

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

Date: February 5, 2020

To: GEGR Economic Planning Team

From: Elbridge

Re: A two-hour conversation with Alfred (Buck) Plummer – Resident – Brookton a UT Town
(With post conversation added descriptive and comments by the writer)

Present: Buck, Sarah, Elbridge

A meeting was held on February 3, 2020, 1:30PM at Buck Plummer's residence located on the Baskahegan Lake Road in Brookton, Maine. Buck, his wife Jill, and family have lived in Brookton for approximately 15 years. As an avid outdoorsman, fisherman, gardener and craftsman he loves the quiet nature of rural living and his proximity to Baskahegan Lake, a Lake which he (and many others) believes is one of the best bass fisheries in the entire region.

Not lost on this writer, is Buck's long standing battle with chronic heart disease which has not deterred his intense interest and involvement in the fisheries issues of the entire Region. Those issues include, amongst others, the negative impact of illegal introduction of landlocked alewife on the salmon fishery at East Grand Lake (St. Croix watershed), and the unknown impacts of potentially pending sea run alewife on both East Grand and Baskahegan Lake, a headwater lake in the Penobscot watershed.

Buck's quiet, but passionate concerns expressed that day stems in part from his love of fishing, but more importantly, from his past involvement in the sport fishing industry at Rideouts on East Grand Lake. He recognizes the significance of the health of these fisheries to the economic well-being of area lodges and guides, many of which he knows personally.

While the outdoors is near and dear to Buck, our conversation turned to the village of Brookton, originally a tannery town situated at the outlet of Jackson Brook Lake. Buck spoke about rural decline rendering the town a shell of what it once was. The School, funded and operated under the UT umbrella is not only closed, but even the few years it was operated as a community center has come to an end. He believes the building is still owned by the State, but its condition renders it unsaleable. Some of the households in Brookton are the homes of retired workers from the paper mill in Woodland and/or associated with the hundreds of thousands of acres of commercial timberlands which surround the village. (The Woodland Mill, area timberlands, and guiding continues to provide jobs for the people of Brookton, while youth is in scarce supply.)

Buck speaks most favorably about the "Morning Coffee Crew", at the Brookton General Store. The Store currently offers little food or groceries, closes at noon but its where news travels fast and is unfiltered. Vinyl Porter and his wife Geraldine are striving to keep the "Store" open. A portion of the building is devoted to Vinyl's service work on area cars and logging trucks.

Not all is doom and gloom. Buck spoke about the economic importance of lodges and guides not only for sport fishing, but also for big game hunting including, deer, bear and moose. (Which is highly dependent upon area landowners including the Baskahegan Company and Wagner Forest Management) Birchwood Cottages situated on Jackson Brook Lake, Chris White a construction entrepreneur, and a fledgling airport being constructed by a local resident named "Cowboy" were mentioned as positives.

The one gem that consistently came up in our conversation was Baskahegan Lake, a uniquely undeveloped natural landscape of water, shore lands and islands totally encompassed by timberlands owned for over 100 years by the Baskahegan Company. The only public access is by way of the 1 mile of county road leading from US Route 1, passing by the Brookton General Store and Buck's residence, on the way to the Landing on the SE shore of Baskahegan Lake.

Buck spoke about the "wilderness – like" camping experiences available at the eight (8) Lake primitive campsites recently restored by the Outdoor Education students and leaders at East Grand School in Danforth. (Other campsites have been put in place at key locations on the entire length of the Baskahegan River from US Route 6 to the takeout in Bancroft, above the confluence with the Mattawamkeag River) Buck mentioned the newly installed vault privy at the Landing and the years of unauthorized camping and now successfully prohibited, which helped drive the installment of a sanitary facility. (A fund established by First Wind, The Stetson Mtn. Fund is held as an endowment by the Forest Society of Maine for use in funding recreational management on the Baskahegan watershed)

The final 20 minutes of the conversation turned to how local assets might be used to help bring economic benefits to Brookton and to the surrounding UT area. One idea stemming from a comment made by Buck in the past, is a commercial campground. We talked about potential locations such as a place in proximity to the village and Baskahegan Lake, but not at the Landing per se. Buck believes the Landing is not only an important asset for guides, clients and local fishers, but is also a gathering place for the people of Brookton throughout the warmer climates of spring, summer and fall; it should remain so. We also talked about not impinging on the client base and businesses of the local sporting camps and lodges, but tailor a camping experience for customers that would not otherwise venture to the rural confines of northern Washington County. Not lost in the conversation was the perception of highlighting lands of the Baskahegan since much of the good land situated along the Baskahegan Lake Road from the village area to the Lake lies within BCO ownership. In the end our conclusion was to draft a recommendation calling for a campground feasibility study somewhere in the Brookton area.

Two other issues came into the conversation: one is a public boat launch at the Arm of East Grand Lake, and the other is providing an opportunity for the use of off-road vehicles such as ATV's and snowmobiles.

A boat landing at the Arm seems like a good fit as the land is already publically owned with a clearly defined demonstrated need. The land is a MDIF&W 150 acre parcel named "East Grand Lake Access". It fronts on East Grand Lake and has frontage on the public road leading to Forest City. Public boat access from the Brookton area is now limited to a very primitive, rock-bound spot with no parking beyond the dike (so-called at the Arm), and a heavily constricted boat landing with little or no parking located in Forest City, 12 miles to the east. A boat landing with parking at the Arm would not only provide the residents of Brookton much improved access to East Grand with half the travel, but greatly increase fishing opportunities for guides and clients hailing from sporting camps outside of Forest City.

Recreational use of off-road vehicles, especially ATV's is not only a highly sensitive local issue, but it has now reached the Maine Legislature with a new report from the ATV Task Force. Landowner permissions, development and maintenance standards, lack of public funding and the capacity of local Clubs to properly manage trails and public use replicates

throughout the entire off-road trails system under BPL programs. Nonetheless, the potential importance of an off-road recreational trail linking Brookton to the Danforth – East Grand area is a matter worthy of consideration. There is general agreement about a recommendation for a feasibility study for such a trail as an important first step in the process. Landowners potentially implicated with such a trail would not only involve the Baskahegan Company, but also a number of small private landowners located along US Route 1 in Brookton.

Other Comments

While others Buck had invited to the meeting were unable to attend because of work and personal commitments, we believe Buck speaks for many in the Brookton/UT area. We will continue to keep the door open for others to participate and to offer ideas about using local assets for economic gain in the UT.

One last comment about economic development in the Brookton-Forest City area of the UT. Much of sporting camp business now, as in the past, has been predicated on clientele having a wilderness-like experience in the wilds of Maine, far away from the influence of man. There is a need for new ideas and projects to consider the somewhat unique qualities this area of the UT offers in that respect. To be sure conservation efforts on Spednic Lake and elsewhere in the Region as well as the expansive undeveloped forest help protect those quality experiences and associated customer base. The GEGR is as remote and sparsely populated by any measure you choose. To some it a blessing to others a curse. With good planning and thoughtful development we can have it both ways.