195-foot Cell Tower License Sought on Freeman Ridge in Southwest Harbor

In a nutshell…
A 195-foot cell tower has been proposed for Buttermilk Brook Road on Freeman Ridge in Southwest Harbor, near the border with Acadia National Park. This tower would be 70 feet higher than the existing tallest cell tower on Mount Desert Island.

Friends of Acadia is concerned about the potential negative impact on the public experience offered by Acadia’s hiking trails and mountain-tops and encourages you to take part in a visual simulation now planned for the morning of Monday, March 18, weather permitting, and then to share your comments with those reviewing the application. See details on how you can help below.

Background:
BRT Group LLC has proposed to construct a 195-foot lattice cell tower near Buttermilk Brook Road on Freeman Ridge in Southwest Harbor. The tower application has been approved by the Southwest Harbor Planning Board but has not yet been approved by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The applicant has been required to do additional assessment of the tower’s impacts to historic resources within a 4-mile radius of the development site. The applicant’s consultant, A&D Klumb Environmental LLC, will float a large red balloon on Monday, March 18, from 8 a.m. to noon at the tower site and take photographs from historic properties in the area to document visual impacts. This is also an opportunity for residents and visitors to observe potential impacts and provide comments to the consultant, the FCC, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and the National Park Service.

Please monitor the website http://www.klumbenv.com/southwestharbortower.html for any changes to the proposed date of the balloon test due to weather and visibility issues.
Acadia’s Trails as Historic Resources

Friends of Acadia is concerned about the potential negative effect that the proposed tower will have on the scenic views from Acadia’s trail system, which has been deemed eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Much of the trail system’s historic value is tied to the natural landscapes and features viewed from trail corridors. Friends of Acadia encourages you to assess the impact from Acadia’s trails, particularly those on the west side of Mount Desert Island while the balloon is in the air.

The Cultural Landscape Report for the Historic Hiking Trail System of Mount Desert Island (https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/492971) documents several reasons that Acadia’s trails are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The trails made available the scenic resources of Mount Desert Island to a wider array of recreationists. They were built to harmonize with the surrounding landscape and were routed to highlight interesting natural scenic features. Statements illustrating this point in the Cultural Landscape Report include:

- “The trails reflect the careful selection of routes to provide access to natural features including interesting rock formations, water bodies, forested low-lands, and dramatic island vistas.” (p.182)
- “Routes tended to be direct, following ridgelines and fall-lines. Routes often traveled across open ledges where there were distant views and little need for maintenance.” (p.183)
- “The natural features that attracted visitors in past centuries are extant, with much of the natural systems and features protected within Acadia National Park. Natural features along the trails and visible at scenic overlooks contribute to the significance of the trail system.” (p.191)
- “The trail system is defined predominantly by the views that it offers walkers. Almost all trails were laid out specifically to lead through or to areas with panoramic views of the surrounding mountains, ponds, ocean bays, and rocky coast.” (p. 194)

Friends of Acadia is concerned that the proposed cell phone tower on Freeman Ridge would significantly diminish the scenic value of the historic trails on Beech Mountain and Western Mountain. At 195 feet and situated on a ridgeline, the tower would be the tallest cell tower in the region; most others on MDI are at 125 feet. Furthermore, because the tower would be significantly higher than tree-line, it would not be possible to camouflage as a tree, as has been done with other towers on MDI. If approved, this tower would permanently alter the scenic nature of Acadia’s trails on the west side of Mount Desert Island. FOA understands the importance of cellular connectivity to residents and park users, however, we believe thoughtful siting, screening, design, and ultimately, height must be carefully considered in this landscape adjacent to a national park.
To comment on the potential impact of BRT Group LLC’s proposed cell tower on the historic value of Acadia’s trails:

2. Send your comments electronically to SWH-tower@klumbenv.com. Be sure to focus your comments on the potential impacts to the historic resources of the region, especially Acadia’s trail system.
3. Copy the following organizations and individuals on your comments:
   a. Federal Communications Commission, Jill Springer, jill.springer@fcc.gov
   b. Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Megan Rideout, megan.m.rideout@maine.gov
   c. Acadia National Park, John Kelly, john_t_kelly@nps.gov
   d. Friends of Acadia, Stephanie Clement, stephanie@friendsofacadia.org

While this stage of the process is focused on impacts to historic resources, there may be future opportunities to comment on the overall environmental impacts of the proposed tower. Friends of Acadia will attempt to keep you informed of these opportunities.

For more information:
Contact Stephanie Clement at stephanie@friendsofacadia.org or 207-288-3340.

www.friendsofacadia.org