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**Taking the Lead: Women and the White Mountains
PSU's Museum of the White Mountains
Opening New Exhibit April 7**

Plymouth, N.H.– From the back-breaking work of cutting trails to painting beautiful vistas, women have a significant role as participants, students, and celebrants of New Hampshire's White Mountains. "Taking the Lead: Women and the White Mountains" opens on April 7 at Plymouth State University's Museum of the White Mountains (MWM), and explores how women have connected with and influenced the region over the past 200 years.

"This exhibit focuses on gender and place over time, guiding visitors from the early 1800s through the 21st century and introducing examples of female artists, businesswomen, and environmental leaders of today," said Plymouth State University Professor of History Marcia Schmidt Blaine, interim director of the museum.

The White Mountains provided women a place to explore their talents and creativity, uninhibited by the constraints of urban life. In the 19th century, female tourists opened up and popularized trails, explored the natural world, and wrote of the beauty, challenges, and discoveries in the mountains. By the 20th century, women connected the White Mountain region to the larger world while pushing the limits society imposed on them.

“People may be surprised how often women have been leaders in the region; from farm wives to climbers, from early hikers to modern businesswomen, from early conservationists to today’s environmentalists,” noted Blaine.

Women highlighted in the exhibit include: Lucy Crawford, one of the first female innkeepers, the first historian of the White Mountains, and one of the first white women to climb Mount Washington; Lucia Pychowska and her daughter Miriam, active trail architects, mountain map makers, skilled botanists and sketch artists who wrote for the Appalachian Mountain Club journal *Appalachia* in the late 1800s; and Jane Difley, the current president of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and one of the leading environmental activists in the state.

Audio recordings allow visitors to hear the voices of historical women featured in the exhibit, as portrayed by PSU theatre students, as well as recorded interviews with contemporary women done by history students. A “maker space” offers the chance for visitors to create their own images, and a writing area invites guests to describe their recent experiences in the Whites. Also featured are replicas of hiking costumes, showing the heavy layers women were expected to wear in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Lesson plans for middle and high school social studies teachers explore ways in which women of the White Mountains challenged and worked within gender norms, allowing them to “Take the Lead.” The exhibit also includes beautiful paintings on loan from regional collectors and contemporary female artists as well as an impressive assortment of rare photographs.

“Taking the Lead” officially opens April 7 and runs through October 7. An opening reception will be held on April 6 from 6-7:30 p.m.

The exhibit was made possible with support from the New Hampshire Humanities, the Jocelyn F. Gutchess Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, and the Museum of the White Mountains membership donations.

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