos County Master Plan and provisions in the Coos County Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review Regulations. That the hotel is contrary to so many thoughtfully enacted provisions and, therefore, requires, at the least, a variance, a development district permit, a PD6 permit, and site plan approval makes it self-evident that a hotel in the proposed location will be detrimental to the resources that those documents were intended to protect.

The proposed construction of a 35-room hotel and restaurant at 5,600 feet (the approximate elevation of “The Skyline”) in the alpine zone raises numerous types of concerns, including, but not limited to, aesthetic, alpine habitat, and public-safety concerns. Aesthetically, the hotel will be visible day and night from the surrounding area, adversely affecting the views of surrounding property owners and visitors, and diminishing the iconic appearance of Mount Washington.

I. The Hotel will be Detrimental to the Alpine Habitat

The hotel and its attendant activity will have an unacceptable impact on alpine vegetation, soils, and wildlife. The alpine habitat on Mount Washington is rare and fragile, and has been ranked as Tier 1 Highest Ranked Habitat by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. Alpine vegetation and soils are easily damaged by human activity, and the regrowth of disturbed areas may take decades or more.



The footprint of the hotel and the trenching and other disturbances involved with the installation of electrical, sewage, and other utilities will irreparably destroy a substantial amount of alpine habitat. Additional damage will inevitably be caused by hotel guests, who will not be content to spend their entire stay in their rooms or within the confines of the hotel structure. Guests will wander around the area, and the impact to alpine vegetation and soils from new trails and off-trail exploring will be devastating.

II. The Hotel will have a Detrimental Impact on Public Safety

The proposed hotel will also have a detrimental impact on public safety and further strain rescue operations' resources. As it is, there are numerous rescues performed by volunteer organizations and the Fish and Game Department in the White Mountains every year and in every season. In the tree-less environment between the hotel and the summit, distances appear deceiving. The summit will appear to many hotel guests as a relatively close destination and easy walk. The location of this hotel will encourage, albeit inadvertently, inexperienced and unprepared guests to attempt a hike to the summit. As you are aware, severe weather occurs in the alpine zone throughout the year and sometimes with little warning. The presence of the hotel will assuredly result in the need for additional rescues.

III. The Proposed Hotel is Not Simply the Continuation of a Prior Use

That a hotel once existed on the summit is not an argument in favor of permitting a new hotel on Mount Washington. Needless to say, our stewardship of New Hampshire's natural places has dramatically improved since the turn of the twentieth century, as evidenced in part by the creation of the White Mountain National Forest, the establishment of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services and Fish and Game Department, and the enactment of the Coos County Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Site Plan Review Regulations.

It has never been contemplated that the proposed location would serve as the location of a hotel or any other structure other than the cog railway itself. This is evident in the Legislature's historic charters of the Mount Washington Railway Company as well as the deeds related to the property. Additionally, from the shape of the 99-foot-wide parcel it is clear that the parcel was intended to be used only for the railway and, indeed, the parcel has historically been referred to as a "right-of-way" for the railway.

Further, people who currently visit the summit are not there for a hotel, as there is no hotel on the summit, and so this proposal will add an additional service to the already taxed Mount Washington alpine habitat. Rather than alleviate existing summit crowding, the hotel will simply put more people in the alpine zone. Given its relative proximity to the summit, the hotel will exacerbate summit crowding. Additionally, a hotel less than one mile from the developed summit will amount to sprawl by allowing development to



creep down from the summit and create a use corridor between two developed areas that are in seemingly close proximity.

IV. Conclusion

In the event that an actual hotel proposal is made, Keep the Whites Wild will vigorously contest the siting of a hotel in fragile alpine habitat. The members of Keep the Whites Wild are residential landowners, long-time outdoor professionals, and local and regional recreationalists intent on protecting Mount Washington, the most iconic feature in New Hampshire and arguably the most treasured mountain in New England. This alpine location is also protected by the language of the Coos County Master Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Site Plan Review Regulations.

I represent Keep the Whites Wild, and I sign this letter on its behalf. The additional undersigned organizations share our concerns.

Thank you in advance for your thorough review of the anticipated hotel proposal.

Very Truly Yours,



Jason Reimers

NEW ENGLAND WILD FLOWER SOCIETY



By: _____
Debbi Edelstein, Executive Director

NEW ENGLAND
WILD
FLOWER
SOCIETY



FRIENDS OF THE LEDGES



By: _____
Sarah Garlick, President

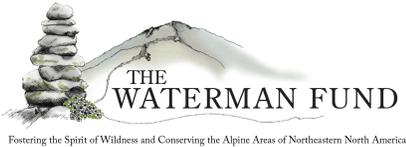
FRIENDS OF THE LEDGES



THE WATERMAN FUND



By: _____
Kim Votta, President



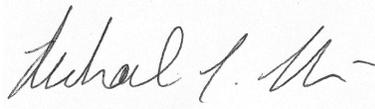
AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB



By: _____
Janet B. Wilkinson, Member
AAC Board of Directors



THE ACCESS FUND

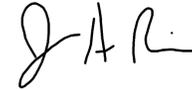


By: _____
Mike Morin, Northeast Regional Director



Protect America's Climbing

THE FRIENDS OF TUCKERMAN RAVINE



By: _____
Jacob Risch, President



By: _____
Peter Nelson, Executive Director



PROTECTOR'S OF THE AMMONOOSUC
RIVER CORRIDOR



By: _____
James W. Pasman, Chairman

