

Mount Washington, Baker River name changes on agenda

- By John Koziol Union Leader Correspondent
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The Mount Washington Commission on Friday will discuss a longshot proposal to rename New England's highest peak.

The name change is one of two proposed by Easton resident Kris Pastoriza: Mount Washington should be renamed because of George Washington's record on slavery, and the Baker River should be renamed because its namesake, Capt. John Baker, led a deadly raid against the Pemigewasset Indians in 1712.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names is undertaking a stakeholder review process on Pastoriza's recommendations, which is why the Mount Washington Commission — the advisory panel that oversees the 60-acre Mount Washington State Park on the summit — will discuss the proposal.

The Friday meeting is at 10 a.m. at the Appalachian Mountain Club's Highland Center in Twin Mountain.

Pastoriza proposed renaming Mount Washington to Agiocochook, which is Abenaki for "Home of the Great Spirit," and the Baker River to Asquamchumauke, which is Pemigewasset for "crooked water from high places."

Pairing the two renaming proposals has upset former Warren selectman Charlie Chandler, who has advocated renaming the Baker River for years. At the 2021

Warren Town Meeting, Chandler introduced a motion to change the name of the Baker back to Asquamchumauke, but the motion failed on a tie vote.

But he draws the line at renaming Mount Washington.

“The name ‘Mount Washington’ is a cultural icon. It *is* Mount Washington,” Chandler said.



A state historical marker on Route 25 in Rumney tells how the Baker River was named.

Any attempt to rename Mount Washington would be “totally inappropriate,” he said. “The Baker River issue should stand alone, on its face, and when you link the two with this federal naming organization, it just calls into question the wisdom of renaming the Baker River.”

Chandler said he is likely to try to rename the Baker again. He said that while Mount McKinley in Alaska was renamed Denali, its Native American name, that is not the equivalent of what is being proposed for Mount Washington.

Washington was “the father of our country,” he said, “and there’s quite a bit of difference between (William McKinley) and Washington.”

In an online op-ed, Pastoriza wrote that George and Martha Washington “engaged in slavery” and that the state recently approved Ona Judge Staines Day, “honoring this enslaved woman who escaped from George and Martha Washington and settled in New Hampshire.”

George Washington “ordered the Sullivan Massacre, one of a series of massacres of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people,” she said, during the American Revolutionary War.

She said Baker “led an expedition against the Abenaki in which several were killed, for which Baker and his men collected scalp bounties and which led to the Baker River being named after him, to commemorate these killings.”

A state historical marker on Route 25 in Rumney said the river was named for “Lt. Thomas Baker (1682-1753) whose company of 34 scouts from Northampton, Mass. passed down this valley in 1712. A few miles south his men destroyed a Pemigewasset Indian village. Massachusetts rewarded the expedition with a scalp bounty of £40 and made Baker a captain.”



Native Americans called the Baker River Asquamchumauke, which means “crooked water from high places.”

In a telephone interview Tuesday, Pastoriza said she knows her proposal has scant support on the Mount Washington Commission, but she is hopeful it will spur public discussion.

According to the draft minutes of its May 19 meeting, some members of the Commission “expressed concern that a name change would cause confusion as it relates to economic activity, public safety and Search and Rescue operations.”

The mountain already has an “Agiocochook Crag.”

Eight New Hampshire departments wrote memos opposing the name change, including Business and Economic Affairs; Administrative Services; Environmental Services; Health and Human Services; Education; Safety; Transportation; and Natural & Cultural Resources.

Pastoriza expects the commission's members will not support the Mount Washington name change.

"They are not going to look at the facts," she said, whereas "the agency people have to toe the line," because they are beholden to those who appointed them.

There's a lot in a place name, said Pastoriza. In this case, she said, much of it is about "the powerful oppressing the powerless."

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